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A "Loochooan" New Testament

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A "Loochooan" New Testament

Abstract

Essay on the history and bibliography of four books of the New Testament (including two editions of the Gospel of Luke) translated by evangelist Bernard Jean Bettelheim into Japanese/Ryukyuan, and published in Hong Kong, 1855-1858. Provides context on Bettelheim's role in Okinawan history as well as his knowledge of the languages spoken on Okinawa in the mid-1800s.

Keywords

Bettelheim, Bible, New Testament, Okinawa, Ryukyuan history

Disciplines

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A "Loochoan" New Testament

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Tags

バツテルハイム, ルカによる福音書, B. J. Bettelheim, Bernard Jean Bettelheim, Bettelheim, Bible, Christianity, East Asia, Edo period, 路加傳福音書, Gospel of Luke, Gospels, Japan, Japanese books, Okinawa, Ryukyu, translations, 伯德令

Okinawa conjures up many images for people in the 21st century. To mainland Japanese, it might be an exotic vacation destination in their own backyard, a place to feel both at home and abroad at the same time. For some Americans, who have our own colonized Pacific paradise in Hawai'i, it is a **snapshot of patriotic WWII bravery**. A truer picture of the island might lie somewhere in between these two idylls, as Okinawa Prefecture remains a tourist destination still marked by significant American military presence. An image rarely associated with the seat of the former Ryukyu Kingdom, however, is Christianity. However, a discovery in Penn's special collections opens up a fascinating window into this aspect of Okinawan history.

As readers of this blog may remember, The Penn Libraries' Japanese Studies unit has enjoyed rediscovering **unique snapshots of Japanese bibliographic history**. But this most recent find came from an unexpected place: Penn's **Evans Bible Collection**. Within this collection are five books of the New Testament from the 1850s, previously cataloged with brief titles like "Luke Loochoan" and even more confusingly, "Japanese Romans." Seen together, these five items reveal trends in 19th century imperialism and missionary culture, and help to tell the story of one cantankerous evangelist, Bernard Jean Bettelheim (1811-1870).

Born into a Jewish family in Hungary, Bettelheim traveled the Mediterranean, where he encountered, and soon converted to, Christianity. He made his way to London, where he became a British national. In his youth, he was an accomplished student with a talent for linguistics and a bent for medicine. Both of these skills, along with his zeal for Christianity, would position Bettelheim to be an ideal candidate as the first Protestant missionary to "Loochoo" (Ryukyu), sponsored by Herbert John Clifford's Loochoo Naval Mission.

Along with his wife Elizabeth Mary (néé Barwick, d. 1872) and daughter Victoria Rose—and later a son, Bernard James Gutzlaff (1845-1910), born along the voyage and named after **Karl Friedrich August Gutzlaff** (1803-1851)—Bettelheim landed in 1846 at Hong Kong, which had recently been annexed by the British. Bettelheim used his time in Hong Kong to study Mandarin Chinese as well a bit of the "Loochoan" language and culture, using knowledge compiled by Clifford during his earlier expedition to East Asia in the 1820s with Basil Hall [1].



— "Parting Scene at Loo Choo" from Hall's account.

In the 1840s, the Ryukyu Kingdom was already under the influence of Japan, itself still operating largely under the *sakoku* policy of isolationism. And while two French Catholic missionaries had already managed to find their way onto Okinawa, they were heavily monitored and guarded. Despite the fact that

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Ryukyuan were not eager to receive foreign visitors, Bettelheim was not to be dissuaded. Bribing some British crewmen to help ply Ryukyuan sailors with alcohol, Bettelheim smuggled his family and their possessions onto boats heading for the island. While the scheme was uncovered during the voyage to the city of Naha, it was too late to turn back. Taking pity on the Bettelheims (who now had an infant to care for), priests of the nearby Gokoku-ji allowed the stranded family to stay in their temple overnight. The next morning found the Bettelheims adamant about remaining there, and this small family (along with third newborn daughter, Lucy Lewchew Bettelheim, named after the islands) would occupy the temple for the next several years.

