PART THREE

CONVERTING SELVES:
TRANSLATING MODERN IDENTITY
At the turn of the last century, a mural of the writer Lev Tolstoi was hung in Kazan’ Cathedral, a prominent symbol of the Russian Orthodox Church located in the center of St. Petersburg. Displayed following Tolstoi’s notorious excommunication from the Orthodox Church in 1901, the massive portrait depicted in grand detail and vividness Tolstoi burning in the flames of Hell. This image would be reproduced and hung in churches around Russia.1 The writer’s anathematization of Russian Orthodoxy was a tumultuous and emotional event for the Church and for the public in general.2

Curiously, at the moment that Tolstoi became a dangerous apostate of the Russian Orthodox Church, he was gaining a widespread religious following in Japan, where many perceived him as a prophetic religious thinker and a saint. If he was a satanic voice for the Russian Orthodox Church, in Japan Tolstoi had become a voice from God by the early 1900s. A follower from Kofu, Japan told him for example, “The truth you advocate comes to my mind convincingly, as if it came from Heaven… I can say it is a revelation in the true sense of the term.”3 Like the Kofu admirer, many used Christian vocabulary to refer to Tolstoian thought in this period. Equally curious was that the very person who introduced Tolstoi’s religious ideas to late Meiji Japan was dean of the

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1 The church of the village of Tazov, Kursk Province, for example, portrayed a mural of Tolstoi embraced by the Devil and tormented in Hell. From S. Pozoiskii, K istorii otlicheniia L’va Tolstogo ot tserkvi (From the History of Lev Tolstoi’s Excommunication) (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1979).

2 The Holy Synod disseminated its official judgement on Tolstoi’s excommunication across Russia, publishing it across the country in 1901. For more information on Tolstoi’s excommunication, see S. Pozoiskii, Lev Tolstoi i tsrkov (Lev Tolstoi and the Church) (Tula: Tul’skoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1963), and his K istorii otlicheniia L’va Tolstogo ot tserkvi (From the History of Lev Tolstoi’s Excommunication from the Church) (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1979).

3 Otdel Rukopisei Gosudarstvennogo Muzeia L.N. Tolstogo (Manuscripts Department, Lev Tolstoi National Museum) (ORGMT) f. 1, inv. 2314, letter to Tolstoi from K. Shiraishi, May 13, 1910, l. 3.