

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Introduction

The goal and the methodology of this study are introduced in this chapter. The goal is what is to be achieved in this study and methodology describes the methods used in order to achieve this goal.

### 1.1 The Goal of this Study

The Holy Bible is regarded by the author of this paper as a special book given by God to human beings so that God who is in heaven could be known by those who are down here on this earth. It is a book through which God reveals Himself to people. Therefore, the Holy Bible should be understandable by people.

In Chinese *tiān shū* 天书 ‘book from heaven’ refers to a book which is impossible for human beings to understand because it is beyond their comprehension. Although the Holy Bible is really a *tiān shū* 天书 ‘book from heaven,’ it should not be an incomprehensible *tiān shū* 天书 ‘book from heaven’ to the Chinese readers. However, this depends on how well the translations communicate.

There are several different translations of the Holy Bible in Chinese. Some translations in Classical Chinese or ancient Chinese are out of use because of translation or linguistic problems such as language change.

In the past century, six different major versions have been translated into Mandarin Chinese: the Union Mandarin Version (UMV), the New Chinese Version (NCV), the Today’s Chinese Version (TCV), the Chinese Living Bible (CLB), the Putonghua Version (PTHV) and the Lǚ’s Version. The Lǚ’s Version has a very narrow

audience—theology students or others who are interested in detailed Bible study but do not know Greek. It is a very literal translation and the language in this version is very unnatural in Chinese since it tries to show the linguistic features of the original languages of the Holy Bible—Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. The other five versions are not as literal as the Lü's Version. Having a wider target audience, they are more used than the Lü's Version. Among these five versions, the Union Mandarin Version is the only widely accepted version among Chinese-speaking Christians and churches all over the world. Finding out why these four new versions could not replace the older established version, even though the language has changed in the course of almost one hundred years, is a worthwhile reason for comparing the translation quality of these five versions.

Besides being used more or less by the majority Chinese, the Han people, these versions of the Holy Bible are also read by the minority groups whose mother tongues are different languages than Chinese. How well these versions communicate also influences these peoples since they do not have the Holy Bible in their own languages at all. Besides this, some minority groups use these Chinese versions as source texts to translate the Holy Bible into their mother tongues. Since Chinese is their second language and most of them are not very fluent in it, it is not an easy task for them to tell which versions are better translated or more reliable. Using these versions without discernment is not wise. Therefore, it is important and helpful for them to know, even roughly, how well these versions are translated.

The goal of this thesis is to analyze the five commonly used Chinese versions of the Bible by comparing a selected portion from the *Epistle to the Colossians* in the New Testament. The functional equivalence, or meaning-based, approach is used to investigate whether these versions are accurate, natural, clear and acceptable.

## 1.2 Methodology

In order to meet the goal, the following methodology is used:

1. From the different translation approaches, the functional equivalence approach was chosen because of its significance in the field of Bible translation from the 1960's until now.
2. Five meaning-based versions were chosen for analysis. They are: the Union Mandarin Version (UMV), the New Chinese Version (NCV), the Today's Chinese Version (TCV), the Chinese Living Bible (CLB) and the Putonghua Version (PTHV).
3. Three portions of text of different genres were chosen from the New Testament to be compared based on the functional equivalence approach. These three portions are: verses 1-10 in chapter 19 of *the Gospel of Luke* (Luke 19:1-10), verses 1-7 in chapter 1 of *the Epistle to the Romans* (Romans 1:1-7) and verses 6-15 in chapter 2 of *the Epistle to the Colossians* (Colossians 2:6-15). These three portions of texts are of different genres: Luke 19:1-10 is a narrative, Romans 1:1-7 is expository and Colossians 2:6-15 is hortatory. Based on the difficulty of the exegetical problems and the challenge of clear and natural re-expression of the concepts in the target language, these three portions can be categorized as: 1) the easy passage is Luke 19:1-10. It is easy because the meaning is obvious and the narrative nature of the passage makes it easy to be re-expressed in the target language; 2) the medium difficult passage is Romans 1:1-7. Exegesis, "the process of discovering the meaning of the source language text which is to be translated" (Larson 1984:48), of this passage is relatively easy, but the ideas are complicated and difficult to be re-expressed in a clear and natural way in the target language; and 3) the extremely difficult passage is Colossians 2:6-15. It is so difficult for

- the following reasons: 1) Exegesis is hard. Many commentators have different viewpoints about the meaning of this passage. Research is needed to find out the meaning; 2) The structure is very complex. According to Nestle (1960:511-512), verses 8-15 comprise only one long sentence with many concepts crowded in it. It is very hard to translate into other languages since they have different sentence structures, information load, and sentence length etc. to convey the same concepts and logical relations; and 3) The concepts are hard to express in simple language. The concepts are profound and hard to put into words, especially in a language which may have no Christian concepts or terms.
4. The three selected portions of texts from five different versions of the Holy Bible were compared verse by verse. It turned out that the translation problems which occur in Luke 19:1-10 and Romans 1:1-7 occur in Colossians 2:6-15 as well. Therefore, only one passage, namely Colossians 2:6-15, was chosen to be discussed and presented in detail herein. The reasons for choosing Colossians 2:6-15 are that this section is extremely difficult and that it is highly representative of the types of translation challenges found throughout the Holy Bible.
  5. Five versions of Colossians 2:6-15 are analyzed and compared verse by verse. The Greek New Testament is used as the original text for analyzing and comparing. Original text, pronunciation in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) based on Koine Greek, grammatical tags, gloss, and free translation are listed verse by verse<sup>2</sup>. Commentaries and dictionaries are referred to in order to find out the meaning of the original text. Most of the time the

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<sup>2</sup> The Greek text and grammatical tags are based on pp. 614-615 of the Analytical Greek New Testament which was edited by Barbara and Timothy Friberg in 1981. The gloss is based on pp. 466-467 of the Interlinear Hebrew/Greek English Bible, edited by Jay Green in 1981.

commentators share the same or similar viewpoints about this passage. However, at some points they have different opinions. If so, the most likely correct exegesis is chosen by giving the reasons. Based on this exegetical analysis, the translations of the five different versions of the corresponding verses are analyzed. Both the merits and drawbacks are discussed. Based on the analysis and discussions with other native speakers of Mandarin Chinese, some suggestions by the functional equivalence approach are given to make improvements on the translation of the verses under study.

6. The detailed analysis of the five versions of the selected passage is categorized according to the linguistic problems which occur in translation. How the different versions handle these problems is compared. A chart is drawn to show the results of this comparison.
7. Conclusions are drawn based on the chart of the comparison results. Further study is suggested as well.