This first night would mark the first of numerous clashes between Bettelheim and the Ryukyuan. The *sakoku* policy enforced by mainland Japanese agents prevented local markets from selling anything to the Bettelheims. Unable to purchase goods, the Bettelheims survived on charity and by taking what they pleased (or leaving a token payment behind) from abandoned stalls—the mere sight of his family would cause some sellers to run away. Further, despite local opposition to Christianity (made illegal and punishable by death in Japan), Bettelheim refused to cease spreading the word of God, employing such stratagems as bribing locals to read some of his roughly “1,200 Tracts in Chinese and English,” and even breaking into homes. In his diary, Bettelheim writes:

“To the rolls of tracts which I colported through the streets I added a good bagful of cakes... Those who refused a tract were frequently less rigorous toward my cakes... Even after [...] nobody cared for either my tracts, or my bag, or my cakes [...] nothing remained but boldly to venture into people’s houses [...] I was little moved with the cries of the women of frightened at the screams of the children, but seated myself in the first room I could get access to.”

More cautious locals barred their doors to the foreign invader, but Bettelheim “found [his] way in through the deep gaps in dilapidated back walls.” In an amazing bit of self-centered cognitive dissonance, Bettelheim considered his breaking and entering as a service to homeowners for exposing weak points in their homes, and to local masons for giving them employment.

Bettelheim’s unpleasant encounters with the Naha locals caused the Ryukyuan officials at the capital Shuri to keep close watch on Bettelheim, employing guards to be stationed around Gokoku-ji and to accompany Bettelheim and family on their travels. Nevertheless, Bettelheim turned this to his advantage, and used his forced government sponsorship as an opportunity to improve his fluency in Chinese, Japanese, and Ryukyuan. Besides compiling grammars and dictionaries of the language, Bettelheim co-opted his Chinese classics tutors into helping him translate portions of the New Testament into the local language. While some reports of Bettelheim’s activities claim that he had translated the whole of the New Testament, there is little evidence that he ever got beyond the sixth book, Paul’s Epistle to the Romans. Manuscript versions of his translations of the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Mark have since been reprinted in Japan, but Bettelheim only lived to see five editions of his translations reach publication.

■ June 2012

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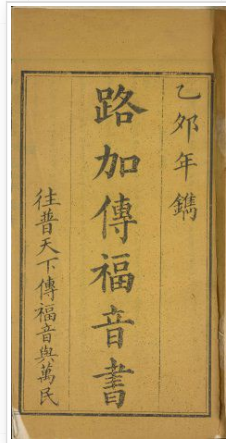
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— Title page of Bettelheim's Gospel of Luke (1855).

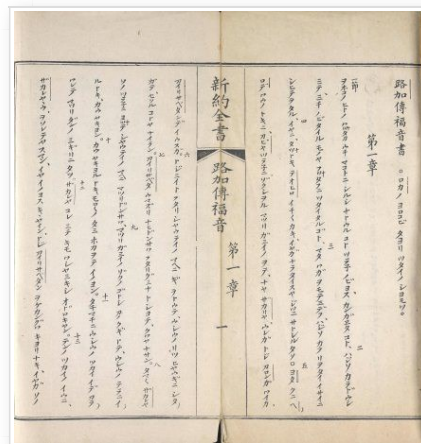
By 1855, Bettelheim and his family had left their post at Naha, having been transported back to China under the auspices of the Matthew Perry Expedition, to which Bettelheim had served as both helper and general nuisance. In that year, the crumbling Loochoo Naval Mission paid for the printing of Bettelheim's translations of the **Gospel of Luke**, the **Gospel of John**, the **Acts of the Apostles**, and **Paul's Epistle to the Romans** in Hong Kong.

These four stitch-bound, folded-leaved volumes, all measuring 29.5 x 15.5 cm, are a curious piece of linguistic history. Their title pages are in Chinese, each bearing the date of woodblock carving 1855 ("乙卯年鐫"), and each with the Chinese exhortation "往普天下傳福音與萬民" (*Wang pu tian xia chuan fu yin yu wan min*), a snippet from Mark 16:15 (the King James version of the Bible has "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature").

