

John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* in Japan: Early Translations

Michiyo Takano

Abstract

The Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan, first published in 1678, has been translated into many foreign languages, and in this regard is ranked as the second most translated work after the Bible. This study looks at when and how the Japanese translations of *The Pilgrim's Progress* were published and how they were appreciated by contemporary Japanese society. The translations mainly to be discussed are the ones published in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Special attentions are paid to the translation by W. J. White, and the illustrations used, which might have contributed to the popularity of the book, are examined. This study concludes that the attitudes of contemporary Japanese people toward Western culture or civilization would be one of the factors affecting changes in Japanese translations of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

The Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan (1628-88), first published in 1678, has been translated into many foreign languages, and in this regard is ranked as the second most translated work after the Bible. This study looks at when and how the first Japanese translations of *The Pilgrim's Progress* were published and how they were appreciated by contemporary Japanese society. The translations mainly to be discussed are the ones published in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

I

John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* was first translated into Japanese in the 1870s, in the Meiji period, by Yoshimine (or Kiho) Sato.¹⁾ The Meiji period experienced an influx of Western culture and civilization, after a long period of Japan's national "isolation policy" which started in the seventeenth century. After the nation was opened to

foreign trade and diplomatic relations commenced in the mid-nineteenth century, the ban on Christianity was lifted in 1873, and its propagation was more freely allowed. A small part of the New Testament was first translated into Japanese in the 1830s, and about half a century later, complete translations of both the Old Testament and the New Testament were published in Japan. It was about the same time *The Pilgrim's Progress* was first translated into Japanese, and it was therefore a rather early example of Christian writings which became available in Japan. This translation was first printed in serialized form in a Christian periodical called *Shichiichi Zappo* from 1875 to 76, and was later compiled and published as a volume in 1879. *Shichiichi Zappo* was a weekly paper published in Kobe, where missionary activities were prominent. The translation of *The Pilgrim's Progress* was only of the first part in sixty-six serials. When the serial translation was complete, *The*

山梨県立大学 国際政策学部 国際コミュニケーション学科

Department of International Studies and Communications, Faculty of Global Policy Management and Communications, Yamanashi Prefectural University

Pilgrim's Progress was soon published as a book. The book was just a simple one, printed on delicate Japanese paper and bound like ordinary popular Japanese booklets of the period.

Sato, the first translator, was not an English scholar; he was a Chinese scholar. His Japanese translation of *The Pilgrim's Progress* was a re-translation of its Chinese translation, and this Chinese translation had been made by a Scottish missionary, William Chalmers Burns. Burns translated *The Pilgrim's Progress* into classical Chinese and published it in 1856. Later, Burns also translated it into mandarin Chinese for a more extensive readership in 1865.²⁾

Sato borrowed the title from the Chinese translation *Ten Ro Reki Tei* 『天路歷程』 which literally means “a heavenly journey,” and this title remains the title of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in Japanese even today. In his translation, Sato employed colloquial Japanese for conversations among the characters, which often succeeds in maintaining the realism of the original work. His translations of verses are also quite well expressed and true to the original even though they are written in the style of Chinese poems. Sato's translation was incomplete in that it lacks the Second Part, Christiana's journey to the celestial city. It is also a free translation as Sato himself makes clear in his subtitle. His intention was to make it readable and approachable to everyone, including the young and the ladies. Sato's translation sold well, and was reprinted at least two times during the nineteenth century.

The second Japanese translation of *The Pilgrim's Progress* was done by William John White, a Baptist missionary. This was published in 1886, and was a translation from the original English. It was not as complete

as the first translation in that it lacked all the verses, and once again the Second Part was left untranslated. White's translation of *The Pilgrim's Progress* was published in Yokohama, by the Japan Book and Tract Society, which was established in 1876 by Christian missionaries from Britain, three years after the abolition of the ban on Christianity in Japan. One might naturally question who helped White with Japanese, because it would not be easy for a Western person alone to write just like a Japanese storyteller. The Japanese used in this book is very typical of classical Japanese literature for casual reading, being both rhythmical and amusing.³⁾ Moreover, what is interesting about this book is that the characters appear in the illustrations dressed in Japanese period costume. For example, Christian has a topknot on his head and carries a sword in the first edition. This type of illustration can be regarded as an attempt at indigenization, and will be examined more fully in the next section.

