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**Guido F. Verbeck**  
– A “Living Epistle” in Bakumatsu-Meiji Japan



Protestant missionaries first arrived in Japan in 1859, and one of the earliest to arrive was Guido F. Verbeck, a Dutch-American missionary for the Dutch Reformed Church in Nagasaki. Verbeck was highly praised by the Japanese leaders in his day, and hailed by the Western missionary literature as a “missionary of missionaries,” particularly after William Elliot Griffis’ 1900 biography of Verbeck. But, in light of the less than one percent of Japanese Christians in Japan throughout the past century and a half, should he still be considered such a successful pioneer missionary? In examining Verbeck’s life and impact, it is necessary to move beyond a focus simply on conversion, and see early missionaries like Verbeck as religious and cultural ambassadors during this formative period in Japanese history. Throughout his four decades in Japan, Verbeck embodied the idea of a “living epistle” as a respected teacher, advisor, translator, evangelist and friend of Japan. He succeeded in developing a remarkable level of trust and a virtually unrivaled ability to communicate with the Japanese people. With these qualities and contributions, Verbeck became a respected interpreter of the West and of Christianity in 19<sup>th</sup> century Japan, and remained a respected figure in Japan even after his death in 1898. Verbeck, therefore, can be seen as an effective pioneer Protestant missionary in Bakumatsu-Meiji Japan.



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“Living epistles of Christianity are as much needed in Japan as written ones.”

(Rev. John Liggins, the first Protestant missionary to Japan, from *Spirit of Missions*, 1861)<sup>1</sup>

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of October, 1871, the 18-year-old Meiji Emperor invited Guido Fridolin Verbeck and several other teachers at the *Daigaku Nankō*, a forerunner of the University of Tokyo, to the Imperial Palace. Verbeck was singled out personally by the Emperor for his contribution to Japan’s education. “Since you have stayed in Japan for a very long time,” declared the Emperor, “and have had a great influence

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1. Quoted in Otis Cary 1909: 54.

on students, speaking Japanese very well which makes your words more effective, I am very pleased.” (Duke 2009: 55) This same emperor later awarded Verbeck the prestigious Order of the Rising Sun (3<sup>rd</sup> class), granted him and his family honorary Japanese passports giving them the rights of citizens (Welch 1937: 203), and generously defrayed the cost of Verbeck’s funeral in Tokyo. (Griffis 1900: 356, 360) Similarly, Verbeck also received lofty accolades in the missionary literature in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Hailed by one author as the “missionary of missionaries” (Clement 1905: 95), in another work on “missionary heroes,” the author claims that “The two greatest missionaries of the nineteenth century, in their political influence as well as religious, have been David Livingstone, who opened up Africa, and Guido F. Verbeck, who laid the foundations of Japan. (Good 1903: 261) What warranted such high praise for Verbeck, particularly when Christianity in Japan has subsequently remained the religion of a mere one percent of the population?

Certainly the early reports of missionaries in Japan were very hopeful, having baptized eleven Japanese believers between 1859-1869, whereas in China it reportedly took ten years of work before the first conversion.<sup>2</sup> Undoubtedly the church in Japan grew remarkably in the 1880s, from 1617 Protestants in 1879 to 29,000 in 1889. (Ion 1993: 32) Verbeck himself was apparently very optimistic about Christianity’s growth in Japan, and Jerome D. Davis, a contemporary American missionary, reported that Verbeck in the 1880s thought that Japan would be a Christian nation in ten years.<sup>3</sup> This growth, however, did not continue, and thus, even by his own standards, Verbeck’s career as a pioneer missionary could be interpreted as somewhat of a failure.<sup>4</sup> Albertus Pieters, a Reformed missionary in Japan who knew Verbeck, wrote that he and other missionaries had painted a “rosy” picture of the future of Christianity in Japan in the 1880s, concluding that because of the growth of Christianity, particularly “the ever increasing number of native pastors and evangelists,” new missionaries would not be needed in Japan after the turn of the century. Pieters also claims that “Dr. Verbeck ... heartily repented later, of having written such things, and that he did his best to remedy the evil they had caused.”<sup>5</sup>

2. Ion 2009: 298; Best 1966: 29.

3. Quoted in Parker 1990: 246.

4. Aasulv Lande writes that Verbeck’s pioneering “History of Protestant Missions in Japan” in 1883, presents statistics and numerical results, thus “expressing ‘expansion’ with a numerical emphasis.” Lande also interprets Verbeck’s periodization into a period of “preparation and promise” and “a season of progressive realization and performance” as revealing “an expansionist imagery.” (Lande 1988: 72-73)

5. Quoted in Pieters 1912: 16. Pieters remains vague on the specific ways that Verbeck tried to remedy the “evil” his views caused, though he implied Verbeck may have changed his views regarding the necessity of sending more missionaries to Japan and the need for a more realistic view of Christian growth in Japan in cooperation with missionary societies.

Some scholars have also doubted the religious impact, not only of missionaries like Verbeck, but of Christianity in general, on Meiji Japan. Hamish Ion, in a recent work dealing with the legacy of the early missionaries in Japan implies that Verbeck's impact may not have been very significant. "In reality," he writes, "Verbeck had little influence on the many Japanese political leaders whom he had taught or met. To them, he was a useful foreigner ... . But it was not for his opinions or his views on Christianity that he was respected." (Ion 1900: 102) Ernest E. Best (1966: 145) asserts that though there were some prominent Christians in Meiji Japan, "neither Christians nor the values they represented were ever decisive in the policies adopted by those in control of the economic and political life of the nation."

Thus, the traditional portrayal of Verbeck in the missionary literature is not without difficulties. But, perhaps a reappraisal of Verbeck's achievements in his career as a influential teacher, a trusted advisor, and an effective Christian leader in Meiji Japan can help to provide a broader understanding both of the modern missionary movement in Japan in general and of Verbeck's impact in particular. This task also fits with a growing trend in recent scholarship on missionary movements to reexamine some issues like conversion, syncretism and missionary endeavors in a more critical light, taking into account the various perspectives not only of the missionaries, but also of the native converts and people in the countries to which they were sent.<sup>6</sup> Although many of the Japanese writings on Verbeck from the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century are similarly praiseworthy of Verbeck's work and life, they also provide differing perspectives on Verbeck. For example, according to one of his respected students – the future prime minister and finance minister, Takahashi Korekiyo – Verbeck "failed as a missionary when he returned to Japan [in 1879] because his fellow missionaries distrusted him. In their view, he spoke Japanese too well and

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6. Though it does not deal with Japan specifically, see Lindenfeld and Richardson (2012). Though it is outside of the scope of this article, the perspectives on Verbeck in Japanese historiography continues from the 19<sup>th</sup> century throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to reminiscences of his many students and colleagues, beginning in the late 1930s, works by Japanese Christian scholars such as Saba Wataru's *Uemura Masahisa to sono jidai* (1937-1941) and Hiyane Ante's 5-volume *Nihon Kirisutokyō-shi* (1938-1941) give their interpretations of his role in Japanese Christianity. In the postwar period, beginning with Ogata Hiroyasu's essay in 1961, *Kindai nihon no kensetsu no chichi furubekki hakushi* ("Dr. Verbeck: A Founding Father of Modern Japan"), there is a growing literature on Verbeck's role in Japan's modernization. In the last few decades, there has been a rising interest in him as a Bakumatsu-Meiji figure who interacted with many of the prominent and popular figures from this time. Thus, with Verbeck, we not only have Western views, but also various Japanese views, expressed first through letters and memoirs of his prominent students and government officials, then by Japanese Protestant leaders and scholars, and later by scholars interested in Japan's development in the Bakumatsu-Meiji Period.

had too many Japanese friends.” (Smethurst 2007: 316) Takahashi’s intriguing comments – which are not substantiated by other missionary sources that all, on the surface at least, praise Verbeck – point to aspects of Verbeck that may have made him less amenable as a missionary colleague, but may have arguably enabled him to be a more effective missionary to the Japanese people. In many ways, then, Verbeck demonstrates how evaluating the legacy of many missionaries, particularly pioneer missionary figures, is an ongoing dynamic process that involves multiple geographical and temporal perspectives.

As some scholars have asserted, looking at the legacy of the early Protestant missionaries like Verbeck “in black and white terms of acceptance or rejection” is too simplistic. (Ion 2009: 285) We can better appreciate the achievements of early missionaries like Verbeck if we move beyond merely focusing on conversion rates, and see them as dynamic and creative “living epistles” during this formative period in Japanese history. Throughout his four decades in Japan, Verbeck embodied this ideal as a *sensei* (“teacher”), an *oyatoi gaikokujin* (“hired hand” or “foreign employee”), and a *dendōsha* (“evangelist”). There were certain periods of his career in Japan when one of these elements took precedence over another – the *sensei* in the 1860s, the *oyatoi* in the 1870s, and the *dendōsha* from the 1880 until his death.<sup>7</sup>

It seems from Verbeck’s letters that he was most comfortable with the idea and role of evangelist (which included not only preaching and lecturing, but translating the scriptures and distributing or writing Christian materials). He took up teaching because it was a way of interacting positively with the Japanese people, and of meeting their desire to study, as well as his own financial needs. In fact, though, it was through the trust he initially gained as a teacher, that he was able to become the head of the *Daigaku Nankō* (which later became the University of Tokyo), an influential *oyatoi*, as well as a respected public speaker. One senses from their writings that Verbeck

