

sPreview from the exhibition catalogue

The approach of the commemorations which marked, in 2025, the 80th anniversary of the tragedy which first struck Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, and then Nagasaki three days later, undoubtedly allowed the French public, who are not very well versed in Japanese history, to discover a figure who greatly contributed to the resurrection of the latter city, a personality that cannot be separated from his wife Midori.

Dr. Takashi Nagai was working in his radiology laboratory when the atomic bomb exploded over Nagasaki, resulting in the almost immediate deaths of 70,000 people. Having converted to Catholicism through his future wife, perhaps also in her memory, Nagai devoted the last years of his life not only to a scientific study of the bomb's radiological effects but also to advocating for the abandonment of nuclear weapons by sharing his personal experiences. His book, **The Bells of Nagasaki**, achieved worldwide success, a success that one might have thought would be fleeting.

But it was not.

In France, while the fleeting successes of Japonisme at the end of the 19th century are well-known, it must be acknowledged that the history of Japan, and even more so that of Nagasaki, remains poorly understood, even though the popularity of manga has largely reached younger generations of French-speaking readers.

In 2020, the doctoral thesis of Sylvie Morishita, published by Éditions du Cerf under the title **The Art of Catholic Missions in Japan (16th-17th Centuries)**, undoubtedly marks a new beginning. The book highlights a very rare and forgotten artistic heritage and above all evokes the flourishing of Christian communities in Japan until the final expulsion of the Jesuits and the prohibition of Catholicism in 1614. With the same publisher, in 2024, the author published from Nagasaki, correspondence exchanged between Father Petitjean of the Paris Foreign Missions and his superiors, from 1865 to 1867, following the recognition in the church of Oūra in Nagasaki of the hidden Christians, who had managed to resist 250 years of terrible persecutions.

With this still relatively unexplored path opened, other publications have enriched this overview, such as Pierre Sevaistre's 2024 work, **Christians and Japanese: A History of Catholicism in Japan**. At the same time, Nathalie Fourny offered young readers a graphic novel, **Nagasaki 1945**, dedicated to the lives of Takashi and Midori Nagai, while the Paris Foreign Missions Society presented a major retrospective, **From Samurai to Manga: The Christian Epic in Japan**, to which various historians and Japanese institutions contributed. Meanwhile, on Tau Editions published two works on Takashi Nagai: Haruhi Katayama's biography, **War Song, Song of Peace in Nagasaki**, followed by a reissue of **The Bells of Nagasaki**, in a new translation expurgated of Allied censorship.

Last year, the exhibition "The Art of Peace, Nagasaki, August 9, 1945, 11:02 AM," supported by the Nagasaki Museum of the Twenty-Six Martyrs, focused primarily on the tragedy caused by the atomic bomb, giving Takashi Nagai the prominence he deserved to evoke the city's rebirth.

The catalogue "Takashi and Midori Nagai: From the Power of the Atom to the Power of Love" thus fits within this particular context of the (re)discovery in France of Nagai and his wife. The

exhibition and the accompanying book could only come about with the support of all the Japanese and French researchers and institutions who, since 2020, have been committed to offering French readers and the public the face of an unknown Japan and of a couple whose cause for beatification was introduced in 2021 by Bishop Joseph M. Takami, Archbishop Emeritus of Nagasaki.

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