

Christianity and Biblical Translations in Japan

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To my wife, who taught me always to try harder

To my family, who taught me to enjoy the small things

And to the countless others who have helped me along the way

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Abstract

This project provides an overview of the story Christianity and Bible translations in Japan by cataloguing and critically examining selected Japanese biblical translations. It begins with the Jesuit missions in the 16th and 17th centuries, continues to the 19th and 20th centuries up until the start of the Second World War, and closes with what the Bible has become in modern day Japan. The first chapter provides a historical summary of the events of the early history of the Bible in Japan. The second and third chapters examine the translations of the Bible made during the two periods that followed and chart the progress made in translating the Bible into Japanese.

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Introduction

While studying at Seinan Gakuin University in Japan, I had the opportunity to experience something unique. Seinan Gakuin University is a Baptist university that was founded in 1916 by C. K. Dozier. Being a Christian university, there was a chapel on campus, and every Sunday there was a worship service. I, however, was invited by a student at the university, Kouji, to visit the church that he attended weekly. I did not know what to expect, but after walking for about 10 minutes we arrived at an international school that focuses on English learning. Honestly, I was confused as I thought we were going to church, but Kouji directed me inside, and what I found was something truly inspiring. It was a small room packed with roughly 20 people with two American missionaries and two Japanese Christians leading the group in worship. What made the experience even more impactful was that it was a bilingual service because the missionaries also wanted to teach those in the local area English. I would soon learn that this was only one piece of Christianity in Japan and that groups of all sizes and denominations all coexisted and pursued God together.

Given the long and turbulent historical relationship between Christianity and Japan, it is no wonder that the current state of Christianity in Japan is unique. According to *Nippon.com*, “as of December 31, 2016, the population of Christians in Japan

numbered 1.9 million.”¹ This data was compiled by the Agency for Cultural Affairs in Japan, and according to the study roughly 60% of the Christian population resides in Tokyo and Kanagawa Prefecture.² With the current population of Japan being around 127 million people, that means Christians account for roughly 1.5% of the Japanese population. Of this, 1.5% the three most common denominations in order of size are: Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox.

Population numbers, however, are not adequate in gauging the impact Christianity has had on Japanese society over the past 476 years. As Mark R. Mullins notes, “The disproportionate role of Christians in the field of education, for example, is readily apparent when one compares the number of private schools associated with the major religious traditions in Japan.”³ A number of universities, high schools, junior high schools, elementary schools, and kindergartens were founded by Christians.⁴ Furthermore, Japanese literature has received worldwide acclaim thanks in part to the works of late Roman Catholic novelist Endō Shūsaku who has sold millions of copies of his works worldwide.⁵

Another influence of Christianity on Japanese culture is seen through popular religious culture in Japan. Mullins points out that while commitment to church attendance is rare, there is a growing adoption of Christian ritual tradition.⁶ In 1982 most weddings were conducted by Shinto priests, with Christian weddings only accounting for 5.1% of

¹ “Christianity in Japan,” *Nippon.com*, last modified May 24, 2018, <https://www.nippon.com/en/features/h00200/christianity-in-japan.html>.

² “Christianity in Japan.”

³ Mark R. Mullins, “Preface and Acknowledgements,” in *The Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, ed. Mark R. Mullins (Boston: Brill, 2003), viii.

⁴ Mullins, viii.

⁵ Mullins, viii.

⁶ Mullins, viii.

the total weddings performed.⁷ According to Mullins, “by 1998, however, the percentage of Christian weddings had increased to over 53 percent.”⁸ This is a result of natural Japanese appropriation, but it also shows that Christianity has a large influence in Japan beyond church statistics. This influence is a result of the long history between Christianity and Japan that spans almost half a millennium.

This long history can be traced through the translations of the Bible into Japanese. The Bible and Christianity are intertwined throughout Japanese history. As Christianity gains traction, efforts are made in producing translations of the Bible into Japanese, but when it is struck with tribulation, so too are biblical translations. When Christianity first arrived in Japan, there were few to no translations of the Bible into the Japanese language. Eventually, efforts were made resulting in the first complete translation of the New Testament into Japanese in 1612. However, that success was short-lived. The country soon rejected Christianity and its proponents. A result of this opposition was the burning of all Christian texts and with their loss so too was any progress made in translation.

This would not be the end of the story, however, for the Bible and Christianity in Japan. With the opening of the country in 1853 by Commodore Matthew C. Perry, the country was thrust onto the global stage. This push by Perry led to a turbulent time of rapid change for the Japanese people as they were forced to adapt to a world from which they had been shut off for over two hundred years. During this rapidly changing time, Christianity began to flourish again. As a result, many feats were made in Japanese Bible

⁷ Mullins, viii.

⁸ Mullins, viii.

translation and progress continued until the outbreak of war with the United States in 1941. In the wake of the Second World War and the reconstruction of Japan by the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP), translation efforts resumed again, this time with even more vigor. Many translations were produced, each one building on previous ones. The translators refined their craft and Christianity itself in the Land of the Rising Sun.

This thesis explores the history of Christianity in Japan as told through selected translations and the reception of the Bible beginning in the 16th century with Jesuit missionaries and ending with the emergence of the *Kakure Kirishitan*, or “hidden Christians.” The first chapter examines the efforts made by Jesuit priests not only to convert Japanese people to Christianity but also to provide them with the tools necessary to maintain their faith in their own tongue. These brave few would sadly be struck down by a government that was threatened by foreign influences in domestic affairs, eventually closing the country off from the outside world and banning the practice of Christianity. The second chapter takes place as the country is reopened to the world through the actions of Commodore Perry. The period between 1853 and 1920 was a turbulent one in Japanese history due to the changes required of the Japanese people who had to adapt to the modern age. This change is reflected in the translations of the Bible during this period translators adapted their language to the ever-changing landscape of the new Japan. The final chapter examines the post-war era from 1945 to the present day. During this time, the country was rebuilt from the ground up, resulting in a more stable nation. The language solidified, too, and with it the Christianity in Japan. This period produced many different translations by many different translators, ranging from translations completed

by a single translator to ones produced by large ecumenical committees. These final translations paint the picture of what Christianity looks like in modern Japan and show that, even through immense hardship, progress can be made.

The chapters are divided based on historical period. This is done to provide historical context for the translations. The first chapter takes place during the 16th and 17th centuries, which was during the time of the great unifiers of Japan and when Japan became unified as one nation-state. A majority of the second chapter takes place during the Meiji era, which saw the opening of Japan to the West as well as rapid industrialization. The majority of the third and final chapter takes place in the late Shōwa era in the years after the Second World War. This was a time of reconstruction for the Japanese people in the aftermath of the war as most of the infrastructure was destroyed and had to be rebuilt from the ground up. These contexts are the rationale for the chapter division in this thesis.

The passages that are analyzed in the thesis were selected because of their subject matter and their linguistic complexity. The passage selected from the Old Testament is Psalm 119:33-40. This passage was selected because of its unique style of praise present in all Psalms and its form as a prayer. Furthermore, the style and the subject matter of this prayer in particular display the different approaches in translating prayer and the different terms/nouns used for God. The passage that was selected from the New Testament is John 1:1-5. The rationale for this passages selection is twofold: 1) the earliest translation that is still available is Karl Friedrich August Gützlaff's translation of the Gospel of John, and 2) the ways in which the theologically complex idea of the Holy Trinity is translated not only into the Japanese language but also into Japanese culture.

The choice of translations selected for this thesis were based on availability and the impact the translation had on the Japanese language, culture, and the field of Japanese Bible translations. Karl Gützlaff's translation of the Gospel of John is the oldest translation of the Bible into Japanese which is still preserved. Thus, its inclusion is paramount. The translations made by James C. Hepburn and Samuel R. Brown, including the subsequent translation committees on which they had served, had a profound impact on the approaches taken by translators when translating. Some their choices are still seen in modern translations, such as referring to "God the Father" in John as *Kami*. The Bible, Japanese Colloquial was selected based on its impact on the written language and its overall success as not only a translation, but also as a literary work. The New Japanese Bible was selected because of its relationship to the Bible, Japanese Colloquial and its widespread adoption in Protestant evangelicals. The Japanese Living Bible was chosen because of its unique creation and as an example of issues that can arise in the translation process. Finally, the New Interconfessional Translation was selected because of the nature of the project itself. It was the result of a large ecumenical effort and is the culmination of hundreds of years of Japanese Bible translations.

I: Beginnings, 1549-1650

The tale of the Bible in Japan began in the port city of Nagasaki. While Nagasaki was not the starting point of Christianity in Japan,¹ the city and the port of Dejima played a vital role in the spread Western thought in Japan for the centuries following 1543, when Portuguese traders, followed by Christian missionaries, first landed in Japan.² Nagasaki soon became Europe's gateway to Japan. It was through this port that not only the Portuguese, but also the Dutch, British, and French traded with the Japanese. Their trade included firearms, medicine, and religion. Firearms, especially, provided rising feudal lords (*daimyos*) the tools they needed to expand their domains. Oda Nobunaga, one such lord, revolutionized the use of muskets in combat and almost succeeded in uniting all of Japan under his rule aided by these European material inventions. Much like Macao in China, Nagasaki became the stepping stone for the West into Japan and, with the new Tokugawa Shogunate unifying all of Japan after the battle of Sekigahara in 1600,³ the Shogunate focused on controlling the feudal lords.

¹ Francis Xavier landed in the port city of Kagoshima, where Christianity initially entered the country.

² Paul Varley, *Japanese Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 143.

³ Varley, 142.

To control the rising feudal lords, the Shogunate implemented systems such as the *Sankin-kotai*, or Alternative Attendance system, in which all *daimyo* who had fought against the Tokugawa at the battle of Sekigahara were to spend every other year in the capital of Edo. Furthermore, when they would leave to return to their domains, they had to leave behind their wife and first-born son as assurance that they would not rebel against the Shogunate. Seeing the growth of wealth in the southern domains of the country, the Shogunate sought to control trade by implementing a policy of seclusion, allowing the Tokugawa to set the rules of foreign trade between Japan and foreign entities. One such restriction was allowing only particular countries to trade with Japan, and only through the small port of Dejima located in Nagasaki.

Of all the European countries that traded with Japan, only the Dutch were allowed to continue. This exception was crucial because the Dutch brought science, medicine, and technology to a secluded Japan. Through the propagation of Dutch Learning, the Japanese were able prepare for the coming Meiji restoration in the 19th century. Without the established Dutch trade and Dutch learning, Japan would have fallen too far behind in the realm of science and medicine for the second arrival of the West in the late 1800s. Thus, Nagasaki played a pivotal role in being Japan's lifeline to Western thought and science. It also was the home to a group of persecuted Japanese Christians, who, under the seclusion act and the subsequent banning of Christianity, were forced into hiding. As a result, their churches are a world heritage site today.⁴

⁴ In 2018, UNESCO named "Hidden Christian Sites in the Nagasaki Region" as a World Heritage Site, insuring that these relics be preserved. The site encompasses a total of ten villages, the remains of Hara Castle and a cathedral, which date back to the 17th and 19th centuries.

