

Feature II

A Typographical Error. Count Eulenburg's Attempt to Introduce Lepsius's Standard Alphabet in Japan.

Sebastian Dobson

Among the numerous commissions which Count Eulenburg had to discharge during his 21-week-long stay in Edo, perhaps the most peculiar was a request from the Royal Academy of Sciences in Berlin to present a gift for which no recipient had been identified. Not surprisingly, given the Prussian envoy's diplomatic priorities, the decision was not made until more urgent matters had been settled, but on 23 January 1861, the day before the formal signing of the Prussian-Japanese Treaty took place and with only a week left before he and his compatriots were due to proceed to Nagasaki, Eulenburg dispatched the mysterious package, together with a covering letter, to its new and as yet unknowing recipient at the British Legation in the nearby temple of Tōzenji.



*Rutherford Alcock
(1809-1897).*

*Portrait published in the
Illustrated London News
on 23 July 1864.*

The gift was a set of type which had been cast from matrices cut in Berlin to represent the characters of a 'Standard Alphabet' recently invented by the linguist and Egyptologist, Richard Lepsius, as a means of establishing a universal standard of Romanisation for every language in the world. Two sets of type for the alphabet, which, by 1860, had been developed to transcribe languages as varied as Sanskrit, Zulu, Persian, Chinese and, most recently, Japanese, had been entrusted to Eulenburg to present wherever he thought 'they would be applied to the most advantage.' After almost five months in Edo, Eulenburg had selected the recipient of the first set – the British 'Envoy Extraordinary, Minister Plenipotentiary and Consul-General in Japan', Rutherford Alcock.¹

¹ Alcock's official rank when he first arrived in Japan in 1859 was Consul-General, but, since this placed him below the other foreign envoys, he gave himself the title of 'Plenipotentiary.' The British Foreign Office not only approved of this but even added the above titles to his original designation. However, 'in typical Foreign Office fashion Alcock was warned that this was not to be regarded as a precedent.' Sir Hugh Cortazzi: 'Sir Rutherford Alcock, the First British Minister to Japan 1859-1864. A Reassessment', *The Transactions of the Asiatic Society*

The Gift

Before we turn to its recipient, however, the gift itself requires some explanation. Today, when standardized forms of Romanisation are taken for granted and when, in the context of Japanese studies, a general consensus exists in favour of the Hepburn system, it is difficult to imagine an age in which such certainties were absent, or at least open to dispute. By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, the enormous surge in interest in the study of oriental languages had revealed a pressing need for some systematic and uniform method of transcribing languages, whether living or dead, unwritten or written, into Roman script. In 1862, William D. Whitney, Professor of Sanskrit at Yale University, succinctly explained the problem:

If the missionaries and emissaries sent out to unlettered countries, and destined to be the first introducers there of modes of writing, had from the beginning been only Italians and Germans, the orthographical question would have worn a far less intricate and pressing phase than now belongs to it. Unfortunately (...) they have been, in much greater part, men to whom was native the English language, a language whose phonetical and orthographical system is more frightfully corrupt and confused than that of any other form of human speech; men to whom, accordingly, it seemed not unnatural to write all kinds of sounds almost all kinds of ways; who lacked a distinct conception that each single sign was originally meant to have a single sound, and each single sound a separate and invariable sign, and that, in the history of writing, certain sounds and no others originally belonged to the characters of our own alphabet.²

Various systems had been put forward but none had gained general acceptance. Among those determined to challenge this state of affairs was Richard Lepsius. Such is Lepsius's fame today as one of the founding fathers of Egyptology that his parallel endeavours as a linguist, and in particular his 'Standard Alphabet' of 1855, have long been overshadowed.

Lepsius's interest in the possibility of a universal alphabet dated back to his student days in Paris during 1833-35, and by the time he left Berlin in 1842 as head of the Prussian Expedition to Egypt, he had already laid down the foundations of a 'General Alphabet' (as he first chose to call it in English) for transcribing not only dead languages but also living languages with no writing system of their own. The three-year Egyptian expedition gave Lepsius the opportunity to improve and refine his system, especially during his investigations into the languages he encountered in the Sudan.

of Japan, 9 (1994), 7. Alcock was knighted in 1862.

² William D. Whitney, 'On Lepsius's Standard Alphabet', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 7 (1862), 299-332.

After his return from Egypt in 1845, Lepsius devoted more energy to his alphabet, and over the next few years he consulted with eminent philologists and missionaries, while, with the assistance of his wife Elizabeth, he completed a translation of the Gospel of St. Mark into Nubian and a German-Nubian dictionary.