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7. In essence Verbeck was both a missionary and an *oyatoi* (“hired hand”) because for fifteen of his early years in Japan (1864-1878) he received his income primarily from the Japanese government, not from foreign mission boards. This was especially true from 1869-1878, when he was employed by the Meiji government. Though no scholars have mentioned this fact, the *bakufu*’s payments were apparently less consistent. In examining the letters of Samuel R. Brown, it is evident that Verbeck did continue to receive periodic assistance from mission funds, even while under contract with the *bakufu*. Brown writes in a letter to the head of the mission board on January 12, 1866 that he sent Verbeck \$300 to make up for his expenses, and that he had sent him \$200 the previous year. Similarly, in a letter from August 27, 1866, Brown writes, “It is quite probable that I shall have to send Mr. Verbeck his allowance for the year ... he writes me that he has not received a dollar from the government since last January. I sent him \$400 the other day.” Papers of the Japan Mission of the Reformed Church of America (JMRCA)

remained “*sensei*” for his students throughout his life, even as he continued to lecture and teach periodically in schools, as well as support Christian institutions such as Meiji Gakuin. Though he worked officially as an advisor to the government only for five years, he had already been advising some of the Meiji leaders since 1868, even before he went up to Tokyo. Even after he stopped his role as an advisor and was awarded the Order of the Rising Sun for his work, he continued to be honored with annual invitations from the Emperor and was granted an honorary Japanese passport in 1891. Though not officially an evangelist until he returned to Japan in 1879, Verbeck had periodically preached, held Sunday Bible classes at his house, distributed and translated materials with Christian content, encouraged the government towards religious toleration, and was an active member of the missionary community throughout his entire life in Japan.<sup>8</sup>

Although other missionaries in Japan may also have had a variety of roles, arguably none of those missionaries were as varied or as far-reaching in garnering respect and trust with the Japanese people as Verbeck. As *sensei*, *oyatoi*, and *dendōsha*, Verbeck succeeded in developing a remarkable level of trust and a virtually unrivaled ability to communicate with the Japanese people. In so doing, he became an interpreter and conduit of Western ideas, and particularly of Christianity, in early Meiji Japan. In the following, I will discuss Verbeck’s impact on Bakumatsu-Meiji Japan through his roles as *sensei*, *oyatoi*, and *dendōsha*, and conclude by evaluating how Verbeck’s life and work contributes to an assessment of the Protestant missionary movement in modern Japan.

### *Verbeck as Sensei: Molding the Makers of Meiji Japan*

Verbeck is perhaps best known in Japan as a teacher of many of the future leaders of Meiji Japan. Though not a teacher by profession or experience, Verbeck was well-qualified to teach, and the conditions in Nagasaki were favorable for a multilingual teacher like Verbeck.

Verbeck achieved a competence in many languages largely through his upbringing in the Netherlands (his father spoke German at home, which William Elliot Griffis called Verbeck’s “heart language”), and by his Moravian schooling in Zeist. This polyglot education gave him the ability to be fluently in his “four mother

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8 One interesting source that reveals Verbeck’s role in the missionary community even as he was employed exclusively by the Meiji government is Margaret Griffis’s journal from the years 1871-1873 in which she describes various meetings and gatherings of missionaries periodically at the Verbeck’s home, as well as a detailed account of the meal they provided when they hosted Christmas for all the missionaries during this time. (Margaret Griffis Journals, 1871-1873. The William Elliot Griffis Collection, Rutgers University.)

tongues” – Dutch, German, French and English.<sup>9</sup> According to one 19<sup>th</sup> century writer, the Moravian schools would assign a day for each language studied, and, for the entire day, the students were not allowed to speak any other language. This education, then, “provided him with a master-key for both studying and using the language of Japan with a freedom, accuracy, and scope such as astonished his Japanese audiences, and have not been equaled by either missionary or civilian in this country.” (Oltmans 1899: 189-190) His English skills, so prominent in his teaching in Japan, improved even more when he moved to the U.S. in 1852, went to seminary in 1856, and married an American woman, Maria Manion, in 1859.

Just prior to Verbeck’s arrival in Nagasaki, the Tokugawa *bakufu* in 1858 decided to open a school for English language education, and several China missionaries who visited Japan were asked if they would teach English in Nagasaki. These missionaries wrote letters to their respective American foreign mission boards (Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Dutch Reformed), encouraging them to appoint missionaries to Japan when the ports of Nagasaki and Kanagawa (later, Yokohama) opened in 1859. (Earns 1997: 89-90) Verbeck was chosen as one of three Dutch Reformed missionaries largely because he was a seminary graduate with Dutch language skills, thus enabling him to communicate with the Dutch interpreters in Nagasaki. So, in 1859, Verbeck was approached by the foreign missions board in January, ordained in March, married in April, departed from New York in May, and arrived alone in Nagasaki on November 7th. (Ibid.) Until he found a place for his very pregnant wife and himself to live, he stayed with two American Episcopal missionaries, John Liggins and Channing Moore Williams, who had arrived in Nagasaki earlier that year. After Liggins left Japan for health reasons in 1860, Verbeck acquired his collection of books, and continued his work of distributing or selling Chinese works in Nagasaki – many of them relating to Christianity. (Smith 1861: 173-174) Unlike his fellow missionaries Samuel R. Brown and James C. Hepburn in Kanagawa, he was able to find reasonably good housing and a competent Japanese language tutor. “Nagasaki,” Verbeck wrote in 1861, “appears to be the place best adapted for missionary operations at present.”<sup>10</sup>

Although Verbeck in his letters seems to consider teaching as a temporary calling for him at the time, it had at least two advantages: the Japanese desired Western education, and it paid fairly well (particularly in light of both Japan’s growing inflation in the 1860s and his own growing family expenses). When he was working at the two schools in Nagasaki, he supposedly received \$4500 annually, a salary that exceeded a pastor’s salary in America.<sup>11</sup> Verbeck reports in 1861 that during that year he taught

9. Frank Cary (1959: 173) and Griffis (1900: 280). Murase Hisayo (2003: 55-78) has emphasized the importance of Verbeck’s Moravian training and heritage.

10. Letter from Verbeck to Isaac Ferris, February 17, 1861, Papers of JMRCA.

11. Duke 2009: 43. Six children were born to the Verbecks in Nagasaki, though their firstborn, Emma Japonica, tragically died several weeks after she was born in 1860.

seven students in English, three interpreters and four other scholars or officials sent from other domains to study English. He wrote that his own language study was going slow because he spent so much time teaching English, but he felt that “yet the general influence cannot fail to be good.”<sup>12</sup> By 1862 he also had a Bible class of four students, though he admits that they may have been there only “in consequence of having been my pupils in English.” (Duke 2009: 42) His teaching was interrupted in 1863 by the circumstances surrounding the British bombardment of Satsuma, which forced the Verbeck family – after a student warned him of a threat to his life – to take refuge in Shanghai for six months. But Nagasaki remained untouched, and he soon resumed his teaching.

By the end of 1863, Verbeck had gained the attention of the Nagasaki *bugyō* (commissioner) who was pleased with the progress two of his interpreters had made under Verbeck’s tutelage.<sup>13</sup> The *bugyō* proposed that a new institution be founded to encourage the study of “foreign languages and science ... and that Mr. Verbeck be made the principal.” (Griffis 1900: 123) Renamed the *Gogakusho* (“Language School”), Verbeck initially taught English there five days a week for two hours, and his students included two of the sons of the later famous court noble, Iwakura Tomomi. In 1865 French and Russian were added to the curriculum, and the school moved to a new location and was renamed the *Seibikan* (and replaced by the *Kōunkan* in 1868). In the *Seibikan*, he taught upper-level English and German. Verbeck, the “Americanized Dutchman,” as he styled himself, also frequently used the U.S. Constitution and the New Testament in his teaching. (Earns 1997: 97-99) In 1865 Verbeck also began teaching on alternate days at the newly-established *Chienkan*, the Saga (Hizen) domain school of Western studies in Nagasaki that was generously open to students from many domains, and where he was allowed to teach a broader curriculum that included some economics, law, history and politics.<sup>14</sup> By 1868, Verbeck’s reputation had grown as a teacher and the daimyo of other domains such as Kaga, Satsuma and Tosa all contacted him about starting similar Western Studies schools in their domains. (Griffis 1900: 129)

Though initially somewhat reluctant to expend so much time and effort to teach languages and Western studies – which he had “sometimes considered as perhaps an unprofitable drudgery, and which often tried my time and patience” – Verbeck realized that it had “under Providence turned to so good an account.”<sup>15</sup> Spiritual fruit did, in fact, come from his teaching when, in 1866, after a lengthy correspondence

12. Guido F. Verbeck. Annual Report for the Year Ending Dec 31, 1861, Papers of JMRCAs; Earns 1997: 95.

13. In gratitude after passing their examination by the governor, these two interpreters sent Verbeck a young pig. (Schwantes (1950: 17)

14. Schwantes 1950: 17; Duke 2009: 44.

15. Verbeck, Annual Report for 1862, Papers of JMRCAs .

through retainers, one of his early students from Saga, Murata Ayabe, arrived at his doorstep with his brother, the *karō* (councilor) Murata Wakasa-no-kami, requesting to be baptized.<sup>16</sup> Though the vast majority of Verbeck's students were devoted to him, like most of the early missionaries, he had a few spies who merely wanted to discredit him. In 1867, he was criticized in an anti-Christian pamphlet which Verbeck insisted was written by a Buddhist priest who was also a former student. However, he continued to teach Buddhist priests, and in 1868, he baptized a priest named Shimizu Miya'uchi, who was later imprisoned for his faith.<sup>17</sup> His final morning in Nagasaki in 1869 was consumed with answering last-minute questions that an inquiring Buddhist priest urgently pressed upon his teacher. Apparently Verbeck was so caught up with this inquiring priest that he had to quickly gather his remaining possessions in the floor onto a sheet and hasten to the wharf to catch his ship.<sup>18</sup>

Verbeck's importance as a teacher was not simply based on his ability and training and favorable conditions in Nagasaki, but it was also because of the caliber and future political status of his students. In the 1860s Nagasaki was a crossroads for many of the aspiring students of Western studies and the future leaders of Meiji Japan, and not a few of them had either been Verbeck's students or had some contact with him. In his letters, Verbeck highlights some of them specifically, such as Okuma Shigenobu and Soejima Taneomi, who later became prominent political figures in the Meiji government. Verbeck was also one of the most important conduits for Japanese students desiring to study in the West. Starting in 1866, Verbeck gave letters of introduction to various family members of prominent individuals like Iwakura Tomomi and Yokoi Shonan to study in America.<sup>19</sup> W. E. Griffis, perhaps exaggeratingly, claimed that Verbeck helped nearly 500 students to study at schools such as Rutgers and the Naval Academy.<sup>20</sup> Verbeck no doubt hoped that study in

16. Earns 1997: 102-103. The famous story of Wakasa Daigaku-no-kami finding, in the 1850s, an English-language Bible (or New Testament) floating in the water in Nagasaki – which started his search to discover and study its contents – was one of the most dramatic and well-known conversion accounts from Japan during this time.