While the importance of Nagasaki to the West— and, specifically, the Christians in Japan— cannot be stressed enough, it was not the starting point for Christianity in Japan. The missions of St. Francis Xavier (1506-52), who landed in Kagoshima (farther south than Nagasaki), introduced Christianity to Japan.⁵ Co-founder of the Society of Jesus or Jesuits, Xavier initially regarded the Japanese as honorable and well-mannered people, and he enjoyed being in their presence.⁶ Although he found the Buddhist priesthood of the areas he traveled to be unwelcoming, he nevertheless respected a wise Buddhist monk by the name of Ninjitsu, stating:

I spoke many times with some of the wiser, chiefly with one who is highly esteemed by all in these parts, both for learning, life, and dignity, as for his great age, he being eight years old, and called Ningit, which is to say in Japanese “truthful heart.” He is as a bishop amongst them and if the term could be applied to him, might well be called “blessed.” In many talks which I had with him, I found him doubtful, and unable to decide whether our soul is immortal, or whether it dies with the body; sometimes he told me yes, at others no, and I fear that the other wise men are all alike. This Ningit is so great a friend of mine that it is a marvel to see.⁷

Xavier, like most Jesuits, held the Japanese people in a very positive light, citing that they were often of “good will” and desired to learn about God.⁸ Xavier, along with other Jesuits, in some cases held the Japanese in a higher regard than their European

⁵ C.R. Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 37-41.

⁶ Boxer, 38

⁷ Boxer, 38.

⁸ Boxer, 38.

counterparts.⁹ Xavier's Japanese assistant, Yajirō, produced the first attempted translation of the Bible into Japanese during his time studying in Goa.¹⁰ However, according to Doron B. Cohen, "no trace of this translation exists, and it is doubtful whether it was indeed an actual translation of the full Gospel."¹¹ This argument is furthered by Miyazaki Kentarō who states, "Yajirō was forced to translate Christian terminology by using Buddhist words."¹² This caused many problems for Xavier as it turned out he was preaching Buddha to Buddhists.¹³ Nevertheless, Xavier continued his mission in Japan, correcting these errors and moving from the city of Kagoshima to the city of Satsuma and in the local Kyushu area, until he departed Japan in 1551.

Japan experienced great conflict in the years following Xavier's departure. Many powers vied for control over Japan with the goal of unifying the nation under one clan. The three men who proved successful in unifying Japan became known as the great unifiers, and the first of them was Oda Nobunaga. Nobunaga treated the European Christians very well. He allowed the Jesuit priests to proselytize to the Japanese people without any restrictions. He saw the European missionaries and their religion as a gateway to courting favor from the technologically superior West. Nobunaga, using his connections with European merchants, acquired many firearms and other weapons and with them, he revolutionized warfare in a way that even the Europeans had not. He had developed a tactic titled "volley fire." With it, he was able to maintain a constant stream

⁹ Boxer, 40.

¹⁰ Bernardin Schneider, "Bible Translations," in *The Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, ed. Mark R. Mullins (Boston: Brill, 2003), 205.

¹¹ Doron B. Cohen, *The Japanese Translations of the Hebrew Bible: History, Inventory, and Analysis* (Boston: Brill, 2013), 20.

¹² Miyazaki Kentarō, "Roman Catholic Mission in Pre-Modern Japan," in *The Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, ed. Mark R. Mullins (Boston: Brill, 2003), 6.

¹³ Miyazaki, 6.

of fire against his enemies. This tactic almost won Nobunaga all of Japan and showed the effectiveness of European weapons in combat. Nobunaga's dreams were never realized, however, because he was assassinated on the eve of his triumph. Nobunaga's view of the Europeans as a vehicle for conquest later colored the opinions of the following regimes and their approaches when dealing with the Western influence.

A few years after Oda Nobunaga's assassination, Japan's ruling powers started to resist the growing Christian influence in Japan. Nobunaga's second in command, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, taking the reins from his lord, gained control over a large swath of Japan. Hideyoshi was the first in a line of Japanese rulers who perceived Christianity as a threat and sought its dismantlement in Japan with his St. James's Day edict. In the edict Hideyoshi proclaimed these five points:

- 1) Japan is a country of the Kami (gods) and for the padres to come hither and preach a devilish law, is a most reprehensible and evil thing.
- 2) For the padres to come to Japan and convert people to their creed, destroying Shinto and Buddhist temples to this end, is a hitherto unseen and unheard-of thing. When the Lord of the Tenka gives fiefs, cities, towns, or income to anybody, it is purely temporarily, and the recipients are obliged to observe inviolably the laws and ordinances of Japan; but to stir up the canaille to commit outrages of this sort is something deserving of severe punishment.
- 3) If the Lord of the Tenka allowed the padres to propagate their sect, as the Christians wish and intend, this is contrary to the laws of Japan, as previously stated. Since such a thing is intolerable, I am resolved that the padres should not stay on Japanese soil. I therefore order that having settled their affairs

within twenty days, they must return to their own country. If anyone should harm them within this period, the culprit will be punished.

- 4) As the Great Ship comes to trade, and this is something quite different, the Portuguese can carry on their commerce unmolested.
- 5) Henceforward not only merchants, but anyone else coming from India, who does not interfere with the laws of Shinto and Buddhist deities may freely come to Japan, and thus let them take due note of this. On the nineteenth day of the sixth month of the fifteenth year of Tensho (July 25, 1587).¹⁴

Hideyoshi issued this edict after a night of discussion with some of his closest advisors, who had informed him that Jesuit padres were responsible for burning Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples, forcing conversions of the Japanese, and conducting a trade of selling Japanese slaves to other nations.¹⁵ In response to these claims, Hideyoshi immediately sent messengers to padre Gasper Coelho inquiring why the padres would do such a thing. Coelho's response was that it was not Jesuit padres destroying Buddhist and Shinto holy sites, but rather zealous converts¹⁶ over whom the padres had no control.¹⁷ Furthermore, Coelho rebuked the claim that padres were forcing the conversions of the Japanese people. He also rebutted the assertion that the padres were conducting a slave trade, stating that it was the Japanese who were selling their own people and it was the responsibility of the Shogunate to control such problems, not the padres who had no

¹⁴ Boxer, 148.

¹⁵ Boxer, 145-46.

¹⁶ Newly converted Christian *daimyos* often converted their entire fiefdom to Christianity. According to Miyazaki, "the lords urge Buddhist monks to convert, and those who refused were banished from their fiefs, temple properties were seized, and temples were handed over to missionaries to be turned into churches." Miyazaki, 7.

¹⁷ Boxer, 145.

authority.¹⁸ This response from Coelho, from all accounts, infuriated a drunk Hideyoshi. As a result, the Shogun took the first step in the persecution of the Christians in Japan with the edict. This was the first of many anti-Christian policies issued by the Shogunate, and the conditions for Christians would only get worse.

Hideyoshi's choice seems to have been for completely arbitrary reasons. While there were factors that could have contributed to him being swayed, such as the close relationships between European traders and newly converted southern *daimyo*, the facts are not clear as to why he suddenly switched stances on the Christian issue. Until the fateful night when he questioned Coelho, he was friendly with the Christians, even seeing them as a tool much like Oda Nobunaga. His claim in the edict that he found the attacks of Christian *daimyo* on Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples appalling is also hypocritical. Both Hideyoshi and Nobunaga often attacked Buddhist temples that they perceived as threats to their political power,¹⁹ so this drastic change in attitude towards them is illogical. It was so inconceivable to the Jesuits and Japanese Christians that they continued on with their mission. This changed in February 1597 when Hideyoshi decided to make a point by crucifying 26 missionaries and converts in Nagasaki.²⁰ This change was sparked by solely political reasons. In 1596, a Spanish ship carrying large amount of cargo was struck by a typhoon and wrecked off the coast of Shikoku.²¹ Hideyoshi needed resources for his Korean campaign and thus seized the cargo rich ship. This, however, was unlawful based on the Japan-Spain Friendship treaty. So, to make the seizure lawful,

¹⁸ Boxer, 145.

¹⁹ Nobunaga had deemed Buddhist priests and monks as subversive elements because of their corruption, and he waged open war on them during his unification campaign. As a result, the temple of the Tendai sect on Mount Hiei was obliterated and all found inside were massacred. Bunce, 21.

²⁰ William K. Bunce, *Religions in Japan* (Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1955), 22.

²¹ Kentarō, 10.

Hideyoshi renewed his policy to expel foreign missionaries from Japan that he instated in 1587.²² This resulted in the aforementioned execution of the 26 missionaries and converts in Nagasaki,

Based on his approach to Buddhism, he likely saw the Christians as a subversive element beyond his control. Perhaps this was caused by the teachings of Xavier and his fellow missionaries when converting the Japanese people. They would give a new convert a new “Christian” name, and missionaries would urge the converts to dress and act in a Western fashion.²³ With a large portion of his southern domains converting to Christianity and acting in this manner, Hideyoshi was certainly worried that he was losing his grip on the nation they had just fought to unify. This, however, was not the Jesuits’ intention. Alexander Valignano, who headed the Jesuit missions in East Asia, instituted a policy of accommodation to the native Japanese culture.²⁴ His plan was not to dominate over Japanese culture and traditions, but rather, accommodate them in mission efforts and to display the superiority of Christian culture after showing tolerance.²⁵ This kind of strategy was extremely rare during this age of missionary work and demonstrates the attitude that the Jesuit had towards the Japanese people. Even still, the Shogunate had growing fears about the expanding Christian population in Japan.

These fears led to the next, and one of the most defining, pieces of Japanese policy for hundreds of years: the seclusion policy instituted by Tokugawa Shogunate in 1633. This policy, termed *Sakoku* meaning “closed country,” shut the Land of the Rising Sun off from the majority of the world. With the exception of the Koreans, Chinese, a

²² Miyazaki, 11.

²³ Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 406.

²⁴ Miyazaki, 8.

²⁵ Miyazaki, 8

few small islands in the Pacific, and the Dutch, the Tokugawa Shogunate restricted trade and banned all Japanese from leaving the country, threatening those who left with no reentry into the country. This policy also banned the practice of Christianity and initiated decades of governmental persecution of Christians, both foreign and domestic. Thousands of Christians were executed, many by public crucifixion or beheading. Those who wished to continue practicing Christianity were forced underground. These few would gain the title *Kakure Kirishitan* or “hidden Christian” and would pass down their faith orally. Miyazaki Kentarō has authored an in-depth study on their traditions and they, along with this study, will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

The rationale for the “closed country” policy is questioned to this day.²⁶ The drastic flip in the treatment of Christianity is puzzling, because up until the policy was enacted, there was little ill will between the government and the Christians. When examined, common threads emerge that could have caused this change: a growing population of Japanese Christians; close relations between said Christians and European traders; the threatening of the Tokugawa’s class-system by Christian doctrine; and *daimyos*, who sought to break away from Tokugawa leadership. When the Tokugawa rose to power, many southern domains practiced Christianity with numerous feudal lords converting to the religion. Because of practices of Francis Xavier encouraging converts to act more like Westerners, the spread of Christianity worried the Shogunate that the south might revolt. These fears were strengthened by the close relationship that Christian *daimyos* often had with European traders. The Shogunate assumed that that these

²⁶ A majority of scholars—including C.R. Boxer, William K. Bunce, Paul Varely, and Stuart D. B. Picken—recognize that there was some tension between the Christians and the Shogunate, but there is no documented rationale for the sudden change in policy towards them.

daimyos, like Oda Nobunaga, would use their connections with European traders to stage a revolt and topple the Shogunate.