Besides the chapter and verse numbers, the only other instances of Chinese characters is the rather optimistic and ultimately misleading running series title printed on the folded column of each leaf, "新約全書" ("The Complete Books of the New Testament"). The rest of the books are written in *katakana* script, a Japanese syllabary used mostly to render foreign words. For most modern readers of Japanese, a text without *kanji* (Chinese characters) is difficult to parse. The Bettelheim Bible books, moreover, present a deeper challenge.

Firstly, it is difficult to determine exactly what language Bettelheim spoke while on Okinawa, and to what degree he recognized the overlaps between native Ryukyuan, mainland Japanese, Okinawan dialect Japanese, and the heavily Chinese-influenced "officialese" used by the local government. His grammar of the Ryukyuan and Japanese languages *Elements or Contributions Towards a Loochooan & Japanese Grammar* (surviving as a **manuscript** and in a **Japanese reprint of the same**) sometimes conflates the two. Bettelheim's less than rigorous linguistics may have played a part in this. In his *Elements*, he appends a list of possible parallel roots to Hebrew words, in order "[t]o invite & stimulate philologists to turn their attention to the Japanese", and in a March 2, 1847 entry in his voluminous diaries, Bettelheim hints at his discovery of a Lost Tribe of Israel using comparative analysis of Ryukyuan personal names ("Moshi מישה [sic]", and "Yudji very near to Jesus") [2].

Secondly, Bettelheim, might be considered an "executive translator" of these editions, since he compiled and adapted the translation work of others rather than laboring over it on his own. He was aided by numerous local tutors, and the lack of continuity among their translations (and their varying willingness to treat with Bettelheim in the "Loochooan" language) have apparently created some internal inconsistencies in the books, with some passages reading as broken sentences. It should also be noted that some of



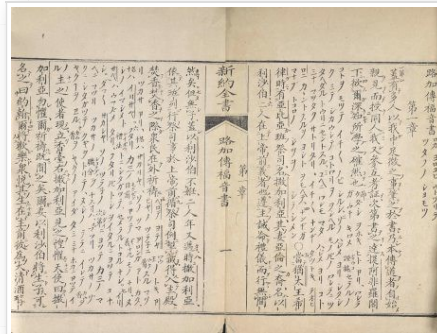
— First leaf of "Loochooan" Luke (1855) "unfolded".

Bettelheim's phrasing in the Gospel of John is very close to that of the **Japanese translation of that same book** made by Karl Gützlaff, Bettelheim's son's partial namesake. Both begin their translations of John 1:1 ("In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.") with the phrase "ハジマリニカシコイモノ..." (*Hajimari ni kashikoi mono...*) "In the

beginning [was] the wise [one]”), substantiating the abstract Greek Λόγος, usually translated literally as “Word.” Bettelheim, then, clearly took Japanese text and repackaged it as “Loochooan.”

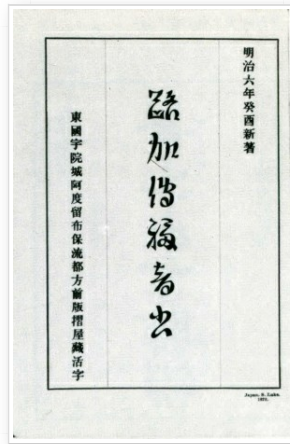
Lastly, Bettelheim’s use of Japanese *katakana* to render Ryukyuan was a matter of necessity, since besides Chinese characters, there was no other method of writing the local language. Because *katakana* was not designed to accommodate Ryukyuan, a modern person literate in Japanese would read these books as if they sounded like Japanese, and not Ryukyuan [3].

By 1858, Bettelheim had revised portions of his work, and 500 copies of a **new version of Luke** were published in Hong Kong, this time as a noticeably wider (29 x 21.5 cm) bilingual edition including the Gospel of Luke from **Delegates’ Chinese version of the Bible**. This same Delegates’ version, incidentally, had already served as the source of all five Hong Kong editions’ Chinese title page quotation. British and Foreign Bible Society bibliographers **Darlow and Moule** record that “[c]opies of this edition were sent to missionaries in Japan, who found, however, that the book was unsuitable for circulation in Japan proper.” Indeed, the curious mix of heavily Okinawan-flavored Japanese and Chinese would not prove useful for mainland Japanese. This second edition of Luke, by the way, still bears the carving date of 1855, since it appears that the block used to print the title page of the 1855 edition was reused for the bilingual 1858 edition.