In 1852, Lepsius was finally ready to introduce his 'Standard Alphabet'. A visit to England that year enabled him to present it to representatives of some of the most influential missionary societies. His friend Christian von Bunsen, the Prussian Ambassador in London and a leading light in the intellectual life of the British capital, was forthcoming with introductions, including one to Henry Venn, the secretary of the Church Missionary Society, who was also interested in the transcription of unwritten languages and whose work Lepsius had already incorporated into his system. Venn quickly became one of Lepsius's most enthusiastic and influential backers.

At the end of 1853, Lepsius presented the Academy of Sciences in Berlin with his portentously phrased 'views concerning the use of and the possibility of realising an alphabet based on our Roman script'³,

*(...) which would be appropriate for depicting the actual sounds of every language in a simple way which corresponds as much to the fundamental laws of science as to practical requirements, whereby [is] envisaged in particular a gradual removal of orthographic anarchy in the study of linguistics and the introduction of a uniform script among the heathen, who are being led in every increasing numbers to Christian civilisation by missionaries and who, for the most part, still do not even possess a writing system.*⁴

A special commission was formed to look into Lepsius's proposal – which included a request for the creation of a type for the alphabet – and after lengthy deliberation it was agreed in the following spring that 260 Thalers would be granted by the Academy for the cutting and casting of types. This task was entrusted to the Berlin typesetter Ferdinand Theinhardt, who had already assisted Lepsius a few years earlier by creating the first practical font for printing Egyptian hieroglyphics.⁵

³ 'Ansichten über den Nutzen und die Möglichkeit der Ausführung eines auf unsre lateinische Schrift begründeten Alphabets.' 'Gesamtsitzung vom 8. December 1853,' in *Bericht über die zur Bekanntmachung geeigneten Verhandlungen der Königl. Preuß. Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*, 1853, 100.

⁴ 'welches geeignet wäre, die wesentlichen Laute aller Sprachen auf eine einfache, sowohl den wissenschaftlichen Grundgesetzen als auch den praktischen Bedürfnissen entsprechende Weise darzustellen, wobei hauptsächlich eine allmähliche Beseitigung der orthographischen Anarchie in der Linguistik und die Einführung einer gleichmäßigen Schrift unter den heidnischen Völkern, welche in immer steigender Anzahl der christlichen Civilisation durch die Missionare zugeführt werden und zum größten Theile noch gar keine Schrift besitzen, ins Auge gefaßt [wird].'

⁵ Ferdinand Theinhardt: *Erinnerungsblätter aus meinem Leben*, Berlin, 1899 (reprinted 1920), 17. Similar commissions entrusted to Ferdinand Theinhardt (1820-1909) by other scholars included the first fonts of Avestan (ancient Persian), Tibetan and Babylonian cuneiform. Ibid, 17-19. The connection between the Theinhardt family

Before the year was out, Lepsius was secure in the knowledge that, as he wrote to Bunsen, he now had 'the authority of the Academy in the background (*die Autorität der Akademie im Hintergrund*).'⁶ Things now moved significantly forward. Bunsen immediately sent out invitations to a series of so-called 'Alphabetical Conferences' to be held at his official London residence in the new year. In all, four conferences were held between 25 January and 3 February 1854 at 'Prussia House' near St. James's Palace.⁶

The list of attendees was impressive, and was itself a reminder of how essential British support was regarded for such a project to gain ground: while the Prussian Academy of Sciences was represented by Dr. Georg Heinrich Pertz, Head Librarian of the Royal Library in Berlin and editor of the *Monumenta Historica Germaniae*, the British scientific and religious establishments were well represented. Among the scientific luminaries were the mathematician, astronomer, chemist and inventor, Sir John Herschel, the biologist, comparative anatomist and paleontologist, Professor Sir Richard Owen (the man who coined the word 'dinosaur') and the mathematician, philosopher, inventor and mechanical engineer Charles Babbage, best remembered today as the father of the computer. Eminent orientalist such as Horace Hayman Wilson, Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford University and Director of the Royal Asiatic Society, Dr. Max Müller (who had his own rival alphabet) and Edwin Norris, and in addition to the Reverend Henry Venn and his colleagues from the Church Missionary Society, influential members of other, non-Conformist organisations such as the Methodist Missionary Society and the Baptist Missionary Society.

In his opening address, Bunsen explained how the need for a universal alphabet had preoccupied him over the past six months in the course of preparing an earlier lecture he had given on the philosophy of language for republication.

'I found a different system of transcription adopted in every one of the contributions of my learned friends to that work, now in the press, destined to give the last results of the researches of comparative philology for the languages of Asia and Europe.'

There seemed to be no system available, he bemoaned, which provided a physiological basis or which was 'unobjectionable as to its application'.

