

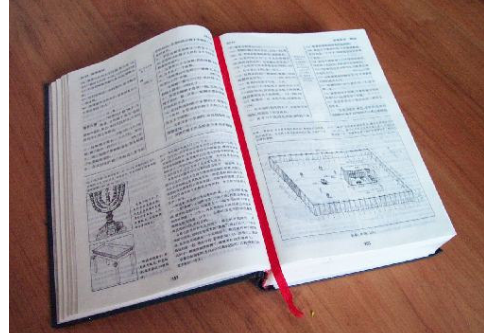
THE CHINESE BIBLE: HOW WE GOT IT AND HOW WE NEED IT

Mans Ramstad (pseudonym; picture not available)

Introduction

The topic of “the Bible and China” has been highly charged ever since China’s opening in the early 1980s. Smuggling of Bibles and “cloak and dagger” approaches to getting the Word of God into the hands of Chinese people has received much attention in the West. We currently get such mixed reporting on China, so that some people even imagine that you cannot buy Bibles in China, or that the Bible they have is in some way distorted. While the motives of most of the people engaged in these kinds of activities or reporting on them may have been respectable, it has contributed to misunderstandings and untold controversy regarding the issue of the Bible and the church in China. In the midst of the controversial cacophony, we desperately need reliable and measured reporting on the issue of the Bible in China.

The impact of the Bible on Chinese literature and thought in the early part of the 20th century was significant, and one gets the feeling that we are the verge of another Biblical Revolution in China. In fact, there is currently an exhibition in the U.S. called "A Lamp to My Feet, A Light to My Path -- The Bible Ministry Exhibition of the Church in China," tracing the course of the Bible's early history in China, and through to the present (Ni, 2006). Writing from within China, both geographically and mentally, this paper will revisit the history of the Bible in China with some thoughts about the future relationship between the Bible and Chinese society, as well as the church. I hope to encourage you that God’s Word is living and active and has accomplished, and continues to accomplish it’s purpose in China in amazing ways.



The History of Bible Translation in China

Early Beginnings

The Bible was partly translated into Chinese during the Tang Dynasty (7th century AD), when Persian Christian missionaries (Nestorians) arrived in China (Sunquist, 2001). During the Ming and Ching dynasties, missionaries from Roman Catholic (Jesuit) and Russian Orthodox churches also worked on translations of the New Testament and Psalms (Sunquist, 2001).¹

The Protestant Bible

Beginning in the early 19th century and up to the publication of the currently dominant Union Version of the Chinese Bible, nine different translation teams produced various translations of the Bible (Zetzsche (Zetzsche, 1999). The first challenge these translators faced was what type of language to use. There were three types of translation done: Wenli² (high literary style, used by Morrison/Milne and Marshman), Easy Wenli (less literary, used by Schereschewsky) and Guoyu (the national common language, used by Medhurst).

The first Bible was published by Marshman and Lassar in 1822. It was rushed and in the end 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,

¹ For Persian / Syrian ("Nestorian") and Catholic assessments about the nature and amount of biblical translations made, I would recommend the major work edited by Nicolas Standaert, entitled *Handbook of the History of Christianity in China*, Volume 1: 635-1800.

² *Wenli* means “the principles of literature.” Even though it is not a Chinese word historically, over time it came to mean “classical Chinese.”

1998; Starr, 1998). It was of poor quality because they did not involve local people in the translation very much. 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. But eventually he learned that many of his preachers were unconverted opium-smokers and criminals who sold the evangelistic materials to the printer, who then sold them back to Gutzlaff (Sunquist, 2001). This has become one of the most ignominious events in Chinese missions history, and is still used as an example of the danger of foreign missions in China.

The early translations of the Bible followed classical Chinese patterns of literature, where only the highly educated person could understand the text, and even then it was only understood by the reader himself (reading was not an option for women at that time). With high illiteracy it was crucial that the common people could understand the Bible to some degree when read aloud, requiring the use of the common people's language. Surveys in the 19th century discovered that Mandarin was the common basis of language from the Great Wall to the Yangtze River. Initially Mandarin was considered inappropriate due to its "colloquial coarseness," but the realization of the need for people to be able to understand the Scriptures eventually gave way, and translations began to follow this pattern. For example, 1852 marked the publication of what is known as the *Delegates' Version* of the Bible. It used a high style of language only understood by the highly educated minority. But within only four years, in 1856, a Mandarin *Delegates Version* was made, which was easier to understand. The *Delegates Version* quickly became the most influential version of the Bible and eventually 100,000 copies of the *Delegates Version* were successfully distributed. It was unique in that it was aided by a

Chinese scholar of high repute, Wang Tao. He is the only Bible translator of that era known for literary work outside Bible translation.

