

THE IMPACT OF RELIGION ON LANGUAGE: A STUDY OF “CHRISTIAN JAPANESE”

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Abstract: The linguistic and cultural influence of Christianity in Japan belies the decidedly small fraction of the population that professes it. Ruthlessly suppressed from late feudal to early modern times, the faith was granted tolerance in the latter half of the 19th century, and Japanese Christians have since enjoyed a numerically disproportionate influence in the intellectual and political life of the nation. Modern Japanese Christian terminology includes borrowings from Western languages, including Latin, Greek, Portuguese, Hebrew, and English, but for the most part it utilizes native Japanese and Sino-Japanese vocabulary in a new semantic and cultural context. Such words have, in turn, had an impact on the language and culture of Japan as a whole. Japanese Bible translations reflect the ongoing interaction between Japan’s Christian communities, their non-Christian neighbors, Christians abroad, and the world at large.

Key Words: Christianity in Japan, Japanese Bible translations

ADOPTION AND ADAPTATION

Two necessary presuppositions of all proselytizing religions are (1) the universal truth of their message and (2) the capacity of both proselytizers and their would-be converts to comprehend it. The consistent cultural relativist may argue that what is nominally the same faith shared by otherwise diverse peoples nonetheless varies significantly according to factors that include linguistic differences. Yet if new religions adapt to pre-existing cultures, the reverse is also certainly true.

A well-documented example can be seen in the profound lexical and semantic changes that took place in the English language with the conversion, beginning in the late 6th century, of the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity. In addition to the handful of direct borrowings from Latin and Greek, new compounds were formed from Germanic elements to express Christian practices and concepts, while old words were given a new meaning. *candle* (Old English *candel*) comes from Latin *candela*; *bishop* (OE *biscop*) is ultimately from Greek *episcopos*, through Latin *episcopus*. *forgive* is a loan translation of Vulgar Latin **perdonare*. *god* in its heathen sense was a neuter noun, becoming masculine in Christian usage. *dryhten* ‘prince, lord’ likewise took on a Christian meaning, much as did its Latin and Greek counterparts, *dominus* and *kyrios*, originally secular terms.

The introduction of Buddhism to Japan in the mid-6th century had a similarly major impact on the Japanese language. For the Anglo-Saxons, Latin served as the primary source for the tenets of the new faith; for the Japanese, the mediating language was Chinese, with some direct influence from Pāli. *sō* (僧) ‘Buddhist priest’, for example, though ultimately from Pāli *sangha* ‘Buddhist community’, comes from Chinese

(Mandarin *sēng*); *ama* (尼). ‘Buddhist nun’, on the other hand, was directly adopted and adapted from Pāli *amma* ‘mother’. Meanwhile, various indigenous Japanese words took on a new meaning. *yo* ‘world, age’, for example, came to be used to represent all that is ephemeral and illusory, as in *kono yo* (この世) ‘this world’. With remarkable similarity, Anglo-Saxon *middaneard*, lit. ‘middle earth’, originally a pagan term, acquired the Christian sense of “the world” (Greek *kosmos*, Latin *mundus*). *satori* ‘spiritual awakening’ (悟り) derives from the verb *satoru* ‘become aware of’.

When, almost precisely a millennium after their reception of Buddhism, the Japanese first encountered Christianity, the language on which it heavily depended was Portuguese. With the religious persecution that followed not long thereafter, most of the words then used became historical relics. Such include *bateren* (< Portuguese *padre*) ‘priest’^[1] and *iruman* (< P. *irmaō*) ‘monk, brother’. St. Francis Xavier, having first used *Dainichi* (大日) ‘the great illuminator’ (Sanskrit *Mahāvairocana*) to refer to the Christian deity, later introduced *deusu* (< Latin *Deus*). Among the few surviving words in modern Japanese Catholic usage are *misa* ‘mass’ and *rozario* ‘rosary’.

