

**THE GIST OF JAPAN:
THE ISLANDS, THEIR
PEOPLE AND MISSIONS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649593910

The Gist of Japan: The Islands, Their People and Missions by R. B. Peery

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
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PREFACE

ALTHOUGH a great deal has already been published in English concerning Japan and the Japanese people, nothing, to my knowledge, has yet been published which attempts to give a full treatment of mission work in Japan. "An American Missionary in Japan," by Dr. Gordon, is the only book I am aware of that deals exclusively with this subject; but its scope is quite different from that of the present volume. Therefore I have been led to believe that there is a place for this book.

I have written for the common people and hence have tried to give the subject a plain, popular treatment. There has been no attempt at exhaustive discussion, but great pains have been taken to make the book reliable and accurate.

In the preparation of this little book I have consulted freely the following works in English:
✓ "Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan";
files of the "Japan Mail"; "Transactions of the

Osaka Conference, 1882"; Rein's "Japan"; Griffis's "Mikado's Empire"; Griffis's "Religions of Japan"; Chamberlain's "Handbook of Things Japanese"; Miss Bacon's "Japanese Girls and Women"; Dr. Lawrence's "Modern Missions in the East"; "Report of the World's Missionary Conference, London, 1888"; and reports of the various missionary societies operating in Japan. In Japanese I have consulted some native historians and moral and religious writers—especially in the preparation of the chapters on History, Morality, and Religions.

The book is sent forth with the prayer that it may be the means of begetting in the American churches a deeper interest in the work it portrays.

R. B. P.

SAGA, JAPAN.

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I

THE LAND OF JAPAN

THE empire of Japan consists of a chain of islands lying off the east coast of Asia, and extending all the way from Kamchatka in the north to Formosa in the south. Its length is more than 1500 miles, while the width of the mainlands varies from 100 to 200 miles. The entire area, exclusive of Formosa, recently acquired, is 146,000 square miles—just about equal to that of the two Dakotas or the United Kingdom of England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. On this territory, at the beginning of the year 1893, there lived 41,089,940 souls.

The country is divided into four large islands and more than two thousand smaller ones. The larger ones are named respectively Hondo, Kyushu, Shikoku, and Yezo. Of these the first named is by far the largest and most important. This island originally had no separate name, but

in recent years it is very generally called Hondo. Western geographers have frequently made the mistake of applying the term "Nihon" to it; but "Nihon" is the native name for the whole empire, and not for its chief island. The capital, Tokyo, the ancient capital, Kyoto, and the commercial center, Osaka, are all situated on this island.

Kyushu is the second largest island in the group, and lies southwest of the main island. It was on this island, in the town of Nagasaki, that the Dutch lived for more than two hundred years, forming the only means of communication Japan had with the outside world.

Shikoku is next in size. It lies south of Hondo and northeast of Kyushu. Shikoku and Kyushu are separated from the main island by the Inland Sea, one of the most beautiful bodies of water in the world.

The island of Yezo is in the extreme north. It has very cold winters and resembles the central part of North America somewhat in climate and productions. On this island the aborigines of Japan, called Ainu, now live.

Among the more important of the smaller groups are the Liukiu Islands, in the extreme south; the Goto Islands, in the west; and the Kuriles, in the north. Besides these there are numerous other islands of considerable size lying

around the coasts, and the whole Inland Sea is beautifully dotted with them.

Japan is a very mountainous country. For this reason hardly twelve per cent. of her total area is cultivated. In general the land gradually ascends on both sides as it recedes from the ocean, at first forming hills and table-lands, and then huge mountains. Thus a chain of mountains is formed in the center of the islands, extending throughout the whole length of the empire. The mountains are nearly all of volcanic origin, which accounts for their jagged appearance. There are many active volcanoes, continually sending up great clouds of smoke, and occasionally emitting streams of fire and molten lava, deluging the whole neighborhood with sulphur and ashes. One of the first sights that greets the traveler from the West as he approaches Japan is the smoke of a volcano, ever active, on Vries Island, in the entrance to Yokohama harbor. The chief volcanoes active at present are Asama, Shirane-san, Bandai-san, Aso-san, and Koma-ga-take. I shall never forget the ascent of Asama at night, in 1894. The volcano had been unusually active recently, and a large part of the crater had fallen in, completely changing its appearance. The sulphurous vapors and smoke came up so thick and fast that we dared not approach near the crater for fear of suffoca-

tion. At that time we could not see down into the crater at all, but occasionally one can see the blue-red flames curling and writhing far down in the bowels of the earth like a sea of fire, a veritable gate of hell.

Of extinct volcanoes Japan boasts a large number. The mightiest of these is the peerless Fuji-san, the pride of every Japanese, the highest mountain in Japan. It is 12,365 feet high, and snow is found on its summit at all seasons. This mountain is now a huge pile of ashes, lava, and boulders—apparently harmless. As late as 1708 it was in eruption, and when I stood on its snowy summit in August, 1893, there were certain places where vapors hot enough to cook an egg came up from the ground. For aught we know, it may at any time burst forth again and devastate whole provinces.

This is a land of earthquakes. The records show that from earliest times this country has been subject to great ruin by their visitations. Whole villages and towns have been suddenly swallowed up, and huge mountains have disappeared in a day. These earthquakes are of frequent occurrence. The seismic instruments now in use throughout the empire record about three hundred and sixty-five per year—one for each day. Certain localities are much more exposed to them than others, although none is