

Editorial Foreword

“Translating the Scripture” and “Interpreting the Scripture”

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“Being that can be understood is language.”^① This phrase has almost become a fulfilled prophecy. It originally implied a refusal to see language merely as the tool of expression, but now leaves us with a feeling of helplessness. The limits of language have already predestined the limits of understanding and interpretation. This is equally true when the Bible is the object of our understanding and interpretation.

All, from the Pope to secular scholars, acknowledge this at some level. As soon as we recognize that the “mediation of finite and infinite that is appropriate to us as finite beings lies in language,”^② then the “divine word” which relates to “the mysteries of revelation” must ultimately be expressed via “human language”, and must eventually be

① Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. HONG Handing (Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 1994), 606. English version please see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London; New York: Continuum, 2004), 470.

② Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Nature of Things and the Language of Things,” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. XIA Zhenping et al. (Shanghai: Shanghai Yiwu Press, 1998), 81; for English version see Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Nature of Things and the Language of Things,” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. David E. LANGE (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 80.

constrained by the “limitation” and “elasticity” of language.^①

In terms of the positive significance of language, the theologian Raimon Panikkar has described the Being of human beings as a fundamentally dialogic relationship, based on the fact that “We are all sharers of the word.”^② The “sharing” in words has constructed the existence of humanity, and brought about the possibility of a spiritual sharing; so-called “existence” and “faith” are predicated on the dialogic relations within language itself.

Approaching from the opposite side of meaning, Nietzsche notes paradoxically, mockingly: “I fear that we are not getting rid of God, because we still believe in grammar.”^③ In line with Nietzsche’s logic, we can say: “Humanity has no way of breaking free from language, and so humanity has no way of undermining God.” But perhaps another facet to his thinking is even more clear: that once we have subverted the myth of language, God will be overthrown.

If Christian doctrine cannot escape the chains of language, how can we deal with the dissolution of the “divine word” in the “human word”? But if it can escape the chains of language, where does that leave the Bible? And where does it leave the translation and interpretation of the Bible? The various arguments on this question practically constitute a complete history of Christian theology. This was particularly so in Schleiermacher’s turn towards the “pietism” of

① Pope John Paul II, “Address of His Holiness John Paul II,” in *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, Document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, trans. XIAN Jiayi (Hong Kong: Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, 1995), ix.

② Raimon Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue*, trans. WANG Zhicheng (Beijing: Religious Culture Press, 2001), 10; for English version see Raimon Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue*, rev. ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), xix.

③ Quoted from Gianni Criveller, “Postmodern Society and Christian Gospels,” trans. MU Nan, *Journal for the Study of Christian Culture*, no. 4(2000): 120.

religious experience , in Barth ’s insistence on the “absoluteness of God ” , Bultmann and Bonhoeffer ’s “demythologized ” and “irreligious ” interpretations; through to Gerhard Eberling ’s attempt to overcome the objective–subjective binary , and rescue certainty in theological interpretation via “the self-understanding of faith ”; in Torrance ’s attempt to differentiate “statements of truth ” from truth itself and use the “effect of truth on us ” to prove the “objectivity ” of truth. ① Alongside these , theologians have been trying to find a possible path beyond the chains of language so that humans can experience and highlight the “infinite ” under the premise of everything that is “finite ” , setting up the truth that is destined to be dissolved by language as the relation between “meaning ” and us.

With regard to the sign that carries meaning , Chinese readers need to take note of an interesting fact: Christianity is a faith that claims Jesus as Christ and Savior , and yet the Bible was not written in Jesus Christ ’s mother tongue. Some exegetes believe that “everywhere behind the Greek text we get glimpse of Aramaic that was Jesus ’ mother tongue. ” Yet , even they have to admit that “to translate Jesus ’ mother tongue into Greek , … undoubtedly will lead to … the change of meaning. ” ②

Nicholas Standaert has shown in his research that there are just four places in the Gospels that Jesus used his mother tongue. “The sayings of Jesus we can hold to are just translations ,” ③ he writes. To aid comprehension , in each of these four places , the Greek adds the

① YANG Huilin , *Word of God and Words of Men: Theological Hermeneutics* (Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House 2002) , 46 – 136.