The *Nanking Version* came out in 1856 and the *Peking Version* in 1872. The progenitor of the *Union Version* of the Bible was first published in Easy Wenli in 1902. This jump-started the process so that in 1907 a High Wenli version of the *Union Version* was published. In 1919 the *Union Version* of the Bible was published. Foreigners were mainly responsible for the translation of the *Union Version*, which resulted in many translation problems, including word choice³ and problems in grammar and style. Because it was made by foreigners, the *Union Version* was highly criticized. It was also not too faithful to the original. But it was embraced by the Chinese people, especially the overseas Chinese community, who resisted changing it. They prevailed over the opinions of some Mainland Chinese believers, who wanted to change it, and thus we have our *Union Version* today.

This shows the at times unfortunate influence that foreign missionaries have. At the time the missionaries said theirs would not be a final product and they even expected the Chinese Christians to improve on it, but it never happened. This shows how important it is to have local people involved in translation and writing projects from the beginning. Their input is crucial. We currently see the blatant translation of many, many Christian materials from the West into Chinese where the only role the Chinese coworkers play is to translate and distribute the materials. This is unfortunate. We should learn from history. This happened in the middle of what Tang has called the "golden era" in terms of dissemination of the Bible in China – the period between 1912 and 1937. (Tang, 2006).

³ For example, the translation for fellowship of *jiaotong* rather than *tuangqi*, and sin as *zui* rather than *guofan*.

The *Union Version* still has the widest following in Chinese churches throughout the world, even though the language is now quite dated. Furthermore, it has the emotional following that the King James Bible has among some Westerners, so it is difficult to introduce new versions into the Chinese churches today. There are several excellent translations available now in both traditional and simplified script, but these are not yet readily available in China. The *Xinyi Ben* by the Worldwide Bible Society is somewhat like a revision of the Union Version. It is very readable and easy to use. There is also a *Chinese NIV* project underway that has used translators from Mainland China. These translations will be very welcome in the future as they become more available in China.

Lessons Learned from the History of Bible Translation in China

This 100-plus year process of Bible translation in China demonstrated the importance of relying on previous versions of the Bible. Mutual dependence on other translators was very high. Morrison was highly dependent on Catholic sources, which had been in process for 700 years! It is important that in any era we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us and benefit from their excellent work and contributions. It is also important that we humbly acknowledge the road they have paved.

Generally speaking the Protestant Bibles were made in great haste, which compromised their quality. There is a lesson for Protestants today who are equally hasty to translate Christian books or training materials for use in China. Hasty translation is poor translation, which either is never used or is misleading. At a minimum it sets a poor precedent for Christians that it is acceptable to rely on poor quality materials. Even

though it is not perfect, the *Union Version* took three decades to translate and was a better translation than previous versions. Furthermore, it has stood the test of time.

Early versions of the Bible had a huge impact on Chinese culture in the first part of the 20th century, including the May Fourth movement. Are we allowing the Word of God to have its due social and cultural impact or are we limiting the Bible to the personal use of the individual believer? In the early years the Chinese Bible as a piece of literature grew ever more popular, even beyond the Christian church. This leads to our next section, which is an introduction to the impact of the Chinese Bible on Chinese society over the years.

The Historical Impact of the Bible on China

The Word of God changes lives as it is the Spirit-empowered medium of humanity's encounter with God. Under the Holy Spirit, unbelievers see and hear God, grow to admire Jesus Christ, God-incarnate, and open themselves up to God. Through His Word and the work of the Holy Spirit, some of them come to believe in God, and then His Word becomes the means by which they come to know this God, the foundation upon which they build their lives (Luke 6:48), and the means to know how to worship Him (John 4:24). The Word of God has impacted Chinese culture in many ways, both in transforming people into followers of Jesus Christ, and in changing society.

