華源協作
CHINASOURCE
ENGAGE • COLLABORATE • SERVE

The Chinese Bible

ChinaSource Quarterly Autumn 2018, Vol. 20, No. 3

Thomas H. Hahn Docu-Images

In this issue . . .

Editorial

Articles

Book Review

Resource Corner

Editorial

An In-depth Look at the Chinese Bible

By Joann Pittman, Guest Editor

When someone speaks of the Chinese Bible, they are most likely referring to the Chinese Union Verson (CUV), or *Heheben* (和合本)as it is called in Chinese, since it is the most commonly used translation among Chinese Protestants, both in China and worldwide. Opinions on the CUV are strong and run deep. Many foreigners dislike it, citing the inadequacy of the translation and its archaic language. Chinese believers, on the other hand, retain a deep affection for the CUV, despite its problems. It carries a weight of authority that other translations do not.

Next year, 2019, will mark the 100-year anniversary of the CUV, so here at ChinaSource, we thought now would be a good time to take an in-depth look at the Chinese Bible.

In the lead article, Dr. Kevin Xiyi Yao examines why, despite much criticism, the Chinese Union Version remains popular among Chinese speakers, not just in China, but worldwide. Similar to the King James-version-only attitude that long prevailed in the English-speaking world, the CUV is viewed by Chinese Protestants as having an authority that other versions lack. Dr. Yao unpacks the factors that account for the staying power of the CUV.

Mark Strand contributes two articles to this issue. In the first, he traces the history of the CUV. Setting its development within the cultural context of valuing the written word, he shows how the translation of the Bible was a prerequisite to winning converts. Reflecting on the work of translation teams and the lasting impact of the CUV, Strand identifies key lessons learned from the history of Bible translation in China.

In his second article, Strand identifies the challenges faced by Bible translators and subsequent word choice errors. The challenges were often rooted in the fact that the theological concepts were new, thus there were no existing words for them.

Since 1988, Amity Press in China has printed more than 75 million Bibles. Does that mean there is no longer a shortage of Bibles in the country? If there is still a shortage, what are the strategies for addressing that shortage? In my article on the availability of Bibles in China, I try to make some sense of the statistics and the factors that affect availability. I also present the differing perspectives of those who bring Bibles in from the outside and those who source Bibles from inside China.

Ben Hu, a pastoral intern in China, offers a personal reflection on the difficulties of trying to shift the church away from the CUV towards more contemporary translations. While he uses a modern translation for his personal study and believes the church should make the shift, he does not see it happening anytime soon.

Many Protestants, both Chinese and foreign have little knowledge about the Bible used in the Catholic Church in China. Dr. Monica Romano, a lecturer at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, Italy, provides a fascinating historical overview of the efforts of the Catholic Church to translate the Bible into Chinese.

The final article is a review of a short biography of Robert Morrison, one of the earliest Protestant missionaries to work on Bible translation. The story of Morrison's faithfulness amid great difficulty is one that still encourages and challenges us today.

We wrap up this issue with a list of places (both online and offline) where one can get a Chinese Bible.

Joann Pittman is senior vice president of ChinaSource and editor of ZGBriefs. She is the author of Survival Chinese Lessons *and* The Bells Are Not Silent: Stories of Church Bells in China. *Her personal blog,* Outside-In *can be found at joannpittman.com, where she writes on China, Minnesota, traveling, and issues related to "living well where you don't belong." You can find her on Twitter @jkpittman.com and on Facebook at @authorjoannpittman. She makes her home in New Brighton, Minnesota.*

A Century Later, Still Dominant

By Kevin XiYi Yao

As the missologists Lamin Sanneh and Andrew Walls argue, the translatability of the Scriptures is essential to Christian tradition.[1] Ever since the beginning of Protestant missions in China, Bible translation has been a huge part of mission work. Since its publication in 1919, in a relatively short period of time, the Chinese Union Version (CUV) has become the most dominant and popular translation. After almost a century, and even with all the changes in Chinese language and available new translations, its dominance is still unabated and unshaken. A Taiwan-based scholar put it this way: "It could well be the most influential 'Chinese text' among the Chinese readers for the past nearly one hundred years and also in the future. Undoubtedly, even if we cannot claim it has become a 'canon' in the Chinese world, it is certainly an 'authority.'"[2]

For the majority of Chinese Protestants, the CUV unquestionably remains an authority often with the status of "God's Word." It is recently reported that a Chinese believer loved God's Word so much that he decided to purchase and compare various Chinese versions of the Scriptures, including the Catholic one. When his fellow believers got to know about this, they began to challenge him, saying only the CUV is the true Bible, and all other versions are erroneous and even heretical.[3] This may be a fairly extreme case, but it is very telling.

Indeed, how fast the CUV rose to dominance and how enduring its dominance has turned out to be are truly mind-boggling and time-honored phenomena. The question becomes: How can we explain this? Many factors behind this occurrence have been identified by the scholars of Chinese Christianity. As a historian of Chinese Christianity, I would like to highlight the following factors.

1. The CUV played a pivotal role in providing and shaping the theological vocabulary of the Chinese Protestant Church.

In their long and pains-taking process of translating the Scriptures into Chinese in the early 19th century, Western and Chinese translators had accumulated a rich repository of theological notions and terms in Chinese languages. The CUV inherited and integrated them into its own translation.

When the CUV was published and circulated, it happened to be about the time the Western missionaries' dominance came to an end, and the Chinese church came of age. Chinese Christians began to share leadership responsibilities and initiate indigenous evangelical revivals that swept across the country. More importantly for our topic, this was the formative time for indigenous Protestant theological understanding and tradition.

The timely arrival of the CUV provided the Chinese Protestant community with a ready-made set of theological notions and vocabulary that were immediately well received and embraced by Chinese believers. It did not take long for the CUV's translation of such key biblical terms as "faith," "sin," "salvation," and "grace" to become the standard "language of faith," used by church leaders, theologians, and evangelists as well as the average churchgoer on a daily basis.

The CUV's defining influence on Chinese Protestant theological thinking and church life is so profound that ever since its translation of key biblical terms has been deeply ingrained in the theological DNA of the Chinese Protestant community around the world. It is fair to say that this is the only theological language system known and used unquestionably by this community up to today. In contrast, one can hardly identify any single, vernacular translation of the Bible which has had such a commanding and lasting impact on church life in the West.

2. The CUV helped shape a universally, unifying identity for Chinese Protestant communities around the globe.

Before the CUV came into being, previous Chinese translations of the Scriptures had been done in either classical Chinese, only understandable to the educated elites in Chinese society, or in particular dialects for certain parts of the country. Therefore, the CUV's aim to produce a translation understandable to all people from all parts of the country and all social classes turned out to be hugely strategic. It has served to unite all Chinese Protestant believers under one single Chinese version of the Scriptures. Today, when you worship with any Chinese congregation in mainland China or the Chinese Diaspora, you can easily feel the presence of a common, universal, Chinese Protestant tradition cemented by a shared set of "spiritual vocabulary," classical hymns, and common version of the Bible, despite very different contexts. It is fair to say the CUV plays a big part in the forging and maintaining of this common identity among Chinese Protestant believers worldwide.

3. The CUV accompanied the Chinese church through its trials and suffering.

The past one hundred years have been a turbulent time for the Protestant church in China. It went through numerous wars, revolutions, constant pressure from an atheist regime, and finally all-out persecution during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Many Chinese believers would attest to the fact that it is in the texts of the CUV that they found comfort and strength. They greatly loved to read and even memorize texts from handwritten copies of the CUV during the darkest years of the Cultural Revolution. In fact, we can even say that the CUV is part of the Chinese church's collective memory and heritage attesting to its perseverance and cross-bearing under tremendous suffering. There is a strong emotional bond between the CUV and the Chinese Protestant community that will not easily fade away.

4. The CUV's exquisite rendering of the biblical texts gives it a special quality and lingering charm.

Linguistically speaking, the CUV does have its own advantage in the contemporary context. As we know, the CUV is largely based

on the vernacular in northern China but integrates some elements of classical Chinese. This combination reflects the genius of the original translating team. It makes the CUV understandable to ordinary folks but also appealing to the educated segments of society.

It is true that the existence of classical Chinese elements sometimes makes certain wordings read awkwardly or seem old-fashioned today. However, in reality, the CUV's combination of the vernacular and classical may ironically play to its advantage. As many Chinese believers, especially the more educated ones would say, they prefer the CUV over other more colloquial translations of the Scriptures precisely because a special quality comes with its unique style. After all, God's Word has to be special and unique!

Of course, there is the technical issue of circulation and availability. Some Chinese believers will tell you that they only know the CUV because they grew up with it and no other Chinese version of the Scriptures was available.

5. The CUV contributed to the emergence of the modern, Chinese national language and the New Culture Movement and still commands significant respect within the greater Chinese society.

Indeed, the longevity of the CUV's popularity also has to do with its influence beyond the church. Since the late 19th century, China's modernization project has gradually led to the transformation of a traditional dynasty into a modern nation-state. As part of this nation-building process, attempts were made to replace the single written language (classical Chinese) and diverse dialects, with one, single, unified, written/spoken language for the entire nation.