② Joachim Jeremias , *Rediscovering the Parables* (New York: Charles Scribner ’s Sons , 1966) , 9 , 17 – 18.

③ Nicholas Standaert , *Inculturatie: Evengelië en Cultuur* , trans. CHEN Kuanwei (Taipei: Guangqi Press , 1993) , 58.

words “as translated” or “as interpreted.” For instance, in Mark 5:41, where Jesus says, “Talitha cumi,” this is followed by the explanation, “which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto you, arise.” Again in Mark 7:34, after Jesus says “Ephphatha”, the Bible adds the explanation, “that is, Be opened.” Even in Mark 14:36 when Jesus prays to God, saying “Abba”, the explanatory word “father” follows straight after. When Jesus is on the cross and about to die, he cries out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” a phrase from the Psalms. The Bible explains this immediately: “which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”^① Some versions of the Bible insert a note here to give the details of this quotation from the Psalms.

If we explore further, we notice that even the word “my God” is not the same in different gospels. In Matthew it is “Eli,” and in Mark it is “Eloi”.^② The discrepancy is small but makes the simple words of Jesus’ mother tongue like a sign waiting to be decoded.

Why does Christianity make its faith and canons bear this innate sense of “interpretation” and “translation”? Why retain this natural chasm with the “Word of God”? From a non-believer’s perspective, we have to admit that Christianity benefits greatly from this “conscious tension” which brings so much extra flexibility. Theologically speaking, it affirms God as the “Absolute Other” through language itself.^③

This characteristic of the Christian canon seems to warn that there

① Matthew 27:46.

② Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34. *The Holy Bible* (New Revised Standard Version & Chinese Union Version), Nanjing: China Christian Council, 2000.

③ Helmut Gollwitzer, ed., *Karl Barth: Church Dogmatics. A Selection with Introduction* (New York: T & T Clark, 1961), 51.

is an inevitable “heterogeneity” between faith itself and the faith that we can understand. The tension between the “Scripture” of the Word of God and the “interpretation” of human words is bound to accompany us through the whole process of seeking understanding. In the words of Thomas Torrance , it is because Truth is expected to be absolute that all statements about truth are to be “relativized”. ①

In this sense , Christianity is the “other” with regard to any and every language. No matter how necessary it was for Chinese Christianity to be “indigenized” or Medieval Europe to be “vernacularized” , if the activity of “interpreting Scriptures” has faith as its object , it has to retain the tension brought by this “otherness”. As Nicholas Standaert has noted , Christianity is “challenging , disturbing and strange to any culture ,” and it “must break with its original culture and setting ,” but , in fact , westerners have been accustomed to Christianity so deeply that they do not feel any “astonishment or disturbance” , therefore gradually Christianity and western culture have been “identified as one integrated body” , which might be regarded as a “tragic”. ② The core of the tragedy is that this “identification” has occluded the challenge of “otherness”. Whether we can consciously be aware of this “tension” , whether we can seek meaning on the premise of accepting its “otherness” , might be crucial to understanding and interpreting the Bible in the current Chinese context.

Early Nestorian texts made use of Buddhist terms in translating important concepts in the Christian Bible , a practice which was severely criticized by later generations. For instance , they translated

① Thomas F. Torrance , *Theological Science* , trans. RUAN Wei (Hong Kong: Institute of Sino-Christian Studies Ltd. , 1997) , 185.

② Nicholas Standaert , *Inculturatie: Evengelie en Cultuur* , trans. CHEN Kuanwei , 46.