Chinese people revere holy scriptures of any kind, including the Bible. This has influenced the extent to which the Bible has been respected by Chinese people. In the past, the Bible impacted China beyond the church, and had significant impact on social and cultural development. This has been true of many developing countries where the

Bible has found a home among communities able to identify with the social and economic realities portrayed by the Bible (Jenkins, 2006).

The Bible had a strong impact on addressing social injustice. During the 19th century women still endured the torture of foot binding. In 1874, women in a church in Xiamen came together and organized the "Foot Unbinding Society" and in 1875 the "Heavenly Feet Society" was organized in Shanghai. Both of these were for the express purpose of opposing the custom of foot binding. By that time many women were already following the teaching of the Bible that God created everything complete and that it was wrong to use the methods of men to damage what God had created. The Biblical reference that parents should not provoke their children to anger and other such texts were also used as a basis to show that girls' feet should not be bound (Cao, 1995).

The Bible also had an empowering impact on the lives of people, especially women. 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 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 come through the wide open door of the church, the church discovered that these women needed to improve their level of education. In order to receive baptism, new believers needed to memorize the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer and other passages, but at that time most of the women were illiterate and unable to learn these important Christian statements. Therefore the main component of most women's worship services and gatherings was teaching the women songs, Chinese characters and the Bible. Later they began using "1000 Characters" as a textbook. Some churches and rural evangelistic

meeting points established short-term literacy and preaching classes and even schools for the women. In some cases they would attend class for a set time, such as a half a day, during which they would learn to read and write, for the purpose of eliminating illiteracy (Cao, 1995).

The May Fourth Movement of 1919 represented a major transformation in education and Chinese society. It meant liberation from the limitations of classic literature with a movement toward embracing the common people and their language as the medium for communicating important literary works. Although the impact of the Bible on the May Fourth movement and the people involved was mixed, it did have a significant impact (Li, 2004).⁴ For example, the Bible brought to Chinese literature a variety of literary expression such as parables and poems and the many forms of writing that are found in its pages.⁵ This influenced the way Chinese scholars began to write, which had previously followed a poetic formula. Early reformers such as Liang Qichao, once an advisor to the Empress Dowager, cited the Bible's teaching of "the spirit of love" (博爱精神 *boai jingshen*) in his political advocacy. Even Communist reformer Chen Duxiu loved the thoughts (理念 *linian*) and example of Jesus Christ.

During the years of Communist rule prior to the opening and reforms of Deng Xiaoping, it was dangerous for Chinese citizens to be found in possession of anything vaguely foreign—including Bibles and other religious materials. Many Christians hid

⁴ *The Double-edged Sword* by Douglas Robinson and *Bible in China: The Literary and Intellectual Impact*", edited by Irene Eber, Sze-kar Wan, Knud Wald and Roman Malek, document the influences, literary themes, and problems associated with these events and the account of biblical themes among Chinese intellectuals in those years.

⁵ Slovakian scholar Marion Galik has made his life's work studying how the Bible and biblical passages are handled by Chinese intellectuals of various sorts. His essays reveal much about the mixed reception of biblical literature across the decades of the 20th century. You can find them in his book *Influence, Translation and Parallels: Selected Studies on the Bible in China*, published in 2004 by Monumenta Serica as a Festschrift for his 70th birthday

precious Bibles or committed long-portions of text to memory in order to preserve God's word. I had the privilege of seeing a friend's family Bible and hymnal, which still had the stains of manure on them, for it had been buried in the ground under the sheep pen during the Cultural Revolution. Mao's death and the end of the Cultural Revolution enabled Christians to slowly come back into public view. These early fellowships recovered their hidden Bibles while at the same time calling for more. Overseas Christians responded by carrying Bibles into China to fill the lack. This era demonstrated that churches experiencing persecution and isolation can endure and even multiply if they have the Scriptures in the local language (Hill, 2006).

Aware of the desperate need for more Bibles in China, in 1984 the China Christian Council began the process of setting the Union Version of the Bible in horizontal, simplified script in order to begin printing. After a few years of negotiating, the Amity Printing Press was established in 1985 as a joint venture between the China Christian Council and the United Bible Societies. In 1986 they printed their first run of Bibles—using paper donated from UBS and actually printing them at a local People's Liberation Army printing press. By 1987 Amity was printing its own Bibles and Christian literature to meet the needs of China's Christian millions (Kaiser, 2002).

