

BY EVERY WORD OF GOD

A History of Bible Translation in Japan



By John R. Himes

©April 2004, March 2016
All Rights Reserved

BY EVERY WORD OF GOD

By John R. Himes

The history of Bible translation in Japan is a colorful and interesting story. Many efforts have been made, and they have often been left uncompleted. This is not surprising, since the number of Christians in Japan compared to the general population has always been very small. Less than one per cent of Japanese are Christians, including all denominations and even the cults! Probably only half of that number are evangelical.

In the light of these facts, it is surprising that as many translations of the New Testament and even of the entire Bible have been completed. Let's explore the history.

The First Missionaries

There is firm evidence that Nestorian missionaries reached Japan many hundreds of years ago. The Nestorians were actually strong and orthodox Christians, despite what their Catholic enemies wrote about them. Also, recent research shows that, contrary to what some scholars say, the Nestorians believed in translating the Bible. In 503 A. D., "A bishop's seat was established in Samarkand and a linguistic school at Merv, for preparing written languages for the central Asian tribes, for Scripture translation" (John Young, *By Foot to China*, p. v).

An important fact for this study is that a Nestorian physician lived in Japan from 724 to 748 A. D. Through his influence the Empress Komyo apparently became a Christian, and began various works of charity uncommon to Buddhism or Shintoism (Young, p. 19). Even before that, however, there was evidently a Nestorian church in Kyoto which is now the lecture hall of the Koryuji Buddhist Temple (Young, pp. 19-20). Again, in northern Honshu is a grave said by the locals to be that of Jesus Christ, believe it or not! The bizarre local legend is that Judas died in place of Jesus, Who then came to Japan, married and had many children. It seems plain that this grave must be that of a Nestorian missionary (Young, p. 19). So Christian missionaries were in Japan quite early in its history. Unfortunately, there are no Nestorian Bible translations extant in either Chinese or Japanese and no proof of the existence of such.

The Catholics Arrive

It would not be until the 16th century when missionaries once again came to Japan. Catholics under Francis Xavier arrived in Japan on August 15, 1549, and began seeking to win Japan to their religion. Unfortunately, the Catholics were not then and are not now officially a "people of the Book." Until the Second Vatican Council revised Catholic doctrine in 1965 with

the "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation," which encouraged Bible reading among the laity, Catholics in many countries were discouraged from reading the Bible, and in many cases (especially before the mid-20th century) actually forbidden to have a copy of the Word of God in their own language. Even when allowed to have a Bible, they were not allowed to interpret it; only the Catholic Church was allowed to do that. Thus, it is no surprise that the Catholic missionaries evidently did not leave a Bible translation in Japan when their religion was outlawed by the decree of Shogun Tokugawa Hidetada in 1616.

Having said that, according to some sources, the Catholics actually did translate the Bible, publishing it in Kyoto in 1613. According to the *Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan*, "The Bible was first introduced to Japan in 1549 when Francis Xavier arrived in Kagoshima with a manuscript translation he had made of the gospel of Matthew. In the late 16th and early 17th centuries, Jesuit missionaries made several attempt to translate the Bible but no copy of any of these early translations is known to exist." (Accessed on the Internet.) In addition, recent discoveries indicate that at least a few passages of the Word of God were translated into Japanese around that time. According to the Internet website of the *Mainichi Daily News*, Japanese Catholic boys who traveled to Rome in 1582 translated some verses of the Psalms into their language, and the manuscript was recently discovered in Krakow, Poland. Even before that, a translation from around 1580 of some verses was found in Portugal. Of course, it must be remembered that these were hand-written manuscripts, and not printed Bibles or even books of the Bible. However, other than that there is no extant Catholic Bible from that time.

What we do know for sure is that the Catholics translated and left with their converts the Mass and a catechism. There is actually the truth of the Gospel in the Catholic Mass and catechism, though these were in Latin. Thus, it may be that some of the Catholic martyrs of the 16th and 17th centuries were truly born again. At the very least, the great courage some of these *Kirishitan* (the name for the followers of Xavier's Catholicism) believers showed, calling on the Lord Jesus at their horrible deaths, should be an example to us. However, in the long run, great damage was done by the Catholics to Christ's cause by their idolatry and other teachings.

The First Bible Finally Arrives

Because of the limited presence of the Nestorians in Japan, and the evident failure of the Catholics to produce a Japanese Bible, there is little doubt that the first Bibles to reach Japan were Chinese. The first Chinese Bible translation was that of Robert Morrison, completed in 1819 with the help of William Milne. This translation was done in the High Wenle dialect, a language used by Chinese scholars. The Greek text used was the Textus Receptus (TR). Educated Japanese were thus able to read the Bible in Chinese even before the rescript against Christianity was lifted in 1873.

It is not known how many, if any, Japanese read the Chinese Bible in the early 1800's, though many did later in the century. In 1866, Missionary Guido Verbeck led to Christ and baptized a minister of the *Daimyo* (ruler) of *Saga* named Wakasa, who was very familiar with the Chinese Bible. In fact, Wakasa later "retired from active life to his country villa, where he

spent much of his time in translating the Bible from Chinese into Japanese. He died in 1874, with a firm faith in his Saviour" (Otis Cary, *A History of Christianity in Japan*, p. 60). Wakasa's daughter and her friend were saved through his efforts in translating the Bible into Japanese from Chinese (Cary, p. 60-61). The Word of God is indeed living and powerful!