The breakthrough came in the form of the May Fourth New Culture Movement of the early 20th century, right around the time the CUV was published. It emerged as one of the very few texts that met the goal of a vernacular, Mandarin-based, unified national language and immediately won popular endorsement. As both Christian and non-Christian scholars agree, the CUV is a masterpiece of the modern Chinese language. It has served as an example for the modern Chinese literature movement and also benefited from the movement's successful, rapid, popularization of the new vernacular based upon the Chinese national language.[4]

The CUV's contribution in this regard is still widely recognized today by Chinese academia. One scholar even claims that "as John the Baptist paved the way for Jesus, these vernacular Mandarin translators of the Bible are the pioneers in making vernacular Mandarin a national language."[5] Not surprisingly, the CUV's role in China's nation-building is compared with the roles of Bible translations in nation-building in modern Europe.[6]

Additionally, the CUV's influence within the larger society of China is attested to by the fact that the CUV is the most cited Bible translation when the biblical terms and texts are quoted by secular academia today. In other words, the CUV enjoys de facto status of being the scholarly norm in China.

In conclusion, the reasons behind the enduring popularity of the CUV among Chinese Protestants and in society run deep historically and presently. For most Chinese believers, the CUV is much more than just another Chinese translation of the Scriptures; it is very close to their hearts. That is why, with all the criticism of the CUV's "antiquity" and "inaccuracy," there is virtually no sign that its dominance will change in the foreseeable future. We can ask whether it is theologically correct to equate the CUV with the Word of God, and whether some Chinese believers have a tendency to turn the CUV into an idol. However, the reality is, if any viable revision of the CUV has a chance to win popular acceptance, it has to keep the CUV's original texts intact as much as possible and make as few changes as possible. Yes, as a prominent Chinese church pastor declares, the CUV is a precious gift to the Chinese church from God[7] and has been used by him to nurture generations of believers. How much longer is God going to use the CUV for his glory in China? God alone knows.

---

[1] See Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message, The Missionary Impact on Culture,* Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2009); and Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996).

[2] Chin Ken-pa (曾慶豹), "Preface," *Ever Since God Speaks Chinese: The 90th Anniversary of the Chinese Union Version Bible* (自上帝說漢語以來：《和合本》聖經九十週年), eds. Philip P. Chia (謝品然) and Chin Ken-pa, (Hong Kong: Centre for Advanced Biblical Studies and Application, Ltd, 2010), xiii.

[3] "Should Christians only use the CUV?" (基督徒是否只能用和合本圣经？) http://www.sohu.com/a/197981876_207783.

[4] See Liu Li-xia (刘丽霞), *Historical Existence of Chinese Christian Literature* (中国基督教文学的历史存在), (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press) 46-56.

[5] George Kam Wah Mak (麥金華), "聖經翻譯中的通行官話概念 - 官話作為中國國家語言的前奏," *Ever Since God Speaks Chinese*， 22.

[6] See Liu, *Historical Existence of Chinese Christian Literature*, 47.

[7] Chou Lien-hua (周聯華), "《和合本》譯經原則和評估." *Ever Since God Speaks Chinese,* 16.

Additional References

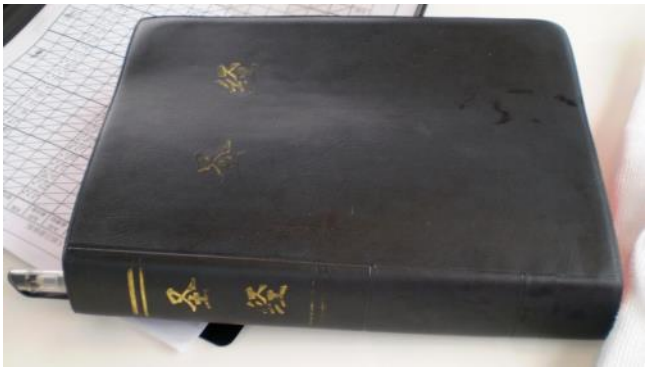
Chiu Wai Boon (趙維本), *Tracing Bible Translation—A History of the Translation of Five Modern Chinese Versions of the Bible* (譯經溯源—現代五大中文聖經翻譯史), (China Graduate School of Theology, 1993).

Zetzsche, Jost Oliver, *The Bible in China: The History of the Union Version or the Culmination of Protestant Missionary Bible Translation in China*, (Sankt Augustin: Monumenta Serica Institute; Nettetal: Steyler Verl., 1999).

Kevin XiYi Yao, ThD, is an expert on the history of Christianity in China and Associate Professor of World Christianity and Asian Studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

The Origins of the Chinese Union Version Bible

By Mark A. Strand



Wesley Fryer

Building on 700 years of Catholic translation work of portions of the Bible, the Protestant Chinese Union Version (CUV) of the entire Bible was published in 1919. The CUV was the summation of the work of several missionary translation teams. Lacking sufficient input from Chinese linguists, the CUV had some inadequacies. Yet, for 100 years it has been treasured by Chinese and has been the source of the remarkable growth of the Chinese church. This essay will describe the history of the translation of the CUV with lessons learned that might be used to improve ministry among Chinese people today.

The year 2019 will be the 100th anniversary of the translation of the Bible into the Chinese Union Version (CUV). Considering the staying power of the CUV Bible, and the remarkable growth of the Chinese church over the last 40 years, it is timely to revisit the origins of the Chinese Bible.

The Chinese Union Version is called the *Heheben* (和 合 本), in Chinese, literally, "drawn together into a whole book." This title is fitting given the process by which several translation efforts were drawn together to create the complete CUV Bible.

Background on Scriptures in China

China has been a literary society for millennia and thus inclined toward the written word; even more, China history records a desire for, and a valuing of, scriptures. The Chinese word *jing* (经), translated into English as *scriptures*, is written using the radical for "sewing," illustrating the traditional way books were assembled and held together. The origin of each of the three main religions in China is tied to a set of scriptures, all three of which amalgamate to form the core of Chinese philosophy and praxis.

Daoism (道 教), the oldest religion in China, was established on the thought of Laozi (老 子) in the 6th century BCE. Daoism is explained in the Daoist scripture, *Daode Jing* (道 德 经), "The Classic of the Virtues of the Way." This is one of the most widely translated works in the world and explains the core metaphysical impulses found within Chinese culture, the sense that there is a universal way that humans can find and should pursue.

Confucius was a contemporary of Laozi; however, his works were assembled and promulgated later, in particular during the Song Dynasty (13th century AD). The Confucian scripture, *Sanzi Jing* (三 字 经), the "Three Character Bible," is the embodiment of Confucian ideology and was the basis for teaching children up until the late 1800s. In fact, this scripture has made a comeback in recent decades as Chinese officials and parents have used it to instill moral beliefs in their young people.

The Buddhist scriptures, known as the *sutras* or *fo jing* (佛 经), came to China in the 2nd century BCE, in the form of Pure Land Buddhism, *Jingtu Zong* (净 土 宗). The entry of Buddhism into China was popularized through the classic 16th century novel *Journey to the West* (西 游 记) which told the story of Tang Dynasty Buddhist monk Xuanzang's journey to India (the West) to secure the scriptures (取 经) and bring them back to China.

It is within this cultural and intellectual context that the Christian faith entered.

Entry of the Christian Faith

From antiquity, Chinese culture has valued the written word, and Chinese people valued *jing*, or scriptures. If one wonders about the role of scriptures in China in the modern era, consider the role of Mao Zedong's Little Red Book (毛主席语录） during the Cultural Revolution when Mao was venerated to deity status, and his book was treated as sacred.

Over the generations, Chinese people have sought sacred texts, treasured them, and taught them to their children. Hence, the introduction of the Christian faith into China met with a prepared audience. This background answers one of the key questions regarding the origins of the Chinese Bible, that is, what came first to China, the Bible or the church? The answer is—the Bible. The translation of the Bible, or the establishment of a *jing*, was the prerequisite to winning converts. In fact, as will be explained below, early Protestant missionaries used the Bible to teach Chinese people how to read, thus simultaneously raising their educational level and winning them to the Christian faith.

Translation of the Bible began during the Tang dynasty (7th century AD) when Persian Christian missionaries, the Nestorians, arrived in China (Standaert 2000). During the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing dynasties (1636-1912), Jesuit missionaries of the Roman Catholic church and Russian Orthodox missionaries also worked on translations of the New Testament and Psalms (Sunquist 2001).

The Protestant Bible

The currently dominant CUV Bible is the fruit of nine different translation teams producing various Bible translations beginning in the early 19th century (Zetzsche 1999). The first challenge faced by these translators was deciding on the type of language to use. The issue of language resulted in three types of translation. The first Protestant translation (Marshman and Morrison/Milne) used the *Wenli* (文理） style. *Wenli* means "the principles of literature," and used a high literary style. Even though the term *Wenli* is not a

Chinese word historically, over time it came to mean "classical Chinese," understandable only by scholars.

Following the *Wenli* was Easy *Wenli.* Easy *Wenli* was less literary and closer to the way people spoke at that time. It was used by the Schereschewsky translation team. The third type of language used was *Guoyu* (国 语), literally "the national language." *Guoyu* was used by Medhurst, and came closest to integrating literary style and accessibility by the common people.

The first Bible, written in the Easy *Wenli* style and published by Marshman and Lassar in 1822, was rushed and, in the end, was considered a poor translation. One year later, the Morrison/Milne translation was completed using the High *Wenli* language. Although this translation became the foundation of Chinese Bible translation, it was "wooden and unclear" (Pfister 1998; Starr 1998). Its poor quality was attributed to insufficient involvement of local scholars in the translation process. It should also be noted that, at the time, the comparative values of formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence translation concepts developed and coined later by Eugene Nida were not yet considered. Formal equivalence translation, or literal translation, was the standard practice.