Opportunities and Challenges Regarding the Role of the Bible in China

Bible Publishing

Between 1985 and 2002 over 26 million Bibles were printed in China. Currently over 2.5 million Bibles are printed annually and distributed within China—more than anywhere else in the world. Some 200,000 of these are given away at no cost to poor

believers, while the rest are sold through over 80 sales and distribution centers across the country at about \$0.90 US per Bible.

An ever-increasing variety of scriptures are becoming available in the local church bookstores in China. There are now at least two different translations (the Union Version and a modern language version for inquirers), a topical Bible, a parallel of the synoptics, English-Chinese parallels, leather-bound gift Bibles, and four different kinds of study Bibles—including chain references and Zondervan's *NIV Study Bible* notes.

Secular bookstores in China also sell Bible story books and are increasingly providing good Christian titles as well such as *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth*, *The Cost of Discipleship*, *Church History in Plain Language* and others. Several large cities in China also have Christian bookstores operating in public, in addition to those in the church, so this has also opened up the availability of Christian books to wider audiences.

Revival on the Way

Living in China one gets the feeling that we are on the verge of another revival of the impact of the Bible on society (Aikman, 2003). The space within which Christian faith is allowed to exist in Chinese society is growing. I frequently find officials to own Bibles and to have a deep interest in understanding the content of the Bible. Whether for personal reasons, or to better understand Christian culture, it reveals the extent to which they are aware of the power of the Bible. It is crucial that we be ready with “a word in good season,” and likewise to be training up young believers who are able to “rightly

handle the word of truth," including weighing it up well with classical and contemporary Chinese literature and thought.

A popular phrase in China in the mid-1990s was "cultural Christians" (wenhua Jidutu). It was used to criticize intellectuals in China at that time who were intellectually interested in Christianity but not institutionally committed to church life. Since then, and especially in the first years of the 21st century, many of these persons have become real Christian advocates working under distorted conditions. So the gospel is at work in China even among intellectuals, but it is happening in subtle and profound ways that would not be fully appreciated by Western observers.

The Bible and Education

The Bible is recognized in Chinese education circles as a crucial piece of literature to understanding Western culture. However, the Bible is still vehemently opposed by the Chinese education system as a means of education. Furthermore public school text books still contain propaganda opposing religion and highlighting the historical mistakes of missionaries and the Christian church. So in educational circles, the Bible and faith are still sensitive topics.

Many universities in China have established departments of religious studies in recent years. Although they are designed for the academic study of all religions and not for the promotion of any one religion, they provide opportunities for Christian scholars from around the world to teach Biblical and theological courses openly. Interest among young people toward religion in general, and Christianity in particular, is very high (Li &

Liu, 2000), so that China is again poised for a Biblical renaissance in both the church and society.

Christians working in China should be prepared to think diligently about the public relevance of the Bible, and ready to teach the Bible in the most unlikely settings. We have started a training course to train social workers with our organization. This has brought us into the company of the director of the Social Work Department of a local college. Social work requires an understanding of human nature and decision-making. In a recent training I taught the dual doctrines of the *imago Dei* and original sin as crucial foundations to understanding human nature. This director found the content relevant and persuasive. The Word of God is for the purpose of God calling us to Himself, it is not a social tool, but the process God uses to communicate to stubborn humanity and the way He uses His Word to call people to Himself urges us to be thoughtful and creative, and not “hoard” the Bible for the church’s use.

The main education role for the Bible now is in educating new believers in literacy and basic language skill. In the churches, especially in rural areas, there are many illiterate women. Many churches have already established Bible Reading Clubs for the women, using *A Basic Christian Reader* as a textbook. This is useful for the women to learn to read and also to understand basic Christian teachings. Of course, educating women doesn't stop at wiping out illiteracy, it also includes improvement in Bible study methods and the use of Bible study aids (Cao, 1995).

The Bible and Society

Early on, the Bible's influence was mainly as mediated by missionaries. But their activities led to significant cultural transformation and reform in China. "Most Chinese scholars seem to agree that American missionaries in particular played a very significant role in the introduction of Western ideas, institutions, and values into China." (Shen & Zhu, 1998).

