

A New World of the Tradition of Bible Translation into Chinese is Opening up:

Review of Study on the Tradition of Bible Translation into Chinese

REN Xiaochuan^{1,*}

Abstract: As the canon of Christianity, the Bible has constantly been the focus of intensive study. But study on Chinese Bible translation remains inadequate by comparison. Ren Dongsheng deals with this field in depth and width in his book entitled *Study on the Tradition of Bible Translation into Chinese*. The book review covers the outline of the book and comments on the key ideas and research findings. Apart from elaborate materials and expert discussion, his study on Yan Fu's Bible translation has added to the richness of Chinese Bible translation. Undoubtedly, this book is the first monograph that centers on Chinese Bible translation study in great insight.

Key words: Bible study; Chinese Translation; Cultural Tradition

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The Bible is not only the canon of Christianity but also a very important part of culture in the West. (Ma Yuelan, 2008) It is viewed as "cornerstone of western civilization" The word "*Bible*" comes from the Greek word *biblia*, meaning "books". The term "*Bible*" is best known in reference to the Christian Scriptures bearing various titles: *The Scriptures*, *The Holy Scriptures*, *The Word*, *The Word of Truth*, *The Old and New Testaments* (Huang Long, 1988, p. 268). Although known as the "Book of Books", it is not a book but a collection of 66 books originally written in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Koine Greek by over 40 different authors from all walks of life: shepherds, farmers, tent-makers, physicians, fishermen, priests, philosophers and kings. It was written over a period of nearly 1600 years, from around 1450 B.C. to about 100 A.D. Despite these differences in occupation and the span of years it took to write it, the Bible is an extremely cohesive and unified book and it is worked on from different angles ranging from literature to history, from archaeology to translation.

Of the 6,912 languages in the world, 2,936 languages are in progress of Bible translation (Bible translations by language, 2010). It is a common fact that the Bible has been translated more times, and into more languages, than any other books. The Bible has become the book that has the largest number of translated versions and readers. Eugene A. Nida claimed that Bible translating had a longer tradition,

¹ School of Foreign Languages, Qingdao University of Science and Technology, China. Research Orientation: Translation

* Corresponding Author. Email: 69 Songling Road, Teachers' Mailbox No.502, School of Foreign Languages, Qingdao University of Science and Technology, Laoshan District, Shandong Province, Zipcode:266061 E-mail: rxc197200@163.com

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involved far more languages and was concerned with a greater variety of cultures and included a wider range of literary types than any comparable kind of translating. However, "Translations are not made in a vacuum." (Lefevere, 2004, p. 14). Ideology determines the translator's basic translation strategy, and also his approaches to the linguistic problems of the source text and to the related questions of the source text register. A translator lives in a particular culture of the particular times. His understanding of himself and his own culture is one of the many factors restricting his translation methods.

Currently, the translation of Chinese classical works into foreign languages is on its way while Chinese Bible translation is still dominated by *the Chinese Union Version* (UV), which was originally translated nearly a century ago. The study of Bible translation into Chinese is still in its infancy in China and it is overlooked and excluded from the mainstream academic study due to cultural, ideological and historical reasons. Furthermore, there exist wide gaps between China and the world, church and outside the church in this field. In this sense, the study of Bible translation into Chinese is still "a garden locked up" and "a spring enclosed" (Holy Bible, 1987) in China.

Chinese Bible translation has covered a history of over 1300 years tracing back to the Tang Dynasty. How to read the thousand-year history of Bible translation is a question of perspectives. In the field of translation in Mainland China, the "cultural turn" is prevailing. Translations are facts of target cultures. (Gideon Toury, 1977) Scholars adopt theories in the field of culture in studying translation. *Study on the Tradition of Bible Translation into Chinese* by Ren Dongsheng can be seen as a giant leap both for him as a scholar and for translation study with a "cultural turn" in China.

This book is divided into ten chapters. In Chapter One, a new concept is touched upon using the story of the "Babel" to illustrate his statements. Chapter Two focuses on the interpretation and translation of the Bible from the perspective of pure translation. In Chapter Three, the author brings the readers to the field of a comparative study of Bible translation in China. Next chapter deals with theories concerning Chinese Bible translation using a lot of case studies. In Chapter Five, it covers the application of the principle of "Dynamic Equivalence" in *Today's Chinese Version*. Chapter Six involves the shifting roles of Chinese scholars and translators in Chinese Bible translation (helper-associate-independent translator). Chapter Seven collects valuable resources of Yan Fu's translation of Chapters 1-4 of Mark. In the following 2 chapters, Chinese poetics and modern Chinese literature are analyzed from a different angle. The last chapter is viewed as a summary of the whole book---revelation of Bible translation culture in China. The comments are as follows.

In the first place, the selection of this subject asks for great insight and admirable courage for Bible study is still a "mine field" in most scholars' eyes. His quest for truth and deep love for freedom of academy has led him to lay his eyes on this subject and get down to work without hesitation or apprehension. (Zhao Wei, 2009)

In the second place, he adopts a very complicated system and makes "the tradition of Bible translation" the core of his system for his study covers different fields ranging from Bible study to translation study. As Yang ZiJian remarked, the systematic research method is an important method, which is a weak point with regard to Chinese academic tradition. (Ren Dongsheng, 2007, p. 3).

In the third place, Ren Dongsheng combines the current research achievements home and abroad with his particular focus and manages to make a breakthrough in studying Chinese translation activities by the translators, translation strategies and translation effects.

In the fourth place, he has paved the way for further study. For one thing, he has made great contributions in collecting valuable materials and abundant resources. For another, his study can spark off enlightening ideas and allow for continual study of this subject and other possible subjects.

Undoubtedly, this book is not without its drawbacks. For instance, the comparative study of the translations of three religions' sacred books seems to be on the brief side and the arguments are weak in a sense. Also, the proportion of historical narration is obviously much higher than that of remarks or analysis and explanation.

There is a sense in which the work of translation is never wholly finished. This applies to all great literature and uniquely so to the Bible." (Preface to NIV, 1978). We can claim the study of Bible translation into Chinese also has a long way to go.

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