

13 Πολλὰ εἶχον γράψαι σοι
 ἀλλ' οὐ θέλω διὰ μέλανος καὶ καλάμου σοι γράφειν·
 14 ἐλπίζω δὲ εὐθέως σε ἰδεῖν,
 καὶ στόμα πρὸς στόμα λαλήσομεν.

=====

15 εἰρήνη σοι.
 ἀσπάζονται σε οἱ φίλοι.
 ἀσπάξου τοὺς φίλους κατ' ὄνομα.

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THE IMPACT OF THE BIBLE ON THE EVOLUTION OF MODERN JAPAN

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Let me begin with a paradox. The Bible was almost certainly one of the most influential texts during the period in which Japan opened itself to the outside world. And yet, Japan has never become a Christian nation. Even today, the conversion rate to Christianity is very small—less than one percent of the total population. The translation of the Bible into Japanese did have a considerable impact on modern Japan—but in unforeseen and unpredictable ways. This article explores the influence of the biblical text through the impact it had on a variety of influential figures in modern Japanese history and language.

The Bible was introduced into nineteenth-century Japan in three stages. First, it was written in the Chinese language, and as such could be read only by the Japanese *literati*, around two percent of the total population. Then missionaries taught the English text of the Bible to young Japanese students, many of whom later became the leaders of modern Japan. The third and final stage saw the completion of the translation of the Bible into Japanese. This monumental work was completed in 1887, and is one of the greatest achievements in translation during the modern period, as it unified disparate styles and established a distinct one which was to have so strong an impact on the development of modern written Japanese.

In this article I shall consider three elements which helped define the biblical influence on the development of modern Japan. These are: (1) the work and influence of a key Western missionary figure, Guido Fridolin Verbeck; (2) the stories of the Japanese followers of the Bible; and (3) the impact on the Japanese language.

The cultural impact of the text through education, politics, and leaders

The influence of the biblical text on Japanese history and culture can be seen through the impact it had on the attitudes of the intellectuals and many of the leaders of the *Meiji* era (1868-1911). There is a cultural point to be made here. Even now, in modern Japanese society, when a movement is evaluated or judged, it is the people, not the principles, that are the focus. When assessing Christianity,

for example, the Japanese think in terms of the Christians they know. Deeply rooted in the rice culture, the village mentality is still preserved, in which harmony with other people is considered essential. In Japanese society, things are often decided based on the trust relationship of the persons in charge, rather than through a contractual relationship. In such a society, the text needed to be reincarnated in the lives of Christians in order for it to be a convincing influence. Because of this unique characteristic of Japanese culture, we need to assess the influence of the text through the influence it had on people, and in turn, the influence those people had on Japanese history, culture, and society.

The late nineteenth century in Japan was a dynamic era, a period of great cultural turmoil. The Japanese people were awakened from their peaceful two hundred and sixty years' slumber in seclusion from the rest of the world by the visit of the so-called Black Ships led by Commodore Perry. The country was now facing three distinct influences for change: domestic disintegration, foreign pressures to open its ports for trade, and the missionaries' ambitions to land and evangelize the Japanese.

Guido F. Verbeck, a Dutch-born missionary from the Reformed Church in America, served as advisor for the embryonic *Meiji* Government from 1869 to 1877, just after the regime was handed over from the Tokugawa *Shogunate* to the Emperor in 1867. Verbeck first taught English, politics, economics, military studies, and science in two English schools opened for the sons of *samurai* in Nagasaki.¹ The number of his students soon rose to a hundred. The Mission report reveals Verbeck's method of teaching:

The missionaries used the Bible as their principal textbook of English wherever and whenever they dared to use it. Mr. Verbeck taught a selected group of the sons of *samurai* the Constitution of the United States and the New Testament. He represented these as the two basic foundations of the American civilization. These students rapidly rose to positions of leadership in the new *Meiji* Government and then employed Mr. Verbeck as adviser to the Privy Council and Council of State, and also as superintendent of the leading school of the country, which later developed into the Imperial University of Tokyo².