From its beginnings, the Bible has been a source of social reform and progress. And yet in some evangelical circles today, the Bible is treated primarily as a book to bring personal comfort to the believer or a tool to help one deal with personal problems. Have we deprived the world of enjoying the riches of the Word of God by refusing to more creatively relate the Bible to the world and her needs? We need to re-learn from Reinhold Neibuhr the use of "middle level axioms," the use of jargon and concepts that we share with the world, as a vehicle to communicate precious Biblical truths.⁶

Awareness of the need for churches in China to engage and relate to society as a part of her witness is growing. In an article on the Chinese church Dong Yanliang, President of the Qingdao Christian Council spoke to this issue, pledging to make the church he serves, Jiansulu Church, better known among Qingdao residents and more involved in the community" (Yan, 2006).

The Bible has been responsible for every manner of social movement – literary, social and otherwise over time, including in China. In the late 19th century an opium smoker in Shanxi Province named Xi Liaochi (later Xi Shengmo) was healed of his opium addiction by conversion to Christ. This inspired him to start a ministry of

⁶ During the era of Nazi Germany, the Barmen Convention of the Confessing Church clearly rejected the "Doctrine of the Two Spheres," stating, "We reject that there are some state spheres over which Christ is not sovereign." The church in China might model the confessing church by rejecting the communist expectation that personal faith is allowed, but in public is subject to the party line of unbelief.

addiction recovery using the Bible and a concoction of local herbal medicines as part of the therapy (Austin, 1996). The Bible was more than a means source of “personal, spiritual food,” it was a call to an ethic and a way of life that compelled him to serve others. It is high time we embrace a broader view of Biblical truth to guide all our thinking. The Bible speaks to everyday real-world issues of poverty and debt, urban crises, racial and gender inequalities, and state oppression, all issues pertinent to China and her current social changes (Jenkins, 2006). There is hope. Chinese scholars have written that even today, "The Bible has a major influence on many Chinese, including those who are not raised as Christians." (Tang, 2006)

Globalization and the Bible

A healthy market economy requires justice and integrity which is not part of human nature. The philanthropic teachings of Jesus Christ, Amos’ call for justice and Paul’s exhortation to “be transformed by the renewing of our minds,” are crucial ingredients of a global economy that brings blessing to all, and not just to some. The current extent of corruption and abuse of privilege by the rich the world over requires an ethic that runs counter to human nature. The Bible has proven to be the prophetic and wise word to check such abuses in Western countries. This impact is not strongly felt in China. However, the historical value of justice or righteousness (义 *yi*) in China shares much in common with Biblical teachings of righteousness, self-sacrifice and integrity. But the historical concept of righteousness (义 *yi*) in Chinese society today is not embraced or applied as it once was. We now have an opportunity for the Bible to provide content for a Chinese value that is rapidly disappearing, but which is a necessary check

on unbridled economic development, without which the divide between rich and poor will only widen.

Theology and church leadership are also being globalized, but as with economic globalization, the flow is primarily from the West to the rest. The majority of the teaching aids and theological works used in China today are still translations from Western sources. This is unfortunate. We need to provide funding and opportunity for cultural reflection by godly Chinese leaders so they can remove the gospel from its western wrapping. This is a project which has hardly just begun.

The Bible and the Church

The growth of the Chinese church in this generation is nothing short of remarkable. There are many things we can learn from the Chinese church (Hwa, 2004). Chinese Christians are deeply committed to the authority of Scripture and have a hunger for God's Word. There is a strong emphasis on obedience, discipleship and sacrifice, with a deep commitment to prayer. Repentance, with a strong emphasis on turning from sin, characterizes the church. The church in China has a clear focus on Christ and the cross, and is not encumbered with many other things. Because of its unique history, the church in China has learned how to coexist with a strong central government as a minority. These are all strengths of the Chinese church that we in the West can learn from.

The Chinese church has much to teach us about respect and love for the Word of God. Perhaps due to familiarity or postmodern influences, Western Christians have grown somewhat casual toward the Bible. Much preaching even in evangelical churches moves quickly from the text to application. Chinese evangelists stick close to the

Biblical text when they preach, and often read an entire chapter or more in preparation for the sermon. They tend to allegorize and some hermeneutics are risky, but they stick to the Bible. This is a good example for we sometimes over-educated Westerners.