With the reintroduction of Christianity to Japan at the dawn of the Meiji era came new terminology. The Sino-Japanese compound *kyōkai* (教会), for example, lit. ‘teaching assembly’ replaced *ekureshia* (< *ecclesia*). The word used to translate Greek *naós* ‘temple, holy of holies’, as it is used both literally and figuratively, is typically *shinden* (神殿)^[2], the Sino-Japanese counterpart of (older and strictly indigenously applied) *kandono* (< *kamu-tono* ‘divine exalted dwelling’, though as a translation of Hebrew *mishkan* we also find *kami no miya* (神の宮) ‘shrine’, an otherwise quintessentially Shintō term already recorded in the early 8th century, *mi-* being an honorific prefixed to *ya* ‘abode’.

The word for ‘priest’ (Catholic and Orthodox) became *shisai* (司祭), lit. ‘officiator of ceremonies’ as the general term, *shinpu* (神父), lit. ‘god-father’, as the vocational title, while Protestant pastors were designated as *bokushi* (牧師), lit. ‘shepherd’ and *sensei* ‘teacher’, the latter being a form of direct address. The Catholic word for ‘hymn’ is *seika* (聖歌), lit. ‘holy song’; the Protestant word is *sanbika* (讚美歌), lit. ‘song of praise’. Through the early 20th century, Catholicism was known as *tenshukyō* (天主教), lit. ‘ruler of heaven doctrine’, *tenshu* being originally a Buddhist term that became a Sino-Japanese phonetic adaptation of *Deus*. (The compounds are still used in Korea and China.)

Not surprisingly, the understanding and use of such terms differs significantly between Japanese Christians and the overwhelming majority of the population that does not share their faith. The influence of the (at least nominally) Christian West and of Japan’s numerous Christian institutions of education provides a broad but superficial knowledge of the religion. Largely ignorant of Japan’s older faith tradition, younger people in particular tend to be indifferent to (and even suspicious of) religion in general.^[3] The distinction between *shinpu* and *bokushi*, for example, though strictly observed by Christians is not commonly understood by non-Christian. *rōma-hōō* (ローマ法王), lit. ‘Roman law-king’, is the word commonly used in the Japanese media to designate the pontiff, but, among Catholics, he is usually referred to as *kyōkō(-sama)* (教皇[様]), lit. ‘church-sovereign’ or affectionately as *papa-sama* (パパ様), *-sama* being an honorific

suffix, cf. *kami-sama* (神様), now used to refer both to the Shintō gods and to the Christian deity.

In some cases, words now outmoded, not commonly used within the Christian communities, or otherwise misleading, are perpetuated in the realm of popular culture. The specifically Catholic term used for ‘confession’ is Sino-Japanese *kokkai* (告解), lit. ‘confess (and) resolve’, and the word for ‘confessional’ is *kokkai-shitsu* (告解室). At the same time, the Japanese media have made use of another Sino-Japanese compound, *zange* (懺悔) ‘penitence, confession’ (older *sange*)^[4], combined with *-shitsu* ‘room’. In the 1980s, a Fuji Television comedy show known as *Ore-tachi Hyōkinzoku* [‘Us Jokesters’] regularly included scenes in which members of the cast were “shriven” for their mistakes. A rotund, bearded, half-naked male, half-Buddha, half-Christ, would stand in a quasi-crucifixal pose before the kneeling “penitents” in the *zange-shitsu*, sometimes forgiving them, sometimes punishing them by causing water to be dumped on them from above.

Sino-Japanese *dōtei* (童貞) ‘chaste, virginal’ is given in Japanese dictionaries, both monolingual and bilingual, as referring, as a noun, to a Catholic nun. The term originally designated males without sexual experience but then took on a Christian sense. Again, however, the secular world in general and the realm of pop culture in particular have given the word associations that range from ambivalent to negative and perverse, and thus it has dropped out of Catholic usage. Nuns are addressed with Anglo-Japanese *shisutā*, e.g. Shisutā Yamada ‘Sister Yamada’, their vocational designation being Sino-Japanese *shūdōjo* (修道女), lit. convent-person.