In 1838, Karl Gutzlaff published another High *Wenli* version of the Chinese Bible. In 1844, he formed the Chinese Union to employ Chinese evangelists to distribute Scriptures and evangelize.

The early translations of the Bible followed classical Chinese patterns of literature where only the highly educated person could understand the text so that it was only understood by the reader himself. Reading was not an option for women at that time. With high rates of illiteracy, it was crucial that the common people could understand the Bible to some degree when read aloud which required the use of the common people's language.

Surveys in the 19th century revealed that the Mandarin dialect was the common basis of language from the Great Wall to the Yangtze River. Initially, this dialect was considered inappropriate due to its "colloquial coarseness," but the realization of the need for people to understand the Scriptures eventually held sway, and subsequent translations began to use Mandarin. For example, 1852 marked the publication of what is known as the *Delegates' Version* (代表译本) of the Bible. It used a high style of language understood only by a small, highly-educated minority. However, four years later in 1856, a Mandarin *Delegates' Version* was made, which was easier to understand. This Mandarin *Delegates' Version* quickly became the most influential version of the Bible, and eventually 100,000 copies were successfully distributed. It was unique in that it was aided by a Chinese scholar of high repute, Wang Tao (Zetzsche 1999), the only Bible translator of that era known for literary work outside of Bible translation. After Wang Tao, several other Chinese scholars also engaged in Chinese Bible translation.

The *Nanking Version* came out in 1856, the *Peking Version* in 1872, and the progenitor of the *Union Version,* using Easy *Wenli,* appeared in 1902. This jump-started the process so that in 1907 a High *Wenli* version of the *Union Version* was published. The CUV translation of the New Testament required 16 years, the Old Testament another 13 years, with the entire Bible being completed in 1919 as the *Chinese Union Version* in the same form as used today. The Chinese translation was primarily based on the English Bible with reliance on the original languages as necessary.

It must be noted that non-Chinese missionaries were mainly responsible for the translation of the *Union Version* which resulted in many translation problems, including problematic choices regarding terms, grammar, and style. (See "Word Choice Challenges.") Because it was made by non-native speakers of Chinese, the *Union Version* was highly criticized. It was also not extremely faithful to the original languages; however, it was embraced by the Chinese people, especially the overseas Chinese community. Their opinions prevailed over those of some mainland Chinese believers who wanted to modify the translation. This version became the *Chinese Union Version* used today and continues to have the widest following in Chinese churches throughout the world, even though the language is now outdated. Furthermore, it has an emotional following, so that today it is difficult to introduce new versions into Chinese churches.

Nevertheless, the love for the CUV notwithstanding, several excellent translations are now available in both traditional and simplified script. In 1980, the Modern Chinese Translation, the *Xiandai Zhongwen Yiben* (现代中文译本), was published making it easier for people to understand the Bible without first being familiar with Christian terminology. This was followed by the publication of the Contemporary Bible, the *Dangdai Shengjing Banben* (当 代 圣 经 版 本). In 1993, the Chinese New Version, *Xinyi Ben* (新 译 本) was completed by the Worldwide Bible Society. It was somewhat like a revision of the CUV so it was both welcomed and very readable. Some Chinese Bible scholars believe that the Chinese New Version will replace the CUV. With their increased availability in China, these new translations have proven helpful.

Lessons Learned from the History of Bible Translation in China

The century-long process of Chinese Bible translation demonstrates that mutual dependence on other translators was very high. Morrison's translation was highly dependent on Catholic sources which had been in process for 700 years. It is important in any era that people recognize the degree to which they are "building on another person's foundation," and acknowledge indebtedness to the work of those who have gone before.

The development of the Chinese Bible also shows the occasional, unfortunate influence of foreign missionaries. At the time, the missionary translators did not expect the CUV translation to be the final product. They expected Chinese Christians to improve upon it; unfortunately, this never happened. This underscores the importance of local people being involved in translation and writing projects from the outset. In present-day China, Western Christian materials are frequently translated by Chinese coworkers; however, local Chinese Christians often have little say in what gets translated. The lessons of history should be heeded. Local believers need to be engaged in determining what resources are needed and ensuring they have access to the highest quality biblical and theological resources. This problem was also common in the period between 1912 and 1937, which Tang has called the "golden era" of dissemi-

nation of the Bible in China (Tang 2006).

Generally speaking, the Protestant Chinese Bibles were made in great haste which compromised their quality. There is a lesson here for Protestants today who are equally hasty to translate non-Chinese Christian books or training materials for use in China. Hasty translation is poor translation which results in literature that either is never used or is misleading. At a minimum, it sets a poor precedent for Christians implying the acceptability of using poor-quality materials. However, even though it is not perfect, the *Union Version* did take 29 years to translate and was a better translation than previous versions. Furthermore, it has stood the test of time.

As mentioned previously, Chinese people have a high regard for scriptures. However, it must be noted that they tend to view scriptures in a precritical way, not so much valuing scientific or historical accuracy but rather accepting that ancient authors had a level of wisdom that moderns cannot achieve. Likewise, the Bible is often viewed similarly to the way other Chinese classic scriptures are viewed. Having said that, non-Christians and intellectuals find that the realism and validity of the Bible enhances its validity in contrast to the mysticism of other Chinese holy books (Lin 1959).

The Bible also had an empowering impact on the lives of people, especially women (Li 2004). The Bible, as a piece of literature available in the language of the common people, coupled with the Christian conviction of the need for education for all, especially women, spurred the growth of literacy in China in a remarkable way. In the 19th century, 99% of women and 90% of men in the north were illiterate. As women began to enter the wide-open door of the church, it became evident that their level of education needed to improve. In order to receive baptism, new believers needed to memorize the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and other passages, but at that time, wide-spread illiteracy among women limited their access to these important Christian statements. Therefore, the main component of most women's worship services and gatherings was the teaching of songs, Chinese characters, and the Bible. Later, they began using *1000 Characters* as a textbook. Some churches and evangelistic meeting points established short-term literacy and preaching classes, and even schools for women (Cao 1995).

The growth of the Chinese church since the introduction of the Policy of Openness and Reform (改革开放） in 1978 has surged due to the confluence of two streams. The first was the 1980s rural revival of common people with lower educational levels seeking new life in Christ from an experiential perspective. Elements of this revival resembled folk religion (Ramstad 2005). On the other hand, the second revival, primarily after the June 6, 1989 Tiananmen incident, took place primarily among urban dwellers, intellectuals and returned overseas Chinese (海 归 (Aikman 2003; Fulton 2015).

The conversion of these educated individuals was highly dependent on literary resources which included, in addition to the Bible, materials that explained the Bible from a Chinese cultural and philosophical perspective (Hamrin et al. 1997). Among these materials were Yuan Zhiming's several books, including *Lao Tzu and the Bible* (老子与圣经)， and the film *The Cross: Jesus in China (十字架--耶稣在中国)， which were particularly influential among Chinese intellectuals as they related the* Christian faith to traditional Chinese culture and philosophy. Another influential work was *The Way and the Word: A Meeting of Chinese Culture and Christian Culture* (道与言——华夏文化与基督文化相遇), a compilation edited by Liu Xiaofeng (Liu 1995).

These books satisfied the many cultural and philosophical questions that Chinese intellectuals struggled with regarding the validity of the Bible (Johnson 2017; Yang 2014) and its relationship to Chinese culture. The intellectual needs of Chinese seekers are a reminder of why the translation of the Bible and other theological works into Chinese is so important. Good materials from many languages need to be translated into Chinese, and this translation needs to be of high quality.

Summary

The high value placed upon the written word by the Chinese people from antiquity prepared the ground for the Bible's introduction into Chinese culture in the 19th and 20th centuries. The Bible not only provided the Word of God to the Chinese people, it also brought liberation and opportunity to women and people of all classes. As the 100th anniversary of the translation of the Chinese Union Version of the Bible approaches, it is appropriate to reflect on this history and learn from its many lessons.

References

Aikman, D. (2003). *Jesus in Beijing*. Washington, D.C.: Regnery.

Cao, S. (1995). Looking Back at the Traditions of Christian Women in Ministry in the Chinese Church. *Tian Feng (Heavenly Wind)*.

Chen, I.-H. (2016). From God's Chinese Names to a Cross-cultural Universal God: James Legge's Intertextual Theology in His Translation of *Tian, Di* and *Shangdi*. *Translation Studies,* 9, 268-281.

Eber, I. (1999). *The Jewish Bishop and the Chinese Bible: S. I. J.Schereschewsky (1831-1906)*. Leiden: Brill Academic Pub.

Fulton, B. (2015). *China's Urban Christians: A Light That Cannot Be Hidden*. Cambridge, England: Wipf and Stock.

Hamrin, C.L., Ling, S., and Su, D. B., eds. (1997). *Soul Searching: Chinese Intellectuals on Faith and Society*. Pasadena, CA: China Horizon.

Hiebert, P. (1984). Critical Contextualization. *Missiology: An International Review,* 12, 287-296.

Johnson, I. (2017). *The Souls of China: The Return of Religion after Mao*. New York: Vintage Books.

Lee, A.C. (October 2005). God's Asian Names: Rendering the Biblical God in Chinese. Society of Biblical Literature Forum.

Li, X. (2004). *Shengjing yu zhongguo wenhua.* (The Bible and Chinese Culture). Tian Feng pp. 38-39).

Lin, Y. (1959). *From Pagan to Christian.* Cleveland: The World Publishing Company.