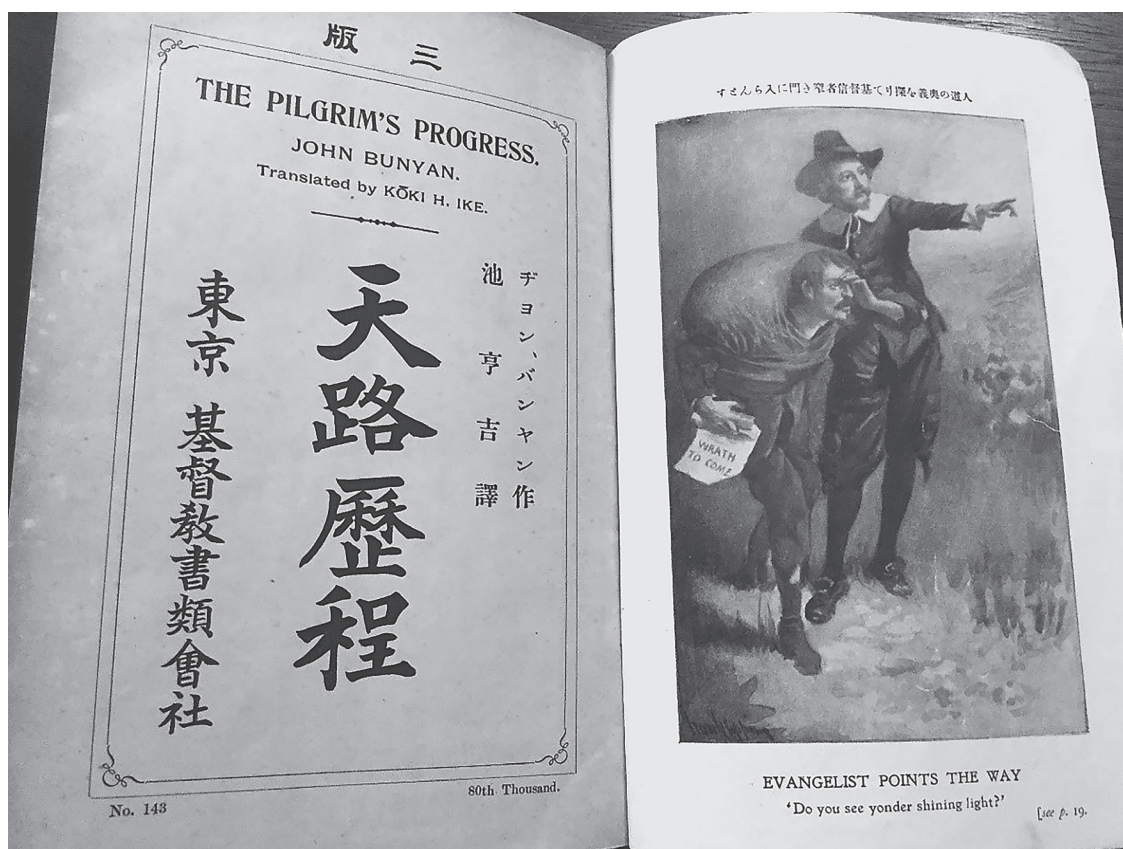
The third translation of *The Pilgrim's Progress* was published in 1904 by Kokichi Ike, who was a poet. Again it was only a translation of the first part, but a translation of the Second Part followed in 1908. Thus, for the first time, both parts of *The Pilgrim's Progress* were translated and published in Japanese. However, Ike was quite free in making his own interpretations, and his translations are often versions rather than literal translations. For example, he shortened the verses and he even deleted some passages. Although he was not very accurate or very sympathetic to the original, Ike's translation was much enjoyed by readers in Japan. It seems to have sold well and was in print until the early Showa period, a revised edition having been published in 1928. Ike's translation was published with

illustrations, and the third edition of 1908 carried four illustrations by Harold Copping, which had been drawn in the nineteenth-century.