Originally Christian concepts and images have become familiar to the Japanese population at large, albeit to varying degrees, through cultural osmosis. Leonardo da Vinci’s famous representation of *l’Ultima Cena* undoubtedly explains why Japanese *Saigo no Bansan* (最後の晩餐) is widely known. The phrase is used in a purely secular and ironic sense, as in *kanojo to saigo no bansan wo shita* (彼女と最後の晩餐をした。) ‘That was my last date with her.’, lit. ‘That was my last supper with her.’) Sino-Japanese *mokushiroku* (黙示録), lit. ‘(lit. ‘record of revealed secrets’) and Anglo-Japanese *apokaripusu* are likewise used without any reference to (or even knowledge of) their Christian origin, the latter term being, for example, the name of video game.

tengoku (天国) ‘heaven’, lit. ‘land of the heavens’, is a Meiji-era coinage, but though explicitly Christian in origin, it is used in a metaphorical and secular sense, as in *hokōsha-tengoku* (歩行者天国) ‘pedestrian paradise’. (By way of contrast, the extended use of words for the various Buddhist paradises is more limited, e.g. *gokuraku-yu* [極楽湯] ‘paradise waters’, the name of a bath-house construction company.) *tenshi* (天使) ‘angel’ is a further example of an old word with a new meaning, corresponding, as it happens, to the literal meaning of Greek *angelos* ‘(heavenly) messenger’.

fukuin (福音) ‘gospel’ is, as is originally its English counterpart, a literal translation of Greek *euangelion* ‘good news’: これ神の子イエスキリストの福音 (*Kore kami no ko iesu-kirisuto no fukuin*) ‘This is the gospel of Jesus Christ, the son of God’ (1880 translation, Mark 1:1). While *fukuin* is also used in an extended, secular sense, as in the translation of Andrew Carnegie’s *The Gospel of Wealth* (*Tomi no Fukuin* 富の福音), it

is primarily a Christian term, in contrast to エヴァンゲリオン(*evangerion*), which appears prominently in a highly popular animated film series, *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, which freely (or, one might say, mindlessly) borrows and blends Judaic, Christian, and Gnostic ideas and images.

rinjin'ai (隣人愛) ‘love of neighbor’ is a Sino-Japanese neologism used to translate the Christian concept of *agape*, cf. the older Buddhist term, Sino-Japanese *jihī* (慈悲), Mandarin *cíbē*, ‘mercy, compassion’, which in turn is a loan translation from Sanskrit. The term *sanmi-ittai* (三位一体) ‘Trinity’ first appears in the 1872 translation by Nakamura Masanao, himself a convert to Christianity, of John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty*.^[5] As with its English counterpart, the phrase has been used in a metaphorical and strictly secular sense, most recently when the Koizumi government vaunted its *sanmi-ittai-kaikaku* (三位一体改革) ‘three-part reform’ policy. *eien* (永遠) ‘eternity’, lit. ‘long-distant’ is likewise a Meiji-era coinage, used to translate both the Greek philosophical idea of timelessness and the specifically Christian concept of ‘eternal life, the life of the world to come’ (*zōē aionios*), which is rendered into Japanese by the phrase *eien no inochi* (永遠の命).

shokuzai no yagi (贖罪のヤギ), lit. expiation goat, would appear to be a rough calque of English *scapegoat*, as the phrase itself does not occur in the passages in Leviticus from which it derives. To the extent that the loanword *sukēpugōto* is understood, such clearly reflects its use in the Western world as a philosophical and anthropological term.^[6] Even more remote from its origin (in the New Testament use of *skandalon*, e.g. 1 Corinthians 1:23) is the loanword *sukyandaru* (scandal), which, as in English, has a purely secular sense. In the Biblical sense of ‘stumbling block’, the word used is *tsumazuki* (躓き).