Liu, X. (Ed.) (1995). *Dao yu yan: Huaxia wenhua yu jidujiao wenhua xiangfeng. (The Way and the Word)*. Shanghai: Shenghuo dushu xinzhi, Shanghai Sanlian Shudian.

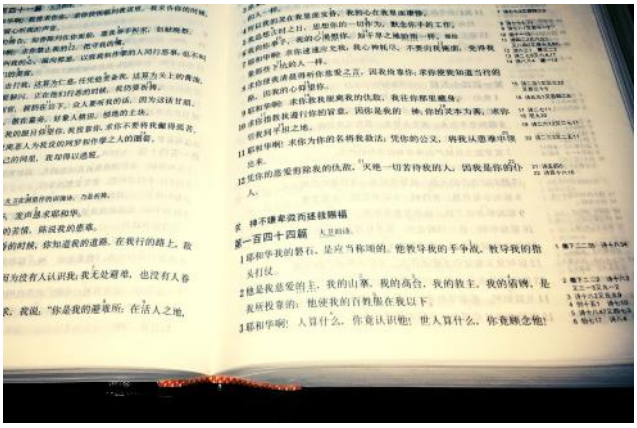
Pfister, L. (1998). The Legacy of James Legge. *International Bulletin of Missionary Research,* 22, 77-82.

Ramstad, M. (2005). Folk Thinking among Rural Christians. *China 20/20*, 1-4.

Continued on page 10

Word Choice Challenges

By Mark A. Strand



Joann Pittman, via Flickr

In translating the Chinese Union Version (CUV) Bible, the choice of key words often presented a challenge. One example of word choice error was the word used for "sin" (ἁμαρτία in Greek, or "to miss the mark") which was translated as *zui* (罪), crime, rather than *guofan* (过犯), miss the mark, a more accurate translation (Strand, 2000). This created the misconception among many generations of Chinese listeners that sin is the breaking of civil and moral laws, rather than missing God's mark. The same can be said for the word "fellowship" which was translated as *jiaotong* (交通), which in common Chinese usage means "traffic" or "communication," while the preferred word choice would be *tuanqi* (团 契).

These errors might have been avoided had there been more involvement of Chinese translators. At the same time, these errors may have been difficult to avoid. Many of these theological concepts were not germane to Chinese culture, and thus time was required for Chinese church members to understand a concept before the preferred Chinese word could be chosen. However, since translation preceded the establishment of the church, the only option would have been for these errors to be corrected in later versions, but this did not happen.

Another early word choice decision focused on the term to use for God. Most cultures have a term for deity, but whether to use that term or introduce a new term is a critical translation decision (Eber, 1999; Zhao, 2010). The Jesuit missionary, Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), asserted that the Chinese people had knowledge of the one true God as espoused in the Confucian Classics. Thus, Ricci advocated for the term s*hangdi* (上帝） to refer to the Christian God (Lee, October 2005). *Shangdi* was used by emperors and historically associated with a kind of civil religion. However, *shangdi* does not represent a plurality, and thus, it is difficult to conceptualize with a triune God.

The indigenous term for god in Chinese, *shen* (神)， is comparable to the lower case use of *god* in English. In China, it is not associated with any particular god. Over time, it has become more widely used in the Chinese church than s*hangdi* and has become the basis of most theological writing. *Shen* was used in the earliest Protestant versions of the Bible. Yahweh, *Yehehua* (耶和华） in Chinese, was preserved in the Chinese Old Testament in its transliterated form. The term *tianzhu* (天主)， the Lord of Heaven, was used by Catholics, but it has not been used by the Protestants to avoid being confused with Catholicism.

The debate over word choice continued, with different versions of the Peking version of the Bible using different terms. In 1850, however, the American Bible Society opted to go with the word s*hen*. Yet, to this day, one can purchase both the s*hen* and the *shangdi* versions of the CUV. Both *shen* and *shangdi* have been used by Christians, during a period when neither term has been much used in Chinese language in their historical sense, so that both terms refer primarily to the God of the Bible. Neither *shen* nor *shangdi* have much association with traditional Chinese concepts of deity.

Two lessons from this historical conversation bear reiterating. First, whether there is one true God, known in part through general revelation by all cultures, whose name should be used when introducing the God of the Bible, is a complex, but important theological decision. Furthermore, it has profound missiological implications. Are the people a *tabula rasa* upon whom all biblical truth must be written? Some fundamentalist missiologists would say yes. Or do the people bear vestiges of God's image within their culture upon which to build the gospel? This would be the position of Matteo Ricci, and what sinologist James Legge referred to as the universal god (Chen, 2016).

Second, there is always a risk in making decisions in reaction against one's opponents. While the Protestant translation of the Chinese Bible relied heavily on Catholicism, avoidance of the terms *shangdi* and *tianzhu* were influenced by the association of those terms with Catholicism. Translation is complex. Despite some word choices that might have been more accurately translated with different Chinese words, the Chinese Union Version of the Bible has been the Word of God for the Chinese church.

For the sources of references in this text, see the list of references following The Origins of the Chinese Union Version Bible *by Mark A. Strand.*

Mark A. Strand, PhD, professor in public health at North Dakota State University, lived in China with his wife and three children for nearly twenty years. While in China he was involved in medical research and development with a non-profit organization in collaboration with the Chinese government.

Can the Chinese Union Version Be Replaced in China?

By Ben Hu

Thomas H. Hahn Docu-Images

In China, the Chinese Union Version (CUV) is the Bible itself. Even before I started seriously studying the Bible, I had no less than five of these Bibles given to me by older sisters within the Three-Self Church. Among those sisters was my grandmother who first shared the gospel with me. Her passion for God's Word is exemplary, and for her, the Chinese Union Version is the Bible. Every word within it is God's Word.

This view of the Chinese Union Version being the Bible itself is most evident among older Christians. At the bookstores of Three-Self Churches, most Bibles sold are the CUV, mainly because it is the cheapest version available which most Christians in China can afford. The Amity Foundation provides the paper on which it is printed, making it affordable, and this has increased its market share in China as price is definitely a factor for Chinese Christians.

Due to my grandmother's influence, I was baptized in a Three-Self Church. While their baptism classes did not help me understand the full gospel, they did give new believers a simple understanding of how to discern a false gospel. They would tell believers that if someone used a different Bible, he or she likely belonged to a cult. For example, we all know that the Christians who use the Recovery Version are influenced by Witness Lee. Or, if someone reads the New World Translation, then we know he or she belongs to the Jehovah's Witness sect. Since Chinese people naturally prefer to do what is politically correct, they stick to the most commonly known, and therefore safest, version of the Bible—the CUV.

I recently saw someone selling a Bible that featured annotations of the Romanization of all the characters in it. Of course, there is nothing wrong with a CUV Bible with a pronunciation guide. However, the seller was advertising it this way:

There are many words in the Old Testament that you can't pronounce, which you skip over while reading your Bible. This is failing God. We need to read every single word of God's revelation. With this annotated Bible, you will no longer fail God when you read your Bible. We recommend that every Christian have a copy. Invest in your faith.

Based on this ad, it is apparent that the seller considers the CUV part and parcel of God's direct revelation.

However, if there are many words in the CUV that today's Christians can no longer understand, why do we not simply say that the CUV is no longer a suitable translation for contemporary Christians? Why must we label all the words in this version with the pronunciation so that people will know how to read each word aloud? If someone does not know a word and is taught to pronounce it, does that help that individual to suddenly understand the meaning of the word? Our Chinese language is not a phonetic writing system, so we cannot understand a word's meaning simply by reading it out loud.

We all know the five solas of Reformed doctrine, the first of which is "Scripture alone." Superficially, it looks like the Chinese church does this well. However, as I look around, the majority of Chinese Christians think that "Scripture alone" means the CUV alone. As long as a Christian reads this version, as long as preaching from the pulpit is based on it, then we are adhering to "Scripture alone."

Many churches, including the one I attend, commonly use the CUV. There are three times during our Sunday worship service when we use this version. First, someone reads an Old Testament passage from it; then another person reads a New Testament passage, and finally, during the sermon, the elders lead us in reading the passage upon which the sermon will be based—all from the CUV.

However, if the CUV is not the best option, why would the church use it so much? This Chinese church tradition of reading a Bible passage together greatly emphasizes that the Bible is the special revelation God has given us, but for us to read together, we all need to read from the same translation. The CUV meets this need, and in addition, has a clear advantage in quality and price.

A brother in Christ once asked our elders if the church could use a different translation of the Bible. Our elders replied that replacing the CUV with another Bible translation would require a lot of time teaching the congregation to adapt. The Chinese church has many important things to do and to teach, and spending our energy on adjusting to another version of the Bible is not essential. Nevertheless, he encouraged church members to use a child-friendly translation with their children at home. For example, they could use the Chinese Contemporary Bible in which words are easier and the language more contemporary.

Using the CUV, however, is not set in stone. There is a weekly Bible study at our church, and a different brother leads the Bible study each time. Some brothers will use the Revised Union Version on their PowerPoint slides. While the goal of this Revised Version was to avoid changing anything unnecessarily, still, using this version does send a good message. In studying the Bible, our goal is to understand what the Bible is saying—not what the CUV says.

Worth celebrating even more is the fact that when we encounter some difficult passages, most members of the Bible study are willing to look the passage up in an English version. Perhaps the English version is clearer and easier to understand than the Union Version. Some members even look up the original text or reference other Chinese translations, such as the Chinese Contemporary Bible. These are very good ways of studying the revelation the Bible has for us.