Another issue was that Christian doctrine contradicted the Tokugawa's class system. It did this by maintaining that all people are equal in the sight of God, and this, combined with Xavier's teachings made Japanese Christians question the class system and, in the eyes of the Shogunate increased the likelihood of revolt. These threads lead to one central issue: Christianity threatened the power of the authoritarian government of the Tokugawa Shogunate. This threat materialized with the Shimabara rebellion in 1637. It was started in response to harsh tax policies instituted by the Matsukura Shigemasa, the feudal lord of Shimabara, but the Tokugawa Shogunate maintained that it was a Christian uprising because of the large population of Christians residing within the fiefdom.²⁷ The result was 30,000 men, women, and children being slaughtered and even harsher treatment of Christians.²⁸ To quell any further possibility of backlash to government policies or any uprisings, the Shogunate took drastic action to cut off the head of the snake, as they perceived it. As a result, tens of thousands of innocent people were put to death, religious texts were burned, and the country was left behind on the global stage.

Prior to the destruction of Christian texts, Jesuit priests had attempted to translate the Bible. In addition to Francis Xavier's translation, Juan Fernandez translated the four Gospels in 1552. He also translated the Ten Commandments, Apostle's Creed, and commentaries on them. Unfortunately, his work was lost when the church which held them was set ablaze in 1563.²⁹ In addition to Fernandez's work, a complete translation of

²⁷ Miyazaki, 13.

²⁸ Bunce, 150.

²⁹ Katsuomi Shimasaki, "A Short History of Japanese Bible Translation," *Seong-gyeong-wonmun-yeongu je24ho byeolchaeg* (2009): 116.

the New Testament was produced in Kyoto, known as the Kyoto New Testament. Records show that it was popular in the Christian community in Japan. Much like Fernandez's work, the Kyoto New Testament was lost during the purge of Christian texts and nothing is left for study.³⁰ Even though Christian texts were burned, Japanese Christians still persisted and moved underground to continue the faith, becoming the *Kakure Kirishitan*, mentioned earlier.

For the next two hundred years, the Christian faith survived secretly in Japan. The process by which the *Kakure Kirishitan* maintained their faith had to be clever in order not to leave a trace of their existence. They preserved the scriptures by passing down an oral tradition from one generation to the next to avoid a paper trail. The priests had also shown them how to conduct themselves in secret without a priest. There were multiple roles held by those in a Christian community: there was the *chōkata* (elder), who was in charge of keeping the church calendar; the *kikikata* (announcer), who went house to house informing Christians of the mass; a *mizukata* (baptizer), who was appointed for ten years and handled all baptisms; and the *oshiekata* (teacher), who taught prayers and doctrine.³¹ These Christians also kept their iconography disguised as Buddhist statues. The *Kakure Kirishitan* had developed a devotion to Mary, and they had created statues of her in the shape of a Buddhist Kannon statue.³² They maintained this system of secrecy until the legalization of Christianity in the Meiji period, but the Christian community lost its cohesiveness as time passed. This was often because of how the traditions were passed down: a father would teach the son the traditions, but if the son was unwilling to learn or

³⁰ Shimasaki, 117

³¹ Joseph J. Spae, "The Catholic Church in Japan," *Contemporary Religions in Japan* 4, no. 1 (1963): 7-8.

³² Spae, 8.

moved away to a different area of Japan, then the family chain was broken.

Consequently, some sects of the *Kakure Kirishitan* began to die out. When the time came for reunion with the Roman Catholic Church in 1858 after the ban on Christianity had been lifted the response from the *Kakure Kirishitan* was mixed. Those who did reunite with the Roman Catholic Church were given the title “resurrected *Kirishitan*” and then event in which they rejoined the Roman Catholic Church was titled the “resurrection of the *Kirishitan*.”³³ The others who rejected the Roman Catholic Church remained in the communities they had formed during the persecution under the Tokugawa Shogunate.

The reason that the remaining *Kakure Kirishitan* decided to remain separate from the Roman Catholic Church was because of a difference in belief. In the 200 years of persecution, the *Kakure Kirishitan* faith had evolved and adapted to their situation. What had formed out of the fear of persecution was a form of Christianity that appeared to be no different from either Buddhism or Shintoism. Because of the nature of their persecution, the *Kakure Kirishitan* had to disguise all of their rituals and services as either Buddhist or Shinto in nature. This led not only to the observation of traditional Christian ceremonies, but also to rituals created by each sect of the *Kakure Kirishitan*.³⁴ A common ritual consists of three parts according to Miyazaki Kentarō: “1) it begins with offerings to the deity (*kamisama*) and reciting *orashio*; 2) this is followed by receiving the offerings from the deity and having a meal in common with the *kami*; 3) finally, it concludes with a banquet in order to deepen amity and exchanges with fellow

³³ Miyazaki, 16.

³⁴ Miyazaki Kentarō, “The *Kakure Kirishitan* Tradition,” in *The Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, ed. Mark R. Mullins (Boston: Brill, 2003), 27.

believers.”³⁵ This format mirrors a Shinto ritual.³⁶ The only difference in these rituals was the *orashio*, which changed depending on the nature of the ceremony.³⁷

The *orashio* (prayers) is the feature that makes the *Kakure Kirishitan* appear the most Christian-like.³⁸ *Orashio* have been passed down orally ever since the prohibition of Christianity and in a majority of sects are recited in silence. However, there are now copies in notebooks and diaries for still practicing *Kakure Kirishitan*.³⁹ Reading of the *orashio* is frowned upon, however, as there is great emphasis placed on their memorization and reciting them from memory.⁴⁰ This is a result of the long-standing tradition of passing down the *orashio* from generation to generation to maintain secrecy. Even though they have been passed down orally for centuries, the *orashio* still remain faithful to the originals taught to the *Kakure Kirishitan* by Jesuit missionaries. The *Kakure Kirishitan* still maintain these traditions to this day, but their numbers are dwindling.

The reason that the *Kakure Kirishitan* did not return to the Roman Catholic Church can be found in their means for survival. In some ways, it is a problem of family heritage and maintaining the faith that so many died to protect.⁴¹ Another is that each sect has strayed so far from the original teachings because of their persecution that they did not recognize the Roman Catholic Church as the same religion.⁴² This fact is made even more evident when a sect disbands. The *Kakure Kirishitan* quickly became Buddhist or

³⁵ Miyazaki, 25-26.

³⁶ Miyazaki, 26.

³⁷ Miyazaki, 26.

³⁸ Miyazaki, 24.

³⁹ Miyazaki, 24.

⁴⁰ Miyazaki, 24.

⁴¹ Miyazaki, 31.

⁴² Miyazaki, 31.

practiced Shinto.⁴³ This change is not caused by some revelation that the other two religions or a folk religion are more valid, but rather that they are so similar to what they were already practicing, only without the Christian elements. The *Kakure Kirishitan* and their traditions are truly fascinating, and their ability to keep the Christian faith alive during the darkest time for Christianity in Japan speaks wonders to their faithfulness and bravery.

⁴³ Miyazaki, 32.

II: THE PROTESTANT REVIVAL, 1837-1920

Introduction

Since the beginning of Christian persecution in Japan in 1587, Christianity had been pushed underground in the form of “secret Christians” or *Kakure Kirishitan*. It was through this small minority that the Christian faith survived in Japan. They continued and passed down the traditions taught to them by Jesuit missionaries and eventually evolved their beliefs further in seclusion. In order not to be discovered, the *Kakure Kirishitan* taught orally. Even though the future seemed bleak for Christianity in Japan, circumstances changed with the arrival of Commodore Matthew C. Perry in 1853. Perry made the Tokugawa government, which was in decline at the time, an offer that they could not refuse: Japan must open itself to the West. Perry gave the Tokugawa one year to reach a decision. When the Japanese saw the might of the United States Navy under his command, the Tokugawa felt they had no choice but to capitulate to his demands. The following year, Japan signed the Treaty of Friendship with the United States.

In addition to exposing Japan to a large foreign presence and unequal trade relations with Western powers, the opening of Japan paved the way for many missionaries to flock to the fertile ground that had not been touched since Christianity was banned in 1587. Although the ban on Christianity had not been lifted even partially until 1873, this opportunity gave translators of the Bible the momentum that they needed.

Prior to the legalization of Christianity, and the opening of the country to the West, missionaries were taking every opportunity to make landfall in Japan, even attempting to establish a foothold in Okinawa.¹ The treaties signed between the United States and Japan finally gave them that foothold. These treaties, which opened ports to the West, included clauses that allowed the parties to freely practice their own religion.² As a result, according to Helen J. Ballhatchet, “missionaries quickly established themselves in the treaty ports, where they formed the single biggest group of foreign residents.”³ Within 14 years of the partial lifting of the ban, translators had completed a full translation of the Bible into Japanese.⁴

The main translators of the time were Karl Friedrich August Gützlaff, who produced the first Japanese translation of the Bible since the Jesuit Missions in the 16th century, and the duo of James Curtis Hepburn and Samuel Robins Brown, who worked together on multiple translations and produced many works on Japanese language study. While they were not the only translators of the time, they had the greatest influence on the field of Japanese Bible translations. Their translations established the foundation for the Japanese biblical translations of today.

¹ Helen J. Ballhatchet, “The Modern Missionary Movement,” in *The Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, ed. Mark R. Mullins (Boston: Brill, 2003), 35

² Ballhatchet, 35.

³ Ballhatchet, 35.

⁴ Cohen, 31.

Karl Gützlaff's The Gospel of John, 1837

The first translation of the Bible into Japanese after the period of Jesuit missionaries in the 16th and 17th centuries was that of Karl Friedrich August Gützlaff (1803-51). Gützlaff was a Prussian doctor turned missionary, who, in 1827, was sent to Indonesia in the service of the Dutch Evangelical Society.⁵ By 1832, he had moved to Macao, where, in 1835, he began to study Japanese with the help of three Japanese sailors in his care. He then translated the Bible into Japanese with the aid of the London Missionary Society. In 1836, Gützlaff completed his translation of the Gospel of John and produced woodcut prints of the translation in Singapore. However, this was not his first translation of the Bible; prior to his Japanese translation, he had produced multiple translations of the New Testament into Chinese while working for the London Missionary Society.

Unfortunately, Gützlaff does not reference the source texts he used when translating the Bible into Japanese. Given his prior translating experience, however, he may have translated from the Greek into Japanese. In his process of translation, he sought the aid of the three Japanese sailors to explain Christian theology in a way and in a language that ordinary Japanese people would be able to understand. The sailors were of little help to him, though, and Gützlaff resorted to using many Buddhist terms that were either inadequate or inaccurate to define such theological concepts as the Holy Trinity. But that was not even the strangest part of Gützlaff's translation: Gützlaff used katakana instead of the traditional Japanese writing scripts, kanji and hiragana.