The fourth Japanese translation of *The Pilgrim's Progress* was made by Unshu Matsumoto, an established translator, and it was published in 1913. He was determined to make a translation which was more true to the original. He had earlier translated Bunyan's *Holy War* and *Grace Abounding*, and by translating both Part 1 and Part 2 of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, he was hoping to publish all the three masterpieces of Bunyan and make them available and approachable for Japanese readers. His translation was reprinted over twenty times, so we can assume that the modernized, colloquial Japanese that Matsumoto was eager to employ in his work was popular with contemporary readers.⁴⁾

II

Although White's translation was often criticized as being too casual and frivolous for a Christian book, one cannot deny that it was successful and much appreciated by contemporary readers.⁵⁾ It is true that all translations except for this one were serious and without much trace of indigenization. For example, the first translation by Sato was written in partly colloquial but mainly literary Japanese, and the book was not illustrated. White's translation was a good example of proselytization by localizing the Christian writings, although it did not elicit any successors in the same vein. It may seem quite ironical that all other translators except for White were Japanese, and it is only White's book that presents Christian and other characters in a Japanese setting. Sato could have employed similar illustrations to the ones



Frontispiece of Ike's translation (1908) with a print by Copping

in a Chinese version, for example, because he was naturally much familiar with them, having used a Chinese book to translate it.

Interestingly, the topknot and sword were something Japanese people had been encouraged to give up by that time. So, why was Christian depicted as a historic Japanese person, with a sword and topknot? In the late Meiji period, people wore a variety of styles of clothing and their hairstyles were mixed. Some wore western clothes, some wore traditional Japanese costume such as kimono; some had cropped hair, some still had a topknot. Those who were more aware of the values of Western civilization would in a sense denounce Japanese customs and values quite readily. Some of them would have been among the Japanese Christian intelligentsia, and they were not willing to accommodate the old Japanese ways in a book like *The Pilgrim's*

Progress. However, White and his colleagues were eager to propagate Christianity by indigenization and actually succeeded in capturing readers' hearts.

Let's take some examples from the fifth edition of White's translation, and examine Christian and the other characters illustrated in it. First of all, Christian in the picture on the front cover looks Japanese, but the landscape is not typically Japanese. It has a universal touch, with Christian standing barefoot by the stream, a book in his hand and a burden on his back. He is dressed in rags, and he looks slightly upward, probably expressing hope.

The first picture in the book shows Christian and Evangelist.⁶⁾ This is quite similar to the Chinese print, with Evangelist showing Christian the way to the wicket gate by pointing the light. Christian is given a Japanese name "Ju Do" (従道). "Ju" means to