The Chinese church also faces some challenges, some of which are elaborated in this paper. For example, there is a desperate shortage of trained leadership. There is a legalism in some churches, perhaps as a carryover from the fundamentalistic legacy of the foreign missionaries in the early part of the 20th century. Some fellowships in China currently exhibit an anti-academic and anti-world bias to the extreme. Some foreigners, unaware, or perhaps sympathetic to their extremist positions, are worsening the problem by supporting such groups and endorsing their teachings. Even as the church has many strengths, there is a real need for the re-engagement of the Chinese church with Chinese society, with the Word of God as our light and guide. Although history is somewhat mixed, Chinese history has given us some good examples to follow.

Bible Study and Theological Training

The Bible is God's Word given to humanity, to teach us about Him and to lead us to Him. Once we come to Him we are a part of His body, which is the church. God then uses His Word and the Holy Spirit to lead and guide the church. Therefore, at the end of the day, the Bible is especially for the church. I will conclude this essay with thoughts on the need for Bible study and training among believers and within the church.

There are 23 official Protestant seminaries and Bible Colleges in China, which openly train pastors and church workers under the approval of the China Christian Council. These seminaries emphasize Biblical content more than theology. They all

teach at least one course on China's religious regulations. The theological positions of the seminaries and their faculty vary considerably, with Nanjing's Jinling Seminary in Jiangsu Province serving as the most elite but also the most theologically liberal seminary. Correspondence courses are also offered. These seminaries provide solid Bible training, but they are too few to train enough pastors to meet the huge demand in China.

There are also many Bible training centers that function covertly. The quality and content of these covers a wide range. Some are highly sectarian, disengaged from society and antagonistic to other churches, especially the open church. Others are orthodox and provide good teaching, and avoid divisive attitudes as they seek to provide excellent and much-needed Bible training to lay workers and evangelists. Because of restrictions, there is a severe lack of coordination among the various training centers. This contributes to divisiveness and extremist teaching.

God's Word is loved by Chinese believers. It is now a wide-open playing field for Bible training in the midst of rapid church growth with a dearth of qualified church leaders and Bible teachers. This training must be done in ways that are appropriate to the China context and not for the aggrandizement of the trainers (Rowe & Strand, 2006).

China has a long literary history and literature has always been crucial to China. In former days the printed word was so precious that it was considered immoral to allow a piece of printed word to fall to the ground. This has contributed to Chinese people's love of literature, and their respect for the Word of God. There is no doubt the Bible is holy and is without error. In the midst of poor theological training, low literacy, limited formal training for preachers and teachers, the church is preserved by a reluctance to

leave the Word of God, and preaching that consists of reading long passages of Scripture with reflection on the text (limited surmising or elaborations).

In terms of teaching style, preaching and Bible teaching in China tend to focus on the “expert teacher.” The listener is passive and should not ask question, lest he reveal his ignorance, or insult the teacher. This basically Confucian teaching style makes it difficult to get participation from the learners (Strand, 1998). There are no small group Bible studies because people don’t trust other “common Christians” to have the authority to teach them, and so they defer to the “expert.” And yet small group Bible study is an effective way to get strong participation, to improve the teaching skills of the common believer and to provide intimate and personal spiritual support. This approach has the potential for development in China, especially among younger believers.

Bible training in China should involve both content and method. A new generation of believers welcomes more participatory approaches to learning and they expect to be able to access a multitude of sources of information, such as teaching aids and the internet. We should diligently teach these approaches to Chinese believers.

Sometimes I fear that the Chinese church’s opposition to society and fundamentalist suspicions toward education and academics will produce a generation of shallow Christian leaders ill-equipped to lead the church into a fierce and highly confident world. We should learn from history that a good Bible teacher is also one who can handle other forms of literature and knowledge. In the fourth century the ancient church engaged in a controversy when the Emperor Julian tried to impose a policy barring Christians from studying Greek philosophy. “After all, should not Christian young people study simply the Bible?” it was asked. Basil of Caesarea saw this as a

threat to the long-term welfare of the church; for this would prevent the church from nurturing young people in an atmosphere of intellectual rigor (Poon, 2004). Similarly, young churches today still have to capture the best minds of society and prepare them well. Let's avoid attitudes that feign spirituality but are actually insecurity that either the individual or the Word of God itself cannot stand in the face of so-called worldly knowledge.