Verbeck's biographer relates how centrally he operated within the Japanese government:

. . . it impressed me mightily to see what a factotum Dr. Verbeck was, a servant of servants indeed, for I could not help thinking how he imitated his Master. . . . I saw a prime minister of the empire, heads of departments, and officers of various ranks, whose personal and official importance I sometimes did, and sometimes did not, realize, coming to find out from Dr. Verbeck matters of knowledge, or to discuss with him points and courses

1 Verbeck first taught English to some students, and as his reputation as a good teacher spread, he was requested to teach at the *Shogunate* Governmental School for English Studies, Saibi-kan, in Nagasaki. The Feudal Lord Nabeshima of the Saga clan also invited him in 1866 to teach at their newly-opened English School for the *samurai* of the Saga clan, Chion-kan, in Nagasaki. He taught English, politics, economics, military studies, and science in this school. [Ogata Hiroyasu, "Kindai Nihon Kensetsu no Chichi, Dr. Verbeck" *Shakai Kagaku Toukyu*, 7, xviii, no. 1 (Tokyo: Waseda University, Institute for Social Studies, 1961), 4; Sawa Wataru, *Uemura Masahisa to Sono-Jidai*, vol.1 (Tokyo: Kyōbun-kan, 1938), 294.]

2 Stephen Willis Ryder, *A Historical Sourcebook of the Japan Mission of the Reformed Church in America (1859-1930)* (York, Pa.: The York Printing Co., 1935), 22.

of action. Today it might be a plan of national education; to-morrow, . . . the dispatch of an envoy to Europe; the choice of the language best suited for medical science; or how to act in matters of neutrality between France and Germany, whose war vessels were in Japanese waters; or to learn the truth about what some foreign diplomat had asserted; or concerning the persecutions of Christians; or, some serious measure of home policy.¹

The early *Meiji* Era was marked by a rapid succession of liberal reforms. It replaced the feudal self-governing clan system with centrally-governed prefectures. The government promoted equalization of the nation by abolishing the exclusive right for *samurai* to bear swords, and granting liberty to everyone to choose jobs, where to live, and what to wear, resolving three strata of farmers, artisans, and merchants into one class of common people, and abandoning the untouchable class, named *Eto* or *Hinin*, literally, “non-human,” who had traditionally been placed under the four-class stratification. The general education system declared in 1873 replaced the traditional feudal education, privileged alone to the *samurai* class children, thus opening the doors of primary schools to children of all classes. According to Ogata Hiroyasu, it was based on Verbeck’s idea.²

As a result of this social reform, the ratio of each social class was, reportedly, 93 percent of common people, six percent of *Shizoku*, the former *samurai*, and one percent *Kazoku*, the former aristocracy.³ When we compare this 93 percent of common people in the *Meiji* era with the 90 percent of the current middle class according to the National Survey by the present government, it is evident that the reformation brought about by Verbeck’s ideas had a long-lasting impact.⁴ For the ratio to remain similar, the educational reform for equal opportunity for schooling must have been effective.

The *Meiji* Government also introduced the concept of the “week,” and established Sunday as a holiday.⁵ The greatest contribution by Verbeck, however, was his submission of his *Brief Sketch* outlining the organization and method of delegation consisting of the top leaders of the new Government to five advanced Western countries including Great Britain, France, Prussia, and the U.S.A. It was realized as the *Iwakura Mission* of 1871-1873 to thirteen advanced countries, and what they brought back laid the foundation of the modern state of Japan. Its official purposes were twofold. For the Japanese people it was, first of all, to observe and learn the Western legal, social, economic, military, and educational

1 William Elliott Griffis, *Verbeck of Japan: A Citizen of No Country* (N.Y.: Revell, 1900), cited by Robert E. Speer, *Servants of the King* (N.Y.: Educational Department, The Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the USA, 1909), 82. This passage was re-cited with grammatical correction and some omissions in Archibald McLean, *Epoch Makers of Modern Missions* (N.Y.: Revell, 1912), 267-8.