Not surprisingly, given the unfamiliarity of the Japanese with sheep until recent times, the word *kohitsuji* (子羊) ‘lamb’, lit. ‘child-sheep’ is a modern coinage with a symbolic (and specifically Christian) rather than pastoral (or culinary!) meaning. It is nonetheless unlikely that many non-Christian Japanese would be able to explain the origin and meaning of the phrase *kami no kohitsuji* ‘lamb of God’.

Native Japanese *tsumi-bito*, in contrast to its Sino-Japanese counterpart, *zainin*, both written 罪人, tends to have a religious and even specifically Christian meaning: ‘sinner’ vs. ‘criminal’. Interestingly enough, the *Nihon-kokugo-daijiten* (日本国語大辞典), the most comprehensive dictionary of the Japanese language, enters *hōtō-musuko* (放蕩息子) ‘prodigal son’ without any reference to its dominantly Biblical reference if not origin. Though the use of the Sino-Japanese compound *hōtō* ‘dissolute’ clearly predates the introduction of Christianity (its first appearance is in the 8th century *Kaifūsō* (懷風藻) [Fond Recollections of Poetry], the oldest collection of Japanese-composed Chinese verse), it has been clearly reinforced as a loan translation. In Akutagawa Ryūnosuke’s *Niwa* (庭) [*The Garden*] (1922), we find: *Jinan wa hōtō ni mi wo mochi-kuzusita kekka, yōka ni hotondo kaeranakatta kara...* (次男は放蕩に身を持ち崩した結果、養家に殆ど帰らなかつたから...) ‘The sibling between them was living a dissolute life and was hardly seen in the home of his adoptive parents.’ A similar example is Sino-Japanese *kiseki* (奇跡) ‘miracle’, a term that though found in the mid-18th century, i.e. before the reintroduction of Christianity, is clearly influenced by both the specifically Biblical concept of “signs and wonders” and the more general idea of “miracle.” *fukkatsu* (復活)

‘resurrection’, first recorded in 1892, was undoubtedly reinforced by the popularity in Japan of Leo Tolstoy’s (1899) Воскресение (*Resurrection*), first translated into Japanese as *Fukkatsu* in 1905.

Sino-Japanese compounds whose marked pronunciation (*go-on* 呉音) reflects their origin as Buddhist terms have in some cases been reinterpreted in a Christian sense and rendered as (more easily read) *kan-on* (漢音). *eshin* (回心 or 廻心) ‘turning away from evil’ (lit. ‘turn heart’), for example, has been in use since the 10th century, while the reading of the same compound as *kaishin* suggests the “conversion” or “change of heart” to which St. Peter refers in Acts 3:13: “(Repent and be) converted,” the Greek original (*metanoēsate*) having the same literal sense. *shōryō* (聖霊), lit. ‘holy spirit’, also written 精霊, refers to the soul of a deceased person. Read as *seirei*, the (former) compound refers to the ‘Holy Spirit’ in the strictly Christian sense.

BIBLICAL JAPANESE

As may be concluded from the discussion above, what might be called “Christian Japanese” is not a static dialect confined to Japan’s small Christian community. Rather it exercises an influence on Japan’s linguistic culture as a whole, while itself responding both to changes within that culture and to general trends within the Christian world. Such can clearly be seen in the translation of the Bible, which, unlike the original, is truly “a work in progress.” In contrast to Meiji-era versions, written in pseudo-classical form, today’s are in the modern style that, at least in principle, unites the literary and the colloquial. Furthermore, as a lingering effect of ecumenism, the translation most widely used by both Catholics and Protestants is the *shin-kyōdōyaku-seisho* (新共同訳聖書), the New Interconfessional Translation (NIT), which first appeared in 1987.

The following excerpts from the first two chapters of *Gospel According to St. John* are given below to illustrate the characteristics of “Biblical Japanese” and the linguistic and cultural issues they raise. The Greek original and the NIT version are Romanized, the former without accents. The English translation is from the Douay-Rheims (American) version of 1899.