“God” as “Fo (Buddha) ” , “Christ” as “Shizun” (one of the honorific names for Buddha , meaning “the World-Honored One”) , “baptism” as “shou jie” (a Buddhist ceremony for receiving precepts and becoming a monk) , “faith , hope and love” as “San Chang” (the three eternal) , “Simon Peter” as “Chen Yin Seng Jia” (which sounds like a Buddhist monk’s name) , etc. ^①However , as other scholars have noted , “when the Buddhist scriptures were first translated into Chinese , ‘Fo’ (Buddha) was translated as ‘Futu’ (pagoda) , ‘Shramana’ as ‘Sang Men’ (Mulberry Gate) , which were not good or appropriate translations either. ” ^②

The Nestorian texts *Xuting mishisuo jing* (Sūtra of Hearing the Messiah , abb. *Xujing*) ^③and *Yi shen lun* (Treatise on One God) are regarded as the earliest translation and introduction of the Holy Bible to China. Weng Shaojun writes , “The first part of *Xujing* and the first two parts of *Yi shen lun* are the doctrinal part of the Nestorian texts , in which the language is simple and clear. … The later part of *Xujing* and the third part of *Yi shen lun* might be the evangelical part. The diction , translation and explanation of these parts are odd and strange , sometimes sentences are reversed , and mistakes or changes of meaning can easily be found. The words do not convey the meaning. ”^④

① ZHAO Weiben , *Yijing Suyuan* (Tracing the Root of Translating the Bible: History of Five Major Versions Chinese Bible) (Hong Kong: China Graduate School of Theology , 1993) ,165; WENG Shaojun , comm. , *Hanyu Jingjiao Wendian Quanshi* (Interpretation of Chinese Nestorian Texts) (Hong Kong: Institute of Sino-Christian Studies , 1995) ,37 – 38.

② WENG Shaojun , “Introduction: The Theology and Narrative Type of Chinese Nestorian Texts ,” in *Hanyu Jingjiao Wendian Quanshi* ,38.

③ According to the Chinese classics , “Xuting (序听) ” should be “Xucong (序聪) ” , the transliteration of “Jesus”; “Mishisuo (迷诗所) ” should be “Mishehe (迷诗诃) ” , which was the transliteration of “Messiah”. Therefore ,the “Sutra of Xuting-mishisuo (序听迷诗所(诃) 经) ” is actually “The Sutra of Jesus Messiah (耶稣基督经) ”. See WENG Shaojun , *Hanyu Jingjiao Wendian Quanshi* ,83.

④ WENG Shaojun , *Hanyu Jingjiao Wendian Quanshi* ,38.

However ,according to Zhao Weiben ,who has compared the translation of *Yi shen lun* (part 3) with the accounts of the *Gospel of Mathew* , the translation of *Yi shen lun* does not suffer any serious problems , as the following examples show:

《一神论·世尊布施论第三》 <i>Yi shen lun: Shizun Bushilun</i> (part 3)	《圣经》“和合本” <i>Holy Bible</i> (Chinese Union Version)
<p>世尊曰: 如有人布施时 ,勿对人布施 ,会须谴世尊知识 ,然后布施。若左手布施 ,勿令右手觉。……</p> <p>Shizun (Jesus Christ) said, “If you give alms , do not do so in front of others. You should first let me know , then give alms. If you give alms with your left hand , do not let your right hand know. ”</p> <p>有财物不须放置地上 ,或时坏劫 ,或时有贼盗将去; 财物皆须向天堂上 ,毕竟不坏不失。……</p> <p>“If you have property , do not put it on the ground. It might be taken by evil ones , or stolen by thieves. You should store your property in heaven , where it will ultimately not be corrupted or stolen. ”</p> <p>从己身上明 ,莫看余罪过 ,……似如梁柱着自家眼里 ,倒向余人说言 ,汝眼里有物除却。因合此语假矫 ,先向除眼里梁柱。</p>	<p>你们要小心 ,不可将善事行在人的面前 ,故意叫他们看见; 若是这样 ,就不能得你们天父的赏赐了。……你施舍的时候 ,不要叫左手知道右手所做的……(太 6: 1 - 3)</p> <p>Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them , for then , you have no reward from your Father in heaven.</p> <p>... But when you give alms , do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. (Mat. 6: 1 - 3)</p> <p>不要为自己积攒财宝在地上 ,地上有虫子咬 ,能锈坏 ,也有贼挖窟窿来偷; 只要积攒财宝在天上 ,天上没有虫子咬 ,不能锈坏 ,也没有贼挖窟窿来偷……(太 6: 19 - 20)</p> <p>Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth , where moths and rust consume , and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven , where neither moths nor rust consumes , and where thieves do not break in and steal. (Mat. 6: 19 - 20)</p>