'This distressing state of things (...) brought me at last to the resolution of calling upon two of my younger friends who had for years occupied themselves with this problem, and who were, by universal consent, considered as men most

and the Prussian state was maintained during the East Asian Expedition by the induction into the naval personnel of Hermann Theinhardt, who was given responsibility for the expedition's printing press. Schleinitz to Prince Adalbert of Prussia, 25 December 1859. III HA II 5067; Prince Adalbert to Schleinitz, 26 January 1860. III HA II 5068.

⁶ The official address was 9, Carlton House Terrace, but it was referred to as 'Prussia House' when Bunsen moved the Embassy there in 1849 and the name stuck for the remainder of the nineteenth century.

*particularly qualified to propose that definitive project of a universal alphabet to the civilised world which might come before the public with some hopes of success.*⁷

Bunsen then introduced Lepsius and Max Müller. After a brief discussion, Müller then explained the advantages of his system, which already had considerable support, not least from Bunsen himself. Lepsius, who had been unable to attend the first conference (his wife was expecting their fourth child) presented his 'Standard Alphabet' at the second conference five days later.

The respective advantages and disadvantages of the two systems were weighed up at the third and final conferences on 1 and 3 February. Müller's 'Missionary Alphabet' was distinguished by its use of italics to differentiate sounds represented by the same letter, which some claimed were 'too ugly and startling' (and others claimed were 'not striking enough').⁸ Lepsius's 'Standard Alphabet', on the other hand, was characterised by its use of diacritical marks with letters, which, as Bunsen summed up on the final day, represented something new:

*The system of Prof. Lepsius offers the advantage – and this for the first time, – that a given diacritical sign, a dot or point, above or below, is always the exponent of one and the same organic affection, and never anything else. The sign therefore impresses itself on the mind as the exponent of a given modifying affection, and thus is easily remembered and extremely instructive.*⁹

Opponents of this system – not for the first time – complained that it placed unreasonable demands upon printers who did not have access to the diacritical symbols.¹⁰ No final decision was made in favour of one alphabet over another, however, and the 'Alphabetical Conferences' ended with an uneasy compromise proposed by Bunsen whereby Müller's system could be used for the transliteration of languages with existing scripts and by those who did not have access to the diacritical marks required by Lepsius's system.

Lepsius ensured that his 'Standard Alphabet' prevailed by quickly ensuring it received a wider circulation than Müller's. Fortuitously, he found Theinhardt's freshly cast types of the alphabet waiting for him on his return to Berlin, and immediately dispatched a set to his supporter Henry Venn, pointedly sending it

⁷ C.C.J. Bunsen: *Christianity and Mankind, their Beginnings and Prospects*, Volume 4, London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1854, 380-381. Summaries of each meeting appear as Appendix D, 'The Universal Alphabet and the Conferences regarding it held at the Residence of Chevalier Bunsen, in January, 1854', 378-397.

⁸ Ibid, 384.

⁹ Ibid, 394.

¹⁰ 'Of the scientific alphabets, which are absolutely required for the study of dialects, and for the exact representation of the sounds of barbarous languages, the "Standard Alphabet" invented by Professor Lepsius taxes too severely the resources of printers.' Isaac Taylor: *The Alphabet. An Account of the Origin and Development of Letters*, London: Kegan, Paul & Co., 1883, Volume 2, 186n.

The Recipient

Rutherford Alcock was the last of the foreign envoys to make the acquaintance of the newly-arrived Prussian envoy, for on the same day that the *Arcona* weighed anchor in Edo Bay (4 September 1860), Alcock and a group of compatriots set off from Kanagawa on an excursion to Mount Fuji and the surrounding area which kept them away from Edo until the beginning of October. Eulenburg's first meeting with Sir Rutherford Alcock had to be postponed until 5 October 1860, when Eulenburg was finally able to pay his respects at the British Legation at Tōzenji. Later that same day, Eulenburg described with almost English understatement how he had been 'not at all displeased (*nicht übel gefallen*)' by his British counterpart.¹⁴ Subsequent contact between Alcock and Eulenburg settled into an undemanding round of social visits and hospitality, including a dinner on Christmas Day at Tōzenji, where, as Eulenburg glumly recounted,

*we sat at the table for three whole hours, with freezing cold feet, freezing cold sour Bordeaux and some twenty-five wretched dishes, among which of course there featured a plum pudding, which was, however, almost inedible.*¹⁵

Eulenburg found Alcock helpful in his dealings with the Japanese, although he was bemused at how much his British colleague overestimated his influence on the favourable turn which the Prussian-Japanese negotiations took in mid-December: 'he is wrong, but this does no harm and I am happy to let him persist in this belief.'¹⁶