The popularity of the CUV is often rooted in its own mistakes. This is something I have only realized this past year. Since most Chinese pastors use this version for Bible study, the places where it mistranslates allows the mistake to be brought into the sermon, then into the exegesis, and finally into the application. If now, a different translation were used, what would happen with the earlier exegesis and application? This is a thorny and challenging problem elders will have to face.

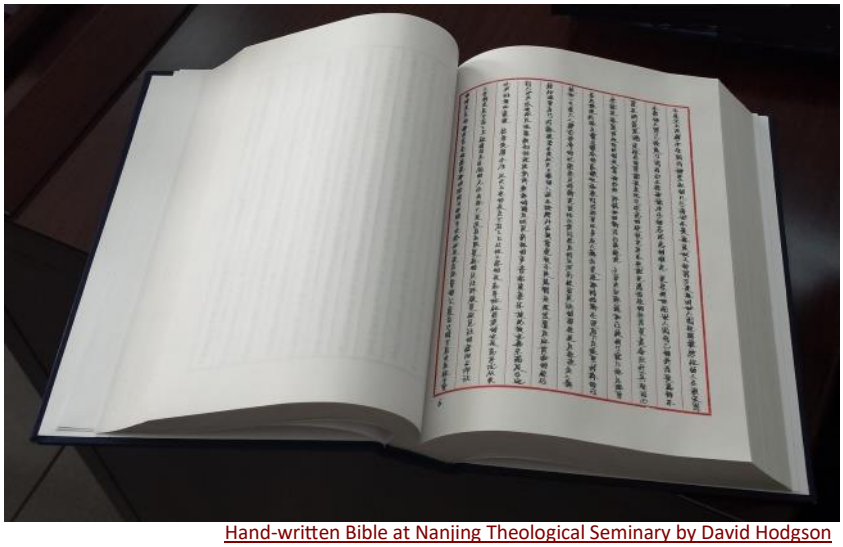
Even though I tend to be "anti-CUV," I think that every translation has its strengths, weaknesses, and readability for time and place. In one era, one translation serves people of that time. The *Wenli* translation (see "Origins" article by Strand) is beautiful, and very ably done. Its translation of the Lord's Prayer is especially attractive. Yet, very few people in China still use this translation because not many of us can read classical Chinese. Likewise, as modern Christians, the beauty of the CUV is not our first concern; rather, the major issue is that we understand God's revelation.

I use the Chinese Contemporary Bible in my daily devotions, but this presents a challenge when reciting a verse with a group as what I recite is different from what others recite. Though we are reciting the same verse, it may sound very different. Nevertheless, this gives me an opportunity to explain to others why I memorize from the Chinese Contemporary Bible, and not the CUV.

May we all love God's special revelation, the Bible, the most—more than the tool of transmission, a particular translation.

Article translated by ChinaSource.

Ben Hu is a member of a church in Shanghai. He is currently a lay leader in his church and in training to be a pastor.



Hand-written Bible at Nanjing Theological Seminary by David Hodgson

The Origins of the Chinese Union Version Bible **Continued from page 7**

Standaert, N. (2000). *Handbook of the History of Christianity in China*. Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc.
Starr, J.B. (1998). The Legacy of Robert Morrison. *International Bulletin of Missionary Research,* 22, 73-76.
Strand, M.A. (2000).Explaining Sin in a Chinese Context. *Missiology,* 28, 427-441.
Sunquist, S.W. (Ed.) (2001). *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co.
Tang, Y. (2006). Becoming a Believer. *Beijing Review* pp. 20-27).
Yang, H. (2014). *China, Christianity, and the Question of Culture*: Baylor University Press.
Zetzsche, J.O. (1999). *The Bible in China: The History of the Union Version*. Netetal, Germany: Steyler Verlag.
Zhao, X. (2010). In the Name of God: Translation and Transformation of Chinese Culture, Foreign Religion, and the Reproduction of "*Tianzhu" and* "*Shangdi"*. *Journal of Modern Chinese History,* 4, 163-178.

Mark A. Strand, PhD, professor in public health at North Dakota State University, lived in China with his wife and three children for nearly twenty years. While in China he was involved in medical research and development with a non-profit organization in collaboration with the Chinese government.

Chinese Bible Translation by the Catholic Church: History, Development and Reception

By Monica Romano

Bible training for sisters (Henan)_©Fen Xiang.

The process of Chinese Bible translation by the Catholic Church in China followed a long, complex, and fascinating history. The earliest attempt to translate the New Testament and Psalms into the Mongolian language, the language of the *Yuan* dynasty (1278-1368), was made by John of Montecorvino, (1247-1328) Order of Friars Minor (OFM). After this, centuries went by before Catholic missionaries in China embarked on the challenging task of translating the Scriptures into Chinese and produced a complete Bible translation.

Unlike Protestant missionaries, who started to translate the entire Bible into Chinese immediately after arriving in China in the early 19th century, Catholic missionaries such as Franciscans, Dominicans, and Jesuits, during the *Ming* Dynasty (1368-1644), prioritized other liturgical and pastoral works. While these works may have included portions of the sacred Scripture, they cannot be considered proper translations.

Even when, in 1615, permission was granted from Rome to translate the Bible into Chinese (not using the vernacular, but rather the "erudite language proper to the literati"), missionaries never engaged in translation work. This was probably due to their insufficient knowledge of the Chinese language, lack of previous experience they could rely on, and the fact that the Catholic Church traditionally discouraged Bible translation into vernacular languages and instead promoted the Latin *Vulgata* for Mass and liturgical purposes.

In 1943, the Encyclical Letter, *Divino Afflante Spiritu,* by Pope Pius XII declared the supremacy of the original texts in respect for the Latin *Vulgata* for Bible translation. Later on, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) emphasized the centrality of the Bible in the life of the Church, including through translations in the vernacular languages.

Unpublished and Partial Translations

In the mid-seventeenth century, the Congregation for the Propagation of Faith started to apply more restrictive policies resulting in a number of partial translations that were made having to remain unpublished until the end of the ninteenth century. Most of these translations covered only the New Testament and were based on the *Vulgata.* Some used the vernacular language, which had the potential to facilitate greater access to the masses. Other translations were made in classical language which was traditionally used for literary genres and was instrumental in presenting the Bible as a text of the same dignity as the Chinese Classics.

There are two important translators that are worth mentioning for this period. Jean Basset (1662-1707), of the Society of Foreign Missions of Paris (MEP) translated the New Testament into classical Chinese (or *wenli* 文理) from the Latin *Vulgata.* Interestingly, he translated "God" and "Holy Spirit" respectively with *shen* 神 ("god" or "spirit") and *feng* 風 ("wind"). These were not among the terms debated in the context of the well-known Chinese Rites Controversy, which started at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

Notably, the Jesuits were in favor of indigenous terms such as *shangdi* 上帝 ("Supreme God") or *tian* 天 ("Heaven") as opposed to Franciscans and Dominicans supporting the neologism *tianzhu* 天主 ("Lord of Heaven"), which was eventually imposed by the papal bull *Ex Quo Singulari* (1847). At the time of Basset's translation, the controversy had not yet been resolved, and the translator is likely to have opted for terms not involved in the debate.

Basset's translation influenced later Bible editions, namely, the earliest Protestant translations by Robert Morrison (1782-1834) and Joshua Marshman (1768-1837) published in the 1820s. His translation also influenced the first ever complete Catholic Bible, the *Sigao Shengjing* 思高聖經. This was translated under the leadership of an Italian Franciscan friar, the Blessed Gabriele Maria Allegra, OFM (1907-1976), and published by the Hong Kong-based *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum* in 1968.

Louis de Poirot (1735-1813), of the Society of Jesus (SJ), was the author of the earliest translation ever made in Mandarin (around 1790) and the most complete Catholic translation in Chinese at the time, unusually including portions of the Old Testament. Inspired by St. Jerome's use of "vulgar," he adopted some extreme forms of colloquial expressions. Father Allegra took photographs of De Poirot's version to be used as a reference to his translation work.

Published Translations during the Twentieth Century

From the twentieth century onwards, translations started to be published but continued to focus mainly on the New Testament. Among the most meaningful attempts, Joseph Hsiao Ching-shan (Xiao Jingshan, 蕭靜山, 1855-1924), SJ, translated the New Testament into Mandarin from the *Vulgata.* Xiao's translation was first published in 1922, a few years after the May Fourth Movement of 1919 (which raised the status of *baihua* 白話 or vernacular language) and the concomitant publication of the *Union Version* (*Heheben* 和合本) in Mandarin, the most popular Protestant translation.

In 1924, at the First Plenary Council of Shanghai, Chinese Catholic Church leaders noted that there was no complete Chinese Bible translation or Old Testament available in Chinese for Catholics. It was decided to form a translation committee and use the national language (*guoyu* 國語) to translate the Bible; however, this plan never materialized due to a lack of qualified people knowledgeable of biblical languages. In 1943, the already mentioned Encyclical Letter, *Divino Afflante Spiritu,* was issued. In 1956, a revision of

Xiao's translation was published based on the Greek text.

Among the revisions was the shift from the transliteration of "*verbum*" (*wuerpeng* 物尔朋) to the translation of *logos* with the neologism *shengyan* 聖言 (and not with *dao* 道, used across Protestant translations since 1835). Xiao's translation was the most widespread Chinese Catholic edition until the 1990s when it was replaced by the *Sigao Shengjing*.