⁵ Schneider, 207-208.

The development of both hiragana and katakana date back to the Heian period (794-1185). Katakana was derived from *man'yō-gana* which was developed by Buddhist monks. *Man'yō-gana*'s purpose was to provide a way for the monks to read Chinese characters in Buddhist texts by making kanji into phonograms, but because of the large number of strokes needed to write them, they quickly were found ineffective. This prompted the monks to innovate on the kanji they chose for the phonograms, and they began to write abbreviated versions of the kanji which would then become known as katakana.⁶ Yuko Igarashi notes that because of the nature of their use, katakana were not considered full characters until the 12th century when “writings with full sized *katakana* were beginning to appear.”⁷ Gradually, katakana replaced *man'yō-gana* and became its own set of characters.⁸ These developments led to katakana being used along with kanji to transliterate Chinese texts in the mid-Heian era. This trend continued for many centuries.⁹

While this was the trend, the purpose of katakana had changed by the time of Gützlaff's translation. According to Igarashi Yuko, a new style of book was being published in Gützlaff's time called a *Kanazoushi* (Book written in kana).¹⁰ Books produced in this style targeted less skilled readers and were written with a mixture of hiragana and kanji with small kana written over the kanji indicating its reading.¹¹ As Igarashi notes, “katakana were, however, rarely used for these books”¹² thus Gützlaff's

⁶ Yuko Igarashi, “The Changing Role of *Katakana* in the Japanese Writing System: Processing and Pedagogical Dimensions for Native Speakers and Foreign Learners,” Ph.D. diss. (University of Victoria, 2007), 20.

⁷ Igarashi, 20.

⁸ Igarashi, 20.

⁹ Igarashi, 21.

¹⁰ Igarashi, 24.

¹¹ Igarashi, 24.

¹² Igarashi, 24.

use of katakana cannot be linked to this writing style. Furthermore, Gützlaff does not use kanji in his translation, which further rules out that he was attempting to translate the Bible in a *Kanazoushi* style. The only rationale would be that Gützlaff had previously translated the Bible into Chinese and used katakana to transliterate the Bible much like a Chinese source. Gützlaff's choice of script is not the only noteworthy point of his translation.

Gützlaff's lexical choice is noteworthy for how he attempted to explain Christian theology. Because of the difference between Japanese and European cultures, Gützlaff utilized a technique in Japanese translation termed by Hasegawa Yoko as *adaptation*.⁴ According to Hasegawa, *adaptation* is "used when the type of situation in the ST (source text) is totally unknown to the TL (target language)."¹³ In this case, Gützlaff attempts to present the difficult concept of the Holy Trinity in Christianity to an audience unfamiliar with the concept. To accomplish this, Gützlaff describes the Greek *Logos* in John 1:1-5 as *kashikoi mono* (wise one) instead of using the word, *kotoba* (word), which appears in later translations. This lexical choice affects the interpretation of the passage by a Japanese audience. *Logos* in the context of this passage refers to Jesus Christ as the "Word of God." For this reason, most English translations use the phrase "the Word" in reference to the *Logos*. However, in his translation, Gützlaff opted not to use *kotoba*. Whether this was a deliberate choice or the result of ignorance, the outcome is confusing.

The second lexical choice is the use of *Gokuraku* (paradise) for "God the Father." *Gokuraku* is the name of paradise in Pure Land Buddhism, and this lexical choice

¹³ Yoko Hasegawa, *The Routledge Course in Japanese Translation* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 177.

resulted from his consultation with the three sailors mentioned previously as they were his only noted contact with Japanese culture.¹⁴

Karl Gützlaff's translation, 1837¹⁵

ハジマリニカシコイモノゴザル。コノカシコイモノゴクラクトモニ
ゴザル。コノカシコイモノワゴクラク。ハジマリニコノカシコイモ
ノゴクラクトモニゴザル。ヒトワコトゴトクミナツクル。ヒトツモ
シゴトワツクラメ、ヒトワツクラネナラバ。ヒトチカニイノチア
ル、コノイノチワニンゲンノヒカリ。コノヒカリワワラサニカカヤ
クタダンワセカイノクライニンゲンワカンベンシラナンダ。
ヨハネの福音書 1:1-5

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the
Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God; 3 all things were
made through him, and without him was not anything made that was
made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light
shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John 1:1-5 (Revised Standard Version. 1951)¹⁶

This lexical choice would likely be confusing to Japanese readers because of
connotations attached to the word. This diverges from the message that John presents in
this passage and muddies the interpretation as this lexical choice establishes “God the
Father” as a place or plane of existence instead of an entity. In English, the first three
sentences would be: “In the beginning there was the wise one. The wise one was with

¹⁴ Schneider, 207

¹⁵ Meiji Gakuin University Library Digital Archives,
<http://www.meijigakuin.ac.jp/mgda/bible/history/index.en.html>

¹⁶ The Revised Standard Version of the Bible is used as the English translation when there is no direct
reference to any other English translation being used in the translation process.

paradise. In the beginning the wise one was with paradise.” Gützlaff’s lexical choice in his *adaptation* technique here alters the interpretation of the passage entirely. It not only downplays the importance of Christ, but it also implies that that “God the Father” is a place rather than an entity.

Although Gützlaff’s translation was the first one produced since the Jesuit missions in the 16th and 17th centuries, his translation of the Gospel of John is generally criticized for its lack of understanding of Japan’s culture and examined for its use of katakana instead of other writing scripts.¹⁷ Even so, Gützlaff’s work inspired many other translators to study Japan, the Japanese language, the Japanese people, and to translate the Bible. The most notable of these later translators was James Curtis Hepburn. Inspired by Gützlaff’s work, Hepburn quickly became a world-renowned expert on Japanese studies and a pioneer translator of the Bible into Japanese.¹⁸ Hepburn, along with Samuel Robins Brown, would translate the Gospels of Mark and John, followed by a complete translation of the Bible published in 1880. In retrospect, while Gützlaff’s translation was inadequate in terms of its theological accuracy, it paved the way for many others, resulting in more accurate and localized translations in the future.

¹⁷ Cohen, 31.

¹⁸ Cohen, 33-34.

Hepburn and S.R. Brown's The Gospel of John, 1872

James Curtis Hepburn and Samuel Robins Brown made great progress in the translation of the Bible into Japanese. Hepburn and Brown together first produced the Gospels of Mark and John in 1872. Eight years later, with the help of fellow Americans Robert Samuel Maclay and Daniel Crosby Greene, they translated the whole Bible into Japanese. Hepburn and Brown were accomplished scholars in Asian languages, particularly Hepburn, who had published multiple works on Japanese studies, including dictionaries. Also, prior to arriving in Japan, they had spent many years in China as missionaries.

Hepburn regarded translating the Bible as his most important task and, in 1861, he started working with Brown on a Japanese translation, assisted by Masatsuna Okuno.¹⁹ The source used for the translations was the Bridgman-Culberston Chinese Bible, along with an English translation of the Bible, most likely the King James Version, for cross-referencing the translations. Hepburn and Brown completed their translation of John in 1872 and subsequently published it and their translation of Mark in separate volumes.²⁰

In their translation, Hepburn and Brown focused on making the language and references as localized as possible. They sought to accomplish this by using a large amount of hiragana, and they attempted to explain Christian theology to a general audience of Japanese readers. One of the ways they did this was by using *adaptation* like Gützlaff but referring to the *Logos* as *kotodama* (word spirits) instead of referring to “God the Father” as *Gokuraku* (paradise). The literal meaning of *kotodama* is “word

¹⁹ James Curtis Hepburn, *The Letters of Dr. J.C. Hepburn* (Tokyo: Toshin Shobo, 1955), 44.

²⁰ Cohen, 37.

spirits” and is a Japanese belief that words have an innate mystical power, often described as “the power of words to alter reality.” Given *kotodama*’s cultural significance, it makes sense that Hepburn and Brown would use it in the translation, even though it does not faithfully portray the *Logos*. While *kotodama* references the words used by people in everyday life, the *Logos* refers to the “divine WORD,” or Jesus Christ, as he existed with God prior to creation.²¹ The *Logos* in this instance is a being and not an abstract power like *kotodama*. Without an established Christian faith in Japan, it proved difficult to describe the *Logos* using the word *kotoba* (word), which would be used in most of the subsequent translations.

Hepburn and Brown, 1872²²

1 ^{はじめ}元始に言靈あり 言靈ハ神とともにあり 言靈ハ神なり。2 この言靈ハはじめに神とともにあり。3 よろづのものこれにてなれりなりしものハこれにあらでひとつとしてなりしものハなし。4 これに^{いのち}生ありし いのちハ人のひかりなりし。5 光く^{くらき}暗にてりく暗ハこれとらざりし。ヨハネの福音書 1:1-5

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God; 3 all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John 1:1-5 (Revised Standard Version. 1951)

²¹ Wesley J. Perschbacher, *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1990), 260.

²² Meiji Gakuin University Library Digital Archives.

While, literally, the Greek *Logos* and the Japanese *kotoba* mean the same thing, “word,” the concepts presented in John proved difficult to convey in Japanese. The polytheism of Shinto and the nature of Buddhism contributed to this misunderstanding. The issue for those who practiced Shinto was that it has an almost infinite number of deities. A *kami* (god), can be a tree spirit, war hero, emperor, or heavenly entities like the Sun Goddess Amaterasu. Thus, it is easy for the Trinity to be split into three and appraised on the scale of deities in Shintoism. Buddhism in Japan was a conglomerate of different Buddhist ideologies and concepts. This created an incredibly diverse and unique landscape in which many different sects of Buddhism— with different visions of Buddha and Buddhahood— all competed against each other and other religions. It was very easy to misidentify the Trinity as a mythical Buddha, thus, mudding the interpretation of the Trinity.²³ The concept of the Holy Trinity being three forms of one deity was confusing for the Japanese people, who commonly mistook the Holy Trinity for being three separate deities.²⁴ That is what made this portion of the Bible, in particular, so vital to convey accurately to the Japanese readers.

Hepburn later revised the translation in 1873, but this version was not published until after his death in September of 1911. In the 1872 translation, Hepburn redefined the idea of God in Japanese Bible translation by using the word *kami* (god), which was adopted in all later translations.²⁵ This translation would not be the only one produced by

²³ Bunce, 47-48.

²⁴ This was also an issue in the early Christian Church. The priest of Alexandria, Arius, sparked controversy by teaching that Christ, though unique in his relationship to “God the Father,” was not “like” Him in that He was not co-eternal with “God the Father.” This resulted in Arius splitting the Trinity. In response, the first council of Nicea in 325 was called. It was here that the Trinity was defined.

²⁵ Ion Hamish, “James Curtis Hepburn and the Translation of the New Testament into Japanese,” *Social Sciences & Missions* 27, no. 1 (April 2014): 79.

Hepburn and Brown in their lifetime. Eight years later, in 1880, they, along with others, published a complete translation of the New Testament.