Events in the New Year brought them closer. On the night of 14 January 1861, the Dutch interpreter at the United States Legation, Hendrik Heusken, was murdered on his way back from the Prussian Legation. After Heusken's funeral, Eulenburg joined the other foreign envoys at the two conferences which Alcock convened at Tōzenji on 19 and 21 January in order to discuss a collective response to the shogunal authorities. Eulenburg was supportive of Alcock's policy of temporarily withdrawing the legations to Yokohama, but explained that until the Prussian-Japanese Treaty was signed, he and the other members of the Prussian Legation would have to stay in Edo. On 26 January, the British, French and Dutch Envoys formally quit Edo, followed two days later by the Prussians, who having concluded their treaty on 24 January, were now ready to leave Japan. On 30 January Eulenburg and his staff made their final farewells to the foreign diplomatic community (with the exception of the American Minister Harris who refused to leave Edo) at a 'déjeuner dinatoire' held on board the *Arcona* in Yokohama Bay.

¹⁴ Philipp zu Eulenburg-Hertefeld (Hrsg.): Ost-Asien 1860-1862 in Briefen des Grafen Fritz zu Eulenburg, Berlin: E.S. Mittler & Sohn, 1900, 85

¹⁵ 'Wir saßen drei Stunden lang bei Tisch, mit eiskalten Füßen, eiskaltem sauren Bordeaux und etwa 25 schlechten Gerichten, darunter natürlich auch ein Plumpudding, der aber fast ungenießbar war.' Ibid, 135

¹⁶ 'Er irrt sich, aber das schadet nichts; ich lasse ihn gern bei seinem Glauben.' Ibid, 128.

We can only speculate about the relationship between the fifty-one-year-old Alcock and the forty-five-year-old Count Eulenburg. Alcock commended Eulenburg for his 'generosity and loyalty', as well as 'moral courage', in giving his support to a united response to the shogunate after Heusken's assassination.¹⁷ In the light of Alcock's very public dispute with Townshend Harris over the best course of action to take after Heusken's murder, Eulenburg may have felt himself conflicted in his attitude towards Alcock by his friendship with Harris. The closest we seem to get to Eulenburg's opinion of the British Minister is his general admission with regard to his foreign colleagues in Japan that he was very fond of 'every man in his own way (*ich habe Jeden in seiner Art sehr gern gehabt*).'¹⁸

At some point, off-duty discussion between the two led to linguistic concerns. Alcock revealed that he had been working on a grammar of the Japanese language since the summer of 1859, while Eulenburg decided to sound out Alcock's views on Lepsius's Standard Alphabet; the opportunity to do this might have presented itself when Eulenburg invited his foreign colleagues to a private viewing of the official gifts he intended to the Japanese representatives on 14 January 1861. Pride of place among the printed works was given to a beautifully bound set of Lepsius's 12-volume work on Egypt, which we know impressed Alcock.¹⁹ It is tempting to imagine Eulenburg seizing this heaven-sent opportunity to explain other aspects of Lepsius's scholarly endeavour, perhaps even drawing Alcock's attention to the maps and plates in the first volume of *Denkmäler aus Aegypten und Aethiopien* in which Lepsius had employed his system for transcribing Arabic names.²⁰ Eulenburg may also have followed up on this by sending Alcock a complimentary copy of the English translation of Lepsius's introduction to his 'Standard Alphabet'. Some discussion seems to have followed, and by the time Eulenburg formally presented the type on 23 January, he was convinced that Alcock had expressed his 'coincidence' – or agreement – 'in the general principles on which Professor Lepsius bases his "Universal Alphabet"'.²¹ Further encouragement was provided by the news that

¹⁷ Sir Rutherford Alcock: *The Capital of the Tycoon: A Narrative of a Three Years' Residence in Japan*, London: Longman & Co., 1863, Volume 2, 42. The first reference to Eulenburg in the index to this work reads 'Eulenberg (sic), Count, Prussian Minister in Yeddo, his generosity and loyalty.' Ibid, 2, 512.

¹⁸ Eulenburg 1900, 164.

¹⁹ Alcock describes 'costly and choice volumes from the royal printing press, on Egyptian antiquities and scenery.' Alcock 1863, 2, 52.

²⁰ 'C.R. Lepsius: *Denkmäler aus Aegypten und Aethiopien: nach den Zeichnungen der von Seiner Majestät dem Könige von Preußen Friedrich Wilhelm IV nach diesen Ländern gesendeten und in den Jahren 1842-1845 ausgeführten wissenschaftlichen Expedition*, Berlin: Nicolaische Buchhandlung, 1849-59. '[T]he author (...) introduced the new alphabet for the first time to a great extent for the transcription of Arabic names, in eight geographical maps of the North-eastern part of Africa, and the adjacent countries of Asia, which form the first plates of the "Monuments from Egypt and Ethiopia after the Drawings of the Prussian Expedition to those Countries." Lepsius 1863, 6n. These plans, printed in 1859, comprise Plates 1, 2, 2bis, 3 and 3bis, 4, 5 and 6 in Volume 1 of 'Abtheilung I' of Lepsius's work.

