

CHAPTER 3

FIVE CHINESE VERSIONS OF THE HOLY BIBLE

3.0 Introduction

Five Chinese versions of the Holy Bible have been chosen for analysis and comparison. 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). General background information about these five versions is provided below, including the when, who, why, for whom each version was translated and the translation principles used.

3.1 The Union Mandarin Version 和合本 (UMV)

By the end of the 19th century, with the greatly increasing need to have a version of the Holy Bible which could be read and understood by as many people as possible all over China, different denominations and missionary organizations in China decided to join their efforts and translate the Holy Bible into the colloquial language—*Bái Huà Wén* 白话文 ‘the plain language.’

Calvin Wilson Mateer (狄考文), Henry Blodget (白汉理), C. Goodrich (富善), G. Owen (文书田), John Livingston Nevius (倪维思), John R. Hykes (海格思), Thomas Bramfitt (布蓝菲), F. W. Baller (鲍康宁), S.R. Clarke (克拉克) and S. Lewis (鹿依仕) were the main western missionaries who translated the Union Mandarin Version (UMV). However, help obtained from Chinese scholars and checking done with many other native speakers from different regions of China were indispensable for the translation of the UMV, especially because there were almost no books or revered religious books in *Bái Huà Wén* 白话文 ‘the plain language’ to refer to as the standard style. Without the involvement and commitment of these Chinese scholars, translating the Holy Bible into the plain language would have been impossible (Zetzsche 2002:260-264).

The translation of the New Testament was finished in 1906. The translation of the Old Testament was finished in 1919. When the whole Bible was published in 1919, the New Testament had already been revised three times, and the first five Books in the Old Testament, the Book of Job, and Psalms had been revised once.

The source text for the Union Mandarin Version was the English Revised Version's Greek source text (Zetzsche 2002:284)—the seventeenth edition of the Nestle text (Comfort 1990:26).

The target audience was Chinese people all over the whole of China (Zetzsche 2002:325; Hsu 1983:139).

The translation principles were: 1) Use the colloquial language used and understood by the common people in their daily life to translate the meaning of the original text. This language should be understood all over China instead of only in some regions. When it is read from the pulpit, it should be understood by audiences of all classes; 2) Avoid literary words and uncommon words; 3) The syntax structure should conform to the colloquial form in order to have a better Chinese style; 4) The style should be simple, clear, elegant and concise. It should be really Chinese; 5) Figures of speech and illustrations should be translated instead of being paraphrased; and 6) Translation should be close to the original text when permitted by the customary usages of the language (Zetzsche 2002:325-329).

3.2 The New Chinese Version 新译本 (NCV)

The majority of Chinese Christians were using the Union Mandarin Version Bible while the language was in the process of changing. Some people felt the need for a new translation. With the support of the Lockman Foundation, over thirty Chinese Biblical scholars from different denominational backgrounds translated the Holy Bible into modern Chinese. This was called *Shèng Jīng Xīn Yì Běn* 圣经新译本 'The New Chinese Version' (Broomhall 2000:261; Zetzsche 2002:415).

The Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (1977), *The NT Greek text* published by the United Bible Societies (1966 A.D., 1st edition), and the Union Mandarin Version (1919) were the source texts for this new version (Broomhall 2000:261; Zetzsche 2002:415).

The translation of the New Testament was finished in 1976 and the translation of the Old Testament was finished in 1992. It was published by the Christian bookshop Tiān Dào and the Worldwide Bible Society (Broomhall 2000:261; Zetzsche 2002:415).