1:1 en archê ên ho logos kai ho logos ên pros ton theon kai theos ên ho logos.
1:2 houtos ên en archê pros ton theon. 1:3 panta di autou egeneto kai chôris
autou egeneto oude hen. ho gegonen 1:4 en autô zôê ên kai hê zôê ên to phôs
tôn anthrôpôn. 1:5 kai to phôs en tê; skotia phainei kai hê skotia auto ou
katelaben. 1:6 egeneto anthrôpos apestalmenos para theou onoma autô; iôannês.
1:7 houtos êlthen eis marturian hina marturêsê peri tou phôtos hina pantes
pisteusôsîn di’ autou. 1:8 ouk ên ekeinos to phôs all’ hina marturêsê; peri tou
photos. 1:9 ên to phôs to alêthinon ho phôtizei panta anthrôpon erchomenon eis
ton kosmon. 1:10 en tô; kosmô; ên kai ho kosmos di’ autou egeneto kai ho
kosmos auton ouk egnô. 1:11 eis ta idia êlthen kai hoi idioi auton ou parelabon.
1:12 hosoi de elabon auton edôken autois exousian tekna theou genesthai tois
pisteuousin eis to onoma autou. 1:13 hoi ouk ex haimatôn oude ek thelêmatos
sarkos oude ek thelêmatos andros all’ ek theou egennêthêsan. 1:14 kai ho logos
sarx egeneto kai eskênôsen en hêmin kai etheasametha tên doxan autou doxan
hôs monogenous para patros plêrês charitos kai alêtheias...

2:1 kai tē_i hēmera_i tē_i tritē_i gamos egeneto en kana tēs galilaias kai ên hê mêtêr tou iêsou ekei. 2:2 eklêthê de kai ho iêsous kai hoi mathêtai autou eis ton gamon. 2:3 kai husterêsantos oinou legei hê mêtêr tou iêsou pros auton oinou ouk echousin. 2:4 [kai] legei autê_i ho iêsous ti emoi kai soi gunai oupô hêkei hê hôra mou. 2:5 legei hê mêtêr autou tois diakonois ho ti an legê_i humin poiêsate.

01:01 Hajime ni kotoba ga atta. Kotoba wa kami to tomo ni atta. Kotoba wa kami de atta. 01:02 Kono kotoba wa, hajime ni kami to tomo ni atta. 01:03 Banbutsu wa kotoba ni yotte natta. Natta mono de, kotoba ni yorazu ni natta mono wa nani hitotsu nakatta. 01:04 Kotoba no uchi ni inochi ga atta. Inochi wa ningen wo terasu hikari de atta. 01:05 Hikari wa kurayami no naka de kagayaite iru. Kurayami wa hikari wo rikai shi-nakatta. 01:06 Kami kara tsukawasareta hitori no hito ga ita. Sono na wa yohane de aru. 01:07 Kare wa akashi wo suru tame ni kita. Hikari ni tsuite akashi wo suru tame, mata, subete no hito ga kare ni yotte shinjiru yō ni naru tame de aru. 01:08 Kare wa hikari de wa naku, hikari ni tsuite akashi wo suru tame ni kita. 01:09 Sono hikari wa, makoto no hikari de, yo ni kite subete no hito wo terasu no de aru. 01:10 Kotoba wa yo ni atta. Yo wa kotoba ni yotte natta ga, yo wa kotoba wo mitomenakatta. 01:11 Kotoba wa jibun no tami no tokoro e kita ga, tami wa uke-irenakatta. 01:12 Shikashi, kotoba wa jibun wo uke-ireta hito, sono na wo shinjiru hitobito ni wa kami no ko to naru shikaku wo ataeta. 01:13 Kono hitobito wa, chi ni yotte de wa naku, niku no yoku ni yotte de wa naku, hito no yoku ni yotte de mo naku, kami ni yotte umareta no de aru. 01:14 Kotoba wa niku to natte, watashi-tachi no aida ni yadorareta. Watashi-tachi wa sono eikō wo mita. Sore wa chichi no hitori-ko toshite no eikō de atte, megumi to shinri to ni michite ita...