Japanese Translation Attempted

The day finally came when a great scholar undertook the translation of the Bible into Japanese. Karl Gutzlaff, a German missionary to China, saw the need and undertook the task. His helpers were Japanese seamen, not the most educated people in the Japan of those days. At any rate, they completed Genesis, Matthew, and the Gospel and epistles of John. His version of John, based on the TR, the only Greek text in those days, was printed in Singapore in 1837. He called it the *Shinten Seisho* (*God of Heaven Bible*; Akira Izumida, *The Bible and Its Translation in Japan*, p. 12).

Unfortunately, Gutzlaff's version was not well received by the Japanese. He actually had the temerity to write in the vernacular of the day rather than in the *bungotai*, or classical Japanese in which all things were written well into the twentieth century. For this reason, his version came to be nicknamed the *Gozaru Yaku*, "gozaru" being the normal word in the vernacular of the day for "it is." Thus, John 1:1-2 in the Gutzlaff version reads, "*Hajimarini, kashikoi mono gozaru. Kono kashikoi mono, gokuraku tomo ni gozaru. Kono kashikoi mono gokuraku gozaru. Hajimari ni, kono kashikoi mono, gokuraku tomo ni gozaru*" (Izumida, p. 12).

For the Japanese of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, it was rare to write anything in *kougotai* ("colloquial speech"), the common spoken language, since educated people always wrote in classical Japanese. Thus, almost all books of those days were in classical Japanese.

It was almost unthinkable to translate the Bible into the colloquial language. In the thinking of the day, since the Bible was a Holy Book, it was more to be admired by scholars than taken into the heart by the common people. After all, only educated people could read the Confucian classics, which were in Chinese!

Other Efforts

Other missionaries also endeavored to translate the Bible into the colloquial language. S. Wells Williams worked on a translation with the help of shipwrecked sailors, but unfortunately did not publish his work. Missionary C. M. Williams translated some of the New Testament into Japanese around 1850, but unfortunately he also did not publish his work. B. J. Bettelheim published his Japanese translation of Luke, John, Acts and Romans in China in around 1851. A revision of his work with the Gospels and Acts was printed in Vienna in 1872, and many copies sent to Japan (Cary, p. 85). This work is still extant. Then, *Shou Ueda* of the Eastern Orthodox Church came out with a translation of Matthew in 1892, and an entire New Testament from the Greek (evidently with reference to the Slav and Russian Bibles) in 1901 (Izumida, p. 23).

Likewise, a Russian Orthodox Archbishop named Nikolai did a translation of the New Testament in classical Japanese, according to several websites.

In the meantime, J. Batchelor was working with the Ainu tribes of northern Japan. In spite of having to learn the Ainu language from scratch, he printed the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer and "Jesus Loves Me" on his little hand-press in 1885. These were the first things ever printed in the Ainu language (Cary, pp. 181-182)! In 1897 Batchelor completed and printed his translation of the New Testament in the Ainu language, basing it on the TR Greek New Testament. This translation was recently reprinted for the purpose of research in the dying Ainu language.

Early Baptist Translation Work

In 1871, a Baptist missionary named Jonathan Goble published his colloquial version of Matthew from wooden blocks. Due to the fear of Japanese printers of the government's rules against Christianity, Goble was not able to get the blocks cut until he went to a man in Tokyo who did not seem to know what the Bible was! Goble's work was an amazing feat in those days, and shows the courage of this missionary and the others just mentioned in going against the notion that only classical Japanese should be used for the written language. Unfortunately, this translation was not widely accepted. However, when the first complete Bible was published, Goble sold many thousands of books or portions of it as a colporteur (Cary, p. 149).

Interestingly enough, Goble was the inventor of the *jinrikisha*, or rickshaw, which a Japanese craftsman made on Goble's design for the missionary's invalid wife (Cary, p. 52). This fact is not widely known. In fact, Japanese scholars attribute this invention to a Japanese artisan in Tokyo, but there is evidence that this man worked from a stolen copy of Goble's plans.

Another Baptist who translated the Bible was the scholarly Nathan Brown of the American Baptist Mission. This amazing man came to Japan at age 65, having retired years before from his service as a missionary in India and Burma. Brown worked with the *Moto Yaku* translators (see pp. 9-12) at first, but then left the group to work on his own when they would not accept his insistence on the necessity of translating from the original Greek text (Izumida, p. 17), and translating baptism as immersion. Brown actually translated the entire New Testament (Cary, p. 149) with the help of Tetsuya Kawakatsu. This New Testament was first published in 1878, making it the first ever complete New Testament in Japanese.

According to the cover of this New Testament it was translated "in vernacular Japanese," making it far ahead of its time in providing the Japanese with a colloquial version. Here is a sample sentence from his work from Mark 1:1 which is clearly colloquial, even for 21st century Japan: "Kami no musuko, Esu Kirisuto no, fukuin no hajime" (Izumida, p. 17).

Also on the cover was also written that it was "from the oldest existing Greek manuscripts." This was shortly before the time when Brooke Foss Westcott and F. J. A. Hort brought out their critical Greek text, but there were already Greek texts available with an apparatus (footnotes) citing manuscripts such as *Vaticanus* and *Siniaticus*. (Constantin von Tischendorf's Greek NT, 8th ed. of 1872, and that of Samuel Tregelles finished in 1872, are

examples. Henry Alford's commentary on the Greek NT also included manuscript variations. See *The Text of the New Testament*, by Bruce Metzger, pp. 126-129.) Thus, it is safe to say that Brown's New Testament was not based directly on the TR Greek text, but on his own research and textual criticism.

