Kiri Paramore, Assistant Professor of History of Japan at the School of Asian Studies at Leiden University, who received his Ph.D. at the University of Tōkyō, presents here the printed version of his dissertation. The book concerns the field commonly known as mission history of Japan; however, it looks at the problems from the other side trying to evaluate the relevant treatises of the Japanese philosopher, politicians and scholars.

The mission history of Japan is one of the most dramatic of early modern times. Japan constituted an important mission field with great hopes because for the first time a people seemed for the missionaries to be on an equal cultural level (at least in European eyes). However, after the first successes in converting several daimyōs in Southern Japan, whose interest in the Christian faith sometimes went together with their interest in European arms and trade, the situation changed, and Christianity was forbidden. This was followed by persecutions and martyrdoms that were highly praised in the contemporary and also present discourses as true testimonies of the true religion. The martyr stories were reported many times in the Litterae Annuae of the Jesuits and, however less frequently, in those of the Franciscans in the second half of the sixteenth and the first three decades of the 17th centuries, in church histories with its own books on Japan and China (Bartoli, Hazart, Crasset), and in the history of the Jesuit order. Later they were staged as plays of the Jesuit theatre where the religious heroism of the Christian Japanese samurai was shown as an example for European Christians. In contrast, the other side, the Japanese Shōgun, daimyō, and samurai were shown as evil pagans who, influenced by the devil, persecuted the true faith. More modern church histories of Japan try to show the background and reasons of the failure of the promising Japanese mission, one reason just being the clash of civilizations between East and West.

At his point Paramore starts his book introducing the discourses of the Japanese during two different times of anti-Christian writing, namely, after the suppression of Christianity in the Tokugawa era and in the nineteenth century during the Meiji restoration when Western Christianity again arrived in Japan. During both times, and that is Paramore’s thesis, the phenomenon of anti-Christian writings did not serve as a fight against Western ideas or against the foreignness of Christianity but rather to build up a national ideology and identity.

Paramores’s book is subdivided into six chapters following the historical-systematical arrangement of the authors of the texts. The first chapter discusses the influences from Asia on Japanese Christian texts. Note the even more famous China mission started in 1582 with Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) and his Tianzhu shiyi (The true meaning of the Lord of Heaven) which became influential as the classical Christian book par excellence not only in China but also in Japan and Korea. This means that there was not just Western thought which was translated into Japanese but ideas already blended with Confucianism and other philosophies.

The second chapter deals with the influence of Chinese Neo-Confucianism, which led, as Paramore argues, to a concentration of orthodoxy and integration with political power. The third chapter leads into the beginning of the seventeenth century when the Tokugawa Shōgunate prohibited Christianity and started its fight and discourse against it. Paramore demonstrates that the anti-Christian texts were written only after Christianity had completely been destroyed. We may wonder if this kind of discourse can be compared to the Bushido discourses and ethical treatises which appeared after the end of the civil wars in Japan when the unification of Japan had been completed and therefore the armed warriors were no longer really needed. During this time the Neo-Confucian scholar, advisor and tutor of the Shōguns, Hayashi Razan (1583–1657), wrote his anti-Christian letters to China for evidently political uses.
Chapter four discusses texts of the intra-elite of politicians of the mid-seventeenth century which not only show the development of the anti-Christian discourse but also clearly prove that its intention was to attack political enemies and ideas which had nothing to do with Christianity. Starting with the end of the seventeenth century when the Tokugawa Shōgunate had solidified its regime, the discourse against Christianity declined. There is a rather interesting discourse, namely, when the Sicilian priest Giovanni Battista Sidotti (1668–1714, whose first name, by the way, was not Juan Baptista) “secretly” tried to enter Japan to preach Christianity and to attain martyrdom in 1708. After his immediate capture, he was interviewed several times by the famous statesman Arai Hakuseki (1657–1725), who collected all obtained information about Europe and Christianity for the government in his Seiyō kibun. The sixth chapter finally shows the close connection between the discourses during the Tokugawa and the Meiji rule.

Paramore also elaborates the role of three famous Christian texts in Japan from the beginning of the seventeenth century, namely, Matteo Ricci’s Tianzhu shiyi, Fabian (also: Habian) Fukan’s Myōtei Mondō of 1605, and the Dochirina Kirishitan (Christian doctrine, i.e. Catechism). Fabian, who had become a Jesuit, was one of the most influential Christian thinkers in Japan. Later, however, he became an apostate and sharply criticized Christianity in his book Hadaiusu. Myōtei Mondō is, as Paramore observes, comparable to Ricci’s book: both are written in form of dialogues, Ricci’s book is a dialogue between a Christian and a Confucian scholar while Fabian’s book is a dialogue between two Japanese ladies, both widows and one of them Christian, who teaches the other woman, a Buddhist nun, the fundamental teachings of Christianity in contrast to Buddhism, Shinto and Confucianism. So apparently both books served as a first written introduction to Christianity for people who had no idea about it. In contrast the catechism, the Dochirina, had another function: it served as a special instruction for persons who were already acquainted with Christianity about the essentials of the Christian faith.

Paramore’s study of the anti-Christian discourses depends for the greatest part on original Japanese sources which for the first time were translated and discussed in this context. This makes the book especially interesting and valuable. It can be looked at as a Western anthology for Japanese ways of thinking and the way how the Japanese elite used the foreign religion of Christianity to build up the identity and unification of a “modern” Japan. The book has ample endnotes, index and abundant bibliography. Therefore we would welcome the project of Kiri Paramore to start a new study on Sidotti’s enterprise as mentioned on p. 187.