2 “As the highest ranked advisor of the Government, Verbeck was involved in every policy making, and one of the major ones was the abandonment of the feudal social stratification system and equalization of the nation” (Ogata, 14-16).

3 This social reform by the *Meiji* Government was not to abolish the social class altogether. It abolished the non-human (the former *Eto*) discrimination, and distinction between farmers, artisans, and merchants. They all became “common people.”

4 According to the National Survey by the present government, 90 percent of the total population of Japan think and believe that they belong to the middle class, and this ratio of this survey stays the same every year, at least for the past ten years. (Statistics from the *Sourifu, Kokumin-chosa tokei* [Statistics of National Survey by the Prime Minister’s Office]), Tokyo: The Prime Minister’s Office, 1993-2003.)

5 The conventional Japanese holidays had been the days with the numbers 1 and 6.

systems, and secondly, the removal of the extraterritoriality clause in the treaties so that they could obtain equal rights as a member of the international society.

For Verbeck there was another aim behind the dispatching of this delegation. It was to let the Japanese leaders realize the absurdity of the prohibitive edict against Christianity. Verbeck was a natural educator. His approach was to let the Japanese leaders see and judge for themselves, while providing the circumstances where they could find the solution to their problems. This trip opened up the new leaders' eyes to the strength of the society based on Christianity.¹ They saw "that the leading force of the world was Christianity, . . . and that toleration was the law of the future, and largely the condition of the present."² The delegates reported back that unless the edict were removed, it would be impossible to negotiate equal treaties with the countries they had visited. Thus, the edict was removed from the public view, though, as McLean rightly commented, "This was not religious liberty or even toleration, but it was a long stride in that direction."³

Verbeck put all his effort on this one point, to present the principles of the Bible to the Japanese by educating and helping them build a modern nation. He was greatly admired by the Japanese because of his wide knowledge, excellent linguistic ability, and most of all, because of his personality as a follower of Christ testified in the biblical text. Following the withdrawal of the edict, he left government work and devoted himself to translating the Psalms. His Japanese version, completed in 1887 in collaboration with Matsuyama Takayoshi and Uemura Masahisa, has been likened to Mount Fuji for its incomparable beauty.

Japanese followers of the Bible

There were some eminent individuals who courageously stood up against the major trends of their society and generation, firmly based on what the Bible taught them. The law that existed in Japan in the mid-nineteenth century was that any person who had contact with foreigners was to be punished, and those who returned from abroad would be executed. Christianity was strictly forbidden on the pain of death, and vigilance against Christianity involved community-based co-punishment of five households.

The Japanese government had kept a strict watch over the coastline, and the coast near Nagasaki Bay was guarded by Lord Wakasa of Murata. One day he was told that a small book floating on the sea had been caught in a fisherman's net. He took it in his hand. The binding and the letters looked so different from ordinary books with which he was familiar that an enquiry brought the information that it was the New Testament in English, and that there was also a translation in Chinese. He sent to Shanghai for a Chinese version and started reading it.⁴

1 Itō Hirofumi, the first Prime Minister of Japan to-be, saw in Britain and every European country that Christianity was the nation's bedrock. He thought it would be desirable also for Japan to have a "national idea," but it could not be Christianity, and Buddhism or Confucianism had already lost their appeal. Thus, when drafting the Constitution, he deified the Emperor and made him the godhead of the nation (Kamei Katsuichirō, "Uchimura Kanzō to Masamune Hakuchō," *Nihon-no kindai bungaku* [ed. Nihon kindai bungakukan; Tokyo: Yomiuri Shimbun-sha, 1964], 110).

2 McLean, *Epoch Makers of Modern Missions*, 269.

3 *Ibid.*, 270.