‘a kind of school for interpreters has been connected with the British Legation at Yedo, and is likely to remain so.’²²

Eulenburg’s gentle advocacy of the system was in keeping with the advice which Lepsius would give two years later to readers of the second edition of his *Standard Alphabet*: ‘

No Alphabet can (...) force itself into universal adoption. It must make friends.’²³

Making Friends in Japan

At this point it may be worth mentioning that Eulenburg’s approach to Alcock was not the only effort made in Japan at this time by an advocate of the Lepsius alphabet. Considering the important role played by Christian von Bunsen in gaining initial support for the ‘Standard Alphabet’, in particular by means of the ‘Alphabetical Conferences’ he had hosted at his London residence early in 1854, it should come as no surprise that his son Theodor seems to have found time to spread the word in Edo while serving as one of the attachés with the Prussian Expedition. I have examined elsewhere the contact which Bunsen had with the Japanese scholar Ichikawa Kanenori, who visited the Prussian Legation on nine separate occasions during January 1861, ostensibly to examine the telegraphic device which was among Eulenburg’s official gifts.²⁴ The often halting exchanges between the two in Dutch and German were concerned primarily with linguistic matters and it seems that, like Eulenburg with Alcock, Bunsen became convinced that Ichikawa might benefit from being introduced to the ‘Standard Alphabet’ – and *vice versa*. When their final meeting took place on 26 January, Bunsen chose his farewell gifts to Ichikawa carefully.

Without Bunsen’s version of events to refer to, we are entirely dependent upon Ichikawa’s accounts, of which there are two. The first, consisting of his diary entry for that day, reveals little:

三十八度。行接遇所會アッタケテオドルホンブンゼン写横分ブンゼン贈ホフマン日本文典

38 degrees [Fahrenheit]. I went to the Foreign Guest House [where] I met the *attake* [attaché] von Bunsen. Copied out some European texts. Bunsen presented me with Hoffmann’s *Japanese Grammar*.²⁵

²¹ Eulenburg to Alcock, 23 January 1861, British Foreign Office: Embassies & Consulates, Japan: General Correspondence 465 (1861). National Archives, Kew. FO262/34

²² Ibid.

²³ Lepsius 1863, 7.

²⁴ See the author’s contribution ‘Humboldt in Japan?’ to Sebastian Dobson & Sven Saaler (eds.): *Under Eagle Eyes. Lithographs, Drawings & Photographs from the Prussian Expedition to Japan, 1860-61*, München: Iudicium, 2011, in particular 108-116.

The second, written a few days later, was embodied in a confidential report which Ichikawa submitted to Matsudaira Yoshinaga, lord of the Fukui domain to which he had formerly belonged. The original document did not survive the Second World War, but according to the historian Hara Heizō, who examined the Matsudaira archive before 1944, it contained the following fragment:

ブンセンより恭に諸国音訓を書せしブークト日本文典とを進贈せり、此諸国音訓のブークは独逸語を以て書せり、(…)

From Bunsen, [Kane]Nori received the gift of a 'Buch' in which the readings used in many lands are written, together with the *Japanese Grammar*. This 'Buch' of readings from various lands is written in German...²⁶