Chinese theologians in China live as a minority community in a wider society that is pluralistic. The pressure on them to understand and pay attention to their relationship to society is heavy. I have benefited immensely from the thinking of some of them, including Ng Kam-weng (Ng, 1996), Bishop K.H. Ting (Ting, 2004), and Catholic theologian S. He (He, 1999). Although I don't agree with all their conclusions, I agree wholeheartedly with the spirit and impetus of their theological ambitions with regards to the role of the Bible and the church in society.

Summary

The written word is precious to Chinese people and has been from antiquity. This gave the Bible a good welcome into Chinese culture when it first appeared in the 19th and 20th centuries. The Bible was readable, when their own classic texts weren't, so it brought literacy to many people, and still does. The Bible not only provided the Word of God to people, it also brought liberation and opportunity to women and people of all classes. The Bible has impacted China in ways that far outstrip the size of the church and in an increasingly open China, the opportunity for the church to again bring the Word of God to play in Chinese society is open. The Chinese Bible and solid Bible teaching is

crucial for the future of the Chinese church to steer it clear of heresy and truly mine the entire riches of the Word of God.

References

- Aikman, D. (2003). *Jesus in Beijing* Washington, D.C.: Regnery
- Austin, A. (1996). Missions deam team. *Christian History*(52), 19-23.
- Cao, S. (1995). Looking Back at the Traditions of Christian Women in Ministry in the Chinese Church. *Tian Feng (Heavenly Wind)*(7).
- He, S. (1999). *Jidu Jiao yu Ruxue Duitan. (Dialogue between Christianity and Confucianism.)* Beijing, China: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe. (Religion and culture publishing.)
- Hill, H. (2006). The Vernacular Treasure: A century of mother-tongue Bible translation. *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 30(2), 82-88.
- Hwa, Y. (2004). The Church in China Today. *Transformation*, 21(2), 126-129.
- Jenkins, P. (2006). Reading the Bible in the global south. *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 30(2), 67-72.
- Kaiser, A. (2002). *Bibles in China.*: Evergreen.
- Li, S., & Liu, Q. (2000). *Qing Nian Yu Zong Jiao Re (Youth and religious fever)* Beijing, China: China Youth Publishing Press
- Li, X. (2004). *Shengjing yu zhongguo wenhua. (The Bible and Chinese Culture)*, *Tian Feng* pp. 38-39).
- Ng, K.-w. (1996). *From Christ to Social Practice: Christological Foundations for Social Practice in the Theologies of Albrecht Ritschl, Karl Barth and Jurgen Moltmann* Hong Kong: Alliance Bible Seminary
- Ni, Y. (2006). Partners in Faith, *Beijing Review* pp. 32-33).
- Pfister, L. (1998). The legacy of James Legge. *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 22(2), 77-82.
- Poon, M. (2004). Orthodoxy, Apologetics and Discipleship in the Anglican Communion. *Transformation*, 21(1), 25-30.
- Rowe, S., & Strand, M. (2006). *Finding Balance in a Changing China.* Taiyuan, Shanxi: Evergreen Publishers.
- Shen, D., & Zhu, W. (1998). Western missionary influence on the People's Republic of China: A survey of Chinese scholarly opinion between 1980-1990. *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 22(4), 154-158.
- Starr, J.B. (1998). The legacy of Robert Morrison. *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 22(2), 73-76.
- Strand, M.A. (1998). Teaching creative-thinking skills in a Confucist context. pp. 1-8). Colorado Springs, CO: Colorado Springs Osteopathic Foundation and Family Medicine Center.
- Sunquist, S.W. (2001). *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity* (p. 937). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Tang, Y. (2006). Becoming a Believer, *Beijing Review* pp. 20-27).
- Ting, K.H. (2004). *God Is Love* Colorado: CCMi

Yan, W. (2006). A Church Interrupted, *Beijing Review* pp. 30-31).
Zetsche, J.O. (1999). *The Bible in China: The History of the Union Version* Netetal,
Germany: Steyler Verlag

Published in www.globalmissiology.org in Contextualization section, January, 2007