Meiji Version New Testament, 1880

The first complete Japanese translation of the Bible was produced by James Curtis Hepburn, Samuel Robins Brown, Robert Samuel Maclay, and Daniel Crosby Greene. Along with Japanese assistants and other missionaries, they formed a translation committee and began translating the Bible in 1874, beginning with New Testament segments. They eventually published a completed New Testament in 1880. One of the Japanese assistants was a student, Ibuka Kajinosuke, who observed the work of the committee and later assisted with the translation of the Old Testament. According to him, the committee met five days a week for three hours and tried to complete as much work as possible.²⁶ This resulted in not much being translated in each meeting and lengthened the time it took to complete the translation. They only met for a short time likely because of their outside work. For example, Hepburn was a physician and often worked with Japanese patients during the week or taught medical classes. Not only was he attending to patients, but he also was producing works on Japanese studies, including dictionaries for English speakers, so that they could communicate with the people of this “new” nation. These outside activities likely contributed to the almost six-year period taken to produce the translation of the New Testament by itself.

The translation was intended to be easily understood by the common Japanese people of the time who could not read Chinese.²⁷ However, there was resistance from the Japanese assistants, who preferred the sophistication of the Chinese style. This resulted in a mixture of Chinese and Japanese styles with the readings of the Chinese characters, furigana, written next to them.

²⁶ Cohen, 38.

²⁷ Shimasaki, 120.

The source texts for the translation were the Greek Textus Receptus and the King James Version of the Bible, as well as the Bridgman-Culberston Chinese Bible for reference.²⁸ The committee used the Chinese Bible to decide which kanji to use, to confirm that the kanji they were using was accurate and recognizable to their audience, and to ensure the translation's quality. They consulted the King James Version for similar reasons. The committee used the two translations to cross reference what they had translated into Japanese. Then, they translated it back into English and compared it to the King James Version to confirm accuracy. This method was time consuming, but, when done with multiple versions, resulted in greater accuracy.

An issue that the translation committee, and most translators of the time, faced was the rapidly changing state of the Japanese language. Prior to the opening of the country to the West, Japan was closed off to the world. Not only that, the country rarely saw movement of citizens from one region to another. Even though the country had a well-established infrastructure in the form of roads and tolls, Japanese commoners rarely used them because they had to tend to their fields in order to survive. This exacerbated the issue of dialects and illiteracy in rural areas of Japan. However, the citizens who could make a trip to the capital city of Edo would contribute to the enormous changes taking place in the Japanese language. This was because Edo was the cultural center for all of Japan, and citizens from all across Japan would, at the very least, try to visit it. This resulted in what Japanese linguist Hasegawa Yoko refers to as an amalgamation and assimilation of "traits from both eastern and western dialects."²⁹ The largest influence of this melting pot of dialects was the shift in syllables from Middle Japanese to what is now

²⁸ Shimasaki, 120.

²⁹ Yoko Hasegawa, *Japanese: A Linguistic Introduction* (Cambridge: University Press, 2015), 13.

Modern Japanese. This final shift in syllable pronunciation was a result of the Japanese people becoming interconnected at a national level.

Hepburn and Brown learned from their previous translations and incorporated more commonly used kanji. In their previous translation, they start the passage with *genshi* (origin), while this translation begins with *taisho* (beginning of the world). However, in both translations the Hepburn and Brown chose to add the furigana *hajime* (beginning) above both *genshi* and *taisho*.

Meiji Version, 1880³⁰

1 太初にことばあり。ことばハ神とともにあり。ことばハ即ち神なり。2 このことばハ太初が神と偕が在さ。3 萬の物あるをか由て造らる造をたる者か一つとして之か由らで造らをしハ無。4 之か生あり此生ハ人の光なり。5 光ハ暗か照り暗ハ之と暁らざりき。
ヨハネの福音書 1:1-5

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 The same was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men. 5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

John 1:1-5 (King James Version, 1611)³¹

This translation is the first example of *kotoba* (word) being used in reference to the Greek *Logos*. This vocabulary has been used by most translations up to the present day.

Hepburn and Brown use more kanji in this translation than their previous one, which adds

³⁰ Meiji Gakuin University Library Digital Archives.

³¹ The King James Version was selected as the English translation here because Hepburn and Brown modeled the poetic style of the King James Version when translating.

more clarity as seen with the use of the kanji *tsuku* (to build) and it is used when describing large construction. Given the context of the passage, this choice of vocabulary is well suited as it references the creation of the universe. Another note of this translation is the use of *shūshi kei* (conclusive form) in verb endings *ari* (modern Japanese *arimasu*) and *nari* (modern Japanese *desu*). *Shūshi kei* was used to demonstrate the end of the sentence in classical Japanese and its use is favored in writing. This speech style changes in later translations but is a staple for this period and shows a desire for the committee to make their translation as “Japanese” as possible.

Hepburn continued to lead the publication of the Old Testament seven years later in 1887. The translation, as noted by Katsuomi Shimasaki, “became the most widely-spread Japanese Bible in the Meiji Era,” and “its writing style considerably influenced Japanese literature and its writing style.”³² The translation resembles the King James Version (KJV) in its poetic style, which likely contributed to its popularity.

³² Shimasaki, 120.

Taisho Revised Version, 1917

The rapid changes in the Japanese language and the increasing number of Biblical scholars taking an interest in the Japanese Bible led to greater demand in the early 20th century for a new revised version of the Bible.³³ This new translation was titled the Taisho Revised Version (TRV) since the task was undertaken and completed in the Taisho era (1912-1926). The same committee from the Meiji Version selected the eight members of the team who would undertake this endeavor. The team consisted of four missionaries and four Japanese scholars. The translation's aim was to create a version whose style was more colloquial without compromising the integrity of the original.

The source text for the translation was the Nestle-Aland version of the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (The New Testament in Greek). In addition, the committee referred to the Revised English Version of the Bible.³⁴ There is no note as to what was utilized to translate the Hebrew Old Testament as the committee was only able to complete the New Testament, which was published in 1917. The Old Testament was not completed because of the Second World War and the resulting collapse of the Japanese infrastructure.

In the previous Meiji Era (1868-1912), the Japanese language went through many drastic changes. This was because the language had no defined standard up until the late 1800s. During the Edo period (1603-1868), a standard began to form naturally in the nation's capital of Edo, modern-day Tokyo, but that was only due to the large volume of inhabitants in the city and the fact that it was Japan's first urbanized domain. Furthermore, while a particular form of speech was emerging in Edo, regional dialects persisted throughout the rest of the nation. Most of the time, these included very different

³³ Shimasaki, 121.

³⁴ Shimasaki, 122.

styles of speaking and vocabulary. To tackle the issue of these dialects, the Meiji government created a “nationally unified speech” also known in Japanese as *Hyōjungo*. The creation of this national dialect was not simply to provide easy communication, though that would become vital in the years to come. Instead it was to promote the concept of the Japanese nation-state and nationalism. This was accomplished in a national school system, similar to the *kokugaku* (national learning) that was used by the Tokugawa Shogunate in the 17th century. Translators of the Bible benefitted by not having to return to and revise the translation because of dialectic concerns made by scholars of a different region. Furthermore, it solved the issue of the less educated Japanese people needing a different version of the Bible as the nation was becoming increasingly more literate.

This translation further improved upon the work of previous translators as seen in the refinement of kanji choice and vocabulary. *Kotoba* (word; language) is shortened to the singular kanji *gen* (word), which is a trend that continues in future translations. This shortening is made most likely due to the multiple meanings of *kotoba* “language, word, and speech.” *Gen*’s meaning, on the other hand, is more refined only meaning “word.”

Taisho Revised Version, 1917³⁵

太初に言あり、言は神と偕にあり、言は神なりき。この言は太初に神とともに在り、萬の物これに由りて成り、成りたる物に一つとして之によらで成りたるはなし。之に生命あり、この生命は人の光なりき。光は暗黒に照る、而して暗黒は之を悟らざりき。

ヨハネの福音書 1:1-5

³⁵ Meiji Gakuin University Library Digital Archives.

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God; 3 all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John 1:1-5 (Revised Standard Version. 1951)

Another refinement of this translation is the use of *ankoku* (darkness) instead of *kura* (dark). The previously used term, *kura*, derives from the adjective *kurai* meaning something is dark, while *ankoku* is normally used as a noun meaning “darkness.” Furthermore, these new lexicons are all *wago*, which are of Japanese origin, while the older translation contain *kango*, which are of Chinese origin. This refinement demonstrates the great leaps in translation quality during this one-hundred-year period.

With the support of the world’s leading Bible Societies —American, British, and Scottish— the Taisho Version was disseminated throughout Japan. Its use of a more refined Japanese, thanks to *Hyōjungo* and the colloquial nature of the translation, made it easier for the common Japanese person to understand. That being said, it was not without its problems. Because the language was in a state of flux and the lack of reforms that would not come until after the Second World War, it still did not read as it was spoken. Again, this was due mainly to the state of the language at the time, not because of the translators, who were working with a standard they thought would be understood by everyone. Even so, the translation stood above the rest and was used as a template for the translators of the next major translation: *The Bible, Japanese Colloquial* (1955).

III: THE POST-WAR ERA, 1955-Present Day

Introduction

On August 15, 1945, Japan surrendered to the Allied powers, ending the Second World War. Over the next seven years, the country was governed by outside powers until the withdrawal of the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP) in 1952. Before SCAP withdrew, work had already begun on the first full translation of the Bible since the Taisho Revised Version, the Japanese Colloquial Bible.

In the era following with the publication of the Colloquial Bible, biblical translations in Japan reached their apex. Translators, a majority of them Japanese, produced translations of the Bible ranging from individual books translated by a single author to the greatest ecumenical effort made in Japan, the New Interconfessional Translation. This explosion of translation efforts likely was caused, in part, by the collapse of the Japanese infrastructure. However, the groundwork had been laid out many years prior to the war with the growth of Christian scholarship in the country. The desire for more accurate and specific translations grew.

The key translations of this time were the Japanese Colloquial Bible (JCB), the New Japanese Bible (NJB), and the New Interconfessional Translation (NIT). These translations show the evolution of the Bible in Japan and the adaptation of the nuances of the language. The JCB developed a new colloquial style for Japanese biblical translation

and is still used today; the NJB sought to improve on the formula that the JCB laid out; and the NIT sought to establish the standard for Japanese Bible translation. Another translation of this period, the Japanese Living Bible, would display the dangers of inaccurate translation and how even those with the best intentions but without multiple inspections can result in misinterpretations of the Bible.

The Bible, Japanese Colloquial, 1955

Sponsored by the British and Foreign and American Bible Societies, the Japanese Colloquial Bible (JCB) was published by the Japan Bible Society in 1955.¹ Work began on the translation in 1951, one year prior to the withdrawal of the Supreme Commander of Allied Powers (SCAP) in 1952. The committee was comprised of six members: Dr. Tsuru Senji, Tezuka Giichiro, Endo Toshio translated the Old Testament, while Dr. Matsumoto Takuo, Dr. Yamaya Seigo, and Masashi Takahashi translated the New Testament.²

Following the example set out by the new Japanese Constitution, the goal for the translation was to create a complete Japanese colloquial Bible that included both the Old and New Testaments, which had not been published up to this point. Aiming for a middle-school reading level, the translators used simple grammatical constructions and added furigana (the practice of placing hiragana above a kanji so that the reader can understand it). They also sought to maintain the elegance of the classical language that was used in previous translations.