17. Griffis 1900: 133-137. See also Ozawa (1973: 59-81) and Ion (2009: 112, 115).

18. Griffis 1900: 184-185. This story derives from a letter by Henry Stout who replaced Verbeck in Nagasaki.

19. Yokoi Shonan was a samurai from Kumamoto who, in the 1850s and 1860s advocated political reform and the opening of the country. In 1869 he was assassinated by reactionary samurai who suspected him of being a Christian. His nephews received letters of introduction from Verbeck. Iwakura Tomomi was an imperial court noble who was a prominent figure in the Meiji Restoration.

20. This number seems highly speculative but is repeated by many contemporary works as authentic. Schwantes asserts that this number is exaggerated, and the archivists at Rutgers were unsure how many there were, except that they agree that Griffis' number is inflated. It is still used by some sources as an authoritative figure today, however.



America would incline the students to look favorably upon Christianity, as well as provide a quality education in Western subjects. Still, he realized the limits that the government placed on these students who received passports with several stipulations, one of which was that they could not change their religion. (Ion 2009: 139)

It is difficult to know exactly how many individuals Verbeck taught or how deeply he influenced those with whom he came into contact. There are two rare Bakumatsu-era photographs, taken by the Nagasaki photographer Ueno Hikoma, that highlight Verbeck sitting amidst some of his samurai students. In one of them Verbeck is seated with 23 of his students from various domains at the Nagasaki government school, the *Seibikan*. (Murase 2000: 63-94) In the other photograph Verbeck, with his son William on his lap, is surrounded by 44 young samurai apparently affiliated with the Saga school, the *Chienkan*. The authenticity and dating of the photograph, as well as the identities of the students, have been the source of much speculation in a number of recent books and articles in Japan.<sup>21</sup> According to many of these sources, Verbeck is seated with samurai from various powerful domains that reads like a “who’s who” of the Meiji Restoration: Ōkubo Toshimichi, Saigō Takamori and Mori Arinori of Satsuma; Kido Kōin, Itō Hirobumi and Ōmura Masujiro of Chōshū; Sakamoto Ryōma and Gotō Shōjiro of Tosa; as well as Ōkuma Shigenobu, Katsu Kaishō and others.<sup>22</sup> Even if only half of these are correctly identified, this striking photograph provides a tantalizing glimpse of the unrivaled influence that Verbeck gained during these early years of teaching.

When he left Nagasaki for Tokyo in 1869, he claimed that 36 of his students left with him and were one reason why he was committed to staying in Tokyo despite the difficulties he encountered there. Hamish Ion has claimed that Verbeck alone among the missionaries in Japan supported the Meiji Restoration from the beginning. (Ion 2009: 75) This may be partly because he was the only missionary at the time in southern Japan, but perhaps the deeper reason is the relationship with many of his students who became an integral part of the new government. Though in his years in Nagasaki he was isolated from other missionaries, he seemed to look back fondly on those years, and knew that the trust and confidence he gained with the Japanese

21. Yamaguchi 2009: 14; Murase 2003: 87-88. Takao Yamaguchi, in a recent book concerning the latter photograph, which first appeared in a work published in 1895, claims that the photo is authentic and attempts to identify all but one of the students. Takao, however, dates the photograph to around February 1865, whereas Murase Hisayo argues that it was taken sometime between December 1868 and the end of January 1869. See also Masakazu (2007) and Kuramochi (2009: 37-44). This article was based on an exhibition in Nagasaki on Nov. 16-17, 2007 entitled “International Exchange Depicted in Old Photographs.”

22. Yamaguchi 2009: 227-288. Though often neglected by scholars, Murase Hisayo (2000: 63-94) claims that Verbeck also left quite an impression on Itō Hirobumi.

people was fundamentally based on his reputation formed in these early years. In 1869, Verbeck's successor in Nagasaki, Henry Stout wrote tellingly of his predecessor that, "the half of his work and his influence has not been told."<sup>23</sup>

When Verbeck received the formal invitation to come to Tokyo in February 1869, he was not too surprised because the previous autumn he had met with some of the new Meiji leaders (and former students) and they had intimated such a possibility. In a letter in 1868 from the Meiji leader Ōkubo Toshimichi of Satsuma to Kido Kōin of Chōshū, their high opinion of Verbeck is apparent:

As you know, Verbeck, an American residing in Nagasaki, is a knowledge-able and virtuous man and is well acquainted with our Imperial Land ... If you hire him and take him under your wing, others will surely want to learn from him at once. Would that not be an excellent outcome? New schools are about to be founded. One like the shogunate's old Kaiseisho ought, I think, to be opened immediately. When that happens you are apt to find him of great use indeed.<sup>24</sup>

Verbeck accepted the offer to come to the capital without much hesitation, as it came unsought and thus seemed to be providential.<sup>25</sup> He also writes that rejecting such an offer might open the door for the more "undesirable" influence of Roman Catholics ("Romanists") "who exert themselves to the utmost for the same object."<sup>26</sup>

When he arrived in Tokyo in the spring of 1869, however, educational reform was in turmoil. Western Studies (*yōgaku*) faced hostility from both the traditional Confucian establishment and the newly empowered Shinto (*kokugaku*) scholars. (Motoyama 1997: 94) Eventually, however, Western Studies prevailed, and the old bakufu Western Studies school, the Kaiseisho, was renamed the *Daigaku Nankō* (Southern College of the University), and included a translation bureau. Verbeck was the third foreign teacher hired at the *Daigaku Nankō*, and he was understandably unclear about his role among a mediocre foreign teaching staff that were increasingly hired from elements in the treaty ports attracted by the relatively high salaries. (Ion 2009: 175) The need for competent teachers was urgent and Verbeck writes that if this "active demand for general instruction is not satisfied by good men, it will be done by those who undo and destroy as much, if not more, than we can build up."<sup>27</sup> The students also left much to be desired. Kido Kōin reported in 1869 that "There are a great many students [in Tokyo], and they are totally undisciplined."<sup>28</sup> The

23. Quoted in Earns 1997: 112.

24. Quoted in Motoyama 1997: 95.

25. After becoming the head of the *Daigaku Nankō*, he received a salary of \$600 a month, supposedly the maximum paid to a foreign teacher in Japan at that time. (Parker 1990: 125)

26. Quoted in Griffis 1900: 183.

27. Letter from Verbeck, 29 October 1869, Papers of JMRCA.

28. Quoted in Motoyama 1997: 121.

schools in Tokyo were flooded with samurai returning from the war who were often not very interested in studying. One student described the scene in 1869: "... anyone who wanted to study was scorned as a shilly-shallying fogy. Many students would go off in the afternoons and, depending upon how much money they had, go to ... a restaurant, drink sake, and summon a geisha, although some went to the brothels ..."<sup>29</sup>

Verbeck was by no means idle at the *Daigaku Nankō* while he patiently waited for domestic educational reforms. He wrote his last letter of 1869 on December 29<sup>th</sup> at two a. m. in order to get it onto the mail ship, and in the letter he wrote that he was busy with five and half hours of teaching at the school, extra tutoring and translation work, the placing of orders to America for texts, materials and instruments, in addition to all the preparatory work for his teaching. On Sundays, he had a half-dozen or so inquirers for Bible study as well.<sup>30</sup> In 1870, Verbeck was appointed head teacher (*kyōto*), and he began to fill the positions with more competent foreigners, many of them Christians. (Duke 2009: 52-54) By March 1871, there were twelve foreign teachers and 994 students who could choose to learn English, French or German and study Western subjects such as physics, chemistry, mathematics and literature in these languages. (Pedlar 1990: 128) Verbeck was the head of the English department as well as head teacher for the entire teaching staff. A rare photograph of the school in 1871 depicts a large number of students of various ages, with a smattering of foreign teachers, including Verbeck, in the back.<sup>31</sup>

In November 1871, the new Minister of Education, Ōki Takatō, Verbeck's former student, closed the school for a few weeks, conducted rigorous examinations and whittled down the student body to 430 students who were kept under greater control when the school reopened. (Schwantes 1950: 36) According to Benjamin C. Duke, the *Nankō* became essentially a foreign language school of science and, "As a result of Verbeck's reforms in both the curricula and faculty, by the end of the 1871 school year Japan finally had a national institution worthy of recognition as the first public institution of higher education in the modern era." (Duke 2009: 55) In 1872, the school was divided into eight grades with the students spending six months in each. The four American teachers taught the three highest classes completely in English with Verbeck teaching algebra and ethics. Verbeck watched with joy as the Western education at the school progressed, writing that, "It is a real pleasure to hear a man say: I just read the first volume of "*Buckle's History of Civilization*" and am going to the second."<sup>32</sup>

29. Quoted in Motoyama 1997: 120.

30. Letter from Verbeck, 29 December 1869, Papers of JMRCA.

31. In Griffis 1900: 187. Also at Rutgers University, W.E. Griffis Collection.

32. Quoted in Griffis 1900: 204.

Despite the success of the school, the foreign teachers were still threatened at times, and were required to have two guards as escorts if they left the school. In 1871, two European teachers from the school – who had left without guards and were “in the company of a native girl” – were murdered in the streets of Tokyo. W. E. Griffis also recalled that one time a man was “cut down by some sword-bearing ruffian” within a few yards of Verbeck’s door, and that during this time Verbeck kept his Smith and Wesson revolver in his jacket pocket when he went outside the school grounds.<sup>33</sup>

In 1873, the school was renamed the *Kaisei Gakkō*, and Verbeck left for a long-overdue six-month furlough. Without Verbeck at the helm, relations between the foreign staff and the Japanese officials became very heated over issues such as the introduction of a “bewildering variety of courses,” an illegal firework celebration on July 4th (and the corresponding insistence on extraterritorial rights), and the government’s attempt to take away Sunday as a holiday. When Hatakeyama Yoshinari, who had attended Rutgers College through Verbeck’s recommendation, was eventually appointed to replace Verbeck, he was able to stabilize the relationship between the foreign staff and the Japanese officials.<sup>34</sup>

Though Verbeck did not teach in a school from 1873-1877, after his contract as a government advisor during these years ended, he accepted a short-term teaching assignment in 1877-1878 for the *Gakushūin* (former the *Kazoku gakkō*) or the Peers’ (or Nobles’) School for the children of the nobility (after apparently refusing the initial offer to be the president of this institution).<sup>35</sup> After this year, he resigned, but did not completely sever his ties with the *Gakushūin* and continued to give lectures there, mainly on ethics, several times a month, when he returned to Japan. The reasons for maintaining this connection Verbeck stated in a letter,

I said above that it would seem a pity to throw up the Nobles’ School too rashly, and this is chiefly because we cannot tell what this work may result in ... The higher classes here are so very inaccessible to missionaries generally that it would seem a great pity to sever a tie of considerable confidence and intimacy...<sup>36</sup>

33. Griffis 1900: 237, 245, 248-250.

34. Schwantes 1950: 37-38; Duke 2009: 46. However, William Elliot Griffis’ contract was not renewed, probably as a result of some of these issues.