— First leaf of “Loochooan”/Chinese Luke (1858) “unfolded”.

Bettelheim and his family, on attempting to return to England, eventually found themselves immigrating to the United States. Bettelheim’s misadventures continued with his participation in the American Civil War as a surgeon for 106th Regiment of Illinois Infantry, leading ultimately to a **failed court-martialing** for “neglect of duty for leaving a soldier to die”. He was, however, guilty of “two charges of eating the patients’ food and of disrespect to his superiors” and he was (dishonorably) discharged. The redoubtable Bettelheim, still up to his old tricks, continued meanwhile to improve his translations with the help of some Japanese living in the Chicago area, making his texts more uniform with “standard” Japanese. After a few years of lecturing and running a pharmacy, Bettelheim relocated to Brookfield, Missouri, where he **died in 1870**. His widow Elizabeth offered the manuscripts of her husband’s revised editions to the British and Foreign Bible Society along with a sum of \$400 towards the cost of printing the Gospel of John. The Gospel was published in Vienna in 1873 with the help of sinologist August Pfizmaier (1808-1887). Bettelheim’s Gospel of Luke (now in its third version) was published in the same year, and in 1874 a revised and retitled Acts of the Apostles followed. These editions were published in *hiragana* script and their title pages are markedly different from their predecessors.



— Title page of Bettelheim's third edition of Luke (1873). (Facsimile from Tenri Toshokan's collection, reproduced in reduced size in Ebisawa, 1977.)

It would be generous to say that Bettelheim's role in Okinawan history is checkered, and some historians like George Kerr have portrayed him as somewhat mad. As a *persona non grata* of the Ryukyu Kingdom, he indirectly helped pave the way for Western military intervention in Okinawa and in Japan. And although he failed as a missionary (he only successfully converted one man, who later died in imprisonment), he introduced the smallpox vaccine to the islands, despite the reluctance of officials to accept his teachings on medicine and science. But Bettelheim's most enduring legacy are his contributions to Biblical translation, not so much for their successful implementation in proselytization, but rather for their preservation of historical language use in the Ryukyu archipelago.

By way of epilogue, I'd like to mention that in 1926 a monument to Bettelheim was erected at Gokuku-ji, the temple his family had occupied, by the reverend Earl J. Bull's "Bettelheim Memorial Mission." The 14 foot high structure included 10 stones contributed by major localities in which Bettelheim worked in lifetime, and also bore a quotation from Bettelheim's Gospel of John. While the monument was destroyed in World War II, a digital copy of the rubbing is available through the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. The University concludes that "the rubbing provides a rare physical representation of a structure that can no longer be directly studied." Luckily for scholars in the United States, the Evans Collection and the Penn Libraries have helped to prevent the same fate from befalling physical copies of Bettelheim's Bible, whose imminent digitization will reach an audience far larger than Bernard Jean Bettelheim could have ever had in his lifetime.

[Ed. Note: Today's post comes from *Mike Williams*, a Japanese Specialist here at the Penn Libraries]

[1] See Hall's *Voyage to Korea and the island of Loo-Choo*; though Bettelheim likely had a copy of the *edition with Clifford's Loochooan and Japanese vocabulary at appended*).

[2] I suspect that the what should appear in Bettelheim's diary is actually מֵישָׁה and not מֵיטָה as it appears in reprint. Whether this is a defect in the original diary or in the modern transcription is uncertain. The "Jesus" connection becomes a bit more apparent considering his Aramaic name Yeshua (יֵשׁוּעַ), though Yūji itself is a fairly common male name.

[3] As a result of these circumstances, some agencies have wavered in their language classification of these books, though at the Penn Libraries we have cautiously chosen "Japanese," especially considering that the Library of Congress has yet to include Okinawan on their *official list of language codes* for bibliographic records.

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About Michael P. Williams

Michael is the library specialist for the Japanese and Korean collections at the University of Pennsylvania Libraries. He has written *Chrono Trigger* for Boss Fight Books, and his work has appeared in *The Appendix* and the *Journal of East Asian Libraries*.

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