Several factors prevented Brown's translation from being widely used. First of all, his original work did not use the *kanji* (Chinese) characters. Secondly, following William Carey, Brown insisted on "immersion" for the Greek word *baptisma* (βαπτισμα), following William Carey, and this was unacceptable to the missionaries of most denominations. Finally, the soon appearance of the *Moto Yaku* eclipsed his work, since it included the Old Testament. In spite of these factors, a revision of Brown's translation with the *kanji* (Chinese) characters by a missionary named White was printed in 1886, and in 1894 Kawakatsu published his revision of the New Testament. All of these three editions are extremely rare, though a copy of Brown's original New Testament is on display at the church he founded, Yokohama Baptist Church, the first Baptist church in Japan.

The "Original Translation"

A giant step was made in Japanese Bible translation when, for the first time, the entire New Testament as translated by a committee (as opposed to a one man translation) was published in Japanese. The *Moto Yaku*, or "Original Translation" as it was called, was published in 1880. The Old Testament followed soon after, being completed in 1887.

The chairman of the committee for the new translation was Reformed Church missionary Samuel R. Brown, ably assisted by J. C. Hepburn, D. C. Greene and R. S. Maclay. Brown had done his own work on the New Testament in around 1860, but did not publish it.

Many others helped, including Guido Verbeck, who worked on the Psalms. Japanese believers who helped included Masatsuna Okuno, Goro Takahashi, Takayoshi Matsuyama, Kajinosuke Ibuka and a man named Miwa (Izumida, p. 15, Cary, p. 149). Ibuka believed that the Bible should be read in the vernacular, and later published his own version of Mark in colloquial Japanese (Izumida, p. 18).

J. C. Hepburn of the committee was the missionary giant of scholarship who invented the Hepburn system of Japanese Romanization, and produced the first Japanese-English dictionary. He printed Matthew, Mark and John in 1872-1873 with the help of Okuno, who had such good calligraphy that he was eventually used to prepare the woodblocks with which to print the New Testament. Even after the publishing of the *Moto Yaku*, Hepburn continued to work on his own translation, though it is unclear how much he eventually published. Of interest is his translation of *logos* (λογος, "word") in John 1:1 as *kotodama* (literally "word spirit"), meaning a word with spiritual power (Izumida, p. 18).

The committee first met in Yokohama in 1872, with the actual work beginning in 1874. The work was chiefly done by the missionaries, with the Japanese being used as "helpers to fit the translation with beautiful clothing in the national vernacular." According to Izumida, there were many difficult discussions during the work, for example about what word to translate as

"God." *Kami* was used by Shinto, but the Chinese Bible used *Shang Ti* ("Emperor of Heaven"). In spite of the difficulties, the work progressed well, and resulted in some very interesting renderings. One example is in John 1:1-2 where *logos* was translated with the Chinese character for "way" (the *Tao* of Taoism) but with the *furigana* (characters for pronunciation) reading *kotoba*, or "word".

This translation was done chiefly from the English King James Version (KJV), but also drew from several other sources including the TR Greek text, the Masoretic Hebrew text, the Chinese Bible and the Latin Vulgate Bible of the Catholics. Thus, to its detriment, it was a double translation rather than being strictly from the Greek and Hebrew.

Unfortunately, the *Moto Yaku* was done in very difficult, albeit beautiful, classical Japanese, making it hard for any but scholars to read. Also, there was another problem. The level of scholarship of the translators was not quite up to par in some areas, so serious errors were made.

To give one example, the Greek word *oinos* (οἶνος, or "wine" in the KJV) was translated by the Japanese word *sake* in most cases, meaning "rice wine" or sometimes alcoholic drinks in general. This means that in His first miracle, Jesus was portrayed as turning water into a very potent drink with high alcoholic content. However, the Bible calls such a drink "strong drink," not wine.

Again, in Acts 2:38, the *Moto Yaku* has Peter preaching that we should be baptized in order to repent and receive forgiveness of sins: "Kuiaratamete tsumi no yurushi wo en ga tame ni...baputesuma wo ukeyo." Unfortunately, this error was repeated by all major versions after this (*Bungo Yaku*, *Kougo Yaku*, *Shinkai Yaku*), though strangely the liberal *Shinkyoudou Yaku* gets it almost right!

The Old Testament also had problems. For example, in the Leviticus 18 passages about "uncovering the nakedness" of close relatives, the *Moto Yaku* translated the Hebrew words *galah* ("to uncover") and *'ervah* ("nakedness") as, "to indulge with, take pleasure with," thus avoiding an embarrassing Biblical prohibition against the Japanese custom of taking a Japanese *furo* bath with the whole family. This weak rendering became worse in time, with several Japanese Old Testaments after this translating "to rape" in this passage.

There was another problem with the *Moto Yaku* and its revision that is not widely recognized, but which no doubt contributed to the problems of the first colloquial version (see below). All three of the main translations in classical Japanese (*Moto*, *Bungo* and *Nagai*) end Acts 1:11 with the suffix "-n", which is a variation of the verb ending "-mu".