4 Murata's story is well known in Japanese Christian academics. As the source of this story, see Ryder, *A Historical Sourcebook*, 31; James I. Good, *Famous Missionaries of the Reformed Church* (The Sunday-school Board of the Reformed Church in the United States, 1903), 253-5; McLean, 262.

When Verbeck started teaching Japanese students in Nagasaki, Murata sent his younger brother Ayabe to the missionary in 1862, ostensibly to study Western medicine, but really to study the Bible. Verbeck prepared a page explaining about a particular subject, and the students took it home, diligently studied, and then asked for further explanations regarding anything they had not understood. Murata also sent his subordinate to Verbeck, officially to procure books, but actually to enquire about the texts he had found difficult to understand. Finally, one day in 1866 Murata himself appeared, accompanied by his younger brother and the subordinate, and asked Verbeck to baptize them. Verbeck warned him of the political and social risks involved in conversion, yet Murata's determination was not shaken. He said, "Sir, I cannot tell you my feelings when I first read the account of Jesus' character. I had never heard of such a person. I was filled with admiration, overwhelmed with emotion and taken captive by His nature and life."¹

His words attest to the nature of the incarnated God which he found exhibited in the Bible. On May 14, 1866, they were secretly baptized in the parlor of Verbeck's house. Courageously, Murata reported his conversion to his feudal lord. Despite the *Shogunate* government's order to punish him, his lord (Nabeshima of Saga clan) only burned some of Murata's books.² As an officer in charge of the guard of the coastline, Murata had been fully aware of the possible severity of the punishment. His act, thus, attests to his strong commitment to his Saviour whom he found in his Bible. The conversion of Lord Wakasa of Murata testifies to the existence of a keen aspiration amongst the Japanese *samurai* for truth or for a better life on which they could found modern Japan.

Many leaders of the *Meiji* era were educated in schools where the Bible was taught either for its moral principles or as a method of teaching English. For example, Uchimura Kanzō, whose powerful writing criticizing the nation, society, and literature from a Christian perspective, based on the text of the Bible, was influential among many, particularly young writers. Nitobe Inazō, who became a Quaker and served as the Vice General Secretary to the United Nations, was another. He worked actively to promote international relations and world peace; his vision was to become a bridge between the East and the West. He wrote *Bushidō, The Soul of Japan*, in 1889 to introduce Japanese *samurai* culture to his readers.

The cultural impact of the Bible extends beyond the *Meiji* era. Other significant historical persons have been profoundly influenced by it. Yanaihara Tadao, Nitobe's professorial successor at the Imperial University of Tokyo, was one of the few people who spoke out loudly against the colonization policies of Japan. He argued that China was trying to be independent and Japan should watch over it. He supported his arguments against Japan's militarism with direct quotes from the Bible. When Japan was rushing into war with China in the 1930s, Yanaihara warned the Japanese leaders with this text from the Book of Isaiah (30.15-16):

For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel;
In returning and rest shall ye be saved;
In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength:

1 Good, *Famous Missionaries*, 255.

2 Ryder, *A Historical Sourcebook*, 31; Good, *Famous Missionaries*, 253-5.

And ye would not.

But ye said, No; for we will flee upon horses; therefore shall ye flee: and,
We will ride upon the swift; therefore shall they that pursue you be swift.

Yanaihara predicted the defeat of Japan, and because of his bold criticism, he was expelled from the university. Yet, he continued to publish his articles in Christian circles. When history testified to his righteousness, following the defeat of Japan, he was welcomed back to Tokyo University and later became its president. Yanaihara's protests against the war were directly supported by reference to the biblical text.

In the short history of modern Japan, it can be observed that it was often the Bible that supported those who made radical proposals for reform, who took courageous, decisive, and revolutionary actions against the prevailing culture.

The impact of the text on Japanese language modernization

Nanette Twine has identified the four major elements of language modernization as:

- (1) orthographic reform (reform and unification of transcription methods),
- (2) lexical expansion (expansion of the Japanese vocabulary),
- (3) stylistic reform,
- (4) standardization¹.