There are varied viewpoints about the translation principles used in this version: 1) According to Zetzsche (2002:415), formal equivalence was the translation principle used for this version; 2) Joseph Hong, a translation consultant of the United Bible Societies, made the comment on NCV that “it is claimed to be a functional equivalence translation into Modern Chinese, but in fact appears to be modified text of the UMV Bible” (Hong 2002:241). This evidence suggests that functional equivalence may be the attempted translation principle for NCV; and 3) According to <http://www.worldwidebible.net/English/NCV/>, the website of Worldwide Bible Society-North America on 18 December 2003, “NCV features its strict compliance with the four principles, i.e. (1) exalting Jesus Christ, (2) upholding inerrant doctrines, (3) striving for absolute faithfulness to the original Holy Bible and (4) pursuing high readability.” The statement of the third principle does not clearly define “faithfulness” in terms of communicating the original meaning of the source text or closeness of form.

After analyzing the selected portion from NCV and comparing it with the analysis of the same text from other four versions, a further comment on the translation principles used in the NCV will be made.

3.3 The Today's Chinese Version 现代中文译本 (TCV)

“Following the publication of the English Good News Bible (Today's English Version or TEV), UBS launched a similar translation in Chinese” (Hong 2002:243).

Today's English Version of the Bible (1971, 3rd edition) was used as the model text and the source text. In 1975, the New Testament of *Xiàn Dài Zhōng Wén Yì Běn* 现代中文译本 'Today's Chinese Version' was published by the United Bible Societies. In 1979, the translation of the Old Testament of *Xiàn Dài Zhōng Wén Yì Běn* 现代中文译本 was finished. *The Biblia Hebraica* (1952, 3rd edition) was used for revising the Old Testament. The Greek text published by the United Bible Societies (1968, 2nd edition; 1975, 3rd edition) was used for revising the New Testament (Hsu 1983:144 -155; Broomhall 2000:261).

The translator was Xǔ Shì Mù 许牧世 (Moses Hsu) and the editors were Luò Wéi Rén 骆维仁, Zhōu Lián Huá 周联华, Jiāo Míng 焦明 and Wáng Chéng Zhāng 王成章 (Hong 2002:243; Zetzsche 2002:414).

The target readers were the Chinese churches and the new readers of the Holy Bible (Hsu 1983:195-196).

The translation principle used in this version was functional equivalence. Colloquial language was used. Terminology unfamiliar to non-Christians and transliterations were avoided as much as possible. Some reference materials were provided for a better understanding. Modern names for measurements and money were used (Hsu 1983:198-204).

3.4 The Chinese Living Bible 当代圣经版 (CLB)

Another translation project was launched in the 1970's with Zhāng Mù Ái 张慕皑 as the head of the translation team. Kenneth Taylor's English Living Bible (1971), a paraphrase translation, was the resource text for this new Chinese

version—*Dāng Dài Fú Yīn* 当代福音 ‘the Chinese Living Gospel.’ The New Testament was published in 1974 and the Old Testament was published in 1979. The name of this version was changed to *Dāng Dài Shèng Jīng* 当代圣经 ‘the Chinese Living Bible.’ The publisher was the Living Bible International (Hong Kong) which was merged with the International Bible Society (Hong Kong) in 1992. According to Zetzsche (2002:413), meaning-based translation principles were applied. Simple language and some words popular in Mainland China were used. The simplified Chinese characters made it easy to read for the new generation in Mainland China. The target audience was non-believers and new Christians (Broomhall 2000:261).

3.5 Putonghua Version 普通话本 (PTHV)

A new version of the Holy Bible, called the Putonghua Version was translated and published its entirety in 2,000 for the following stated reasons: 1) The meaning of some words has changed through the past century, and 2) more manuscripts have been found and they can be used as the original texts. This project was launched by the World Bible Translation Center (WBTC). The target audience is anyone who is familiar with Putonghua, the common language used in China. Based on the preface to the New Testament in the PTHV Bible published by WBTC, the translation principle of PTHV is functional equivalence which emphasizes effective and natural communication to the target audience of the accurate meaning of the original writer instead of merely matching the lexicon meanings found in the dictionary.

According to an email from Roger Massey of the World Bible Translation Center (WBTC) on December 17, 2003, the translators were thirty native speakers of Putonghua from Mainland China.