This form was thought by early missionaries and linguists to be a normal future tense, which is no doubt why it was used for the Greek future tense. In fact, missionary Samuel Brown is said to have rushed out one day, "like Archimedes, to inform Hepburn that he had at last discovered the future tense" (*Japan in Review*, ed. by Arthur Reynolds, p. 37). However, as a classical grammarian has pointed out, "MU is usually described as forming a future tense, but it is more accurate to say that it denotes probability" (George Sansom, *An Historical Grammar of Japanese*, p. 187). A Japanese grammar of the classical language gives a similar explanation

(Hiroo Nakano and Kikuichi Nakamura, *Classical Grammar from the Basics*, p. 52-53). Thus, it was not until the *Shinkai Yaku* Bible that Japanese believers were given a sure promise from the Word of God of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ!

The Revision

It did not take too long for the missionaries and Japanese pastors to realize that the *Moto Yaku* was not good enough. So, a revision was planned and the work begun. Only the New Testament was revised, with the Old Testament remaining just as it was in the *Moto Yaku*.

For the revision, published in 1917, a modern critical Greek text was used for the first time, that of Eberhard Nestle which had been published a few years before. This New Testament was still in the classical Japanese (*bungotai*), and was thus called the *Bungo Yaku Seisho*. The revision was done with beautiful style and vocabulary.

Some have mistakenly assumed the *Bungo Yaku* to be the Japanese equivalent of the KJV, and a few Fundamentalists still insist on its use over modern Japanese translations. However, the *Bungo Yaku* cannot be the Japanese equivalent of the KJV for several reasons: (1) While the Old Testament was unchanged from the *Moto Yaku*, the New Testament was not translated from the TR but from Nestle's Greek text. (2) By my research, comparing the KJV to the *Bungo Yaku*, the classical Japanese is almost three times more difficult to read than the English of the KJV, assuming one to be fluent in both languages. Because of this archaic language, the *Bungo Yaku* is gradually passing from use, though it is still being printed.

Modern Catholic Translations

From 1895 to 1900, various books of the Bible were translated by Catholics and printed in pamphlet form. However, it was Emil Raguét who was the first Catholic to translate the complete New Testament into Japanese. His translation of the Latin Vulgate came out in 1910.

From 1954 to 1959, Eusebio Brian produced a Japanese Old Testament from the Vulgate. The Franciscans followed with a New Testament in 1959 and their Old Testament in 1980. The Catholics finally had a complete Bible in Japanese, even though it was from the Vulgate, and thus a weak double translation.

Another Catholic New Testament came out in 1981, the *Barubaro Yaku* by a priest from Italy named Frederico Barbaro. It was done—you guessed it—from the Latin Vulgate!

The Nagai Yaku

In 1928, a great Japanese scholar named Naoji Nagai, the pastor of the Tokyo Asakusa Church, completed and published his one-man version of the New Testament from the Stephanus version of the TR Greek text. Nagai called his translation the *Shin Keiyaku Seisho* (*New Covenant Bible*), possibly indicating that he intended to translate the Old Testament also (unfortunately he never published an OT), but it became widely known as the *Nagai Yaku*.

This was a wonderful and accurate translation, so much so that when it was reprinted in the 1990's, it quickly sold out. However, since it was a one-man translation, was in the very

difficult classical Japanese, and consisted of only the New Testament, it never became widely used except as a study Bible for pastors and missionaries. The *Nagai Yaku* is unfortunately now out of print. Thus, as of this writing there are no Japanese New Testaments available which have been translated directly from the Textus Receptus (or Byzantine/Majority) Greek text.

A Controversial Colloquial Translation

In the early 1950's, missionaries and Japanese pastors began to feel more than ever the need for a colloquial version of the whole Bible. Thus it was that the New Testament translation of the *Kougo Yaku* (*Colloquial Version*) was finished in 1954, followed by the Old Testament in 1955. Though it purported to be a new translation, this version reads as though it depends greatly on the *Bungo Yaku*. The Greek text used for the New Testament was the 21st edition of the text of Eberhard Nestle, a German scholar who followed the theories of Westcott and Hort.

Controversy immediately followed. Since one of the versions used for comparison purposes was the liberal *Revised Standard Version* (RSV), the *Kougo Yaku* was not readily accepted by most Fundamentalists and many evangelicals. The RSV had been a target of much criticism in the United States for such things as its rendering of the Hebrew word *almah* as "young woman" instead of "virgin" in Isaiah 7:14. Unfortunately, in a pamphlet touting the new Japanese version the RSV is praised as "a splendid example of up-to-date Bible translation" (*Introducing the New Testament in Colloquial Japanese*, p. 8). Thus it was that the *Kougo Yaku* was soon accused of being a liberal translation.

To be fair, the truth of the matter is more complicated, as is often the case. Though the translators did actually use the RSV as one reference, it did not serve to make them mistranslate in such important places as Isaiah 7:14, where *otome* was used, which does have the meaning of "virgin" as well as "young woman" in Japanese. There are also a number of other key places where the *Kougo Yaku* is more conservative than the RSV, such as in Hebrews 1:3. However, there are other places where the *Kougo Yaku* follows the RSV in error, such as in the prophecy of Christ's birth in Jeremiah 31:22, which says, "A woman will protect a man" (*Onna ga otoko wo hogo suru.*"; just as in the RSV) rather than "a woman shall compass a man" (KJV).