<p>“Try to focus on yourself. Do not focus on the sins of the others. . . . As if there were a beam in your own eyes ,but you spoke to others of the object in their eyes needing removing. If you want to overcome the falsity of your words , get rid of the beam in your own eyes first.” ①</p>	<p>你们不要论断人 ,……为什么看见你弟兄眼中有刺 ,却不想自己眼中有梁木呢? ……你这假冒为善的人! 先去掉自己眼中的梁木 ,然后才能看清楚……(太 7: 1 -5)</p> <p>Do not judge. . . Why do you see the speck in your brother’s eye but do not notice the log in your own eye? . . . You hypocrite , first take the log out of your own eye , and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye. (Mat. 7: 1 -5)</p>
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Comparing the three paragraphs , the translation is obviously different in just one sentence , “You should first let Shizun (Jesus Christ) know , then do your alms.” “Shizun ” was originally an honorific name in Buddhism for Sakyamuni , used here to refer to “Jesus Christ.” “Zhishi”(知识) means “to let somebody know ,” so the meaning of “*Shizun Bushilun* (part 3) ” is that when you do alms , you should first of all let Jesus Christ know , but you do not need to let other people know. According the *Gospel of Mathew* , it is not necessary to “make Jesus known” because “your father who sees in secret will reward you.” (Mat. 6 : 4) This discrepancy is therefore not significant. Why in the same text , are some other passages said to be “Tuo wu duo gai (脱误多改 , out of context , with mistakes and changes of meaning) ” and “Yan bu da yi (言不达意 , the words do

① ZHAO Weiben , *Yijing Suyuan* , 10.

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not convey the meaning) ”?

Some scholars have argued that the translator of *Shizun Bushilun* (part 3) was “pretentious , imposing his own understandings on the original text. ”^①But judging from the above quotations , one can see that the situation is not so serious. If we explore the text further , we can see that “sign ” does have a certain innate influence on “expression” , as does “language” on “understanding”. The translator of *Shizun Bushilun* (part 3) might have extended the meaning and paraphrased the text in the process of translation and interpretation , but this could be due to compelling factors in the different language systems.

To take one verse from *Gospel of Mathew* as an example.

<p>《世尊布施论第三》 <i>Shizun Bushilun</i> (part 3)</p>	<p>《圣经》“和合本” <i>Holy Bible</i> (Chinese Union Version)</p>
<p>从一(上帝)乞愿,打门他与汝门;所以一神,乞愿必得,打门亦与汝开。若有乞愿不得者,亦如打门不开,为此乞愿,不得妄索,索亦不得。自家身上有者,从汝。等于父边索饼即得,若从索石,恐畏自害,即不得。若索鱼亦可,若索蛇,恐蜇汝,为此不与。……你所须者,余人索;余人所须,亦你从索。余人于你上所作,你还酬偿。</p>	<p>你们祈求,就给你们;寻找,就寻见;叩门,就给你们开门。因为凡祈求的,就得着;寻找的,就寻见;叩门的,就给他开门。你们中间谁有儿子求饼,反给他石头呢?求鱼,反给他蛇呢?你们虽然不好,尚且知道拿好东西给儿女,何况你们在天上的父,岂不更把好东西给他的人吗?所以无论何事,你们愿意人怎样待你们,你们也要怎样待人……(太 7:7-12)</p>

① WENG Shaojun , *Hanyu Jingjiao Wendian Quanshi* , 38 - 39.