Dan zal ik u deze pendulo toegeven.	Then, I will give this clock into the bargain.	夫 ^{ソレ} 此 ^{コノ} 置 ^{オキ} 時 ^{トケイ} 計 ^{ゲイ} 一 ^{イツ} 器 ^キ ニ ^ニ ヨ ^ヨ リ ^リ シ ^シ マ ^マ ス ^ス Sore-de wa kono oki-tokei-oo fūtsū soye-ni si-masoo.
Gij moogt het koopen of niet, daarbij blijft het.	I don't care, take it or leave it.	所 ^ソ 買 ^{カイ} ナ ^ナ サ ^サ レ ^レ テ ^テ モ ^モ 所 ^ソ 止 ^ト ナ ^ナ サ ^サ レ ^レ テ ^テ モ ^モ 此 ^{コノ} 上 ^ウ ノ ^ノ 出 ^デ 来 ^キ ト ^ト ナ ^ナ サ ^サ レ ^レ テ ^テ モ ^モ O kai-nasare-te mo, Oyame-nasare-te mo, kono uye wa deki-masenū.
Dan zal ook ik het nader overleggen en dan zien.	Then, I will think again.	夫 ^{ソレ} 私 ^シ モ ^モ 勘 ^{カン} 辨 ^{ベン} シ ^シ テ ^テ 見 ^ミ ル ^ル ニ ^ニ ヨ ^ヨ リ ^リ シ ^シ マ ^マ ス ^ス Sore-de wa wātakūsi mo kan-ben-site mi-masoo.
Morgen zal ik u antwoord geven.	I will give you an answer to tomorrow.	明 ^{アス} 日 ^{ニチ} 申 ^{マウ} 返 ^{ヘン} 答 ^{トウ} 致 ^シ ス ^ス ニ ^ニ ヨ ^ヨ リ ^リ シ ^シ マ ^マ ス ^ス [答 ^{コタヘ}] Myoo-nitsi Go hen-too itasi-masoo.
Overleg het zoo mogelijk en gelief dan mijne goederen te koopen.	Think of it, if possible, and then please buy my goods.	成 ^ナ 文 ^ン 勘 ^{カン} 辨 ^{ベン} シ ^シ テ ^テ 買 ^{カイ} フ ^フ ニ ^ニ ヨ ^ヨ リ ^リ シ ^シ マ ^マ ス ^ス カ ^カ ラ ^ラ 私 ^シ ノ ^ノ 品 ^{ヒン} ヲ ^ヲ 所 ^ソ 買 ^{カイ} 下 ^ゲ サ ^サ ス ^ス Narū-dake kan-ben-si-masoo kara, wātakūsi-no sina mo Okai kudasare.

The first application of Lepsius's 'Standard Alphabet' to Japanese in Professor Johann Joseph Hoffmann's Shopping-Dialogues in Dutch, English and Japanese (1861). The only peculiarity of Hoffmann's system was his preference for the letter 'f' instead of 'h' in words such as 'hitotsu'.

²⁵ Entry for 16th Day, 12th Month, 1st Year of Man'en (26 January 1861) in Futensai nikki (浮天斎日記) (manuscript diary of Ichikawa Kanenori), Ishin shiryō hikitsugibon: I 13-1286. Institute of Historiography, Tokyo University.

²⁶ Hara Heizō: 'Bakumatsu no doitsugaku to Ichikawa Kanenori', *Shigaku zasshi*, 55: 8 (1944), quoted in Hara Heizō: *Bakumatsu yōgakushi no kenkyū*, Tokyo: Shin jinbutsu ōraisha 1992, 294. The translation is mine. An alternative rendering of ブーク would be the Dutch word 'boek'.

²⁷ J.H. Donker Curtius & J.J. Hoffmann: *Proeve eener Japansche spraakkunst*, Leiden: Sythoff, 1857.

²⁸ J.J. Hoffmann: *Winkelgesprekken in het Hollandsch, Engelsch en Japansch/ Shopping-Dialogues in Dutch, English and Japanese*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff/ London: Trübner & Co., 1861. Lepsius 1863, 6n.

'Neco ni cobang'?

Eulenburg did not receive any response to his letter of 23 January or any acknowledgement of his gift of the Lepsius type. Indeed, it is only because Eulenburg's original letter is still contained in the files of British consular correspondence that we know that it was received at all. Curiously, although Alcock wrote to Eulenburg that same day, it was in response to an enquiry Eulenburg had sent him almost two months before concerning the organization of the British consular service in Japan.²⁹ The only other letter which Alcock sent to Eulenburg before the Prussian expedition left Japan only expressed Alcock's congratulations on the signing of the Prussian-Japanese Treaty, his thanks for Eulenburg's show of solidarity with the other foreign envoys and his confirmation that, until the treaty came into force in 1863, Prussian subjects resident in Japan could rely on British diplomatic protection.³⁰

We can be certain however that Eulenburg's gift had arrived too late to make any perceptible difference to Alcock's projected Japanese grammar. Only a few weeks later, in February 1861, Alcock sent the final version of his work to a printer in Shanghai. In his preface, he explained his haste in going to press:

*The following pages have been written in the midst of many distractions, and under circumstances by no means favourable to literary labour. (...) Impeded by serious occupations, the work has advanced but slowly, and even now, at the end of eighteen months, the last chapters have been very hastily put together, in the fear that otherwise circumstances might arise to prevent the whole book ever appearing. The work is no doubt very imperfect, and may stand much in need of correction, for in such an attempt mistakes are inevitable...*³¹

²⁹ Eulenburg to Alcock, 26 November 1860, FO262/35; Alcock to Eulenburg, 23 January 1861, FO262/36.

³⁰ Alcock to Eulenburg, 30 January 1861, FO262/36.

³¹ Rutherford Alcock: *Elements of Japanese Grammar, for the Use of Beginners*, Shanghai, 1861, 'Preface' [no page number].

XV

Lacquer ware (Objets en laque).