Beyond this, the *Kougo Yaku* does have another major problem which caused it to be rejected by almost all Fundamentalists, though some evangelical and many liberal churches use it to this day. The problem is that this version often translates the Greek future active indicative with a potential verb in Japanese, as did the *Moto Yaku* and *Bungo Yaku*. Thus, for example, Acts 1:11 reads that Jesus *may* come again ("*Mata oide ni naru de arou.*"), instead of that He *will* come again. However, the Greek mood of the verb here is the indicative, showing certainty, whereas the subjunctive and optative moods are used in Greek for uncertainty.

A Colloquial and Conservative Version

Because of the problems with the *Kougo Yaku*, conservatives in Japan felt the need for their own translation. Thus it was that in 1961, Missionary Ken McVety of TEAM proposed a new translation to several conservative Japanese scholars, to be called the *Shinkai Yaku* (*The*

New Japanese Bible). This project gathered wide support among evangelicals in Japan, both foreign missionaries and Japanese pastors.

When McVety traveled to the States in 1961, he was able to garner support for the project from the Lockman Foundation, producers of the *New American Standard Version* (NASV). Thus, the *Shinkai Yaku* is a translation produced largely along the lines of the NASV. In fact, in the introduction, translation principles are listed which are virtually identical with those of the NASV. This translation was done from the critical Hebrew and Greek texts. For the Old Testament, Kittel's Hebrew text (3rd edition) was used, and Nestle's 24th edition was used for the New Testament. The New Testament was published in 1965 and the Old Testament came out in 1970.

This Bible has been quite well received among conservatives of every stripe. Almost all Fundamentalists use this version, even those who prefer the TR Greek text or are "KJV-Only" advocates, simply because there is no better translation in Japanese. However, the version has been criticized for various errors in translation, in particular in Acts 2:38 where this version follows previous versions in having Peter say, "Be baptized to receive forgiveness of sin." ("Tsumi wo yurushite itadaku tame ni...baputesuma wo ukenasai.") Also, it is criticized for being overly literal and thus not easy to read, a criticism also of the NASV.

At one time there was talk of a completely new version of the Bible to replace the *Shinkai Yaku* (Don E. Regier, "The History of the Shinkaiyaku Bible," p. 4). However, the committee in charge finally decided on a revision. There had been one minor revision before, but the new revision, which came out in 2004, incorporated corrections on over 900 verses. Most of the corrections were designed to update the language to 21st century Japanese, in particular softening the language used to refer to handicapped people and lepers.

The Version Born of Compromise

As the New Evangelical compromises of the past have led to further compromise, the ecumenical movement has blossomed. In Japan, more and more cooperation has taken place between Protestants and Catholics, in spite of the Biblical injunction that we should not be unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14). This compromise culminated in a translation of the New Testament called the *Kyoudou Yaku*, or *The Interconfessional Version*. The method of translation being "dynamic equivalence," this version was rejected from the start by most Bible-believing Christians. Oddly enough, the Old Testament was translated from the Septuagint.

This New Testament made massive concessions to Catholic doctrine and practice. For example, names were in large part pronounced in the Catholic way. Jesus became *Iesusu* rather than *Iesu* as in the Protestant versions. Also, the same honorific language which was used of Christ was also used of Mary, whom Catholics worship as the "Mother of God." For example, see Luke 1:43, where Elizabeth refers to Mary as *okaasama*, "honored mother." Because of these and other problems, this New Testament was taken off the market for revision.

The revision came out along with the Old Testament in 1987, and was dubbed the *Shinkyoudou Yaku* (*The New Interconfessional Bible*). By this time, "the evangelical voice on the

committee was extremely weak because of the addition of Catholic scholars and so had almost no influence on disputed passages" (Regier, p. 4).

This revision is not much better than the original, though it did change the names (in particular the name of Jesus) back to the Protestant pronunciation. However, this version, as was its predecessor, is particularly unacceptable to Baptists because of the translation of the Greek word *baptisma* (βαπτισμα, "immersion") with the Japanese word *senrei*, meaning "washing ceremony." This is the word used for sprinkling by the churches in Japan which teach baptismal regeneration. The *Shinkyoudou Yaku* is the most liberal translation in Japanese yet, and thus is generally used by the largely liberal *Kyoudan* churches.

Other Efforts

There have been a number of other efforts in Bible translating in recent years. First of all, the Jehovah's Witness Watchtower Society produced its own New Testament in 1973, the *Shin Sekai Yaku (New World Translation)*, with the Old Testament being published in 1982. It is a strange translation as might be expected, since it is not only done by cultists, but is a double translation from the English *New World Translation*. For example, in order to support the heresy of works salvation, the word "believe" is translated as "make your faith work." ("Shinkou wo hatarakaseru.")

The *Shou Yaku* New Testament, published in 1962, is the Japanese version of the *Amplified Version*. Those who use the *Amplified Version* in English for the variety of possible translations it gives will no doubt use this translation in Japanese, in spite of its weaknesses. There is no Old Testament *Shou Yaku*.

In 1975 the *Ribingu Baiburu* New Testament, translated from the English *Living Bible*, was published, with the Old Testament coming out in 1978. Not only is this a paraphrase rather than a proper translation, it is a double paraphrase, being based on the English *Living Bible*, itself a paraphrase. In recent years a revision has been produced. Unfortunately, for a long time the Japanese *Living Bible* was the only complete Bible version available to read on the Internet, perhaps due to the copyright restrictions of the other major Japanese translations. In recent years the *Colloquial Bible* has become more available since its copyright has elapsed.