<p>If you pray to God , and knock at the door , he will open it for you. So pray to the One God , who will grant your request; knock on the door , and the door will surely be opened. If anyone prays but is not answered , it is like knocking on a door but the door is not opened. Therefore you should not pray futilely. You will not receive if you pray in this way. What you have , is given to you. It is like asking for bread from your father , who will give it to you. If you ask for a stone , he fears that the stone will hurt you , so it is not granted. If you ask for fish , you will be given that also. If you ask for a snake , he fears that the snake will bite you so it is not given. . . . Let others pray for your needs for you. And you should pray for others ' needs for them. What others have done unto you , you should repay. ①</p>	<p>Ask , and it will be given to you; seek , and you will find; knock , and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives; and everyone who searches finds; and for everyone who knocks , the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who , if your child asks for bread , will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish , will give a snake? If you then , who are evil , know how to give good gifts to your children , how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! So in everything , do to others what you would have them do to you. . . (Mat. 7: 7 - 12)</p>
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Concerning the translation of this paragraph , the following two points deserve attention. Firstly , although we are not always aware of it , the methods used by the ancient Chinese , stressing the cooperation of the positive and negative and the opposition of Yin and Yang , have been fused into our ways of thinking , in diction and rhetoric. This is well-known for pre-Qin classics such as the *Yijing* and the *Laozi*. When

① WENG Shaojun , *Hanyu Jingjiao Wendian Quanshi* , 136.

later generation read and interpreted their forebears’ works ,they would often set up more oppositional examples ,becoming accustomed to this method. As Laozi said “All in the world knows the beauty of the beautiful ,and in doing this they have (the idea of) what ugliness is; they all know the skill of the skillful ,and in doing this they have (the idea of) what the want of skill is. ” Xu Fancheng comments that there is one sense of meaning expressed , and another sense of meaning implied ,in this way of expressing ideas , that is to say , “Because everything is ugly , people know beauty when they see the beautiful. Because no one is skillful ,they know what is skillfulness through the skillful. ”^①Therefore there are “zhuan (twists) ” and “he (combinati-
ons) ” in the sentence , expressing the full meaning of the author.

Shizun Bushilun (part 3) uses “qi yuan bi de (if you pray it will be given) ” to explain the reason for believing in the One God , and also expresses the idea that “if you knock on the door He will open it for you”. If it were to follow the Gospel of Mathew and go on to explain the reasons , this would be boring and dry in Chinese , making the readers suspect that the author was indulging in circular arguments. The translator’ s “wen qi (style of writing) ” turns naturally to the binary oppositions of “qi yuan bi de (your desires will be granted) ” and “qi yuan bu de” (your desires will not be granted) , “da men yi yu ru kai (the door will be opened for you) ” and “da men bu kai (the door will not be opened) ” , setting “bu de wang suo (not receiving futile requests) ” and “suo yi bu de (not receiving what you seek) ” as the thread to connect the arguments. The translator might have extended the meaning of the original text ,but the style is quite natural

^① XU Fancheng , *Laozi Yijie* (An Interpretation of Laozi) (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company ,1988) ,4.

and fluent.

Secondly, in terms of the norms of Chinese expression, Matthew 7:7-12 is not consistent in logic. For instance, verse 8 and verse 7 use the same key words, lacking the beauty of parallelisms (duizhang) and reference to each other (zhaoying), and appearing to be redundant. Strictly speaking, the metaphor of “asking for bread, but giving a stone” and “asking for a fish, but giving a snake” is quite baffling, and the saying, “in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you,” comes out abruptly and oddly.

In the light of this, we can more easily understand the modifications and changes in *Shizun Bushilun* (part 3). To a certain extent, the Chinese mode of expression might have been inescapable here, forcing, or tempting, the translator to “yi wen hai yi” (do violence to the meaning for the sake of maintaining the form or style). Besides, the Nestorian texts were not translated directly from Greek texts but were orally narrated by Alopen, the priest, to the translator, with the translator then re-expressing them in Chinese.^① It is only natural that the texts were influenced by the mother tongue of the translator.

Therefore, the reason for “suo shi bu yu (asking for a stone but not being given a stone)” is to “kong wei zi hai (avoid harm to oneself)”, “suo she bu yu (asking for snake and not being given a snake)” is because of “kong zhe ru (fear that the snake will bite you)”. The Golden rule, “Do to others what you would have them do to you” is also changed to “what you want, others will pray for you; and what others want, you should pray for them. Others are praying for you, so you also pray for others.” Such modification, according to

① WENG Shaojun, *Hanyu Jingjiao Wendian Quanshi*, 38.

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Chinese standards , is appropriate in both style (wen qi) and meaning (wen yi) .