Ma Xiangbo 馬相伯 (1840-1939), a well-known patriot, scholar, and educator, completed a translation of the Gospels in classical Chinese just two years before his death, using a Latin version as a textual basis. John Wu Ching-hsiung (Wu Jingxiong) 吳經熊 (1899-1986), a jurist and ambassador to the Holy See, translated the Psalms and the New Testament in poetic forms of classical Chinese, producing what is often considered the best literary Chinese Bible translation ever made. Probably because Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi 蔣介石), a Methodist, sponsored and revised Wu's translation, it was influenced by some terminology adopted in Protestant versions including the use of *dao* for *logos*.

The First Complete Catholic Bible

After three decades of work, the *Sigao Shengjing* was published as individual books in 1961 and in one volume in 1968. Father Allegra committed himself to this enterprise in 1930 when he came to realize that, unlike the Protestants, Catholics had not yet translated the full Bible into Chinese. However, while published in Hong Kong, the *Sigao* Bible was not authorized for printing in mainland China for over two decades.

Based on the original texts, the *Sigao* translation is appreciated for its elegant style, accuracy, and fidelity. Despite its emphasis on formal renderings—sometimes to the detriment of fluency—after more recent publications of other translations, at the time of its fiftieth anniversary (1968-2018), the *Sigao* Bible continues to be the most popular and reputable edition among Chinese Catholics.

"Post-*Sigao*" Translations

The *Today's Chinese Version* (in Chinese *Xiandai Zhongwen Yiben* 现代中文译本) is an inter-confessional, Protestant-Catholic edition published in the beginning of the 1980s. Based on its English-equivalent version, it is published in two separate editions that differ only for the terms used for "God" and "Holy Spirit" (respectively *Shangdi* or *Shen* and *Shengling* in the Protestant edition; *Tianzhu* and *Shengshen* 圣神 in the Catholic edition). Meaningfully, both editions adopt the term *dao* used by the Protestants in place of the traditional Catholic term *shengyan* for *logos*.

In the beginning of the 1980s, Aloysius Jin Luxian **金鲁賢** (1916-2013), who would soon become bishop of Shanghai, started a new translation of the New Testament and the Psalms which took about two decades to complete with the assistance of some educated Catholics. The textual basis was *La Bible de Jérusalem*; hence, this edition is also known as the *Yelusaleng Shengjing* (耶路撒冷圣经). Bishop Jin must have felt an urgency to make this translation as he started immediately after being released from prison and continued after becoming a bishop.

At the time he started, Chinese Catholics still used the New Testament edition by Father Xiao Jingshan because the *Sigao* Bible had been authorized in mainland China only in the 1990s, just two years before Bishop Jin's edition was published in one volume. However, even after the *Sigao* Bible was available in China, Bishop Jin launched a major revision process of his translation that was completed in 2004. In 1991, he reportedly said that "*the Bible is for today's people and therefore it needs new translations so as to keep up with the current use of the language and be read more smoothly.*"[1] The Chinese Jerusalem Bible is characterized by a fluent style, expressions typical of Shanghai (generally less appreciated by people from northern parts of China) and more "Chinese" features, some of which distance it from the *Sigao* translation (such as the choice of the term *dao* for *logos*).

Lack of a missal in Chinese according to the post-Vatican II liturgy, (adopted in mainland China from Hong Kong or Taiwan in the beginning of the 1990s), was also another reason behind Bishop Jin's move to engage in the translation work. In those years, he indicated that he would use his translation for the liturgy as some wordings from China might be different from those used outside the mainland. Bishop Jin's translation is widespread in Shanghai and neighboring dioceses but has not challenged the authority and the popularity of the *Sigao* Bible.

The Pastoral Bible (*Muling Shengjing* **牧灵圣经**) was published at the end of the 1990s in Hong Kong and then in mainland China. The translation work was coordinated by the French Claretian father, Bernard Hurault (1924-2004), together with a group of Chinese translators, on the basis of his experience as translator of the popular *Biblia Latinoamericana*, which aimed at a simple and clear translation combined with pastoral explanatory annotations.

Based on editions in Western languages, the Pastoral Bible attracted some criticism: the theological and biblical formation of the translators was questioned and inaccuracies were found in the translation and commentary. Despite this, the Pastoral Bible gained some popularity but has never replaced the *Sigao* translation.

Conclusions

The Catholic missionary community in China started to translate the entire Bible late compared to Protestants although para-biblical texts were included in their written works. The first Catholic complete Bible from the original texts was published at the end of the 1960s, much later then the earliest Protestant translations by Marshman and Morrison dating back to the 1820s. This could be explained by the fact that traditionally the Catholic Church discouraged Bible translation in the vernacular until the Second Vatican Council whereas Protestants have always placed emphasis on the *Sola Scriptura* principle and personal scripture reading.

A challenge faced by the earliest Catholic translators was that they had no precedents to use as a reference; on the contrary, their works were known by Protestant translators and influenced their translations, especially in the beginning.

The *Sigao Shengjing* remains the most commonly used and reputable Catholic edition in China. The time has yet to come when a Bible translation initiated and led by the Chinese has acquired the same acceptance and popularity.

---

[1] "Shanghai needs its own Chinese Language Missals, says Bishop Jin," *UCANews*, January 17, 1991, http://www.ucanews.com/story-archive/?post_name=/1991/01/17/shanghai-needs-its-own-chineselanguage-missals-says-bishop-jin&post_id=31858.

Bibliography

Choi, Daniel K.T. and Mak, George K.W. "Catholic Bible Translation in Twentieth-Century China: An Overview." In *Catholicism in China, 1900-Present*, edited by Cindy Yik-yi Chu. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

蔡錦圖 (D. Choi). 天主教中文聖經翻譯的歷史和版本 (The History and Editions of Catholic Chinese Bible Translations). 天主教研究學報 (*Hong Kong Journal of Catholic Studies*), 2011.

Chu, Yik-yi C. *The Catholic Church in China: 1978 to the Present*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Foley, Toshikazu S. *Biblical Translation in Chinese and Greek*. Leiden Boston: Brill, 2009.

Romano, M. "The *Sheshan* New Testament Translation by Bishop Jin Luxian of Shanghai." In *Foreign Missionaries and the Indigenization of the Chinese Catholic Church*, edited by Cindy Yik-yi.Chu. Hong Kong Baptist University, April 2017: 125-170.

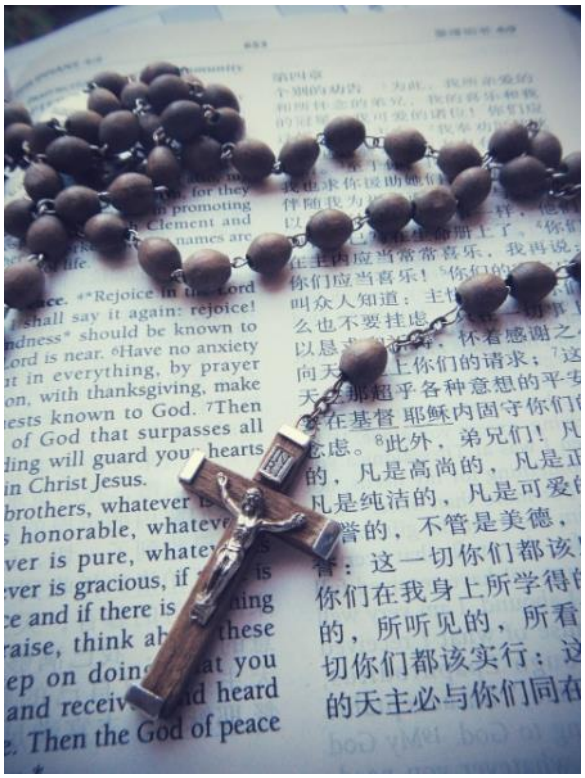
Romano, M. "Translating the Bible into Chinese: The Contribution of Chinese Translators." In *Shaping Christianity in Greater China*, edited by Paul Woods. Regnum: Oxford Center for Mission Studies, 2017: 98-111.

Standaert, N. "The Bible in Early Seventeenth-Century China." In *Bible in Modern China. The Literary and Intellectual Impact*, edited by Irene Eber and others. Sankt Augustin: Monumenta Serica Monograph Series XLIII, 1999: 31-54.

Starr, C., ed. *Reading Christian Scriptures in China.* London: T&T Clark, 2008.

Zetzsche, J. O. *The Bible in China. The History of the Union Version or the Culmination of Protestant Missionary Bible Translation in China.* Sankt Augustin: Monumenta Serica Monograph Series XLV, Monumenta Serica Institute, 1999.

Monica Romano, a sinologist and social scientist, holds a doctoral degree in Ethnology and Ethno-Anthropology and is currently a lecturer at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. Her research interests include Christianity and the Catholic Church in China, particularly Chinese Bible translation which she has been investigating for nearly 20 years, presenting the findings in various conferences and studies. She has visited China several times to conduct research and field work.



Tricia Bølle

Bibles in China: A Question of Availability

By Joann Pittman

Bibles received at Xhaohe church, Jiangsu by David Hodgson via Flickr.

In his book *Our Endangered Values,* former United States President Jimmy Carter writes of a conversation he had with Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping during his visit to the United States in 1979. After telling Deng about his own religious background, he asked if it might be possible for the Chinese government to change its restrictive policies towards religion. Deng asked him for specific suggestions. "After a few moments' thought," Carter writes, "I made three requests: guarantee freedom of worship, permit the distribution of Bibles, and reopen the door to missionaries. Before returning to China, Deng Xiaoping told me that the basic law would be changed to allow for religious freedom and that Bibles would be authorized." Deng rejected the request to allow missionaries back into China.