02:01 Mikka-me ni, gariraya no kana de konrei ga atte, iesu no haha ga soko ni ita. 02:02 Iesu mo, sono deshi-tachi mo konrei ni manekareta. 02:03 Budōshu ga tarinaku natta no de, haha wa iesu ni, “budōshu ga nakunarimashita” to itta. 02:04 Iesu wa haha ni iwareta. “Fujin yo, watashi to donna kakawari ga aru no desu. Watashi no toki wa mada kite imasen.” 02:05 Shikashi, haha wa meshi-tsukai-tachi ni, “Kono hito ga nani ga iituketara, sono tōri ni shite kudasai” to itta.

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 made nothing 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 did not comprehend it. 6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 This man came for a witness, to give testimony of the light, that all men might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but was to give testimony of the light. 9 That was the true light, which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. 11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not. 12 But as many as received him, he gave them power to be made the sons of God, to them that believe in his name. 13 Who are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. 14 And the

Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we saw his glory, the glory as it were of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth...

2 And the third day, there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee: and the mother of Jesus was there. 2And Jesus also was invited, and his disciples, to the marriage. 3And the wine failing, the mother of Jesus saith to him: They have no wine. 4And Jesus saith to her: Woman, what is that to me and to thee? my hour is not yet come. 5His mother saith to the waiters: Whatsoever he shall say to you, do ye.

Firstly, in regard to structure, we should note that while sentences in modern written Japanese tend to be shorter than in the older language, they are generally longer than, for example, their English counterparts. Moreover, there is a greater use of sentential conjunctions. Thus, the reader of the NIT is struck by the “choppiness” of the syntax, an impression that is only reinforced when one examines the original, in which, though the clauses are short and include only one instance of hypotaxis,^[7] there is conspicuous use of coordinating conjunctions, notably *kai* ‘and’, which appears with that function no fewer than sixteen times.

The first verse, consisting of a single sentence, with three coordinate clauses joined by *kai*, is rendered into Japanese as three sentences: ...*ga atta* ‘was (existential); ...*ni atta* ‘was’ (locative); ...*de atta* (copulative). (Older translations, including the Taishō Revised Version [1917], link the clauses by means of *ari*, the conjunctive form of the verb: 太初に言あり、言は神と偕にあり、言は神なりき。Hajime ni kotoba ari, kotoba wa kami to tomo ni ari, kotoba wa kami nariki.)

Like the (postposed) conjunction *de*, *kai* can, particularly through Semitic influence, have an adversative as well as conjunctive sense. 1:5, for example, is variously rendered into English as “The Light shines in the darkness, *and* the darkness did not comprehend it.” (The New American Bible) and “The light shines in the darkness, *but* the darkness has not understood it.” In the NIT version, we find two unconnected sentences. The only sentence-initial conjunction occurs where there is none in the original, that is in the last verse cited here: “Shikashi, haha wa meshi-tsukai-tachi ni...” (‘But [his] mother [said] to the servants...’).

Structural issues overlap with semantic considerations. In the original, *ho logos* ‘the Word’ is marked for definiteness and number, in contrast to Japanese *kotoba* ‘word(s)’. Of course, regardless of the readers’ language, the concept must be understood in a specific theological context, as it relates to the Jewish concept of *dabar-YHWH* ‘the Word of God’, to which the gospel writer is clearly alluding. Still, as though to facilitate that understanding, earlier translations into Japanese give the term greater specificity. Federico Barbaro’s translation of 1970 (Don Bosco-sha, Tokyo) and the Franciscan translation of 1980, among others, render *ho logos* with honorific *mi-* + *kotoba*, the entire phrase being thereby more readily understood in a Judeo-Christian context.^[8]

The use of the definite article in *hê skotia* ‘the darkness’, as juxtaposed to *to phôs* ‘the light’, makes explicit a consistent dualistic image found the Fourth Gospel. A literal rendering into Japanese is a structural impossibility.