The source text used for the translation of the New Testament was the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*, which, according to Takahashi (1959), was the standard adopted by Bible Societies in 1904. The translators also consulted any available Syriac and Latin translations as well as the Revised Standard Version of the Bible in English when translating both the Old and New Testament.

¹ Cohen, 67.

² Masashi Takahashi, "The Colloquial Japanese Bible of 1955, With a Short History of Bible Translations in Japan," *The Bible Translator*, no 10, 101–106.

The translators of the JCB struggled to create a colloquial translation, as colloquial Japanese had no defining style. This was caused by the lack of cohesion in the Japanese language prior to the standards set in the nation's new constitution.³ Thus, the translators' goal was to produce something that was, in comparison to the previous Meiji Translation, easier for the average Japanese person to read, much like the new constitution. The constitution drafted by SCAP was targeted to a wide audience of people, and one of the requirements was that it was simple enough for the majority of the population to read and understand it. The translators applied this same philosophy when producing the JCB and accomplished their aims by using Kanji, which was familiar, and language that was simple but was an accurate depiction the scripture.

The Bible, Japanese Colloquial, 1955

33 主よ、あなたの定めのをわたしに教えてください。わたしは
終りまでこれを守ります。 34 わたしに知恵を与えてください。わ
たしはあなたのおきてを守り、心をつくしてこれに従います。 35
わたしをあなたの戒めの道に導いてください。わたしはそれを喜ぶ
からです。 36 わたしの心をあなたのあかしに傾けさせ、不正な利
得に傾けさせないでください。 37 わたしの目をほかにむけて、む
なしいものを見させず、あなたの道をもって、わたしを生かしてく
ださい。 38 あなたを恐れる者にかかわる約束をあなたのしもべに
堅くしてください。 39 わたしの恐れるそしりを除いてください。
あなたのおきては正しいからです。 40 見よ、わたしはあなたのさ
としを慕います。あなたの義をもって、わたしを生かしてくださ
い。

詩編 119:33-40

³ Takahashi, 101-106.

33 Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes; and I will keep it to the end.
34 Give me understanding, that I may keep thy law and observe it with my
whole heart. 35 Lead me in the path of thy commandments, for I delight in
it. 36 Incline my heart to thy testimonies, and not to gain! 37 Turn my
eyes from looking at vanities; and give me life in thy ways. 38 Confirm to
thy servant thy promise, which is for those who fear thee. 39 Turn away
the reproach which I dread; for thy ordinances are good. 40 Behold, I long
for thy precepts; in thy righteousness give me life!

Psalm 119:33-40 (Revised Standard Version, 1952)

This translation demonstrates a drastic change from the previous ones through its use of more colloquial verb endings. In this translation, conclusive form is abandoned in favor of the more common *desu/masu* form. This form is used outside of literature and thus would be more recognizable to the common reader. The shift from the conclusive form to *desu/masu* form signals that the translators are targeting a broader audience. With this shift away from conclusive form, the translators also make use of the benefactive *-te kudasai* form. In Japanese, *-te kudasai* is used when the speaker is making a request to the addressee for the speaker's benefit. In this passage, the speaker is praying to God and making requests that would result in their benefit. A great example of this is verse 35, in which the speaker prays that God will lead them down the path of His commandments. The result of this is that the speaker will benefit because they delight in doing such.

The translators made large strides in producing a colloquial version, as seen in this passage from the Gospel of John:

The Bible, Japanese Colloquial, 1955

1 初めに言があった。言は神と共にあった。言は神であった。 2 この言は初めに神と共にあった。 3 すべてのものは、これによってできた。できたもののうち、一つとしてこれによらないものはなかった。 4 この言に命があった。そしてこの命は人の光であった。 5 光はやみの中に輝いている。そして、やみはこれに勝たなかった。
ヨハネの福音書 1:1-5

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God; 3 all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John 1:1-5 (Revised Standard Version. 1952)

This translation utilizes short form/dictionary endings in the sentences which is different from the previous translations and the previous passage from the same translation. This speech style shift is caused by the context of the passage from John. It is a third-person narration with no clear addressee. Thus, the short form is used because there is no need for addressee honorifics if there is no specific addressee.

This style is similar to telling a story to a large audience. For example: *mukashi mukashi, ano hito ga atta* (Once upon a time, there was a person). It is very common for stories to begin in such a manner. With the subject matter of this passage of John being a story at the beginning of the universe, this style is appropriate. Furthermore, this is the first use of the past tense verb ending *-ta*. The kanji in the translation follows the pattern established by previous translations. It is not until verse 3 that the use of hiragana instead

of kanji becomes relevant. *Subete* (everything; all; the whole) is a common word in Japanese with an unambiguous meaning. Thus, the use of hiragana instead of kanji makes sense. It would not cause any misinterpretation to use only the hiragana here and would allow younger or less educated readers to understand the translation without being hindered by their lack of kanji knowledge. In the same clause that *subete* appears, it is also used to qualify the noun *mono* (thing) through the use of *no* to create the meaning “all things.” The passage continues in this fashion of using hiragana until the topic switches to the discussion of the light that dwells within man, seen in verses 4 and 5. The kanji *inochi* (life; life force) is used to solidify the concept that life resides within “the word” and to state explicitly what this life is.

The published translation received many scathing reviews. The general consensus among scholars was that the translation was accurate, but inadequate. One of the translation’s most severe critics was Nakazawa Koki, who argued that the poetic sections of the translation were nothing of the sort.⁴ He further argued that there were inconsistencies in the translation of Hebrew terms, which would confuse the reader. Another critic, Fujiwara Fujio, claimed that the translation was “dry” and when compared to a previous translation (the Meiji Translation); it was coarse, possessed neither beauty nor power, and had no spirit.⁵ Another criticism of the translation was its use of the potential form to reference the future. This creates a problem because it implies that matters which were made certain in other Biblical translations would be viewed as probable by new readers and not definitive.

⁴ Koki Nakazawa, “Kōgo seisho hon’yaku no shomondai,” *Rikkyōdaigaku kenkyū hōkoku*” dai 9-kan (1960): 87–118.

⁵ Fujio Fujiwara, “Seisho no wayaku to buntai-ron” *Kirisuto shinbun-sha*, (1974): 294-306.

Even with this criticism, it was impossible to deny the praise that the translators rightly deserved for the product of their efforts. The translation was produced in only three years with financial constraints and with the goal of discarding the classical Japanese used in previous translations. Furthermore, there was no agreement about what constituted “colloquial” Japanese because each region possessed a vastly different dialect. According to Schneider, the translation was such a success that “*Asashi Shinbun*, one of the largest newspapers in Japan, awarded this version its prize for the best religious literature published in 1955.”⁶ The translators created an accurate translation of the Bible in a mere three years. While not free of error, the translation accomplished a feat that previously had been considered impossible.

⁶ Schneider, 214.

The New Japanese Bible, 1965 – Present

The New Japanese Bible (NJB) was published by *Nihon Seisho Kankōkai* in 1970. While the text was not completed until 1970, the translation committee released sections of the translation when they had completed their work. The first of these was The Gospel of John, which was released in 1963. The translation was also sponsored by the Lockman Foundation, the publishers of the New American Standard Version of the Bible. This was a committee translation headed by Nao Kōsaku for the Old Testament and Matsuo Takeshi for the New Testament. According to Bernardin Schneider, the committee was comprised of twenty-five translators, six commissioners, twenty-eight collaborators, seven editors, and a representative from the Lockman Foundation.⁷

The aim was to create a translation that was different from all previous translations. It was also intended to address the criticisms leveled at the 1955 Colloquial Version.⁸ The idea of the translation was to show the Bible as it was, to use as much literal translation as possible, and to use honorifics and polite language.

According to Schneider, the translators used the original Hebrew and Greek as the source texts and consulted the New American Standard Version as model for style and references within the text.⁹

A particular stylistic choice for this translation was to use the kanji *shu* (lord), bold the font of the kanji, and place it as the first line in a passage. This translation departs from its predecessor, the Japanese Colloquial Bible (JCB), by adding complex grammatical constructions. This is seen in the second sentence of the first verse.

⁷ Schneider, 215.

⁸ Nihon Seisho Kankōkai, Shinkaiyakuseishokankōkai (hen) “seisho hon'yaku o kangaeru ‘shin kaiyaku seisho’ daisanpan no shuppan ni saishite” Inochinokotobasha, 2004.

⁹ Schneider, 215.

New Japanese Bible, 2003

33 主よ。あなたのおきての道を私に教えてください。そうすれば、私はそれを終わりまで守りましょう。34 私に悟りを与えてください。私はあなたのみおしえを守り、心を尽くしてそれを守ります。35 私に、あなたの仰せの道を踏み行かせてください。私はその道を喜んでいますから。36 私の心をあなたのさとしに傾かせ、不正な利得に傾かないようにしてください。37 むなしいものを見ないように私の目をそらせ、あなたの道に私を生かしてください。38 あなたのことばを、あなたのしもべに果たし、あなたを恐れるようにしてください。39 私が恐れているそしりを取り去ってください。あなたのさばきはすぐれて良いからです。40 このとおり、私は、あなたの戒めを慕っています。どうかあなたの義によって、私を生かしてください。

詩編 119:33-40

33 Teach me, O Lord, the way of Your statutes, and I shall observe it to the end. 34 Give me understanding, that I may observe Your law and keep it with all *my* heart. 35 Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it. 36 Incline my heart to Your testimonies and not to *dishonest* gain. 37 Turn away my eyes from looking at vanity, and revive me in Your ways. 38 Establish Your word to Your servant, as that which produces reverence for You. 39 Turn away my reproach which I dread, for Your ordinances are good. 40 Behold, I long for Your precepts; revive me through Your righteousness.

Psalms 119:33-40 (New American Standard Version, 1971)¹⁰

¹⁰ Because of the close relation to the Lockman Foundation, the creators of the American Standard Version (ASV), and the use of the ASV as a reference, it is being used here as the English translation.

The sentence “*sou sureba, watashi wa sore o owari made mamorimashou*” translates as: “if you do, I shall keep it until the end.” This structure is drastically different from the NJB’s predecessor the JCB, which ignores the use of the *ba* style grammatical construction. This type of construct is used when one wants to describe cause and effect (i.e. *if clause A, then B*). An example in Japanese would look like this:

もっと勉強すれば、いい成績を取れます。

Motto benkyo sureba, ii seiseki o toremasu.

If (I) study more, I can get a good grade.