35. According to Verbeck’s letters, he split his time between the *Gakushūin* and the Union Theological School, founded by his colleague, Samuel R. Brown, where he continued his “lectures on the Christian evidences and homiletics.” (Quoted in Griffis 1900: 294) Though Verbeck terminated his teaching contract with the *Gakushūin*, he continued to associate with the institution, delivering periodic lectures at the school for years.

36. Quoted in Griffis 1900: 306.

According to Griffis, the *Gakushūin*, “under Mr. Verbeck’s magic name, had become the gateway through which not a few men had entered high government positions.” (Griffis 1900: 291, 302-303) Though no doubt exaggerating Verbeck’s role in the *Gakushūin*, it is nonetheless true that the school continued to foster its connection with Verbeck.

In general, Verbeck became increasingly interested in promoting Christian educational institutions in Japan. In 1877, he expressed a desire to teach in a more “distinctively missionary school,” and wrote, “I think that we may leave mere secular teaching to secular teachers.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, when he returned as a full-time missionary in 1879, he became an instructor at the Union Theological Seminary in Tokyo, eventually teaching courses on “Christian Evidences,” homiletics, pastoral theology, and the Old and New Testaments.<sup>38</sup> Verbeck taught these subjects in Japanese, though all of the subjects, except homiletics, could have been taught in English with a student interpreter (as most of the other foreign professors did).<sup>39</sup>

Verbeck was one of many missionaries who supported Christian mission schools, and between 1859-1905, there were at least 84 mission schools established (54 of them girls’ schools) in Japan. Of these, 18 of them were colleges or universities, and one of the most important of these was the Presbyterian and Reformed Meiji Gakuin in Tokyo, which in 1886 merged four separate institutions into one.<sup>40</sup> Verbeck encouraged the founding of such a Christian college in Tokyo, and he also supported giving Japanese Christians control over Meiji Gakuin, the first mission school to do so. In 1886, Verbeck was one of the seven foreign members of the 14-person board of directors for Meiji Gakuin, and he continued to be involved in Meiji Gakuin throughout the rest of his life. He was a frequent lecturer at the school and from 1890 he taught regularly in the school’s theology department.<sup>41</sup> In a letter in 1891, he wrote that he gave four lectures a week there, which required about six hours preparation for each one.<sup>42</sup> He soon resigned his teaching position, however, wanting to spend more time in evangelism, writing, and other missionary work. The impact of

37. Quoted in Griffis 1900: 291-292.

38. Griffis 1900: 294; McLean 1912: 272. The Union Theological Seminary had been founded earlier by Samuel R. Brown and others, though Brown returned to the U.S. in 1879 and died in 1880.

39. Quoted in Griffis 1900: 333.

40. The four institutions were the Union Theological Seminary (1877), the Tsukiji University (1880), the Tokyo Union College (1883) and the Anglo-Japanese Preparation School (1884). (Yamamoto 1967: 94-95, 148)

41. William Elliot Griffis’ (1895) Interview with Guido F. Verbeck.

42. Quoted in Mueller 1948: 73.

Verbeck on Japanese Christians and pastors in the theology school at Meiji Gakuin is not as extensively discussed in the literature on Verbeck, though some sources claim he was close to many of the pastors and evangelists during this time.<sup>43</sup>

The most important aspect of Verbeck's teaching was the impact of his personal interaction with his students, and perhaps a couple of examples would illustrate this best: one from his teaching in Nagasaki, and one from his days in Tokyo. Ōkuma Shigenobu, two-time Prime Minister and the founder of Waseda University, was arguably his most famous student. In an address by Ōkuma in 1910, he discussed the impact of Verbeck as his teacher, and congratulated the missionaries on the past fifty years of work in Japan. At the end, he reminded them, "But we must not forget that life is more important than discussion. It was the life of Dr. Verbeck that influenced me more than his teaching."<sup>44</sup> The other example is Takahashi Korekiyo, a future finance minister and prime minister who lived with Verbeck while a student at the *Daigaku Nankō*. He studied history and read the Bible with Verbeck, and according to Takahashi's biographer Richard J. Smethurst, "Verbeck's teachings had a powerful impact on Takahashi ... . Takahashi's lifelong magnanimity and his tolerance toward what he saw as the foibles of others (and himself) may well have developed from his ten years of close association with Verbeck." (Smethurst 2007: 43) Undoubtedly more stories could be told of what his students learned from their teacher, both from his words and his life. Though it is somewhat ironic that Verbeck did not seem to enjoy or prioritize his teaching as much as evangelism or his translation work, he nevertheless realized from his early days, that the respect and status that a "sensei" received in Japan was a valuable means of forming relationships and gaining the trust of the Japanese. In reality, one of Verbeck's most obvious legacies in Japan were his students. So, perhaps it is fitting that the monument that graces his grave in Aoyama Cemetery – his name curiously spelled in the original Dutch spelling of "Verbeek" – was placed there in honor of the *hakase* ("doctor"), as they respectfully called him, through the contributions of 39 of his students throughout his career in Japan.

#### *Verbeck as an Influential Oyatoi Gaikokujin in Bakumatsu-Meiji Japan*

In addition to his multilingual Moravian education in the Netherlands, Verbeck received a more technical education in civil engineering at the Polytechnic Institute in Utrecht. This, along with his practical experience working in several foundries in America, made him more knowledgeable on scientific matters as well. His interests in aspects of science continued – for example, in Japan he built a type of seismograph

43. Verbeck had received an honorary doctorate in theology from Rutgers in 1874. (Griffis 1900: 278) For a reference to his influence on pastors see Ion 2009: 283.

44. Quoted in Frank Cary 1959: 340-341.

to measure the direction of earthquakes and later became, by special invitation, an honorary member of the Seismological Society in Japan.<sup>45</sup> Undoubtedly, Verbeck was a “generalist,” not a “specialist,” when it came to his overall background in Western science and scholarship, but that was precisely what many in Japan wanted in the 1860s and 1870s.

Much of the recent literature on Verbeck in Japan in the postwar period has focused on Verbeck as an *oyatoi gaikokujin* (a “hired hand” or “foreign employee”).<sup>46</sup> Hazel Jones has written that Verbeck was seen as “the epitome of a trusted *yatoi*,” an expert on Western matters, but also one who was “gentle, friendly, and honest.” (Jones 1980: 96) In addition to his leadership role at the *Daigaku Nankō*, Verbeck was also an unofficial advisor to the government on various matters. On Verbeck’s advice, the government adopted the German language for the *Igakko*, the Western Medical School, instead of English or Dutch. (Duke 2009: 55) He also encouraged the Meiji government in the formation of a conscripted army, and in 1869 he wrote a “brief sketch,” a proposal that was instrumental in the subsequent Iwakura Embassy to the West between 1871-1873.<sup>47</sup> In addition, regional daimyo (or governors) asked Verbeck to find teachers for their schools. In 1870 the daimyo Matsudaira Shungaku asked him to obtain a science teacher for his domain of Fukui, and

45. Verbeck was also musically gifted (he played the harmonium for church services in Nagasaki) and also enjoyed reading poetry. (Griffis 1900: 309)

46. The literature begins with Ogata Hiroyasu’s article on Verbeck in 1961, continues through the the *Oyatoi Gaikokujin* series edited by various Japanese scholars and published in volumes by subject area. In addition to Hazel Jones’s *Live Machines* (1980), is Ardath Burks’s work, *The Modernizers: Overseas Students, Foreign Employees, and Meiji Japan* (1985). A Japanese biography on Verbeck by Ōhashi Akio and Hirano Hideo, is entitled *Meiji Ishin to aru oyatoi gaikokujin – Furubekki no shōgai* (1988). There have also been recent articles comparing Verbeck with W.A.P. Martin, a similar contemporary missionary and government advisor in China. A more critical approach to these missionaries and *oyatoi* is Hamish Ion’s *American Missionaries, Christian Oyatoi, and Japan* (2009).

47. Hazel Jones (1980: 95) writes that Verbeck’s advice to the Meiji leaders’ proposal for building a modern army and introducing military conscription was, “Peace is the dream of philosophers and the hope of Christianity but war is human history.” The Iwakura Embassy involved high-level Japanese government figures such as Iwakura Tomomi, Kido Kōin, Ōkubo Toshimichi and many others who accompanied them to the U.S. and various countries in Europe between 1871-1873. In addition to learning from these countries, they had originally set out to attempt to remove the “unequal treaties” with many of the countries they visited. For an account of the embassy, see the five-volume work by Kume Kumitake, *The Iwakura Embassy, 1871-1873 – A True Account of the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary’s Journal of Observation through the United States of America and Europe* (2002). For Verbeck’s role in the Iwakura Embassy see Altman 1966: 54-62.