To indicate the influence of the Bible on Japanese language modernization, I shall refer briefly to the first two categories: orthographic reform and lexical expansion.

Orthographic reform

There were two major reasons that orthographic reform was particularly necessary at this point in time. First, attempts at modernization were hampered by the fact that there was no standard written Japanese. Second, high-level education, i.e., anything more than simple training of literacy and math, was restricted to only the very elite, sons of *samurai*, involving a difficult, lengthy, and burdensome study of the classical Chinese and Confucian texts. Modernization was prevented because of the enormous gap between the written and spoken language. There were three kinds of transcription: Chinese characters and simplified *hiragana* and *katakana* syllabic scripts. Various styles of written Japanese coexisted and were in use by different social classes for different purposes.

This period saw the establishment of romanized characters as an alternative Japanese orthography.² It also saw a unification of Sino-Japanese and native Japanese words on the orthographical level. Japanese words are presented here in the following way so that the distinction between Chinese characters and *kana* syllabic scripts is made clear in romanised transcription.

¹ Nanette Twine [Gottlieb], *Language and the Modern State: The Reform of Written Japanese* (London and N.Y.: Routledge, 1991), 13.

² James Curtis Hepburn, a Presbyterian missionary, systematized it in the process of compiling his *Waei-Gorin Shūsei, A Japanese and English Dictionary: with English and Japanese Index*. The first edition, published in Shanghai in 1867, contains more than 20,000 Japanese words. The fifteenth edition was published in 1907.

Kanji: Chinese characters are in bold;

Kana: *hiragana* and *katakana* syllabic script are in italics;

Words written in Chinese characters with superscript in *hiragana* alongside are both bold and italicised, for example, *Megumi*.

In order to introduce new Christian concepts distinct from the traditional religious concepts, the Bible translators provided a native Japanese word as the superscript of the roughly equivalent Sino-Japanese written in Chinese characters. For example, as equivalent for προσευχη, a native Japanese word *inori* “prayer,” written in *hiragana* syllabic scripts, was supplied as the superscript to the Chinese two-letter compound **qi-dao**, traditionally read in Japanese as **ki-tō**, which was closely associated with *Shintōism*, in order to indicate that it was a new concept.

Gradually, as the equivalent of προσευχη, the term, *inori*, sharing the identical Chinese character with the first letter of **ki-tō**, followed by *hiragana ri* was established as the modern transcription. This approach of integrating Sino-Japanese and native Japanese styles on a lexical level was a major contribution to orthographic reform.¹

Lexical expansion

As new, modern, technological or philosophical concepts were introduced to Japan, it was necessary to create a new vocabulary to incorporate words from these fields. As a result, during this period of rapid modernization, many new words were created. In the process of translating the Bible into Japanese, many nouns were created from the stem of polite forms of native Japanese verbs. In order to incorporate abstract words such as σωτηρια “salvation,” a noun, *sukui*, was created from the verb, *sukui-mas* “save”; and for αναστασις “resurrection,” *yomigaeri*, from *yomigaeri-mas* “resurrect.”² There are many words either newly created or adapted to introduce new Christian concepts distinct from the established religious ones. An example is the Sino-Japanese noun, **shin-kō**, from the equivalent of πιστις “faith.” The existing term for “belief” or “trust” was mainly the Sino-Japanese noun, **shin**, often used as the stem of a verb, **shin-zu** “believe.” The term **shin-kō**, formed by adding another verb *aogu*, to “look up” with respect, or to “ask,” in native Japanese, read as **kō** in Sino-Japanese, did exist, but not in wide use.³ According to Haraguchi Takaaki, this word was used in Buddhist scriptures, but read as **shin-gō** in early days.⁴ During the process of translating the Bible, the Chinese compound written in the same Chinese characters but read as **shin-kō** establishes itself as the term denoting Christian “faith.” Later it comes to be recognised as the new term denoting “faith” in general in a wider religious

1 It had dual efficiency of presenting a complex concept in a condensed way in Chinese characters, while at the same time making it sound familiar by providing the equivalent native Japanese words as the superscript. But gradually they integrated and established a simplified orthography as the standard Japanese. More examples include *sakae* “glory,” as superscript for **eikō** for δοξα; *okite* “law,” for **rippō** for torah.