Another translation came out in 1978 when Reiji Oyama published his New Testament. His title in Japanese is *Gendaijin no Seisho*, meaning the *Bible for Modern Man*. The English title Oyama gave it is *The Understandable Bible*. Oyama, a well-known evangelical scholar, is the founding pastor of the Christ Bible Church in Tokyo and the founder and president of the Tokyo Seminary. He is conservative in doctrine, believing in the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible (*The History of Bible Translation and the Understandable Bible*, Reiji Oyama, p. 106). Thus, his translation is in general quite conservative.

Unfortunately, Oyama translated by the "dynamic equivalence" method (Ibid, p. 66 ff.). The use of this method makes for some very poor renderings. For example, he translates in Luke 1:35, "The high God will create life in you." ("Itotakaki Kami ga, anata no uchi ni inochi wo

souzou sareru no desu.”) This translation could be used against the pre-existence and incarnation of Christ!

In another interesting development, the Japan Deaf Evangel Mission (www.deaf.or.jp) has been working on a sign language translation of the Bible, according to their Internet website. They have published several books of the New Testament on video tape, and plan to complete the New Testament. Since many Japanese deaf people cannot read the Japanese Bible, this is an exciting project for those in deaf work in Japan.

Other modern translations include the *Tsukamoto Yaku*, translated by Toraji Tsukamoto, a scholar of the liberal *Mukyukai* (“non-church movement”), and put out by the Iwanami Publishing Co. The Gospels were published in 1963 and Acts in 1977. Another scholar named Masao Sekine brought out various individual books of the OT as well as a translation of Romans before publishing a complete Old Testament in 1997.

Another modern individual translation deserves mention. A teacher named Gorou Maeda has loved the Bible on his own since his youth, but is not a pastor and possibly not even a Christian. He translated quite a bit of both the Old and New Testaments into beautiful modern Japanese in the copy I have dated 1978, then published the entire New Testament from Nestle's 26th edition Greek text in 1983. While one must praise Maeda's love for the Bible, his translation does have liberal readings. For example, in Isaiah 7:14 he translates the Hebrew *almah*, meaning virgin, as "woman of tender youth" (*urawakai onna*). We cannot tell without more information whether Maeda is a true believer in Jesus Christ or not, but at the least he has been very misled in his scholarship.

In 1985, Yagyuu Naoyuki came out with his New Testament. There is no information in the book about the translator other than what he himself has written in the afterword, so we cannot be sure of his affiliations, background or qualifications. According to the afterword, Yagyuu used the UBS 2nd edition for his Greek text, but did not stick strictly to it. As for his translation method, he simply would read the original and translate however it came into his head! The result, while readable, is a mishmash of mistakes. For example, in John 1:1 he translated that the Word "has the same nature as God." ("Kami to doushitu na mono de aru.") In John 3:16 he has translated that whoever believes "is able to have eternal life." ("Eien no inochi wo itadaku koto ga dekiru.")

The most recent modern NT, published in January of 2004, is simply called "The New Testament" (*Shin Yaku Seisho*), with the translators being known simply as "The NT Translation Committee." It appears to be extremely liberal since the table of contents lists "Paul's Books" and "Books in the Name of Paul." It also panders to baptismal regeneration, since in most cases it renders baptism as "washing ceremony" (*senrei*), the word for sprinkling among Japanese churches. However, oddly enough, the translator of the Synoptic Gospels did translate baptism as "immersion." Another interesting rendering is *omoi* for "will" in Romans 12:2.

One final modern version deserves mention, and that is the *Denmo Seisho* ("Internet Bible"), a public domain version which is not actually in print, but available only on the Internet (www.cozoh.org/denmo). The translator or translators do not give their names or any other

information, but they finished at one point at least thirteen books of the New Testament, though the effort seems to have stalled at this writing. It is evident that the translators have great skill in the Japanese language. Unfortunately, they have not answered questions by e-mail, so little else is known about them.

According to the "Notes" on the website, the translation is based on the *World English Bible*, a revision of the American Standard Version of 1901. The translators list the *World English Bible* (on the Internet at www.ebible.org) as the "standard text" and "foundation" for the work, and many Japanese translations for reference, even including the Jehovah's Witness *Shin Sekai Yaku*. The translators also list the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* as an OT text and the *Byzantine Text Form* (no doubt the one edited by Maurice A. Robinson and William Pierpont) as a NT text. These are the texts used by the *World English Bible*.

The translators are to be commended for the Hebrew and Greek texts being used, for the hard work done so far, for making the translation public domain, and for putting it on the Internet. However, their work has some weaknesses which it is hoped they will correct. First of all, being based on an English translation means that it is a double translation. Secondly, the translators have followed the *Kougo Yaku* in translating the Greek future active indicative as a Japanese potential verb. (See comments above on the *Kougo Yaku*.) Thirdly, the use of the deeply flawed Watchtower translation as a reference, the *Shin Sekai Yaku*, is a huge mistake.

The *Kijun Yaku*

Many pastors and missionaries have wished for years for a new, colloquial translation from the TR (or Majority/Byzantine text), so that the rhythm and content of the beloved KJV could be had in the Japanese. In particular, there are words, verses and even passages which the modern critical text Greek New Testaments do not have.