William Elliot Griffis, a graduate of Rutgers, was hired. In 1871, the daimyo of Kumamoto in Kyushu inquired whether Verbeck could procure a samurai teacher from the West. Though Verbeck assured him there were no samurai in America, he asked the mission board to look for a military man and eventually Captain Leroy Lansing Janes, a veteran of the Civil War, was hired for the school.<sup>48</sup> In his years at the *Daigaku Nankō* he assisted the new Ministry of Education (*monbushō*) in improving teacher standards and curriculum, helped to establish employment standards for foreign teachers, and also influenced the educational plan issued by the Ministry of Education in 1872. (Jones 1980: 95)

When Verbeck returned to Japan in 1873, he seemed initially discouraged by his dismissal as head of the *Kaisei Gakkō*. But, he understood the government's desire for more specialists, a trend that Verbeck himself had begun in his recruitment of foreign staff at the *Nankō*. The Meiji leaders still valued Verbeck as a generalist of "broad learning" and therefore hired him as a special advisor first to the *Dajōkan* (Council of State) and later to the *Genrōin* (Senate) for an unprecedented (for foreigners, at least) five-year contract.<sup>49</sup> Though his role as educational advisor was eclipsed by others, such as David Murray, after 1873, Verbeck's advice was still sought, and in 1876 the government asked him to translate a book written for the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia entitled *An Outline History of Japanese Education*. (Duke 2009: 221)

Verbeck had devoted much of his early years in Nagasaki learning to understand and speak Japanese, and this was to pay off in his future career in Japan. In 1861, he wrote that he spent most of his days at home teaching English to a few students and studying Japanese through a tutor and using the available Dutch or German grammar books and dictionaries<sup>50</sup> At one point Verbeck complained of red eyes with inflammation from pouring over Chinese and Japanese characters. (Parker 1990: 210) Unlike some of the other pioneer missionaries, however, he had no prior knowledge of the Chinese language, and the only Japanese he learned prior to his arrival was a smattering of words from Samuel R. Brown on the long voyage to Shanghai. At the time, learning Japanese was a much more difficult prospect than modern Japanese, with wide variations for *bungo* (literary Japanese) and *keigo* (formal Japanese), as well as various forms of colloquial Japanese. Thus, Verbeck's progress in

48. Schwantes 1950: 22; Notehelfer 1985: 105-106, 138.

49. Jones 1985: 247. W. E. Griffis (1895) interview with Guido F. Verbeck.

50. Guido F. Verbeck, Annual Report for 1861, JMRC. Verbeck's Dutch and German language skills gave him a great advantage when it came to reading the few language books that were available for foreigners. Verbeck published an article in *Chrysanthemum* in 1882 about the Doeff-Halma *Waranji* (*Dutch-Japanese Dictionary*) which had been published in 1855 (though written earlier). Verbeck spent his early years revising some of these and working with Brown and Hepburn on various language materials. See Ōhashi and Hirano 1988: 114-140.



such difficult circumstances was truly amazing. The purpose of language acquisition, for all of the early Protestant missionaries, was, first and foremost, to translate the Bible correctly (something Brown and Hepburn had already begun in the 1860s), and to prepare for the day when they would be able to openly preach and teach Christianity throughout Japan.

As a result of his multilingual abilities and the respect he had gained as a teacher, Verbeck played a prominent role as a government advisor and translator of Western works for the Meiji government. He had already begun doing translation work while at the *Daigaku Nankō*, assisting Japanese scholars in translating such texts as Blackstone's *Commentaries* and Henry Wheaton's *International Law*. (Schwantes 1950: 35) However, most of his translations projects were done while he was a special advisor to the Dajōkan and the Genrōin between 1873-1877. In October 1873, Mitsukuri Rinshō, the head of the Central Chamber (*Seiin*) Translation Bureau, appealed to the Meiji leaders to employ Verbeck as "supervisor of translation and consultant to each bureau on matters relating to foreign countries," and in December Verbeck signed a contract dividing his time "equally between translation and answering questions from the legislative section" (*Sain*, or the Left Chamber). (Schwantes 1950: 96-97) It must have been an especially busy time for him, for he wrote no letters (as far as we know) home to America during this time, and in 1878 returned thoroughly exhausted for a long-overdue furlough.

Verbeck was not an expert in law or politics, yet he was asked to continue helping Japanese scholars in the translation of many works, including the *Code Napoleon*, works by jurists like Johan Caspar Bluntschli and Louis Prosper Auguste Eschebach, miscellaneous works on topics such as forestry laws and parliamentary rules of practice, as well as various state constitutions.<sup>51</sup> Though Verbeck was supportive of a representative system in Japan, he advised the government not to reform too hastily, stating that for Japan to move from "feudalism into republicanism is like trying to make a yard-fowl give birth at once to a living chicken."<sup>52</sup> Thus, he was "one of the few Americans who counseled caution as impatient young Japanese sought quick results," for he apparently did not assume automatically, as some missionaries did, that Christianity and Westernization were synonymous. (Ibid.)

Considered by both the Japanese people and the foreigners living in Japan as an expert in languages, Verbeck was often asked to assist on various projects. Verbeck had earlier helped compile the *Satsuma Japanese-English Dictionary* and later also assisted with a French-Japanese dictionary. In 1887, Verbeck wrote and published

51. Griffis 1900: 280. The constitutions included countries like Spain, Switzerland, Portugal, Netherlands, Denmark, Italy, Germany and Austria. See also Ebisawa 1954: 34-38, 64-68.

52. Quoted in Treadgold 1980: 12..

a treatise on Japanese verbs entitled, "A Synopsis of All the Conjugations of the Japanese Verbs, with Explanatory Text and Application."<sup>53</sup> In the same year, he was asked to revise language texts written by Japanese authors.<sup>54</sup> On occasion he even used his language expertise in his lectures and evangelism. In an address at the Osaka Y.M.C.A., Verbeck apparently asserted that "in his opinion it was Christianity that introduced the words 'patriotism' and 'patriot' into the Japanese language." He said this because he had looked through many dictionaries and vocabularies and had not found the term. (Frank Cary 1959: 193)

Verbeck was also widely respected – from the Emperor Meiji to his missionary colleagues – for his oral Japanese language skills.<sup>55</sup> Verbeck's colleague D. B. McCartee wrote that he had met Verbeck earlier in 1862, but when he came to teach at the *Daigaku Nankō* in the early 1870s, "I then began to know his great linguistic abilities ... His fluency and eloquence in the Japanese spoken language, and what he has written upon the Japanese grammar and eminent ability ..."<sup>56</sup> J. A. B. Scherer, a Lutheran missionary during Verbeck's later years in Japan wrote,

... there was no finer linguist in the far East. Higher compliment could not be paid to his ability in Japanese than once fell to my hearing. A native teacher who heard him lecture in Saga said, 'He knows more of the language than I do.'<sup>57</sup>

It is difficult to assess the influence of Verbeck's translation work on the Meiji government and reforms, and it is clear by the late 1870s that the Japanese government was relying more on legal experts, such as the Frenchman, Gustave Emile Boissonade. It seems that Verbeck also realized that his influence in this area was waning, and at times he felt inadequate to the task.<sup>58</sup> Though Verbeck no doubt tried to influence the government toward many Christian and/or Western ideas amenable to his faith, he was also sympathetic to Japan's needs, and seemed to try to encourage what he thought was best for Japan's development at the time.

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53. Guido F. Verbeck. "A Synopsis of All the Conjugations of the Japanese Verbs, with Explanatory Text and Application." Yokohama: Kelly and Walsh. (Verbeck 1887)
54. One example is *New Easy Conversations in English and Japanese, Adapted for Japanese Schools*. Osaka: M. Sasuke. (Verbeck 1887a)
55. This may very well have been true, though I have found no direct proof of this other than Takahashi's statement. (Smethurst 2007: 316)
56. In *The Japan Evangelist* June 1898: 189.
57. In *The Japan Evangelist* June 1898: 179.
58. Even a sympathetic observer would agree with the assessment that Verbeck was not a specialist and not the best qualified political and legal advisor. Ironically, his insistence on higher standards for hiring may have contributed to his declining influence by the late 1870s.

*Verbeck as an Effective Dendōsha (“Evangelist”) throughout Japan*

Undoubtedly, Verbeck’s contributions to Japan’s Meiji transformation and the reputation he gained as a Japanese-language proficient *oyatoi* and teacher served him well in his subsequent years as a missionary. Verbeck’s varied religious background prior to Japan also had provided a good preparation for his calling as a Protestant missionary. His parents were Lutherans, but became Moravians, the first Protestants to engage in foreign missions. As a lad, he was inspired by the eccentric missionary Karl Gutzlaff, who came to his hometown of Zeist to speak while on furlough from his mission to China. Verbeck wrote in 1890 concerning this Moravian missionary spirit:

whatever of true missionary spirit I imbibed in my youth and retained through life ... I still hold in dear remembrance my early attendance at missionary meetings, and can vividly recall the deep impressions received in hearing missionary reports and addresses, among others especially those of Gutzlaff, the apostle of China.<sup>59</sup>

Though his early years in America were difficult, he also had several religious experiences that instilled in him a conviction of his calling to be a missionary. While working in Kansas, he almost died of cholera and supposedly promised to become a missionary if he recovered. Years later, he recounted another experience where, as an observer at a Methodist revival meeting, he was “deeply moved” and felt “led to repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and became a new creature ...” (Ferris 1906: 257-258) Shortly after this, Verbeck attended the Presbyterian-affiliated Auburn Seminary, and received what in the 1850s was arguably the most organized advanced level of graduate education in America. (Noll 2006: 13) He became involved in the founding of a missionary society at Auburn, in which its members met to discuss missions around the world. He also began attending the Dutch Reformed Church pastored by Samuel R. Brown, a former missionary to China and a man deeply committed to missions.<sup>60</sup> Undoubtedly, his seminary training in biblical theology and classical languages (particularly Hebrew and Greek) further augmented his teaching, preaching and translation capabilities.

Overall, his religious perspective was also broader than most American missionaries. James H. Ballagh (1898) claimed that Verbeck “received a warmth and breadth of piety that with his Cosmopolitan education made him more of a

59. Quoted in *The Japan Evangelist* June 1898: 174.

60. It is through his connection to Brown that Verbeck was recommended in 1859 as a candidate for the newly inaugurated Japan Mission of the Dutch Reformed Church. Verbeck had earlier applied to be a missionary to China for the American Board of Foreign Missions, but was rejected on account of the fact that he was not American.