Chikki (or nourimono.)

レツキ ヌリモノ

Nourimonowo caitaiga.

ヌリモノヲ カイタイガ

*I wish to buy some lacquer ware.**Je désire acheter des objets en laque.*

Sa, oagarinasatte gorannasouyé.

サ オアガリナサツテ ゴランナスエ

*Come on to the mats, and look round.**Entrez sur le plancher nappé, et regardez à l'entour.*

Hakimonoga doro dara kede agararene.

ハキモノガ ドロ ダラ ケデアガラレチ

*I have muddy shoes, and cannot therefore.**Mes souliers sont crottés, et je ne puis marcher sur les nattes*

Nani, ocamon nacou agarina chiye.

ナニ オカモン ナク アガリナレエ

*Never mind; pray come up.**N'y faites pas attention, et veuillez entrer.*

Cono tansouwa icourada.

コノ タンスワ イクラダ

*This cabinet, how much is it?**Ce cabinet, combien vaut-il?*

Hiac'gojôûriôde gozaimas.

ヒヤクゴジウリヨウデ ゴザイマス

*One hundred and fifty cobangs.**Cent cinquante cobangs.*

Oh, mega derouyôna neda, sochite cori-

オフ メガデルヨウナ チダ ヲシテコリヤ

Oh, preposterous! There is nothing special in it.

chiireja- (or dekiyaija)neca.

レイレシヤ デキセイシヤチカ

Quel prix extraordinaire! (litt. qui épouvante les yeux) — en effet il n'y a rien de remarquable.

Mr. Alcock goes shopping. A sequence of dialogues from Rutherford Alcock's 1863 publication Familiar Dialogues in Japanese, showing his system of Romanisation in operation. The author helpfully informs the reader a few pages earlier that 'in Japan the seller always assumes the form of speech of an inferior.'

As the section headed 'Classified Alphabet under Vowel Sounds' testified, Alcock still held to the 'orthographic anarchy' which Lepsius so deplored. Syllables which the Lepsius Alphabet could represent intelligibly as *u* (or *ũ*, for a shorter vowel sound), *ku*, *su*, *tsu*, *nu*, *fu*, *mu*, *yu* and *ru*, were represented in Alcock's grammar by 'oo', 'koo', 'soo', 'tsoo', 'noo', 'hoo', 'moo', 'yoo' and 'loo or roo', making the Anglophone priorities of the work abundantly clear. Nothing seemed to have changed in the thirty years since Walter Henry Medhurst had published the first Japanese-English dictionary on his lithographic press in Batavia.³² The results were a series of ungainly transcriptions, such as 'watakooshi' for 'watakushi' (私).

One could excuse Alcock's failure to use the Standard Alphabet due to constraints of time, but one would not have expected him to write as if he was in complete ignorance of it. After observing the limitations of 'the English alphabet' and its French equivalent in rendering Japanese sounds in Roman script, as for example in the terminal 'ng', Alcock went on to note that:

'There is yet another sound which cannot be conveyed by any European alphabetic sign, something between l and r, alternating between the two. (...) The sound given partakes more of the one, and sometimes of the other, yet is never wholly either; and there is considerable latitude of pronunciation among the Japanese themselves as to the sounds.'

Considering that Lepsius's Alphabet, with its combination of letters and diacritics, was specifically designed to convey such subtleties, this provides a telling statement on Alcock's shortcomings as a linguist.

Worse was to follow two years later, by which time it was obvious that Alcock had not simply ignored the Lepsius Alphabet: he had chosen to reject it. In May 1863, at the same time that Lepsius's booklet was appearing in a second edition, Alcock published his next contribution to the study of Japanese, *Familiar Dialogues in Japanese with English and French Translations for the Use of Students*. With regard to Romanization, Alcock not only continued to ignore the Standard Alphabet without even acknowledging it, but even took a retrograde step by embracing a new method of transcription which lacked even the relative intelligibility of the earlier system he had based on Medhurst's transcription. In the preface to his work, Alcock explained his new system with disingenuous understatement:

'As regards the orthography and value of the letters employed to render the Japanese sounds, a very few indications will suffice to guide the student. The French pronunciation of the letters of the alphabet has been adopted, as being perhaps the most universally known by the educated classes all over the world,

³² Walter Henry Medhurst: *An English and Japanese, and Japanese and English Vocabulary*. Compiled from Native Works, Batavia [Jakarta], 1830.

and also as affording some few sounds more nearly approaching the Japanese, in which the English is defective. Ch, therefore, takes the place of our s, and o-o represents a contraction which can be rendered in English aou.’