A purely lexico-semantic problem is the rendition of Greek (*kai to phôs en tē skotia phainei kai hē skotia auto ou katélaben*), as the verb here means both ‘apprehend’ in the sense of ‘overcome, capture’ and ‘comprehend’. Whereas in English, for example, it is possible to hedge with “...and the darkness has not grasped it,” such has apparently not been considered as an option for any Japanese rendition.

The concept of “blood” as symbolic of kinship is common to many cultures. The Johannine image of “the flesh” (*thelēmatos sarkos* ‘the desire of the flesh’), on the other hand, first appears in Japanese after the reintroduction of Christianity, along with the juxtaposition of *rei to niku* (霊と肉) ‘spirit and flesh’.

Greek *doxa* ‘glory’, which originally meant ‘teaching’, acquired a new sense through the translation of Hebrew *kavod* in the Septuagint. Sino-Japanese *eikō* (栄光) ‘glory’, though also used in a strictly secular sense, has come to be at least subliminally associated with Christianity, cf. *kami no eikō* (神の栄光) ‘the glory of God’.

In the original, the verb that is translated into Japanese as *yadorareta* (宿られた), the past honorific form of *yadoru* ‘dwell, make as one’s temporary abode’, is *eskênôsen* (*skēneien*), lit. ‘pitched [his] tent’, cf. *skēnos* ‘tent’, the source of English *scene*. The Greek verb is clearly used to reflect the Hebrew idea of the in-dwelling place of God, (*shechina*, cf. *mishkan* ‘tabernacle, sanctuary’: “Let them construct a sanctuary for me, that I may dwell among them.” (Exodus 25:8). As it happens, the Japanese verb *yadoru* (< *ya* ‘abode’ + *toru* ‘take’) has strong animistic associations, cf. *miya* ‘shrine’ (above), and thus makes for a remarkably appropriate match.

Particularly vexing for translators are high-frequency words and phrases whose meaning in a given context must be understood as they relate to other occurrences. In the concluding verses of the above excerpts (John 2:4-5), Jesus, presumably speaking Aramaic, is made to use a Semitic idiom rendered into Greek as: *ti emoi kai soi gunai* ‘what is there between you and me, woman?’ *gunai* is the vocative form of *gunē* ‘woman, (my) lady’ and is Jesus’ exclusive form of address when he refers to his mother, lastly in his words to her from the cross.^[9] The *Catholic Encyclopedia* notes:

The above cited passages show that in the language of Jesus the address “woman” has a most respectful meaning. The clause “what is that to me and to thee” renders the Greek *ti emoi kai soi*, which in its turn corresponds to the Hebrew phrase *mah li walakh*. This latter occurs in Judges, xi, 12; II Kings, xvi? 10j xix, 23; III Kings, xvii, 18; IV Kings, iii, 13; ix, 18; II Par., xxxv, 21. The New Testament shows equivalent expressions in Matt., viii, 29; Mark, i, 24; Luke, iv, 34; viii, 28; Matt., xxvii, 19. The meaning of the phrase varies according to the character of the speakers, ranging from a most pronounced opposition to a courteous compliance. Such a variable meaning makes it hard for the translator to find an equally variable equivalent. “What have I to do with thee”, “this is neither your nor my business”, “why art thou troublesome to me”, “allow me to attend to this”, are some of the renderings suggested. In general, the words seem to refer to well or ill-meant importunity which they endeavor to remove. The last part of Our Lord’s answer presents less difficulty to the interpreter: “my hour is not yet come”, cannot refer to the precise moment at