As has been seen, there is a true rarity of translations in Japanese from the TR (or Byzantine/Majority) Greek text. There has only been one complete New Testament in Japanese history from this Greek text, the *Nagai Yaku*. Furthermore, this translation is currently out of print.

Thus, in the mid-1970's a new translation committee was formed by independent Baptist missionaries and pastors. Their goal was to complete a translation of the New Testament from the TR called the *Kinjun Yaku*, or *Standard Translation*. This project immediately ran into trouble when the participants could not decide which Greek text to translate from. After two years of discussions, the TR was decided upon, at which point a number of pastors and missionaries who favored the Nestle's Greek text left the project. After things finally got going, the work continued apace. An interesting facet of this effort, according to Missionary George King, was 120 "monitors" who read the translation and checked it for readability.

Among others, the group included missionaries Floyd Wooden of Baptist Mid-Missions (BMM), George King of Baptist Bible Fellowship International (BBFI) and Vernon Chandler of the Association of Baptists for World Evangelism (ABWE). Japanese pastors cooperating included independent Baptist pastors Seiichi Ueda and Inaba (given name unknown), with Akira

Yamauchi working full time at one point, according to a prayer letter from the group dated May 6, 1978.

Troubles persisted. After the work began, it became evident that one Japanese pastor would have to be asked to quit the project because of his insistence on being the primary translator. However, this hardly slowed the work.

The *Kijun Yaku* project produced a pilot version of the Gospel of Mark in 1978, but it had many errors of translation and orthography. Of course, a pilot version is not meant to be a final version, and thus is expected to have errors. Unfortunately, though, a corrected version was never printed.

Over the years the project's leadership passed from hand to hand. George King relinquished leadership in 1980 in order to take over the Baptist Bible Fellowship Bible Institute, and passed it on to Seiichi Ueda, who headed the effort for three years until depletion of funds sidetracked matters.

After this, Lavern Rodgers (BBFI) took over the leadership for a while. Rodgers gave the reins in later years to Floyd Wooden (BMM). At this time, Daniel Fujii of Maranatha Baptist Mission and a pastor named Ikeda joined the project. Fujii did massive re-writing, including over 1000 corrections on the book of Mark as well as many corrections other books, but his rough style of written Japanese did not sit well with the other translators. This good man is now in Heaven. The committee continued working off and on into the 1980's, in particular on the Gospel of John.

Floyd Wooden, a godly good missionary, went to Heaven from a sudden illness on Christmas Day of 2002, and the leadership was taken over by Nobumasa "Nobby" Tajima, a missionary with BMM. In the meantime, faithful pastor and translator Akira Yamauchi retired in the town of *Kouriyama*, where Pastor Tajima pastors the work he founded.

According to George King, the entire New Testament was eventually completed, and extensive notes on the Greek and Japanese were included in the hand-written manuscript. Unfortunately, though, no other books were ever published. This author was told that one of the Japanese translators, a man named Yanagi, had the manuscripts, but he is now in Heaven and his wife suffers from senile dementia. At this point, almost all of the translators are in Heaven or retired, and no one is sure where the manuscripts rest.

Other Fundamentalist Projects

An ambitious effort was begun in 1994 when independent missionary Larry Hagen of Hokkaido, accompanied by other missionaries, visited Tokyo and held a meeting to discuss the possibility of a new cooperative effort. Unfortunately for his efforts, Hagen's insistence on using the KJV as the original instead of the Greek text gained him little support among other missionaries.

In another setback for Hagen's effort to find helpers, his guidelines for translation were not well received. For example, he wished to translate the English word "wine" with the Japanese "*katakana*" word *wain*. (See Hagen's "Vocabulary List for John's Gospel." *Katakana* is the

Japanese alphabet for foreign words.) This Japanese word is the one used for modern wine, and is certainly not the equivalent of the Greek word *oinos* (οἶνος), which includes non-alcoholic drinks made from grapes. Even when it does refer to alcoholic wine, *oinos* means a drink with much less potency than modern wine because of the limitations of ancient brewing technology. Thus, Hagen's translation would have had Jesus making water into modern wine, which has a high alcoholic content and would thus be called in the Greek of the New Testament *sikera* (σικερα), or "strong drink" (Luke 1:15). Hagen has now retired from the field, but evidently continues to work on his translation. However as of this writing he has not yet published any books of the New Testament.

One more effort was begun in late 1994, led by David Carter of Baptist International Missions, Inc. (BIMI), who was joined by Paul Fischer (BIMI), independent missionary Takafumi Miyashita, Pastor Shuuji Seki and this writer, John R. Himes (Baptist World Mission). Our committee translated the book of John through chapter six from the TR Greek New Testament before being interrupted by various personal matters among the translators, including this writer being led of the Lord to the island of Hokkaido. We were thus never able to finish the book of John, nor any other book of the New Testament, but the effort was not wasted.

The Lifeline New Testament Project

God used this experience to burden this writer to lead a new effort to produce a new translation of the New Testament from the TR, which was begun in 2002. The name of the project is the *Lifeline New Testament*. The first draft of the New Testament was finished on August 4, 2008. My co-translator, an excellent linguist in Japanese and English, Masaki Miyakawa and I finished the second draft on July 31, 2013. As of this writing, over 82,000 copies of the final draft of John's Gospel and Romans have been printed, and are being distributed in Japan. Work continues apace at finalizing other books at this writing, with Missionary Randy Smith working as the final editor and putting the files into PDF form for printing. Katsuyuki Furukawa is doing valuable duty as an editor and proofreader.