Continental or Ecumenical type of Christian than that of an insular or provincial character." Similarly, Otis Cary (1909: 351) described him as "a conscientious and broad-minded Christian," a quality which undoubtedly helped him to gain the trust of the Japanese people. In Japan he continued to interact with missionaries and Japanese Christians of various Protestant denominations. Though influenced by the Pietist faith of his youth, his embrace of the Calvinistic Reformed faith was a consistent part of his abiding faith in God's sovereignty throughout his years as a missionary.<sup>61</sup>

When Verbeck arrived in Japan in 1859, Christianity was still proscribed and proselytization and the distribution of the Bible and Christian literature outside the foreign concessions was illegal. Thus, Verbeck and the other missionaries did other work like teaching and medical work while gaining language skills and waiting for the day when they could openly engage in missionary work. Verbeck's accounts of official and samurai hostility to Christianity in Nagasaki – particularly the reference in his letter about the samurai who, at the mention of Christ, would put their hand to their throats in fear – are still quoted in many works on the history of Bakumatsu-Meiji Christianity.<sup>62</sup>

To some extent, Verbeck's teaching, although it primarily provided instruction in languages and other Western subjects, indirectly fostered knowledge that could help nurture the Christian faith. He used the New Testament in his English lessons, and offered free Bible classes to students who were simply interested in learning more about the West. And, as mentioned previously, some of the first converts came from the classes he taught in Nagasaki. Perhaps the most important aspect of his time in Nagasaki was the friendships and trust he developed with many of his students, as he quietly and patiently lived and taught among them. Okuma Shigenobu writes of Verbeck that

Our teacher was an extremely tender gentleman (*shinshi*). In Nagasaki, I entreated on behalf of 50 students for him to teach us English. There were occasions where we listened to Christian teachings. But, unlike some missionaries, our teacher was not the type of person to force his opinions upon us.<sup>63</sup>

61. Verbeck supported the use of the creeds and catechisms of the Reformed faith in the Japanese church, and expressed some concern when these standards were dropped later by the Church of Christ in Japan. In the 1880s, he wrote a preface for a new translation of the Heidelberg Catechism by the German Reformed Church missionary A. D. Gring. A copy of this translation of the Heidelberg Catechism can be found in the Reformed Church Archives in the Gardner Sage Library, New Brunswick Seminary.

62. Verbeck, in his report on the history of Protestant missions in Japan in 1883 describes this experience. For a work that quotes this description, see Otis Cary 1909: 50.

63. Quoted in Furata 1989: 85-86. (Translation mine)

Okuma also writes that Verbeck influenced him and other students to think about religion in different ways, and it is clear Verbeck's manner in approaching such potentially divisive issues was very circumspect. (Ibid.) Though perhaps few of his students became Christians, at the very least, they could not dismiss all Christians and missionaries as hostile and useless to Japan.

When Verbeck moved to Tokyo, he continued to build on his work in Nagasaki. He was instrumental in proposing a plan for the government to send out an embassy (which was the model for the Iwakura Embassy in 1871), hoping – rightly so as it turned out – that this would encourage Japan's leaders to a greater tolerance for Christianity. He continued to support the use of many Western texts that contained some Christian foundation. He also preached in English-speaking and Japanese churches when he was able to, and began to give lectures on the Bible at his home.<sup>64</sup> Takahashi Korekiyo recollected that when he was leaving the Verbeck residence to live elsewhere, Verbeck suddenly “presented him his large, leather-bound, annotated family Bible ... and asked Takahashi to read it at least once a day no matter what happened.” After Takahashi's death, at an exhibit of his political mementoes in Tokyo, Takahashi's family included this Bible that he had kept his entire life and had inscribed on the first page that he read it “to correct his bad habits.” (Smethurst 2007: 45-46, 315) This personal style of evangelism was characteristic of Verbeck. One pastor who knew him well wrote of Verbeck that,

As a missionary he was not the man to approach a stranger with a tract in his hand. His reserve in intercourse with comparative strangers among the Japanese was due ... to his native disposition, which fitted him to influence individuals by living rather than by preaching Christianity. It was undoubtedly one secret of his immense influence that his Japanese friends felt that he could be trusted not to take unworthy advantage of his relations with them so as to force Christianity upon them in any way.<sup>65</sup>

When Verbeck left Japan in 1878, it was not at all clear that he would return. E. H. House, a former colleague at the *Daigaku Nankō* wrote in the *Tokio Times* at the time of his departure:

The steamer which sails for San Francisco ... will carry from Japan a gentleman whose name has been identified with the educational development of this country ... who has enjoyed during the successive years of his career an unexampled degree of confidence throughout his large circle of social and official connections, and who stands almost alone in the possession of an esteem which has never been dimmed by

64. In the diary of the Meiji statesman, Ueki Emori, he writes that on a Sunday afternoon, he “went to Verbeck's to hear a lecture on the Bible.” Quoted in Donald Keene 1998: 256.

65. H. N. Cobb in *The Japan Evangelist* June 1898: 174.

distrust and which the Japanese of all ranks and conditions have united in according to him with a singular abandonment of the reserve that commonly characterizes their closest association with strangers ... His absence will be a real loss ... one that will be lamented with a sense of obligation that words can only imperfectly acknowledge. ..."<sup>66</sup>

When he returned the following year, he came not as a government employee or teacher, but as a full-time missionary. In his letters, he had expressed a desire to do so even in the 1860s and such statements increased after the proscriptions against Christianity were removed in 1873. Though missionaries still faced travel and residence limitations, Japanese churches began to be founded, and the options for missionary work expanded.

In the initial years after his return to Japan in 1879, Verbeck spent a majority of his time preaching and translating, particularly the Old Testament, but he also published some other work such as *Kirisuto-kyō shōko-ron* ("Essay on the Proofs of Christianity"). (Ebisawa 1954: 35) As mentioned earlier, he also taught in a theological seminary, but, according to the Rev. H. N. Cobb, with whom Verbeck exchanged letters for the last 15 years of his life, Verbeck preferred translating the scriptures and preaching over teaching.<sup>67</sup> Verbeck had always seen translation as central to missionary work, and, in the 1880s Verbeck was able to see the fruit of his language acquisition in his translation and editing work on the Bible.<sup>68</sup> In 1882 a Japanese Bible translation revision committee for the Old and New Testaments was formed, which met at Verbeck's house in Tsukiji and included Guido Verbeck, Philip Fyson (from the Church Missionary Society) and James Hepburn, with several Japanese assistants, including Matsuyama Takayoshi and Uemura Masahisa. (Ritter 1898: 225) Verbeck specifically focused his own specific translation work on translating the Psalms. (Ballagh 1898: 4) The New Testament had already been completed and published by 1880, and the Old Testament was completed by 1887, with the American Bible Society's one-volume Bible translation published with great celebration on February 3, 1888. (Schneider 2003: 211)

Verbeck's translation of the Psalms has been highly praised by native and foreign readers alike. Griffis wrote that, "his work in translating the Book of Psalms is a monument of industry, scholarship and spiritual insight. I have heard Japanese say

66. Quoted in Griffis 1900: 289-290.

67. In *The Japan Evangelist* June 1898: 175-176.

68. According to one source, had helped to compile the first hymnbook, which was translated mainly from American hymns and was largely the work of three Japanese pastors and Verbeck. See Cho 2001: 58. Verbeck was very musically gifted, and in Nagasaki he sometimes played the organ for the Episcopal Church service held in the foreign concession there in the 1860s. Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate more evidence of Verbeck's participation in the compilation of this hymnbook.

that in quality and power, as compared with some other parts of the Bible in Japanese, it stands like a mountain above a plain."<sup>69</sup> Ohashi Akio and Hirano Hideo, Verbeck's biographers, have asserted that he

was responsible for the translation of the Psalms and Isaiah for the Meiji Old Testament Translation (*bungo yaku*). His translation of the Psalms was especially influential on modern Japanese literature. A number of modern poets gained poetical imagination from the model of its beautiful style of writing.<sup>70</sup>

Recently, Junko Nakai Hirai Murayama has shed light on Verbeck's biblical translation work based on newly-discovered Japanese sources and has concluded that Verbeck (with the assistance of C. M. Williams, the Episcopal missionary Verbeck had met in Nagasaki when he arrived in Japan) did the bulk of the translation work on the Psalms. "The elegant style of the Psalms in Japanese," writes Murayama, "echoes the elegant classical style mastered by Verbeck."<sup>71</sup> Another Japanese author, Wakashiyama Daisaburo, asserted that the text Verbeck "created for the Psalms is something far beyond the level even we Japanese could reach."<sup>72</sup> Matsuyama Takayoshi, one of the prominent Japanese collaborators who worked with Verbeck in the translation of the Bible, wrote that their translation work on the Bible helped to create a new style of Japanese writing which aimed at the "middle-ground, that is, to create an ordinary style, yet, not uncultivated, and that, without losing reverent dignity through our efforts."<sup>73</sup> The existence of various styles of Japanese writing was a challenge to the translators. "However," asserts Murayama, "the translators, both the Western missionaries and the Japanese assistants, turned this disadvantage into an advantage by exploiting the potential of these styles and selecting and combining them to create a distinctive style unprecedented in the history of Japanese language and literature." (Murayama 2007: 293)

Thus, Verbeck was a respected leader among the missionaries, and also among Japanese Christians. When it came to writing a historical overview of Protestant Missions in Japan for the 1883 Osaka Missionary Conference, the committee chose Verbeck, a candidate that all could trust, and whose lengthy paper was read at the outset of the conference and reprinted at the 1900 Conference (with an addendum

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69. Griffis 1909: 360-361. Griffis here does not recognize the Japanese who assisted Verbeck, though Verbeck was usually careful to give recognition to them, particularly to Matsuyama Takayoshi.

70. Ōhashi and Hirano 1988: 11. Translation mine.

71. Murayama 2007: 250. Verbeck respected Williams, named his second son after him, and had Williams baptize his oldest children.