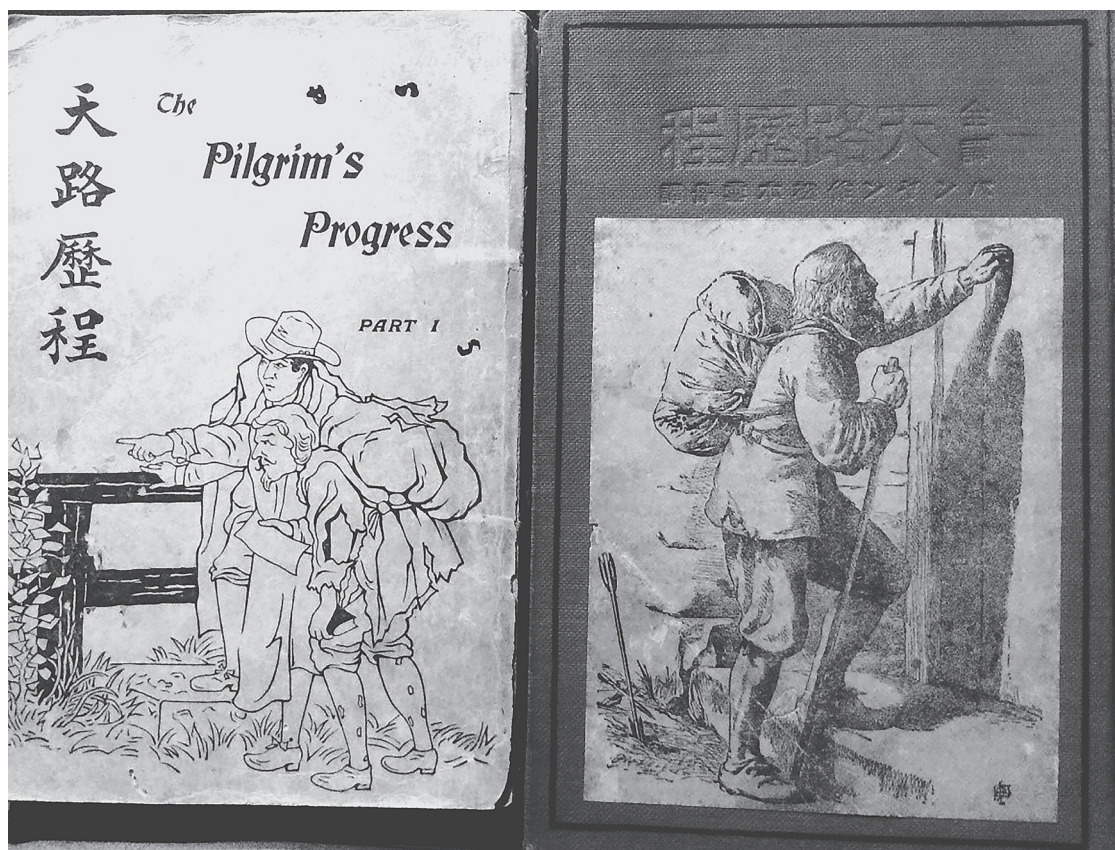


Front cover, White's translation (5th edition, 1901)

follow, and “Do” means the way, so these two Chinese characters together would mean a person who follows the teachings or the right path. Evangelist is named as “Nori Michi” (教道) which literally means a person who teaches the right ways. Evangelist wears a long white beard and is dressed in kimono. Christian has cropped hair, and he is holding his scroll tightly. They seem to stand in the middle of a wasteland, and they look staid. The next illustration evokes a more local atmosphere. It depicts the scene of Christian running away from home, leaving his family behind. There is a man with a topknot who tries to stop Christian, and he is probably one of his neighbors. Christiana also tries to prevent her husband from leaving home. There are their two little children as well, and the older child is actually crying. Christian’s right ear is plugged with his hand, since he does not want

to listen to their words. They all look quite poor, because they are all barefoot and dressed in shabby clothing. In the next illustration, Obstinate and Pliable are depicted in kimonos and topknots. They are carrying straw hats for travelling and have slippers, unlike Christian. Pliable is called “Ryuta” (柳太), and “Ryu” means a willow tree, and “Ta” is a final composition of men’s names. So Ryuta would suggest a fickle man who flutters in the wind.