A year later, in 1980, churches began to reopen in China, and three years later, in 1982, the government issued Document 19: The Basic Viewpoint on the Religious Question during Our Country's Socialist Period, which allowed for the return of religion into Chinese society.

In 1988, Amity Press, a joint venture between China-based Amity Foundation and the UK-based United Bible Societies began producing Bibles in China. Since then it has grown to be one of the largest Bible printing operations in the world. According to statistics published by Amity Foundation, they printed 495,289 Bibles in China in 1988; in 2015, the number was 12,087,489. On July 18, 2016, Amity celebrated the printing of the 150 millionth Bible. While they do not give the breakdown of what percentage are for export vs. domestic consumption, the American Bible Society indicates that roughly half of the Bibles printed are for distribution within China. That would indicate, then, a total of 75 million Bibles published in China for distribution in China since 1988.

Is that enough to meet the demand for Bibles in China? As with most questions related to China, the answer is "complicated." In this article we will explore some of the key issues related to Bible availability in China, as well as the common means of addressing them.

The first issue is one of demand. This is difficult, if not impossible, to measure because of the unreliability of statistics about the number of Christians in China, which range from 36 million to estimates of 100 million. However, with either of those numbers, it's reasonable to infer that the demand for Bibles would be quite high.

Another way of thinking about demand is to base it on the total population. There are 1.35 billion people in China. Because each person should have the right to the Bible, that is how demand is determined. Many organizations that continue to smuggle Bibles into China adopt this posture. Their rationale is simple, namely, that that there are still tens of millions of Chinese who do not have access to the Bible.

The second issue is supply. This is somewhat easier to measure because of the Amity statistics; we know how many they produce each year. However, there are a number of factors that influence the supply of Bibles.

The most important is the fact that the Bible does not have access to the market in China. China does not allow for the importation of books into China, whether it is the Bible, a Harry Potter book, or the latest from Jordan Peterson. In order for any book to be legally sold or distributed in China, it must have a China-issued ISBN. Although there was much optimism that it was about to happen around the time of the Beijing Olympics in 2008, to date, the government has not issued one for the Bible. Instead, the Bible is classified as an "internal document" (*neibu* 内部) of the China Christian Council/Three-Self Patriotic Movement (CCC/TSPM). As such, Bibles are only legally available from CCC/TSPM outlets such as registered churches, registered meeting points, and approved distribution centers.

This has a limiting effect on supply because production levels are determined based on the demand within the CCC/TSPM churches. While it is possible, even likely, that the number printed each year is enough to supply the registered churches, it is less likely to meet the demands within the unregistered churches.

It is also not clear how the production levels are set—according to actual demand from the churches or by quotas from the government. For the past 10-12 years, many Western ministries that purchase Bibles directly from Amity for their rural distribution efforts have reported few problems in securing Bibles to meet their needs.

Another factor related to supply is distribution. While Bibles are readily available in urban areas, churches and congregations in remote rural areas have a harder time obtaining them. Sometimes this is a function of access, and sometime this is a function of economics. Even if believers in rural areas have access to one of 70+ distribution centers around the country, they may be too poor to purchase the Bibles.

The past decade has also seen the proliferation of online bookstores that offered the Bible for sale. This meant that anyone with access to the internet could go online and purchase a Bible that would be shipped anywhere in the country. Although quite common, this was never legal and in the spring of 2018, the Chinese government ordered the practice to cease.

The advent of the smart phone has also impacted the availability and distribution of the Bible in China. Consider the numbers. As of January 2018, the Chinese Internet Network Information Center reported 772 million Internet users and 753 million mobile phone subscribers, with 97.5% of Internet users access the Internet via their smart phones. This means that anyone with access to the Internet and/or a smart phone technically has access to digital versions on sites such as O-Bible, as well as a variety of downloadable Bible apps such as *Bible.is*. While there may be a preference for the printed Bible in many quarters, as of this writing, digital versions of the Bible continue to be available China.

Historically there have been two approaches used by outside organizations that feel called to address the issue of availability and accessibility of Bibles in China: smuggling them in, and purchasing/distributing within official channels. Before the advent of Bible printing in China, receiving smuggled Bibles was the only method that many believers inside China had of obtaining Bibles. After Bibles became available within China, many believed that smuggling was no longer necessary, and any availability problems could be addressed internally. The debate continues today.

Despite the availability of Bibles inside China, there are still ministries that bring in Bibles from the outside. This involves printing Bibles outside of China, having foreigners with tourist visas carry them over the border, and then handing them over to local contacts for distribution within the country. I spoke with a leader of one such ministry who said they look at the numbers and sees a shortage. "There simply aren't enough Bibles being produced and distributed within China to meet the demand," he said. "We believe there are tens of millions, mostly in the rural areas who have trouble accessing a Bible, either because they can't afford it or they can't afford to travel to the urban areas where they are available. They have to find the Bible in their community." Working with local networks, they have been able to distribute more than one million Bibles to places where they are needed.

The second approach is to work within the system, purchasing the Bibles directly from Amity or local churches and distributing them to areas where they are needed. Mike Falkenstine, President of One-Eight Catalyst (formerly China Resource Center) and author of *The Chinese Puzzle*, was involved for many years in rural Bible distribution projects through legal channels in China. This method was more in line with his ministry philosophy of working through legitimate means to address needs within China. He said that his ministry was always able to secure the requested number of Bibles for their distribution projects. Another ministry leader that sources Bibles within China indicated that they have been able to distribute ten million Bibles over the past 20 years, both to registered and unregistered congregations.

While the debate is not likely to be settled anytime soon, it is clear that there is room for different approaches to the problem, and that God can and does use them to see his Word "run and be glorified" in China.

As to the current situation under Xi Jinping, both ministry leaders I communicated with indicated things have gotten tighter, with local contacts (both official and unofficial) becoming more cautious of working with "Western-looking faces."

And once again, the "new normal" may have the effect of actually shifting the conversation away from outsiders (to smuggle or not to smuggle) to the church within China itself. Relying less on outside personnel and funding, the church has an increased opportunity to come up with creative solutions for addressing the issue of Bible availability in China.

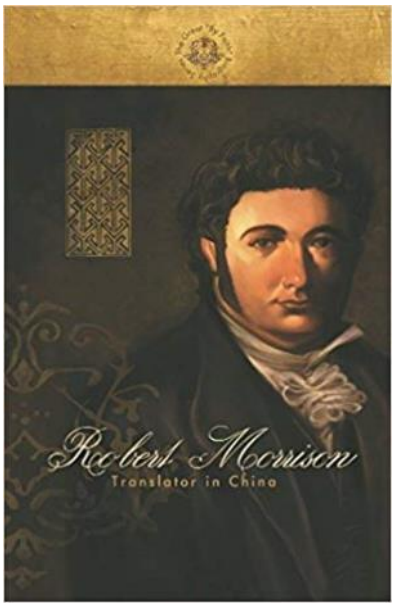
---

[1] Carter, Jimmy, *Our Endangered Values: America's Moral Crisis* (New York: Thorndike Press Large Print Edition, Published in Arrangement with Simon and Schuster, 2006), pp. 38-39.
[2] Amity Foundation. https://www.amityfoundation.org/eng/150-millionth-bible. Accessed July 23, 2018.
[3] TechNode.com. https://technode.com/2018/01/31/chinese-internet-users-772-million/. Accessed July 23, 2018.

Joann Pittman is senior vice president of ChinaSource and editor of ZGBriefs. She is the author of Survival Chinese Lessons *and* The Bells Are Not Silent: Stories of Church Bells in China. *Her personal blog,* Outside-In *can be found at joannpittman.com, where she writes on China, Minnesota, traveling, and issues related to "living well where you don't belong." You can find her on Twitter @jkpittman.com and on Facebook at @authorjoannpittman. She makes her home in New Brighton, Minnesota.*

Book Review
Be Amazed, Encouraged, and Challenged for Under $10

Reviewed by BJ Arthur



Robert Morrison: Translator in China (Faith Biography Series, Book 3), Edited by Rebecca Hammond for Ambassador International, Emerald House Group, Incorporated (September 1, 2004) 129 pages. ISBN-10:1932307265; ISBN-13: 978-1932307269; Paperback, $5.99 at Amazon.

Robert Morrison: Translator in China is a compiled work rather than an authored one. What shines through in this book is not great style or scholarly research, but a jewel in the person of Robert Morrison. *Translator in China* is inspiring because it is the biography of a man tasked by God with bringing his word to China, a nation largely closed to foreign missions after the Rites Controversy. Due to the difficult language, the exotic culture, and China's fierce self-sufficiency, foreign missionaries had a difficult time planting a lasting shoot within its soul. It was Morrison who attempted to make that work possible through his extensively footnoted Chinese dictionary and translation of the Bible that rendered the language accessible. He succeeded in a quiet, humble way that benefitted so many but brought him less fame than other missionary patriarchs.

Why was he successful? God equipped him with just the right mind, personality, and upbringing; as a result, Morrison had not only the ability but a love for the Lord that provided the will to obey and overcome. This combination gave him an insight into his task that served him well.

What can the reader take away from this succinct biography?

Be amazed by the man. Youngest of eight in the family of a Scottish agricultural worker cum boot-tree maker, Robert Morrison preferred studying to working with his hands. Following his conversion at the age of 15 in Newcastle, UK, Robert kept a 14-hour workday, using evenings and Sundays to study the Bible and visit the sick. In addition, Morrison decided to educate himself. Though considered "not brilliant," he found memorizing easy and was extremely diligent and persevering. As he worked for his father, "he would have a book propped up on his work bench so that he could work and read at the same time, and he finally . . . made a bed for himself on the floor, so that he could study late at night and early in the morning undisturbed" (p. 5).