72. Quoted in Murayama 2007: 250.

73. Quoted in Murayama 2007: 257.

for subsequent years). Verbeck's authoritative work on these first decades is the basis for all subsequent historical writing on Protestant missions in Japan and has remained virtually unquestioned.<sup>74</sup>

In addition, Verbeck was often appointed by the missionaries to translate or relay information to Japanese Christians because of his language skills as well as trust which both the missionaries and Japanese Christians possessed in him. For the 1883 Osaka Missionary Conference he was put on two committees – the “Committee on Self-Support of the Native Churches” and the “Committee to Prepare a Statement in Japanese of the Views of the Conference.”<sup>75</sup> For both of these committees, his understanding of Japanese language and customs, as well as his rapport with the Japanese people, was essential. This aspect of Verbeck is also evident in some of his comments during the discussion following papers at the conference. Though he made relatively few comments, when he did, he often expressed a concern for the Japanese people. Regarding the hotly-debated issue of self-government, he remarked that “in all our intercourse with and arrangements for the people of Japan, there should shine forth a real love for them. All this desire for self-support and efforts toward it springs from this as its paramount motive, and is for their real good alone.”<sup>76</sup>

Though religious toleration was not guaranteed by law until the constitution was promulgated in 1889, in the 1880s evangelistic lectures and preaching tours were allowed and Verbeck participated in many of these from Kyushu to Aomori. For example, in 1884, Verbeck and others were invited by the liberal political leader Itagaki Taisuke to come to his native province of Kochi in Shikoku to speak, where they found a great enthusiasm for Christianity. In his biography of Verbeck, W. E. Griffis describes the importance of Verbeck's preaching tours, and claims that Verbeck wrote that this trip to Shikoku was “by far the most lively and interesting trip I have made since I came to Japan.”<sup>77</sup>

After Verbeck received a special passport officially granting him the rights of a Japanese citizen in 1891, he had more freedom of travel than all the other foreigners (who were still limited by the “unequal treaties” until 1899). One writer in the foreign press wrote that Verbeck's act of quietly “submitting to Japanese jurisdiction ...

74. Verbeck 1883: 1-158. This work was recently translated into Japanese by Igarashi Yoshikazu (1985).

75. Verbeck and Hepburn were also assigned to “prepare a statement in Japanese, setting forth the views embodied in the report on Self-support for general circulation amongst the native Christians.” In *Proceedings of the 1883 Osaka Missionary Conference* 1883: xii-xiii, 278.

76. *Proceedings of the 1883 Osaka Missionary Conference* 1883: 275.

77. Yamamori 1974: 47. Griffis 1900: 312.



seems to us more eloquent than the talk of a hundred cavillers who raise a barrier of imaginary perils in the path of free intercourse."<sup>78</sup> H. N. Cobb describes the joy Verbeck found in preaching during this time:

But the work in which he took most pleasure, especially of late years ... was that of public address in lectures and evangelistic preaching. Such was his knowledge of the language, his conformity to Japanese custom and etiquette, his attractive personality and his wide reputation throughout the empire, that his presence was always hailed with pleasure, and welcomed with considerable and attentive audiences.<sup>79</sup>

According to Griffis, Verbeck was a very popular speaker, for "When the time came to preach publicly, whenever it was announced that Verbeck was to speak, the theatre or hall ... would be crowded long before the time of service." (Griffis 1909: 360-361) Another anecdote by a younger missionary in the late 1880s or early 1890s reveals the great respect in which the Japanese people held Verbeck. This missionary attended a meeting with the students of the Imperial Tokyo University and happened to be seated next to Dr. Verbeck, whom he describes as "the great Japanese preacher and orator." Apparently the audience was very rude and several of the speakers were "howled down" from the stage. Dr. Verbeck turned to him and said,

"If they treat me like that I shall make my bow, leave the stage, and go home." When his name was announced, he walked forward, mounted the platform amid a hush, then for perhaps 45 minutes made a strong plea for Christianity without a single note of disturbance, amid a silence that was almost sensational. And when he had finished his speech and retired, there was applause which made the very rafters of the building ring. (Moore 1925: 50)

Unfortunately, few of Verbeck's sermons and lectures remain, because he did not write them out, but delivered them by memory from color-coded (red, blue, green and black) notes. A fellow missionary, E. R. Miller, explained his method:

Each color had a distinct meaning to him, but what was written was but an outline of the discourse, which when spoken, was filled in with the most suitable words, in the most felicitous manner, so that any one would suppose the whole were carefully elaborated and written out beforehand.<sup>80</sup>

However, there are descriptions of Verbeck's preaching, and he published at least one tract that might have been the basis of a sermon or talk entitled, *Shu wo homeru beki* ("The Worship of God"). Dr. Learned of the American Board of Foreign

78. Quoted in Speer 1904: 431.

79. In *The Japan Evangelist* June 1898: 176.

80. *The Japan Evangelist* June 1898: 187. A couple of his speeches are preserved in Japanese from notes that observers have taken, in such works as Saba (1967).

Missions, reflected that “Dr. Verbeck was a man of learning, but he preached in such a simple way that all could understand him, even the women and the children.”<sup>81</sup> Though Verbeck seemed to speak Japanese with such ease, it actually came with much preparation. When Verbeck visited Aomori in the autumn of 1897 to give a series of lectures and sermons for ten days, the missionary Leila Winn wrote of his preparation:

The first thing that impressed me was what a student he was. He never preached at random. One could see at once that there had been thorough preparation beforehand. He called the little park at Aomori his “study room.” As soon as breakfast was over, he would go off to the park and not be seen again till noon. After dinner he did the same until evening. It was no wonder then that, evening after evening, he held his audiences spell-bound.<sup>82</sup>

J. A. B. Scherer, in describing Verbeck’s preaching, wrote, “I should say that his chief powers were the graphic vividness with which he could portray a scene, being richly gifted in voice and gesture; then the resistless logic with which he forced truth home. His sermons abounded in illustrations, and were the delight of Japanese audiences.”<sup>83</sup>

After his death, it was Verbeck’s preaching and evangelism that was given some of the highest recognition in the press. According to the *Japan Daily Mail*, Verbeck

acquired an admirable mastery of the Japanese language, written and spoken; a mastery so exceptional that he was able to preach fluently in the vernacular. Indeed, his capacity in this respect was almost without parallel, and considering his linguistic facility, his gift of oratory, his single-hearted devotion ... and the fine example of his blameless life, he may be said to have contributed more to the spread of Christ’s creed in Japan than perhaps any other ...<sup>84</sup>

Even more tellingly, Uchimura Kanzo, the Japanese theologian and founder of the *Mukyōkai* (“Nonchurch”) movement who was overall very critical of missionaries, wrote a reflection upon hearing of Verbeck’s death in which he reminisces about the pioneer missionaries Brown, Hepburn and Verbeck. Uchimura writes that

The first [Brown] said he would preach, the second [Hepburn] that he would heal, and the third [Verbeck] that he would preach ... . Apart from the doctrines he came here to preach, there was a sustained energy in the man such that we might well envy and seek to possess ... . (Uchimura 1971-1974: Vol. 5, 319-320)

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81. *The Japan Evangelist* June 1898: 189.

82. *The Japan Evangelist* June 1898: 189.

83. *The Japan Evangelist* June 1898: 180.

84. *The Japan Evangelist* June 1898: 180-181.

If James C. Hepburn was famous for his useful dictionary, Verbeck was known for his unrivaled – in missionary circles at least – grasp of the Japanese language, particularly colloquial Japanese. In the 1880s, Verbeck published several works intended to help foreigners learn Japanese. In 1882, he wrote a short paper for a Missionary Conference in Tokyo entitled, “What is the Best Method of Acquiring the Japanese Language,” in which he exhorts his fellow missionaries to, “Remain 20 years in the country, mix much with the people, read and study much – and with the many helps you now possess, you are sure to make more and better progress than perhaps any one of us older ones have done.” (Verbeck 1882: 22) Perhaps the most intriguing image of Verbeck as a missionary scholar of the Japanese language is one that Griffis gives of Verbeck sitting on his porch or walking in his garden reading the words of the Confucian scholar and writer Kaibara Ekken “again and again in order to master literary graces as well as lines of thought and argument.” (Griffis 1900: 26)

### *Verbeck and the Protestant Missionary Movement in Meiji Japan*

Charles Iglehart, in *A Century of Protestant Missions*, describes Verbeck as

The most brilliant and conspicuous man selected for Japan ... . His unusual gifts called him to places of responsibility in planning and counseling with national leaders; a status not ordinarily given to foreign missionaries in Japan ... . He had the stature of a giant. (Iglehart 1959: 32)

What is the basis for this assessment of Verbeck a century after his arrival to Japan? The reasons why he was considered to be an effective missionary are many and include elements of his character and background, his superior language capabilities, his diligent teaching and preaching, his humility and generosity, his commitment to and respect for the Japanese people, as well as his zeal for his faith. It is not the concrete results of his work alone, but these relatively intangible factors which help explain why he was so effective and valued by many as a *sensei*, *oyatoi*, and *dendōsha* during his life, throughout subsequent Japanese history, and even today.

In the West, Verbeck was hailed – particularly after the publication of William Elliot Griffis’s biography of Verbeck – as one of the great missionaries, not only in Japan, but in the history of Christian missions. Undoubtedly, Verbeck’s success was partly a result of accident and geography – he happened to be one of the only Westerners in Nagasaki when the demand for education was so high. Also, he was the only missionary in southern Japan and thus the only one who developed relationships in the 1860s with the future Meiji leaders in the 1860s.

Though he is seen as a critical figure in Japanese history, interest in Verbeck in the West has not endured throughout the postwar era. Yet, he is a fascinating figure among the missionaries. Though there are others like him in other countries, such as W.A.P. Martin in China, there is no one quite like Verbeck in Japan. Of

the early missionaries, Verbeck was one of the few who chose not to reside in the foreign concessions, but to live among the Japanese people. Verbeck's identity as an *oyatoi* of the Japanese government for some 15 years distinguished him from other missionaries, but did not change his view of himself as a Protestant missionary. He never fostered close relationships with Western merchants and officials, though he did develop through his students an informal "network of influence" in Meiji Japan through his students, cultivating relationships with a variety of influential Japanese figures.