2 Mochizuki Yōko, *Hebon no Shougai to Nihongo* (Tokyo: Shincho-sha, 1987), 177.

3 Regarding the term *aogu*, see *Kokugo Jiten*, Revised New Version (Tokyo: Oubun-sha, 1970), 13. With regards to the word, **shin-kō**, there is no entry in the major dictionaries of classical Japanese lexis. (U. Saeki and K. Mabuchi, *Kogo Jiten* [Tokyo: Kōdansha, Gakujutsu Bunko, 1979]).

4 Haraguchi Takaaki, “**Shinkō ka Shin ka?**: Pistis no hon-yaku-shi wo bunka-teki, shuukyō-shi-teki shiten yori kangaeu,” *Kirisuto-kyō Ronshū*, vol. 41 (Tokyo: Aoyama Gakuin University Alumni Association Kirisuto kyō Gakkai, 1998), 39-52.

context. This fact attests to the impact of Bible translation on the development of modern Japanese language.

In conclusion, it can be observed that, like the proverbial still waters, the Bible had a quietly profound effect on the formation of the modern state of Japan, on those leaders, inspired by it, who courageously stood up against the sterile conservatism of previous generations or militarism, and especially on language reform. Barely noticeable on a superficial level though they might be, these currents contributed remarkably to the nation's making a giant stride in the development of a modern society and language.

While the conversion rate has remained at less than one percent, the number of Bible readers is considered to be about 10 percent of the total population, which seems to attest to the impact of the Japanese version of the Bible.¹

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THE CHINESE MANDARIN BIBLE: Exegesis and Bible Translating

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Introduction

In recent years, scholars have posed various questions about the role of Bible translating in China. Increasingly, translations of the Bible are viewed as an aspect within the context of cultural exchange rather than an exclusive religious phenomenon. Nevertheless, this new research interest in the nature and significance of the Bible in China is only in its initial stages. There is still a lack of textual analyses of the different translations and their translating strategies.

This article will deal with Samuel Isaac Joseph Schereschewsky's 1874 version of the Old Testament (henceforth the 1874 version). Despite its importance, the 1874 version has received serious attention from scholars only recently.² This was the first OT translation in Mandarin, which was spoken by the majority of the Chinese population. It was widely distributed until the twentieth century and to a large extent became the basis for the OT translation of the 1919 standardized *Union Version*, which is still in use today.

Very notable is Schereschewsky's multi-cultural background and his involvement throughout his life with Jewish, Christian, and Chinese cultures. He was a Jew and was thoroughly familiar with both the Masoretic Text (henceforth MT) and the Jewish commentary tradition. Although he had been converted to Christianity, he "wished to retain his culture and past experience by integrating

1 The Bible readers' ratio of 10 percent is according to Suzuki Norihisa, "The Bible and Japanese culture," *The Bible and Japanese Culture* (Tokyo: Rikkyō University, 1999), ix. This is remarkably high for a nation which does not teach religion in school curricula.

2 The major studies include Irene Eber, *The Jewish Bishop and the Chinese Bible: S. I. J. Schereschewsky (1831-1906)* (Studies in Christian Mission 22; Leiden: Brill, 1999); and Lihi Yariv-Laor, "Linguistic Aspects of Translating the Bible into Chinese," in *Bible in Modern China: The Literary and Intellectual Impact* (ed. Eber, et al.; Sankt Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica, 1999); and Cao Jian, "The Chinese Mandarin Bible: Textual Variations in Genesis 1-4 in the 1874 Translation by S. I. J. Schereschewsky (1831-1906)" (M.A. thesis, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2002).