Alcock seems to have fallen under the influence of French scholars such as Léon Pagès, whose assistance he acknowledged in his preface. The resulting Romanization was unwieldy enough, but it was not simply a case of replacing ‘wata-kooshi’ with ‘watacouchi’: the system was further burdened by Alcock’s apparent refusal to break down his transcribed text into its constituent elements (possibly another manifestation of his well-known fondness for verbosity and lengthy exposition in his writing?). Take, e.g., a simple exchange such as:

ゴキゲン ヨロシク (‘How do you do?’)
アリガタウ。カワルコトモゴザイマスセヌ。 (‘I am pretty well, thank you.’)

Under the new system of Romanisation, the transcription reads:

Gokighen yorochikou.

Arigatoo. – Cawaroucotomo gozaimachchenou.

Alcock’s linguistic excursions did not produce a lasting legacy. A former member of Alcock’s long-suffering staff at the Edo Legation, who witnessed his chief’s excursions into print as both the author of an account of his consul-generalship in Japan and the compiler of a Japanese grammar, later remarked caustically that Alcock ‘would have been a greater man if he had never written a book on a country he did not understand and the grammar of a language he could neither read nor write.’³³ The addition of *Familiar Dialogues* to Alcock’s literary output does nothing to set the record straight, especially in terms of confirming his credentials as a linguistic scholar, and the last word probably lies with one of his most recent biographers, who simply remarks with regard to both of Alcock’s publications on the Japanese language that ‘neither can be recommended to the student today!’ and awards his subject ‘high marks for effort, even if he only deserved a lesser one for achievement.’³⁴

It is possible that Eulenburg soon realised that his choice of recipient for the first set of type had been misjudged, and it is certainly significant that, when it came to finding a good home for the second, he took no chances. While in Hong Kong towards the end of 1861, he presented it to the Reverend Rudolf Lechler, a member of the Basler Mission, who had already shown his enthusiasm for the scheme by applying the ‘Standard Alphabet’ to the Hakka language and publishing a Hakka translation of the Gospel of St. Matthew in 1860.³⁵ Sometimes it is easier to preach to the converted.

³³ Algernon Mitford, quoted in Pat Barr: *The Coming of the Barbarians. A Story of Western Settlement in Japan, 1853-1870*, London: Macmillan, 1967, 78.

³⁴ Sir Hugh Cortazzi: ‘Sir Rutherford Alcock, 1809-1897’, Ian Nish (ed.): *Britain and Japan. Biographical Portraits. Volume II*, Richmond: Japan Library, 1997, 5.

Appendix

Eulenburg to Alcock, 23 January 1861

My dear Mr. Alcock,

I beg to send you a set of types for the use of your Legation. They were entrusted to me by my Government to be given away in Japan, wherever I might think they would be applied to the most advantage. Knowing therefore not only that you have a work in hand, for which they may be usefully employed, but also that a kind of school for interpreters has been connected with the British Legation at Yedo, and is likely to remain so, I have thought the gift could nowhere be better bestowed. I know too that you have expressed your coincidence in the general principles on which Professor Lepsius bases his "Universal Alphabet", and it is for this Alphabet expressly – in its special adaptation for the Japanese language – that these printing types have been case. To approach all nations in the world to each other, not by unity of language – an aim beyond human powers – but at least by a common system of signs, representing each one sound only, would seem a grand object, and Professor Lepsius' proposals for this purpose – based on a philosophical enquiry, and ably expressed in the treatise, of which I have sent you a copy – have met with the approval of several scientific & nearly all (protestant) Missionary Societies in the world.

Its introduction would seem most useful & most easily attained in a country & a language hitherto in no contact with our own, as its adoption by those, who are the first to render the sounds of the foreign language in European characters will not fail to ensure its adoption by all who follow them.

Hoping that this set of types may be of use to yourself and your successors in Japan, and may tend to spread the systematic pronunciation in question – I beg your acceptance of them from

*Yours very truly,**Comte d' Eulenburg.³⁶*

*Count Friedrich zu Eulenburg (1815-1881).
Head of the Prussian East Asian Expedition.
Portrait published in the
Leipzig Illustrierte Zeitung, c.1859.*



³⁵ Von der Heydt to Bernstorff, 28 June 1862. III HA II 5076. R. Lechler [Hrsg.]: Das Evangelium des Matthaeus im Volkdialekte der Hakka-Chinesen, Berlin: Gebr. Unger, 1860. On the Basler Mission's advocacy of the Standard Alphabet among the Hakka Chinese, see Jessie G. Lutz & Rolland Ray Lutz: *Hakka Chinese Confront Protestant Christianity, 1850-1900, with the Autobiographies of Eight Hakka Christians*. M.E. Sharpe, 1998, 231-234.

³⁶ Eulenburg to Alcock, 23 January 1861. FO262/34.