In 1801, at the age of 19, Robert Morrison decided that God was calling him into ministry and then missions in Africa. He began the study of Latin under a minister in Newcastle and soon demonstrated a true gift for languages as he expanded his studies to Greek and Hebrew.

No emotional or financial support in these decisions came from his family. His mother, who was in poor health, was so distressed upon learning of these plans that he had to promise not to embark on them while she still lived. After her death, he was accepted as a candidate for the ministry at Hoxton Academy in London. His time there was most difficult, not because of studies, but rather due to the constant pleadings of family members to return to Newcastle to help with the business and family needs. Even his tutor believed he should work in Newcastle. However, his persevering stubbornness carried him through those difficult days. As his time at Hoxton drew to a close, he wrote in his diary: "I have given myself up to Thy service. The question with me is where. . . . My desire, is, O Lord, to engage where laborers are most wanted. Perhaps one part of the field is more difficult than another. I an equally unfit for any, but through Thy strengthening me, I can do all things...enable me to count the cost" (p. 10). He was accepted by the London Missionary Society and sent to the Academy at Gosport, still assuming it was for work in Africa; God had other plans.

Be encouraged by God's power, wisdom, and faithfulness. God endowed Robert Morrison with all of the following: a memorizing mind—uniquely required for learning Chinese characters; a gift for languages that enabled him to hear and mimic the strange sounds and tones; a devotion to study and hard work; an obedient heart to go to China, not Africa, when asked. In the same years that God was shaping Morrison, he gave Dr. W. Moseley a passion and vision for translating the Bible into Chinese. The project seemed too expensive, China too closed to Protestant missions, and the language too difficult to learn for most. In his quest for a way, Moseley approached Morrison's principal at Gosport, and Principal Bogue knew just the student fit for the challenge. One had "prayed to be given a hard and difficult task and his prayer had certainly been granted (p. 13).

Be challenged by Robert Morrison's accomplishments and God's succor in the midst of great difficulties. When wearied by the long flight to China on a 747 or the discomforts of living in a China with most everything but clean water, refer to this biography of Robert Morrison that chronicles a life of overcoming. When the East India Company continued to refuse passage to missionaries, Morrison endured more than a hundred days replete with fierce gales, a shipboard fire, and near shipwreck just to get to the U.S. in order to board a ship going to China; another 119 days of stormy seas and searing heat were required to get to Guangzhou (then called Canton).

Once there, Morrison found seemingly insurmountable difficulties in establishing a foothold. Rent, food, and supplies were very expensive for foreigners who were deemed fantastically rich. Finding a language tutor, who risked death if caught teaching a foreigner Chinese, was even more problematic. Just as he was about to move his work to Malaysia to escape the continual harassment of the Chinese government and local populace, God opened a position with the East India Company as Chinese Translator; Morrison perceived that it was God's perfect provision. He gave the following justifications to his mission board to obtain permission to accept a

secular job, thus becoming the first Protestant tent-maker in China missions:

> *first and most important this official status would make his position at Canton safe, because as a member of the Company he had a right to be there; secondly, the duties would help him considerably with the language, because he would meet and talk to Chinese merchants and government officials; thirdly, the salary would mean he would be less of an expense to the Missionary Society, and lastly, he was sure that his readiness to serve the Company ought to help them to be more tolerant of missionaries generally* (p. 40).

Though Morrison now had a legal right to be in China and expenses were covered, his life was yet filled with distress. His dear wife (née Mary Morton), who had to remain in Macao while he worked on the mainland, suffered a breakdown from which she never fully recovered and their first-born son died on the day he was born. Also, Morrison quickly discovered that a 24-hour day was not sufficient to accomplish all that he wanted to do: "[My job] occupies a great part of my short life in that which does not immediately refer to my first object . . . while I am translating official papers I could be compiling my dictionary. . . . To be faithful and yet not impede myself in my missionary work is a difficult thing" (p. 42).

In spite of his heavy workload, within four years of settling in Guangzhou, Morrison had completed translations of Acts and Luke, written a Chinese catechism, a Chinese grammar, and several tracts, while continuing work on his Chinese-English dictionary. A year later in 1813, translation of the New Testament was complete and 1000 copies printed. Within the following year, Morrison baptized his first convert and prepared 2,000 copies of the New Testament, 10,000 tracts and 5,000 copies of a catechism to be distributed in the Chinese settlements of the Malay Archipelago (p. 58). By the age of 40, Robert Morrison had baptized his former teacher, Liang A-Fa, the second Chinese Protestant convert in mainland China and first Chinese Protestant minister/evangelist, and buried both his wife, and close friend and co-worker, William Milne.

After his Chinese dictionary was printed in 1823, he took a long overdue furlough in England. While there, Morrison established a School of Oriental Languages and traveled the country training Missionary Societies how to overcome ignorance and apathy toward China in their churches.

Robert Morrison finally returned to China in 1826 with his second wife (née Elizabeth Armstrong) and two children. Upon arriving in Macao, he found his home mostly destroyed and, even worse, his vast library mostly eaten by white ants! After settling his family, he moved on to his lonely life in Guangzhou. Since the dictionary was finished, Morrison felt that in addition to his East India Company work, he could begin to minister as he chose. "If I go on learning the polite language of China . . . I may go on learning to my dying hour . . . therefore I think I had better . . . teach Christianity in the simple Chinese phrase" (p. 92.) He began new projects including a coffee shop for the sailors of the East India fleet, a language school for anyone in the Company who wanted to learn Chinese, notes on the Chinese scriptures, and a dictionary of the Guangzhou dialect.

As the health of both Morrison and his wife began to fail, he sent Elizabeth back to England with the younger children, but refused to leave his work. He continued to negotiate, translate, and lead worship until the day before he died . . . of fever and exhaustion in July of 1834.

A lasting shoot of the gospel had indeed been planted within the soul of China; the church, even in the face of renewed persecution, is alive and flourishing. Robert Morrison played a vital part in equipping those who planted and harvested. If God could do this through an English shoemaker, what might he accomplish in this mess of a world through those who are available today?

---

[1] The Rites Controversy centered on whether Chinese ritual practices of honoring family ancestors and other formal Confucian and Chinese imperial rites qualified as religious rites and were thus incompatible with Catholic belief; or were they secular rituals, compatible within certain limits, that should be tolerated. Clement XI banned the rites in 1704. In 1721, the Kangxi Emperor disagreed with Clement's decree and banned Christian missions in China.

[2] Tentmaking: A 2,000-Year Tradition in Missions, November 17, 2017, http://www.goliveserve.org/updates/2017/11/16/tentmaking-a-thousand-year-tradition-in-missions.

[3] The Qing emperor in 1757 issued a decree explicitly ordering that Guangzhou be made the only port open to foreign commerce. Foreign merchants became subject to numerous demanding regulations, including the prohibition of foreign women and a variety of restrictions on the merchants' personal freedom. While in Guangzhou they were confined to a small riverbank area outside the city wall where their 13 warehouses, or "factories," were located. (https://www.britannica.com/event/Canton-system)

BJ Arthur (pseudonym) has lived in China for many years and was in Beijing in June 1989.

Resource Corner
Obtaining a Chinese Bible

Compiled by the ChinaSource Team

Girl with Bible by David Hodgson via Flickr.

There are numerous ways to obtain Chinese Bibles, both outside of China and inside. Consider this your handy guide.

Chinese Bibles

Inside mainland China

Bibles printed by Amity Press for the CCC/TSPM can be purchased at registered churches. A Chinese-English Bible is also available for download directly from the CCC/TSPM website in .rar format.

Outside of mainland China

Ambassadors for Christ Bookstore: This online bookstores is one of the best sources for Chinese Bibles in North America. It offers six different versions of the Chinese Bible. A list of the versions, as well as a short description of each can be found on this page.

Amazon.com: Amazon has numerous versions and editions of the Chinese Bible for sale, both print and audio.

Bamboo Resource Centre: Located in Auckland, New Zealand, Bamboo is part of OMF-NZ and offers several Bible options including *Pinyin* and an audio version in Mandarin on CD as well as other resources.

Bibles in Bulk: To buy multiple copies, Bibles in Bulk offers several Chinese Bible options including the Chinese Contemporary Bible in simplified script.

Chinese Bible International, LTD: Chinese Bible International, based in Hong Kong, has a wide selection of Chinese Bibles in both traditional and simplified script.

Churchsource.com: Churchsource has a number of versions of the Bible in Chinese in simplified script.

COCM (Chinese Overseas Christian Mission): Has Bibles in both simplified and traditional script.

Eden.co.uk: Eden, based in the UK, has a number of Chinese Bibles available on their site.

Fountain of Grace: Based in Perth, Australia, Fountain of Grace offers Chinese Bibles and other resources.

United Bible Societies: Bibles are available in both print and digital formats from local Bible societies. For information see the following sites:

- China Partnership
- Hong Kong Bible Society
- Bible Society of Singapore
- Bible Society in Taiwan

The Wandering Bookseller: The Wandering Bookseller (Australia) includes a Chinese language section with Bibles and other resources.

Chinese Bible Apps

Two of the most popular Chinese Bible reading apps are:

- You Version
- We Devote (阅读圣经)

Appcrawlr.com: A more complete list of Chinese Bible apps can be found at this website. As of this writing , they remain widely available in China.