Judged from the perspective of interpretation and commentary , such modification is understandable. Even according to translation principles , this has not gone beyond the principle of “dynamic equivalence”.^① However , it has lost the logic and analogy of the Bible itself , as in the verse “If you , then , though you are evil , know how to give good gifts to your children , how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”

Perhaps in order to rectify the inappropriate methods of early Nestorian text and Matteo Ricci’s “policy of accommodation” , almost all Bible interpreters in later generation liked to boast that they were true to the original text. According to Zhao Weiben , the Jesuit missionary Louis de Poirot introduced his Chinese translation *Guxin Shengjing* with the following words “the translators do not follow the grammar of their mother tongue but are faithful to the original text and meaning of the Bible. They do not attempt to be pleasing to human ears , but try to keep the original text and meaning of the Bible. Since ancient times , all sages have interpreted in this way , and I am following their models. … If asked about the small characters inserted inside the big characters , we answer that the big characters are the original text of the Bible , and the small characters are forced to be inserted because if we do not insert these small characters , the words do not make any sense in Chinese and the original meaning cannot be conveyed in Chinese.”^② We might doubt the effect of using such poor Chinese to translate the Bible in order to be “faithful to the original

① XU Mushi , *Jing yu Yijing* (Scripture and the Translation of Scripture) (Hong Kong: Chinese Christian Literature Council , Ltd. , 1983) , 144 – 55.

② ZHAO Weiben , *Yijing Suyuan* , 15.

text”. Fortunately this version was not published ,but merely preserved in Beijing’s Xishiku Catholic Church. ①

Again ,the version translated by E. C. Bridgman would sacrifice the splendor of words and diction ,in order to be faithful to the original text. The Delegates’ Version , in which sinologist James Legge was involved ,though enjoying “rhyme and elegance in a style that no one could resist ,” was criticized because it “made mistakes in several critical places , and the terms they used were too similar to Chinese philosophy , … they did not have enough insight appropriate to Christian doctrines. ” ②

Around 1890 ,the Protestant mission societies in China proposed a policy of “One Bible in three versions”. However , the publication of the *High Wenli New Testament* was delayed for several years because of debates on questions such as “how to handle the terms that contain Confucius connotations as used in traditional Chinese language” and “which is better , to focus on literal translation or to pay attention to style and rhetoric?” ③What deserves attention is that in the above efforts to be faithful to the original text , the translation was mainly carried out by foreign missionaries not Chinese scholars , which might be one of the reasons for “sacrificing the splendor of the words and diction”. This is a major difference in comparison with the Nestorian texts.

According to Weng Shaojun , the Nestorian texts were not translated directly by the priest Alopen , and his Chinese oral communication ability was much questioned. He had to use sign

① ZHAO Weiben , *Yijing Suyuan* , 15.

② Ibid. , 21.

③ Ibid. , 33 - 34.

language alongside oral expression^①, which the translators then put into eloquent Chinese. In the materials presented by Zhao Weiben, we can see that the majority of early Protestant missionaries all liked to stress that the versions were completed by “myself alone”, or that a person “translated the texts alone”, “translated the Old Testament independently;” or that “in those days no one could speak mandarin and use Chinese idioms so freely as he did”, etc. ^②Only in three places, did a missionary mention that he “asked a Chinese who does not know English to correct and modify the text”, or “agreed to hire Chinese scholars to take over the work of correction in Chinese”, or “after finishing the translation, the text was turned to the inspection of all commission members, and then was carefully proofread by Chinese scholars.” ^③ Even in these three cases, the participation of Chinese scholars is secondary to the work of the missionaries. Right up until the publication of Chinese Union Version in 1919, missionary H. B. Rattenbury had been expectantly waiting for Chinese Bible translators. He said, “The Chinese version of the Bible we expect must wait for a while. It is not going to be fulfilled until the Chinese scholars know very well the original biblical text as well as Mandarin.” ^④

It seems that the missionaries believed that only when the proficiency of Chinese reached a certain standard and they could translate by themselves, that the Chinese translation of the Bible could be counted as “translation” in a strict sense. This sounds ridiculous, but it might be akin to the Greek parables that Jesus spoke^⑤, which

① WENG Shaojun, *Hanyu Jingjiao Wendian Quanshi*, 38.