This construction is noteworthy because of the nature of the translation. It was meant to correct the mistakes and replace the JCB, but it was also sponsored by the Lockman Foundation with a member of the foundation serving on the committee. This sentence structure resembles that of the New American Standard Version (NASB), the English version also sponsored by the Foundation. Verse 33 in the NASB reads as follows: “Teach me, O Lord, the way of Your statutes, and I shall observe it to the end.” This translation is also structured in an *if clause A, then B* construction, and the NJB mirrors the NASB in this regard. Furthermore, the previous JCB translation does not use this construction in this verse. Rather, it definitively states, “I shall keep it until the end.” In JCB’s translation, the person singing the prayer says that he/she will keep the law of the Lord until the end without question. In the NJB, the keeping of the law is dependent on whether or not the Lord teaches them. It is only a slight difference in interpretation, but the NJB’s translation is more accurate, which is its intention.

New Japanese Bible, 2003

1 初めに、ことばがあった。ことばは神とともにあった。ことばは神であった。2 この方は、初めに神とともにおられた。3 すべてのものは、この方によって造られた。造られたもので、この方によらずにできたものは一つもない。4 この方にいのちがあった。このいのちは人の光であった。5 光はやみの中に輝いている。やみはこれに打ち勝たなかった。ヨハネの福音書 1:1-5

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. 4 In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. 5 The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. John 1:1-5 (New American Standard Version, 1971)

In this passage from John, both the lack and the choice of kanji is surprising. A majority of the characters within the passage are sole hiragana, which can lead to confusion since there are many words in the Japanese language that sound similar, but their meanings are different and are assigned based on their kanji. The kanji *tsuku*¹¹ (create; make; structure; physique) is used instead of the kanji *saku*.¹² These kanji are used in the verb *tsukuru* (to make; to produce; to manufacture; to build; to construct) with the latter being the more common kanji used. *Tsuku* replaces *saku* when it is referring to large-scale construction, such as manufacturing or building construction. Thus, its usage in reference to the universe's creation is a nuance that a native speaker would immediately identify. A

¹¹ *Tsuku* (造).

¹² *Saku* (作).

lexical choice of note is the use of *kono kata* in verse 2 to refer Christ. *Kono kata* functions as the honorific equivalent of *kono hito* (this person). Because Japanese does not have exact equivalents of third person him/her, *kono kata* is being used as a substitute. This distinction is made clear in verse 4 with the distinction between “Him” and “men.” Even with these complexities, the rampant use of hiragana throughout this passage and the lack of kanji lacks the clarity that is required in this passage. Without the use of kanji, the meaning can be distorted.

According to Schneider, the translation became widely used.¹³ This is most likely due to the improvements made by this translation over the previous colloquial version. However, this did lead to a problem as the title of the translation made some readers believe that it was a revision of the 1955 colloquial version.¹⁴ Even so, the translation is easy to read, utilizes nuances of the language, and continues to be revised to this day, with the latest version being released in 2017.

¹³ Schneider, 214.

¹⁴ Cohen, 82.

The Japanese Living Bible, 1978 – Present

The *Japanese Living Bible* (JLB) was published in 1978 by the International Bible Society, also known as Biblica. One of Biblica's noteworthy translations is the *New International Version* (NIV) of the Bible into English. They began work on the NIV in 1950s and finished the NIV translation at the same time as the JLB translation in 1978. Biblica does not cite any translator specifically, instead referring only to the Society itself when referencing the work done for the translation. Perhaps this is proprietary information that they do not wish to share with the public.

Information on the rationale for the JLB is also not abundant. One might speculate that it was translated for the same reasons that Biblica would translate any Bible. As noted in their mission statement, they developed their many different foreign language Bibles in order to provide “the Bible in accurate, contemporary translations and formats so people around the world can have the opportunity to be transformed by Jesus Christ.”¹⁵ Biblica also states that they focus on using contemporary languages so that the Bible is easy to read and understand.¹⁶ Taking these two statements into account, it is clear that the goal for the translation of the JLB was in order to bring this ease of reading and comprehension to the Japanese people.

The source texts used for the JLB are unclear. Biblica has not released this information. One may assume, based on of the publishing date of 1978, that the translation would utilize the original Hebrew and Greek translation as the source, that is, if the scholars at Biblica were trained in classical Hebrew and Greek and had the ability to utilize those texts.

¹⁵ Biblica, “Our Ministry,” accessed July 19, 2019, <https://www.biblica.com/our-ministry/>.

¹⁶ Biblica, “Our Ministry.”

Whether or not Biblica accomplished the goals of the translation is another story altogether. A good point is that the vocabulary is very relatable to the common person, but, while it is relatable, the vocabulary used in the translation lacks depth:

Japanese Living Bible, 1978

33-34 主よ、どのように歩めばいいか教えてください。あなたの教えのとおりにします。いのちある^{かぎ}限り、心を^つ尽くしてお^{したが}従いします。35 私に正しい道を歩ませてください。私は、それがどれほど喜ばしいことか、よく知っているのです。36 不正な利益を求めることなく、従順の道を選び取らせてください。37 あなたのご計画以外のものに目を奪われることがないようにしてください。私の心を奮い立たせ、ひたすらあなたを慕わせてください。38 お約束をもう一度保証してください。私はあなたを信頼し、あがめていますから。39 なぜ私は、あなたに従うゆえのあざけりを恐れるのでしょうか。あなたのおきてはみな正しく、良いものばかりです。40 私はあなたのおきてを守りたいと、ひたすら願っています。どうぞ私を生かしてください。詩編 119:33-40

33 Teach me, Lord, the way of your decrees, that I may follow it to the end. 34 Give me understanding, so that I may keep your law and obey it with all my heart. 35 Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight. 36 Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain. 37 Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word. 38 Fulfill your promise to your servant, so that you may be feared. 39 Take away the disgrace I dread, for your laws are good. 40 How I long for your precepts! In your righteousness preserve my life.

Psalm 119:33-40 (New International Version, 1978)¹⁷

An example of this would be the last sentence of the passage: *dōzo watashi o ikashite kudasai* (please, revive me). The verb *ikasu* has the meaning of “revival” and is used in the medical field in reference to the resuscitation of a patient. This word choice falls in line with the original Hebrew phrasing “ḥay·yê·nî” (revive me). However, verse 40 in the JLB lacks something that is contained in the original Hebrew: “bə·šid·qā·tə·kā” (in your righteousness). Another issue is the use of the clause A *ba*, clause B in the first sentence of the passage, which is odd given the nature of the verse. This grammatical construct is typically used when describing that “if A occurs, then B.” In the case of this sentence, it describes *dono yō ni ayumeba īka* (in what way would I walk for it to be good?). Not only is this grammatical form unnecessary to describe the meaning of the passage, but it also complicates the passage. Other Japanese translation noun qualifiers or larger noun constructs to accomplish this goal, while still maintaining the original meaning. Not only does the translation lack depth, but it also has the potential to imply the wrong image of the Christian faith, which is a significant in the passage from John:

Japanese Living Bible, 1978

1-2 まだこの世界に何もない時から、キリストは神と共におられました。キリストは、いつの時代にも生きておられます。キリストは神だからです。3 このキリストが、すべてのものをお造りになりました。そうでないものは一つもありません。4 キリストには永遠のいのちがあります。全人類に光を与えるいのちです。5 そのいのちは暗闇の中でさんぜんと輝いていて、どんな暗闇もこの光を消すことはできません。

ヨハネの福音書 1:1-5

¹⁷ Because both the Japanese Living Bible and the New International Version were produced by the same company, Biblica, it is used as the English translation in this section.

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. John 1:1-5
(New International Version, 1978)

There are two problematic areas within this passage: 1) in verse 1, it can be inferred that the physical world existed prior to creation, and 2) the title, “the Son,” is used throughout this passage even though He is not given that title until after He becomes flesh.

The first clause of this passage reads in English: “before there was anything in this world.” This statement suggests that the physical world predates creation, which theologically is incorrect. This is caused by the use of the kanji *sekai* (the world) which implies that the world, with form as a sphere, existed prior to creation. This confusion could be resolved with the using the singular kanji *yo*¹⁸ in place of *sekai* because of its more abstract meaning. Furthermore, reading this first clause would cause many problems for a first-time reader of the Bible, which is Biblca’s target audience, as it confuses the issue of creation and the creation story presented in Genesis. It could also imply that God only has the power to create smaller things such as plants, animals, and humans, which is also contrary to Christian theology.

The second issue with this passage is the use of the Son’s title “Christ” prior to His human birth. The Son did not possess such a title prior to becoming flesh and being born of the Virgin Mary. Thus, the use of the title is improper as the Son was not “Christ”

¹⁸ 世, *yo*, “world,” as in reality.

yet. This use of the title “Christ” also complicates passages later in this chapter of John in which John describes the Son becoming flesh and dwelling among us.

An interesting choice made by the translators was to use long form with the use of *desu/masu*. As mentioned previously, the context for this passage is a narration of the divinity of Christ by John. As such, it would follow the normal convention of storytelling without a direct addressee. Thus, the choice of speech style would be short form as seen in other translations. Biblica, however, chose to use long form in this translation. This results in the narrator establishing a particular addressee and using honorifics while speaking to the addressee and narrating the story. This breaks standard conventions for writing. Biblica offered no rationale for this choice.

The reception of the JLB is unknown as Biblica does not cite any statistics for Japan specifically in its fiscal reports, referring to only the greater East Asia Pacific region for any given statistics. An issue with citing these statistics is that they include China and Mongolia, which is one of Biblica’s largest target areas. This results in these statistics being relatively useless in gauging the reception of the JLB. Extrapolating from the information known about other translation’s receptions and Biblica’s evangelical worldviews, the majority of adopters of the JLB would be Japanese evangelicals. Taking that into account, the JLB had little to no effect in the sea of other Japanese translations, (that are used by the Japanese evangelicals) such as the *Shin kai yaku (New Japanese Bible)* translation, which is used widely by Japanese evangelical denominations. The lack of data and adoption could also be due to the translation’s errors and its lack of depth as well as the entrenchment of the longer standing Japanese Colloquial Bible, which was released in 1955 and the *Shin kai Yaku* which was released in 1965.

The New Interconfessional Translation, 1987 – Present

One year after the publication of the *Japanese Living Bible* in 1977, the Japan Bible Society sought to create the “end all” Bible, one that would be used in all churches in Japan by all Christian denominations.¹⁹ While knowing that it was impossible to create a perfect translation, noting it in the preface of the translation itself, they still desired to create something that was as close as possible to a “perfect” Bible. To do this, they assembled an ecumenical team that focused on creating a more specific and refined version of the Bible in Japanese. Schneider describes the translation as “the fruit of over eighteen years of cooperation by Protestant and Catholic scripture scholars and church leaders, as well as the Japan Bible Society and its constituents on the one hand and the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Japan on the other.”²⁰ His description perfectly encapsulates what this translation means to modern Japanese Bible translations.

First published as the *Interconfessional New Testament* in 1978 (a partial translation containing only the New Testament), the goal was to create a Bible that was more refined than the previous versions. The Japanese Bible Society argued that previous translations lacked a sense of clarity in the text, and also failed to elevate the Bible to the level the Japan Bible Society thought would be appropriate for use in the church. To accomplish this, a team of roughly 70 translators, editors, and stylists took the roots of the *Interconfessional New Testament* and, after 10 years, produced the *New Interconfessional Translation* in 1987. Utilizing the work done by previous translators and consulting the original Greek and Hebrew texts, the team published the finished product including both

¹⁹ Japan Bible Society, “History of Japanese Bible Translation,” Japan Bible Society, accessed July 19, 2019, <https://www.bible.or.jp/e/history.html>

²⁰ Schneider, 220.

an Old and New Testament in 1987. Even though the work was completed, the translation committee understood that their work was not finished as no translation is perfect; items can always be reexamined and corrected after the translation is released, which the committee has continued to do for over 30 years by releasing revisions.