Many Japanese scholars have tended to emphasize Verbeck's success as a Western educator and trusted teacher. One contemporary scholar, Yamaguchi Takao, writes that "Verbeck was a very important figure, and should be honored as the respected teacher he undoubtedly was."<sup>85</sup> Though the Japanese have viewed Verbeck as unselfishly helping to "found" modern Japan,<sup>86</sup> in Verbeck's mind the conversion of the Japanese to Christianity was just as important – if not more important – for the welfare of Japan, as education and politics were. Verbeck endeavored not only to assist the Japanese in interpreting what aspects of the West they should adopt, but also what the adoption of Christianity would mean for them. In 1868, he writes hopefully (though naively, perhaps) that Ōkuma and Soejima, two of his most promising students, whom he calls "my friends and pupils," would "work hard ... if possible for universal toleration in the empire ..."<sup>87</sup> He also reports that

a little guiding touch here and there, led these men to the conclusion that at the bottom of the difference in civilization and power between their own country and such countries like ours and England, lay a difference of national religion ... (Ibid.)

Though Verbeck's success in education and government was touted in the Western missionary literature, they tended to emphasize this as preparation for his role as a prominent Protestant missionary, an evangelist, and a gifted translator and editor of the Bible. Then, the fervor of the missionary movement declined in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and Christianity never expanded in Japan as Verbeck and the other pioneer missionaries had hoped it would. But, these mixed results should not diminish what Verbeck achieved as a pioneer missionary during a dynamic time when Japan changed from a hostile country closed to the West to an imperial power with a Constitution based on Western models.

85. Yamaguchi 2009: 16. Translation mine.

86. One of the first works by a Japanese scholar to focus on Verbeck was an unpublished essay written in 1961 by Ogata Hiroyasu, a historian at Waseda University which was entitled *Kindai nihon kensetsu no chichi furubekki hakushi* (Dr. Verbeck, a Founding Father of Modern Japan).

87. Quoted in Griffis 1900: 174-175.

Despite the success of missionaries like Verbeck, the general image of Protestantism in Meiji Japan is mixed. Certainly, early missionaries such as Verbeck and Hepburn are well known in Japan, but not usually for their evangelism. Much of the Japanese scholarship on Meiji Christianity has focused on sociological analyses of Christian converts, on social movements, or on influential indigenous leaders such as Uemura Masahisa and Uchimura Kanzō. But Meiji Christianity can also be presented as a failure of the missionaries to convert the Japanese people and to “Christianize” the nation as was hoped in the 1880s. Inevitably, as Japan became more nationalistic, militaristic, and hostile to Christianity and the missionary movement declined in the 1930s, it might seem that Verbeck would not be an attractive figure during this time in Japan. However, to some scholars, particularly Japanese Christian scholars such as Saba Wataru and Hiyane Antei, Verbeck represents not only a successful missionary, but a selfless Christian who not only became essentially a Japanese citizen, but gave his utmost to promote the faith for Japan, all the while respecting the Japanese and working hard – until his death in Japan – for the good of the nation.

The impact of Christianity on intellectuals and literary figures, on social welfare and the rise of socialism, on education for men and for women, and on medicine, has been readily acknowledged by Japanese scholars. Even in its earliest portrayals, Japanese Protestant Christianity in Japan has been viewed as appealing initially to the samurai class (especially those samurai whose status declined or who supported the *bakufu* in the Meiji Restoration) and then by the 20th century to the rising urban middle class.<sup>88</sup> But, amidst this focus on class analysis, on the quantity of conversions, or on the growth of institutions, what is sometimes lost is the fostering of personal relationships that is truly at the root of Verbeck’s effectiveness. The same can be said of other foreigners in Japan as well. For example, the young American, Clara Whitney, and her family – who were technically not missionaries, but who thought of themselves as such – were able to have an impact through the fostering of friendships with various people in Meiji Japan, such as the families of Katsu Kaishū and Tsuda Sen.<sup>89</sup>

88. Verbeck may have had a real impact on the “samurai” aspect of Protestantism with the emphasis in his letters on appealing to the educated samurai class, his interaction with his samurai students, the circulation of the remarkable story of the conversion of Wakasa Daigaku-no-kami, a high-level samurai retainer of the Saga domain, and his assertion in the history of Protestantism that the educated “sword-bearing” classes were more open to Protestantism. See Yamaji (1999: 33) and Scheiner (1970).

89. Steele and Ichimata 1979. Though Clara mentions Verbeck in her diary, she interacts more with his eldest two children, William and Emma Verbeck. Katsu Kaishū, often called the “father of the Japanese navy” was a pivotal figure in the Tokugawa government during the Meiji Restoration. Tsuda Sen was a prominent agriculturalist and educator in the Meiji period and became a prominent Christian.

So, what can Verbeck add to this picture? Verbeck, unlike some missionaries, has surprisingly few concrete legacies in the founding of specific Christian institutions or the conversion of influential Christian leaders, so that his success has to be seen in terms of his overall “influence” and “impact,” qualities that can be difficult to assess. Stephen Willis Ryder in an early historical analysis of the Reformed Church mission in Japan, categorized missionaries into those who were “appreciative” of Japanese culture and those who were “unappreciative,” and Verbeck, who “showed a deep insight into the Japanese character and history,” is one of top names on his list of the former type. (Ryder 1935: 137-138) Similarly, after his death, one contemporary missionary wrote of him:

But the great service to the Church of Christ in Japan for which Doctor Verbeck will always be distinguished was that of a preacher who prepared the way of the Lord. To him there was given above others the gift of tongues; and for many years he went from place to place, gaining the ear of the people, removing their prejudices, and opening their hearts to receive the Gospel of Christ.<sup>90</sup>

Gaining ears, removing prejudices, and opening hearts are not necessarily easily measurable qualities, but they are arguably also not easy to achieve, particularly in such a divisive period as the early Meiji. Certainly Verbeck, like most 19<sup>th</sup> century missionaries, can be criticized for at times appearing to think that Westernization will lead to Christianity, for perhaps uncritically accommodating aspects of Japanese policies such as the “emperor system”, or conversely for being unduly critical of aspects like Buddhism and Roman Catholicism.<sup>91</sup> But, overall, Verbeck appears most concerned with the Japanese people with whom he had developed a trust, and “he was sensible enough to recognize that the new must find some bonds of connection with the old, and tactful enough not to oppose a situation he could not remedy.” (Ryder 1935: 138)

It seems that Verbeck in his last decades felt more at home in Japan than anywhere else, though most of his family lived outside Japan. He writes in a letter from San Francisco when he returned to America in 1878, “What amidst all the novelty and advantages of this great city we miss most in our daily dealings are the docile and kind-hearted Japanese.”<sup>92</sup> Though Verbeck spent much of the last decade

90. *The Japan Evangelist* June 1898: 183-184.

91. Ryder (1935: 45) cites an early photograph sent by Verbeck to the the Secretary of the Mission Board in which he is bowing before the emperor with “no indications ... that Mr. Verbeck had any fear of compromising himself, or the Christian religion which he represented, with Emperor worship.”

92. Quoted in Griffis 1900: 293. His wife, Marion, returned to the U.S. after the death of their son Guido at the age of 16 in 1885 in California, and she remained there for most of the rest of her life, looking after their remaining children (six survived into adulthood). Emma, their oldest daughter, married an Episcopal missionary and lived in Japan for years. Verbeck lived with her during his last years.

of his life away from his wife and most of his children, he never seemed to doubt his commitment to his mission for the people of Japan. In reality, one of Verbeck's most obvious legacies in Japan were his students, who remained faithful to the *hakase* ("doctor") as they respectfully called him.

Though Verbeck's experience was important in his career, in many ways it was his character that enabled him to be a highly effective "living epistle" to the Japanese. Verbeck was patient, hardworking, polite and generous – traits that certainly helped him in his teaching and evangelism. Verbeck developed long-lasting relationships and friendships with many of his students. One of his colleagues, E. Rothesay Miller, described Verbeck's two most prominent traits as "modesty and unselfishness, or a fixed determination to give just as little trouble to any one as possible."<sup>93</sup> His character contributed to his effectiveness in Japan, and after his death, *The Japan Times* wrote that Verbeck "enjoyed an unexampled degree of confidence, an esteem which has never been dimmed by distrust."<sup>94</sup>

In 1927, almost thirty years after Verbeck's death, Japanese church leaders were asked to respond to a survey with a series of questions regarding missionaries. Though there were a variety of responses, one of them wrote that "Japan needs the missionary who ... understands the ideas of the people outside the church ... . With such a knowledge of things he will be in a position to come to an unbiased heart-to-heart contact with the people." (Stauffer 1927: 118-119) In addition, many concluded that,

If the missionaries of today are such as those who came in the early years of the Meiji era they are needed in any number ... . That is, if they are really self-sacrificing men they are much in demand ... . The missionaries who came in the first years of the Meiji were really great and fine men. Such missionaries are of great value. (Ibid.)

One wonders if many of these respondents were thinking of Verbeck whose "heart-to-heart contact" and "self-sacrificing" life surely made him one of the most trusted and respected Christian missionaries to Japan.

This aspect of Verbeck as a respected teacher, preacher, advisor, and friend of Japan is pervasive throughout his life and even afterwards. According to an account of Daniel C. Greene, an American Board missionary to Japan for 44 years, one of Greene's pupils at a school in Kobe in 1872 possessed an English letter purportedly written by Verbeck in the early 1860s. In this letter, Verbeck "urged the claims of Christianity" and this epistle had somehow "quietly circulated among the Japanese" during the last decade of Christianity's proscription in Japan. (Greene 1927: 98) In 1972, one hundred years after that episode, another American missionary had a somewhat similar experience. A man attended a worship service at their church,

93. In *The Japan Evangelist* June 1898: 185.

94. Quoted in Welch 1937: 203.

explaining that, although he was not a Christian, his family had been Christians for a hundred years largely through the work of Verbeck, who had first brought the gospel to his grandfather. (Sytsma 1992: 196) Surely, the work and legacy of such a remarkably influential missionary in a pivotal period in Japan's history should not be overlooked in an assessment of Japanese Christianity and the missionary movement in modern history.

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