which the need of wine will require the miraculous intervention of Jesus; for in the language of St. John “my hour” or “the hour” denotes the time preordained for some important event (John, iv, 21, 23; v, 25, 28; vii, 30; viii, 20; xii, 23; xiii, 1; xvi, 21; xvii, 1). Hence the meaning of Our Lord’s answer is: “Why are you troubling me by asking me for such an intervention? The divinely appointed time for such a manifestation has not yet come”; or, “why are you worrying? Has not the time of manifesting my power come?” The former of these meanings implies that on account of the intercession of Mary Jesus anticipated the time set for the manifestation of His miraculous power (cf. St. Irenaeus, c. hoer., III, xvi, 7, P.G., VII, 926); the second meaning is obtained by understanding the last part of our Lord’s words as a question, as was done by St. Gregory of Nyasa (P.G., XLIV, 1308) and by the Arabic version of Tatian’s “Diatessaron” (Rome, 1888). See Knabenbauer, *Evangeliumsec. Joan.*, Paris, 1898, pp. 118-122; Hoberg, *Jesus Christus. Vorträge*, Freiburg, 1908, 31, Anm. 2; *Theologie und Glaube*, 1909, 564,” 808. Mary understood her Son’s words in their proper sense; she merely warned the waiters, “Whatsoever he shall say to you, do ye” (John, ii, 5). There can be no question of explaining Jesus’ answer in the sense of a refusal.

The last sentence here is of particular significance as it relates to Japanese translations of the passage. In the NIT version, we find the final sentence introduced with an adversative conjunction (*Shikashi* ‘Nevertheless’) that is absent in the original.

We see in these same two verses how structural and cultural considerations overlap. In the Greek original, “person” – whether indicated pronominally or verbally – is register-neutral. Thus, there is nothing either honorific or condescending in Jesus’ use of *soi* ‘you’ in reference to his mother. In her words to the servants (*ho ti an legê; humin* ‘whatever he tells you’), it is only in the verb inflection that the third-person singular is made explicit. In Japanese, there is no deferential second-person pronoun, and even *anata* tends to be condescending. A parent, for example, may use it (or its contracted form *anta*) in speaking to a child, but it is not normally reciprocated, Biblical translations being a notable exception to the rule. There are likewise no strictly deictic third-person forms, so that when Jesus’ mother is made to say *kono hito* ‘this person’ in reference to her son, the usage is clearly marked.

As a concluding comment, it might be noted that an arguably “Catholic” consideration is reflected in Barbaro’s translation. Whereas as in the NIT version, the first sentence of the second chapter is rendered as “iesu no haha ga soko ni ita,” Barbaro’s version reads: “iezesu no haha mo soko ni kite orareta.” The NIT version not only reflects the Protestant preference for *iesu* over *iezesu* for the rendition of *Jesus* (*Iesus*) but also uses *ita* ‘was (there)’, a plain form, *orareta* being an honorific.

NOTES

[1] The word was given a pseudo-Chinese appearance with the phonetic use of characters (伴天連), literally ‘accompanying heaven joined’, hence the phonetic disparity.

- [2] The *Nihonkokugo-daijiten* (日本国語大辞典), noted elsewhere as the most comprehensive of Japanese monolingual dictionaries, defines the term in purely indigenous terms, despite its broad meaning in actual usage: Greco-Roman, Jewish, and Mormon.
- [3] Among the author's colleagues and students, almost none, when asked, were aware that the leading politician Aso Tarō, Japan's 59th prime minister, is Roman Catholic.
- [4] a Buddhist term (< Sanskrit *ksamayati* 'forgiveness, tolerance', later 'repentance', cf. Mandarin *chànhuǐ*)
- [5] *Nihon-kokugo-daijiten*
- [6] English *scapegoat* (< escape goat) originates in Tyndall's misanalysis and hence mistranslation of Hebrew *Azazel*.
- [7] John 2:3, where the phrase *usterêsantos oinou* 'the wine having run out' is a genitive absolute.
- [8] What in retrospect is quite a startling rendition of *ho logos* is found in the (James Curtis) Hepburn translation of 1872: 元始に言霊あり言霊は神とともにあり (Hajime ni **kotodama** ari kotodama wa kami to tomo ni ari). *kotodama*, lit. 'word spirit', drawn from a passage in the *Man'yōshū*, the earliest collection of Japanese poetry, has since been appropriated by ultra-nationalists and their critics; it also appears in the realm of *anime*.
- [9] Commentators have argued that *gunai* corresponds to Hebrew *ishah* 'woman' as an archetype, with the mother of Jesus being implicitly treated as the Second Eve.

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