② ZHAO Weiben, *Yijing Suyuan*, 17 - 25.

③ Ibid., 18, 20, 24.

④ Ibid., 45.

⑤ Nicholas Standaert, *Inculturatie: Evengelie en Cultuur*, 58.

constitutes the absolute difference between the Word of God and the Words of Human Beings.

That said, it is a bit awkward that a foreign missionary's wait for a Chinese Bible translated by Chinese was a waiting "for Chinese scholars to know very well the writing of Chinese mandarin". Compared with the Chinese scholars who were rooted in Chinese traditions, foreign missionaries had to accept a new vehicle of language long before the emergence of the first shoots of modern Chinese (*baihua*). No matter whether this judgment is ultimately right or wrong, we can feel the significance of modern Chinese in the minds of these translators, which was evidently to the benefit of evangelism, but also implies an interpretive motivation of getting rid of the traditional language "code".

In the context of "One Bible in three versions", the "Chinese Union Version in Mandarin" was more widely accepted by the public compared with the "High Wenli" and "Easy Wenli" versions. "Within ten years of its publication, it was widely used in northern and southern parts of China, and its sales were far better than any other versions."^① Xu Mushi mentions one important reason for this success, "In using sophisticated *wenyan* (literary Chinese) it is easy to slip into the terms and allusions frequently used by Confucius scholars. This should be avoided because using Confucian terms may sometimes not help illustrate Christian truth but may lead to a misunderstanding of its meaning."^②

Xu Mushi's analysis here coincides with Maurice Bloch's theory that "code" decides "the Pattern of speech": "the code adopted by

① ZHAO Weiben, *Yijing Suyuan*, 36.

② XU Mushi, *Jing yu Yijing*, 140.

the speaker contains within itself a set Pattern of speech for the other party. ”^①Historically , the Christian canon as introduced into China has adopted two different models – “using Buddhist or Daoist terms to interpret and translate the Bible” and “using Confucian terms to interpret or translate the Bible” , ^②closely related to the choice and usage of interpretive codes. The emergence of the modern Chinese language brought a rupture to the original language agent of traditional Chinese , leaving unprecedented room for interpretation of this heterogeneous culture. It is also in the modern Chinese translation of the Bible that the sharp heterogeneity between the Chinese context and the Biblical text is most fully manifested.

In this regard , the *Union Mandarin Version* marks an important turning point in the history of Chinese Bible translation. Its significance does not lie in the superficial “translating the Bible into mandarin” , but in its essential estrangement from the original cultural semiotic shell. Concerning the spread of Christianity in China , the translation of the Bible into Mandarin could be interpreted as an accommodation strategy within evangelism , however , its attention to the audience was not dependent on traditional textual habits , and what it accommodated was not the existing hermeneutical structure. It aimed to touch upon the concrete experience of human existence directly through mundane language. This might be exactly the foundation for Chinese of later generations to read and interpret the Bible.

Returning to the topic of “language” , it is clear that new ways of thinking are usually premised on new language systems. This

^① Maurice Bloch , *Political Language and Oratory in Traditional Society* (London: Academic Press , 1975) , 9.

^② Please see YANG Huilin , “Ethical Sino-Christianity and the Ethical Values of Christianity ,” *Journal for the Study of Christian Culture* , no. 2 (1999) .

corresponds to the “heterogeneous” character of the Word of God with relation to the Words of Human Beings , of Christian Thought to the Chinese context. It also echoes with the New Culture Movement. The “newness” of the May Fourth Movement and the “otherness” of Christianity are marked by the linguistic symbol of Mandarin. Therefore , the fundamental significance of using Mandarin derives from its providing a hermeneutical medium that has not been “sanctified” or “signified”.

The unique logic of theological interpretation is not to eliminate the heterogeneity of the Word of God and the Words of Human Beings , nor to bridge the huge gap between “meaning” and “understanding” , but to establish the relation of meaning between “self” and “the other” in the process of absolute “différance” through such absolute heterogeneity. This was surely not the theological consciousness of the biblical translators , but the revelation that their translation practices have left to us.