Among other translators and linguists who have helped or are helping with this task are missionary linguists David Carter (BIMI) and Frank Musk (BWM), Japanese, Hebrew and Greek linguist Paul A. Himes (who grew up in Japan, and has a PhD in New Testament), and Japanese pastor and linguist Takahashi Masashi.

We have finally finished the whole New Testament, thus providing for the very first time a Japanese New Testament from the TR Greek text (or any Byzantine/Majority text) in modern Japanese, the language of the common people. We ask your prayers as we work on the proofreading. Also, in 2020, a bilingual "John and Romans" will be handed out at the Tokyo Olympics. The translation is offered freely to all who wish to print it, with restrictions only on changing the renderings or profiting from the translation. For more current information feel free to write us at: lifelinebible@yahoo.com.

Afterword

Translating the Word of God from a pure heart of faith is a massive job, and not one for the quitter. Only those who have been gifted by God with ability in languages and called of God to this task should attempt it, and it should only be done for the glory of God and to uplift Jesus Christ.

Having said that, you may have noticed that this pamphlet does not touch on the theories of Westcott and Hort, the value of the TR or Majority/ Byzantine Greek Text, or any of the other current issues involved with Bible translation except for comments on the Japanese translations. This is simply because of my purpose for writing this pamphlet.

My primary goal was to provide a reference work on Japanese Bible translations. I wished to provide scholarly material on the Japanese Bible for missionaries, pastors and ordinary believers. There has been much nonsense written and said over the years about Japanese Bible translations, and it has been my goal to debunk the nonsense and set the record straight. Hopefully by now you have learned the falsity of some of those rumors and myths.

A missionary friend of mine was once rejected for support because the American pastor had been informed by a certain Florida pastor that there was a KJV-type Bible in print in Japanese. Foolishly, the pastor refused to believe the veteran missionary and instead took the word of the Florida pastor, who knew nothing whatsoever about the Japanese Bible. It is to help men like my friend and inform men like that pastor that I wrote this pamphlet.

Let us send the Word of God out to win souls, build churches and help saints to grow. The Bible is a sword—you do not need to defend a sword, you simply fight with it! May our wonderful Lord Jesus Christ bless you as you serve Him.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Cary, Otis. *A History of Christianity in Japan*. New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1909.
- "Characteristics of the Third Revision of the New Japanese Bible." Article distributed in 2003 through Christian bookstores.
- Drummond, Richard H. *A History of Christianity in Japan*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1971.
- Hagen, Larry. Open letters on his project dated 10/25/94, 1/13/95.
- _____. "Vocabulary List for John's Gospel." (ND)
- Izumida, Akira. *The Bible and Its Translation in Japan*. Tokyo: Inochi no Kotobasha, 1996.
- Japan Bible Society, The. *Introducing the New Testament in Colloquial Japanese*. Tokyo, 1954.
- Japan Deaf Evangel Mission Internet website. Accessed 8/14/03 (www.deaf.or.jp).
- Kijun Yaku* Translation Committee. Prayer letter dated May 6, 1978.
- King, George. Telephone conversation on October 7, 2003.
- Mainichi Daily News* Internet website. "Researchers Unearth Ancient Japanese Bible Translation." Accessed 8/14/03.
- Metzger, Bruce Manning. *The Text of the New Testament*, 2nd Edition. New York: Oxford U. Press, 1968.
- Nakano, Hiroo and Kikuichi Nakamura. *Classical Grammar from the Basics*. Tokyo: Hieisha, 1947.
- Oyama, Reiji. *The History of Bible Translation and the Understandable Bible*. Tokyo: Akatsukishinsho, 1989.
- Regier, Don E. "The History of the Shinkaiyaku Bible." Article in leaflet form dated April 25, 1997.
- Reynolds, Arthur, ed. *Japan in Review*. Tokyo: JEMA, 1970.
- Sansom, George. *An Historical Grammar of Japanese*, 1968 corrected reprint. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928.
- Tajima, Nobumasa. Telephone conversation on April 21, 2004.
- Young, John M. L. *By Foot to China*. Tokyo: Radiopress, 1984.

Japanese Bibles

- Bungo Yaku Seisho* (Classical Japanese Bible)
- Denmo Seisho* (Japanese Internet Bible, at www.cozoh.org/denmo). Website accessed in late 2003 and early 2004.
- Gendaijin no Shinyaku Seisho* (The Understandable Bible, literally the New Testament for Modern People)
- Kougo Yaku Seisho* (Japanese Colloquial Bible)
- Kijun Yaku Seisho Maruko Den* (Standard Translation, Mark's Gospel)
- Kyoudou Yaku Shinyaku Seisho* (The Interconfessional Bible)
- Maeda Yaku Seisho* (The Maeda Bible)

Moto Yaku Shinyaku Seisho (Original Translation New Testament). My copy is dated 1895.

Ribingu Baiburu (Japanese Living Bible)

Shinkai Yaku Seisho (The New Japanese Bible)

Shinkyoudou Yaku Seisho (The New Interconfessional Bible)

Shin Sekai Yaku Seisho (Japanese New World Bible)

Shin Yaku Seisho Yagyuu Naoyuki Yaku (Yagyuu Naoyuki's New Testament)

Shou Yaku Shinyaku Seisho (Japanese Amplified Bible)