The next print depicts the scene when Christian and Pliable fell into the slough of despond. Pliable gets out of the bog quickly, but Christian is rescued by Help. Help, an older gentleman, looks solemn just like Evangelist. He is formally dressed in a kimono, and has a long beard. On a bough of the tree by the bog, there is a horned owl, which reminds us of a popular ukiyo-e print by Hiroshige. Underneath the bough, Pliable is returning



Front covers from Ike's (left, 3rd ed. 1908) and Matsumoto's (right, 5th ed. 1938)

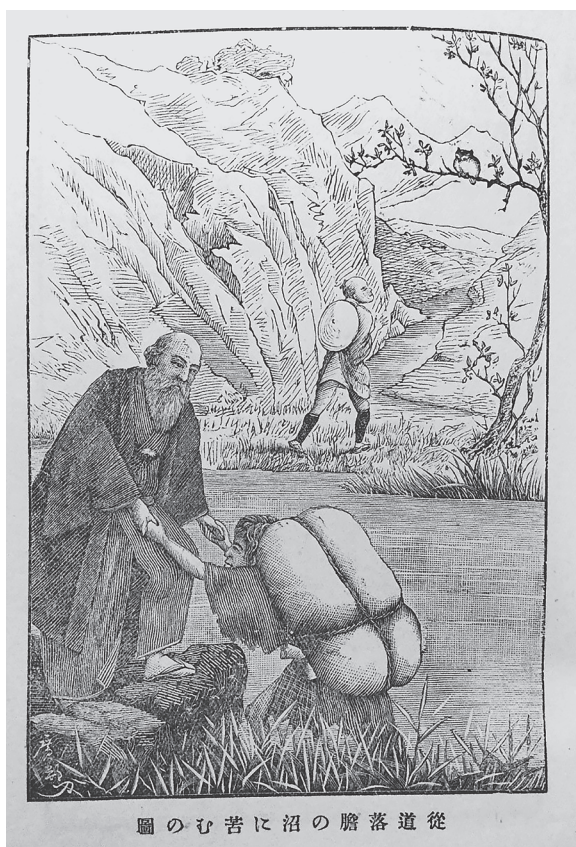
home carrying a straw hat on his back and he just looks like any Japanese traveler of the Edo period. The owl and Pliable together create a very Japanese atmosphere.

The most obvious example of indigenization is the illustration of Christian fighting Apollyon. Christian looks like a sixteenth-century Japanese warrior with armour and a sword. Apollyon is depicted almost as described in the text – the fish-like scales, bear-like foot, a burning belly, a lion's mouth, etc., can all be seen. What is most significant is that in the background of the two fighting figures, we can see beautiful Mt. Fuji capped with snow. This definitely creates a sense of intimacy, because Mt. Fuji has always been a symbol of Japan. Seeing this scene, readers would naturally have been attracted to the story and felt empathy with Christian. In another illustration, everyone is dressed in

traditional Japanese costumes in the crowded fair in the town of Vanity, and the illustration looks very similar to those in contemporary Japanese story booklets.⁷⁾

Besides the illustrations, the language style used in White's translation was very much like the style in Japanese popular stories. Five-seven or seven-five syllable meters are often employed, and the diction and the rhythm are typical of Japanese imaginative literature. In this sense, the language and illustrations are well matched.

The sixth edition of White's translation was published in 1903, which indicates its lasting popularity. Some critics said that White's translation was too vulgar because the style of language was too artificial and whimsical and mimicked contemporary Japanese popular stories; or that the illustrations were funny and unsuitable for a Christian book. All these



Christian is being helped out from the Slough of Despond



Christian fighting Apollyon

remarks made by the critics could similarly be regarded as the reasons for this translation's greater popularity. However, there have been no imitators of White, and all subsequent translations have been straightforward and faithfully true to the original.

There is a similar example of indigenization in Japan of a European book: *Mother's Songs, Games and Stories* by Friedrich Fröbel (1782-1852). This book was translated into Japanese and published in the 1890s by an American missionary A. L. Howe (1852-1940) in Kobe.⁸⁾ It is beautifully illustrated with engravings of the contemporary Japanese scenes. For example, children are playing Japanese musical instruments instead of the piano, and mothers and children are steaming Japanese traditional sweets instead of baking cakes. Without these localized illustrations, this book would have had much less appeal to contemporary readers who did not have much knowledge or experience of Western culture. It was the translator's intention to have her book illustrated by a Japanese artist to raise its level of intimacy. This idea was successful, and the book sold fairly well and was reprinted in at least four editions.