When compared to some of the earliest translations, the progress that has been made over the past one hundred or so years becomes evident. The translation committee utilizes localized vocabulary in the NIT instead of vocabulary borrowed from the Greek or Hebrew written in katakana, as seen in Gützlaff's Gospel According to John. This localization using kanji and hiragana signifies a sense of belonging to the Japanese culture that does not exist with loan words in katakana unless they have been in circulation for many generations. For example, the gender-neutral word for "I" (*watashi*) could be written in a variety of ways.²¹ These three ways of writing the word *watashi* can convey a different meaning or nuance to the reader. The first, in kanji, is generally more formal and masculine, especially in the early history of Japan, when it was only men who were instructed in kanji and hiragana was invented by women as a way for them to write. The second, in hiragana, as previously mentioned, implies a form of femininity or even youngness as younger uneducated individuals would use hiragana instead of kanji. The final, katakana, has a very specific usage which varies but is normally retained in the use of foreign words, onomatopoeia, or when the speaker is perceived as inhuman or mechanical. There are some katakana words which are in common use today but have been in circulation for some time. For example: *tabako* (tobacco), and *bīru* (beer) are some such words. Going back to kanji, there are many kanji which can be read or spoken

²¹ 1) 私 (kanji); 2) わたし (hiragana); 3) ワタシ (katakana).

the same way but are written differently or have a similar meaning when examined in other languages (the word “I” in English, for example, can be *watashi*, *boku*, *ore*, *atashi*, or *wareware*, to name a few) but can have multiple different kanji and readings all having their own nuance. Furthermore, some kanji are more common than others, and not all kanji are known to a majority of Japanese people. Thus, it is important not only to understand who one’s target demographic is when writing, but also the impact one wants to have when using a particular kanji or grammatical style.

The NIT, unlike its predecessors, utilized more kanji (Chinese characters) and more complex sentence structures. These two factors can greatly affect the interpretation for the reader. In the case of kanji, each kanji has its own unique meaning ascribed to it. Furthermore, the use of either common or archaic kanji could affect the interpretation. The NIT makes a unique usage of old and new kanji in order to draw the reader’s attention. For example, the NIT translation of Psalm 119:34 uses the kanji *rippo* or law in reference to understand God’s commandments. This kanji also has ties to the law given to Moses on Mt. Sinai or the Torah in Judaism. This use would not only add clarity to the translation but also connect a kanji to an idea in Christian and Jewish canon, making its use stand out to the reader. Another tactic that the translators of the NIT utilized in their translation was qualifying nouns with verbs.

New Interconfessional Translation, 1987

33 主よ、あなたの掟に従う道を示してください。最後までそれを
守らせてください。 34 あなたの律法を理解させ、保たせてくださ
い。わたしは心を尽くしてそれを守ります。 35 あなたの戒めに従
う道にお導きください。わたしはその道を愛しています。 36 不当
な利益にではなくあなたの定めに関心を傾けるようにしてくださ
い。 37 むなしいものを見ようとすることからわたしのまなざしを
移してください。あなたの道に従って命を得ることができますよう
に。 38 あなたの僕に対して、仰せを成就してください。わたしは
あなたを畏れ敬います。 39 わたしの恐れる辱めがわたしを避けて
行くようにしてください。あなたは良い裁きをなさいます。 40 御
覧くださいわたしはあなたの命令を望み続けています。恵みの御業
によって命を得させてください。

詩編 119:33-40

33 Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes; and I will keep it to the end.
34 Give me understanding, that I may keep thy law and observe it with my
whole heart. 35 Lead me in the path of thy commandments, for I delight in
it. 36 Incline my heart to thy testimonies, and not to gain! 37 Turn my
eyes from looking at vanities; and give me life in thy ways. 38 Confirm to
thy servant thy promise, which is for those who fear thee. 39 Turn away
the reproach which I dread; for thy ordinances are good. 40 Behold, I long
for thy precepts; in thy righteousness give me life!

Psalms 119:33-40 (Revised Standard Version, 1952)

The goal of qualifying a noun with a verb is to be more specific when referencing the noun. A simple example of this would be:

歴史を勉強している 4年生です

Rekisho o benkyou shite iru yo nensei desu.

‘A fourth year (senior) who studies history’

This is a simple construction in which the first clause, “rekishi o benkyou shite iru” (studying history), is attached to the noun, “yo nensei” (4th year/Senior). While simple in its outward appearance, this construction provides the reader with more context when reading a passage. An example from the source text would be the first verse in the passage above, Psalm 119:33. This verse in English would read: “show me the path on which I will obey your law Lord.” This grammatical construction results in a more accurate description of nouns and items, which is crucial in works such as the Bible. One simple mistake or incorrect choice in the translation could result in a very different interpretation of the text.

The same noun qualification is found in the texts translated from the Greek. Below there is a passage from the Gospel of John (John 1:1-5). In this passage, the description of “the word,” *kotoba* in Japanese, one could argue is essential to the Christian faith as it establishes the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Thus, this portion of the text must be treated with extreme care in translation. For this reason, the translators of the NIT opted to use noun qualifiers so to create a clear and accurate translation to describe “the word.”

New Interconfessional Translation, 1987

1 初めに言があった。言は神と共にあった。言は神であった。2 この言は、初めに神と共にあった。3 万物は言によって成ったもので、言によらずに成ったものは何一つなかった。4 言の内に命があった。命は人間を照らす光であった。5 光は暗闇の中で輝いている。暗闇は光を理解しなかった。
ヨハネの福音書 1:1-5

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God; 3 all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John 1:1-5 (Revised Standard Version. 1952)

An interesting choice in this translation is the use of the singular kanji, *gen* (say; word). Generally, when “word” is written, it is as *kotoba*, which also means “word” but can also mean “manner of speaking.” In the case of the NIT, the kanji *gen* is used, but the reader is instructed to read it as *kotoba* in printed versions of the text. Furthermore, the use of the kanji *banbutsu* (all things; all creation) differs from previous translations of this passage. The use of kanji in this passage alone greatly contributes to the accuracy of the translation and ease of interpretation by the reader. There is no guess work when using kanji because they already have ideas assigned to them and can be interpreted even without knowing how they are pronounced. For example, within *banbutsu*, there are two main pieces: the first kanji *man*, which means “ten thousand,” and the second kanji *mono*, which means “thing; object; matter.” Just from understanding the two kanji

independently, one can discern the meaning of “many things” since the literal combination of the two kanji means “ten thousand things,” which when put into perspective is a rather large sum and demonstrates the idea presented in the source text. Through its use of noun qualifiers and kanji choice, the NIT has not only established refinement, but also has translated the text in a way that is clear to the reader. The combination of these two factors helps to preclude differences of interpretation of the text as it states clearly how the text is meant to be interpreted.

It is no wonder that the NIT has been adopted by the majority of Japanese Christians. Both the Japan Bible Society and Katsuomi Shimasaki cite the *New Interconfessional Translation* as widely used by both Catholics and Protestants, except for evangelicals, a majority of whom make use the *New Revised Version of the Bible* (*shinkai yaku seisho*) published by NSK (*nihon seisho kankokai*). Their rationale for not adopting the NIT is unclear, although it would most likely boil down to a church-by-church preference, which is similar in the United States.²² Even so, as of the translation’s 20th anniversary in 2007, it had sold over 10 million copies, which is no small feat. The Japan Bible Society met the goal it had set out at the beginning of this project: to produce a Bible that is universal, formal, and accurate. The NIT set the new standard for other translations that, to this day, has not been beaten. Until a new team with the same focus and caliber is assembled again, something like the NIT will most likely not be created, especially as the NIT continues to be revised.

²² Shimasaki, 123-124.

Epilogue

The story of Christianity and the Bible in Japan is a long and arduous road plagued with adversity. The goal of this work was to paint that picture from the perspective of the Bible and, hopefully, that goal has been accomplished.

There are many sources that discuss certain topics, covered broadly here, but in more depth. I recommend C.R. Boxer's *The Christian Century in Japan, 1549-1650* for those interested in learning more about the turbulent time period between the arrival of Christianity and the closing of Japan to the outside world. Another helpful source for Japanese Bible translation is Doron B. Cohen's *The Japanese Translations of the Hebrew Bible: History, Inventory, and Analysis*, which provides a more expansive look into the translation of the Bible and examines the translation of Hebrew into Japanese closely. The Brill *Handbook of Christianity in Japan* contains an expansive overview of Christianity in Japan with articles from many authors on a variety of topics. Finally, Ebisawa Arimichi's *Nihon no seisho: Seisho wayaku no rekishi* is a useful source for those who can read Japanese. Ebisawa provides a comprehensive history of the translation of the Bible into Japanese and is very in-depth in their discussion.

Although aiming to contribute to ongoing research on Japanese translations of the Bible, this thesis seeks to provide an introduction to the topic for those interested in learning more about the story of Christianity in Japan.

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The Bible. Japanese Living Bible. International Bible Society, 1978.

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Appendix: Japanese Bible Translations

List of Japanese Bible Translations

(from the first to the most recent)

Edo Period 16th Century – 19th Century

Yajirō's the Gospel of Matthew: 1548

Translator: Yajirō

Fernandez's Four Gospels: 1552

Translator: Juan Fernandez

Kyoto New Testament: 1612

Translator: Unknown Jesuit Group

Meiji Period 1868 – 1912

Gützlaff's the Gospel of John, 1837

Translator: Karl Gützlaff

Goble's the Gospel of Matthew, 1871

Translator: Jonathan Goble

Hepburn-Brown's Gospels, 1872

Translator: James C. Hepburn with Samuel R. Brown

Meiji Version, 1887

Translator: James Curtis Hepburn, and Samuel Robbins Brown taken over by a
collection of Bible societies

Steichen's Four Gospels, 1897

Translator: Michael Steichen

Nicolai's New Testament, 1901

Translator: Ioan Kasatkin Nicolai

Raguet's New Testament, 1910

Translator: Emile Raguet

Taisho Revised Version, 1917

Translator: The same committee that crafted the Meiji Version

Post-War Era 1954 – Present Day

Bible, Japanese Colloquial, 1954 – present

Translator: Japan Bible Society

Franciscan Version, 1958 – 2001

Translator: Studium Biblicum Franciscanum

Barbaro's Version, 1964

Translator: Federico Barbaro

New Japanese Bible (NJB), 1965 – present

Translator: Nihon seisho Kankōkai (NSK)

The New Revised Version, 1973

Translator: Unknown

Japanese Living Bible (JLB), 1978 – present

Translator: Biblica

Interconfessional New Testament, 1978

Translator: Japan Bible Society

New Interconfessional Translation, 1987 – present

Translator: Japan Bible Society

