APPENDIX

BIBLE TRANSLATION DEBATES FROM THE MEIJI MISSIONARIES CONFERENCES

Two large-scale missionaries’ conferences were held in Japan during the Meiji Period,¹ both producing thick volumes of *Proceedings* which include some important material on the translation of the Bible.² This material was often used in the previous chapters, and some further quotes and summaries are given in this appendix.

a. *The 1883 Osaka Conference*

When the “General Conference of the Missionaries of Japan at Osaka” was held (April 16–21, 1883), the NT translation had already been published, and work on the OT translation was in progress. In his lecture to the conference, in which he put the emphasis on translating *ad litteram* (see above Chapter 3, A-1), J.C. Hepburn made the following “rules or principles” for translating the Bible into Japanese (Hepburn 1883, 414–415):

1. There should be a thorough understanding of the true meaning of the original.
2. The exact meaning of the original should be rendered without addition or subtraction, and, as much as possible, with strict adherence to the letter, to the figurative expressions, and peculiar idioms of the original.

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¹ A first, much smaller conference was held in Yokohama, September 20–24, 1872, with the participation of between 20 to 30 missionaries and their wives, following which the Yokohama Committee for translating the NT was organized (NKRD 1467–8; Verbeck 1883, 42–43). On the Osaka conference see also NKRD 220–221; 106 missionaries participated, as well as many Japanese. On the Tokyo conference see also ibid. 926; the number of missionaries rose to 379, with many Japanese and other guests.

² Cf. Bibliography, Missionaries. The 1901 volume (p. 502) is also the source for the collage of photos of “Translators of the Bible into Japanese”, which was reproduced many times in Japanese books that have to do with Bible translation or missionaries in Japan (this volume has several other such collages of photos of missionaries alive and deceased). J.C. Hepburn is placed in the middle in the largest photo; above and under him there are three rows of three photos: D.C. Greene, G.F. Verbeck, S.R. Brown; F. Matsuyama, M. Okuno, Takahashi Goro [sic]; N. Brown, P.K. Fyson, R.S. Maclay.
3. To observe, as much as possible, uniformity in the use of words, namely, translating the original word uniformly by the same word; especially in important and official terms.

4. Ambiguous phrases should be rendered ambiguously. The translator has no right to interpret the meaning; though the substitution of a proper name for a personal pronoun to suite the Japanese idiom is allowable.

5. The translation should be made into the vernacular or native language, should be in a respectable and easily understood style, and in strict conformity to its grammar and idioms.

6. To choose and adhere to one form of personal pronouns; Shu not to be used for the second person singular when not so expressed in the text.

7. To avoid the use of honorific terms and phrases, especially the change in the voice of the verb; the only exception to this rule being in the use of Mi and Tamau in speaking of a Divine person.

8. Uniformity in the transferring of proper names, and modern and well known names, instead of the ancient and unknown names of the text; as Egypt for Mitsraim etc.

9. To transfer the names of weights, coins, and measures, or other terms only when no equivalents are found in the native language.

In the discussion following Hepburn’s lecture, six missionaries expressed their opinions, and then Hepburn replied to some of their arguments (ibid., 415–420). Only some of these comments will be summarized or quoted below.

The longest response was by Walter Dening, who praised Hepburn for his lecture while criticizing his methods.3 Many years before E.A. Nida, Dening insisted that the aim in translating the Scriptures should be “transferring of ideas”. According to him, adopting a literal method may cause the message to be distorted. Unlike Hepburn who criticized it, Dening praised the Delegates’ Version (‘British’) Chinese translation as achieving that aim of conveying the true meaning of the Bible, allowing readers to use it without the aid of commentary. He also pointed out that colloquial Japanese was full of Chinese words, and there was no sense in speaking of Japanese as distinct from Chinese. Hepburn rejected this latter point, saying that Chinese words were absorbed into Japanese like Latin words into English, without affecting the syntax. Hepburn also insisted that the only reliable Chinese translation was the Bridgman-Culbertson (‘American’) one, while the “Delegates' version departed from the original text so frequently that it could not be regarded as the word of God”, and

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3 Dening’s offered contribution to the OT part of the Meiji Translation was apparently rejected by the committee, probably due to disagreement over methods (see p. 52 above).