We notice here that both times it was an American who thought that indigenization would work well. Contemporary readers appreciated the indigenization, and these books sold well and were reprinted. However, as in the case of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the opinions of other translators or religious leaders were not favourable. Some thought that an important Christian book like *The Pilgrim's Progress* should be more serious and that Christian portrayed as a Japanese character looked ridiculous. Consequently, later translations did not inherit the familiar style of language and prints. With this friendly

approach rejected, *The Pilgrim's Progress* lost its appeal to a great number of ordinary readers who just liked a good story and limited the readership to within Christian or academic circles. Ironically, this implicit appreciation of Western culture was one of the factors which denied a possibly more successful future of the book in Japan where most people were not familiar with the Christian religion or the culture of the West. The book could have nurtured readers' minds over time, and indigenization may have succeeded if someone had followed in the same style as White and maintained the book's popularity. There were actually those who were lamenting the contemporary situation in Japan where people were denouncing their own culture and alternatively accepting Western values readily.

The translations discussed above are examples of the earliest Japanese translations of *The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan. Even after the mid-20th century, several more translations and versions were published, and some of them are still in print. Further investigations are necessary, especially in terms of the early translations of *The Pilgrim's Progress* into other languages, such as Chinese and Korean, for example, and how they were appreciated in each country. That will enhance our understanding of the reactions to its introduction to Japan.

Although *The Pilgrim's Progress* is not among the books Japanese children would read, it is sometimes regarded as children's literature. This might be because it has been more often used in Sunday schools, rather than in ordinary situations, and it may have once again limited the readership. If the book

had not been regarded as a children's book, it might have enjoyed a wider readership in Japan.

The attitudes of contemporary Japanese people toward Western culture or civilization would also be among the factors which affected the shifting styles of the Japanese translations of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

- 1) It is commonly believed that the translator was not actually Sato, but Shunkichi Murakami, the editor of *Shichiichi Zappo*. cf. Shin'ichi Takamura "A History of the Translation of The Pilgrim's Progress in Japanese (I)" *Annals of the Institute for Comparative Studies of Culture, Tokyo Woman's Christian University* 40 (1979), 1-24.
- 2) For early Chinese translations of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, see Xiaobai Chu, "Memories of the Gate: On the Rhetoric in *The Pilgrim's Progress* and Its Chinese Versions" *Religions* (May 2019).
- 3) The actual translator was commonly supposed to be Kaiseki Matsumura, a Christian pastor in the 1880s.
- 4) Later in 1950, a well-known scholar of English,

Sofu Taketomo, criticized this translation of Matsumoto's as being imperfect, and not good enough, in the introduction to Taketomo's own translation of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

- 5) One of the translators, Unshu Matsumoto, mentions in the introduction to his translation that Christian with a topknot looks absurd in the illustrations of White's book.
- 6) The first illustration in the first edition was of Christian with a sword and topknot, looking like a samurai.
- 7) In Africa, for example, indigenization of *The Pilgrim's Progress* is most remarkable. There are many translations, in which you often find illustrations of Christian and others in engravings or even in photos depicted as native people. Isabel Hofmeyr's book *The Portable Bunyan* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2004) gives a comprehensive account of the African translations.
- 8) Howe's book was a re-translation of an American translation of the book. See Yoko Shirawaka, "F. Frobel's 'Mutter-Spiel und Koselider' examined, and its introduction to America and Japan in the late nineteenth century: Part 2 The introduction to Japan and discussion on the book," <http://www.lib.kobe-u.ac.jp/repository/81000269.pdf> (accessed on October 1, 2019)