

CONTEMPLATING THE FUTURE OF CHINESE BIBLE TRANSLATION: A FUNCTIONALIST APPROACH

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Functionalist approach to translation: A sketch

To set up a framework for discussion, we shall first visit some developments in a functionalist approach to translation in recent decades. In *Toward a Science of Translating* (1964) and *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (1969, with Charles R. Taber), Eugene A. Nida distinguishes between formal identity and dynamic equivalence in translation (e.g., Nida and Taber 1969, 12) and advocates that the focus in translating should not be the “form of the message” but “the response of the receptor” (Nida and Taber 1969, 1). The task of translating, then, “consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style” (Nida and Taber 1969, 12). To accomplish this task, Nida proposes a three-step process in translating, starting with the grammatical and semantic analysis of the source-language text (source text), followed by transferring the components identified in the first step to the receptor’s language (target language), and finishing with a restructuring of the components in the target language (Nida and Taber 1969, 33). In a later book, *From One Language to Another* (1986, with Jan de Waard), Nida refines his approach by replacing the expression “dynamic equivalence” with “functional equivalence” (de Waard and Nida 1986, vii) and reiterates that translating is actually communicating, and translating means translating meaning (de Waard and Nida 1986, 9ff. and 60ff.; cf. Nida 1964, 30ff. and 120ff.).

Nida’s translation theory has profoundly influenced the practice of Bible translation since the 1960s, not only within the circle of the United Bible Societies but also outside it. The impact of his work also goes beyond the field of Bible translation and actually lays a basis upon which modern translation studies is founded (see, e.g., Gentzler 1993, 46).

Despite all its merits, Nida’s theory of equivalence generates issues to be resolved. One critical issue is the borderline between “translation with elements of text revision” (= equivalence) and “text revision with translated element” (= non-equivalence; Nord 1997, 8). The question is how far translation can go in restructuring without crossing over the borderline and stepping into the realm of rewriting. Another issue is in what way or ways these “equivalences” can be judged

so that the “closest” can stand out, since without the requirement of reproducing the form of the source text there can exist more than one equivalence. Katharina Reiß, coming from the background of translation studies, also notes certain exceptions to the equivalence requirement of communicating the author’s intention in the source text to the target audience: exceptions can happen when the translation is intended to achieve a purpose or function other than that of the source text, or when the translation addresses an audience different from the intended readership of the original (Nord 1997, 9; see also her discussion on Reiß, and Reiß 1971, 168-69). For these exceptions, features derived from the source text alone are insufficient to judge the appropriateness of the translation (target text); the context of the translation also becomes a crucial factor in the judgment. Issues such as these call for further theoretical studies, both for the purpose of translation criticism and for that of translator training.

These issues led Hans J. Vermeer, a student of Reiß, to develop his *Skopostheorie* (*skopos* theory) as a general translation theory (e.g., Vermeer 1989). To Vermeer, since the purpose that a translation serves may not be the intention of the original, as Reiß has noted, each translation, and its relation to the source text, should be judged by the purpose set for it. He uses *skopos* (the Greek word for “purpose”) as the technical term to indicate this particular purpose of the translation (1989, 227-29). Nord then saw the need to make a distinction between “intention” and “function”: “‘intention’ is defined from the viewpoint of the sender, who wants to achieve a certain purpose with the text,” whereas “the receivers use the text with a certain function, depending on their own expectations, needs, previous knowledge and situational conditions” (Nord 1997, 28). Since the *skopos* in translation is concerned with the function(s) that the target text has, *Skopostheorie* is basically a functionalist approach to translation.

To Vermeer, Nord, and other functionalist theorists of similar persuasion, a good translation is not the one bearing the closest equivalence, as Nida sees it, but the one which serves the *skopos* set for it. In other words, the concern here has more to do with the sociological dimension (which is mainly related to the target audience) than with the linguistic dimension (which is mainly related to the source text). However, it would be unfair to say that Nida does not take into account this sociological dimension because he has already stated,

Even the old question: Is this a correct translation? must be answered in terms of another question, namely: For whom? Correctness must be determined by the extent to which the average reader for which a translation is intended will be likely to understand it correctly. (Nida and Taber 1969, 1)

The fundamental difference between Nida’s functional equivalence and Vermeer’s *skopos* is whether equivalence to the source text or the *skopos* that serves the target audience should stand higher in the hierarchy of the factors to consider in translating.

To set the *skopos* at the center of translational activity has several implications in practice. First, the whole translation process starts with the determination of the *skopos*. The *skopos* for a particular translation task is determined by the initiator

and/or the commissioner of the task and is normally conveyed to the translator, the expert for the task, in a form of “translation brief,” which specifies what kind of translation is needed (Nord 1997, 20-21, 30). A translation brief normally contains information about the (intended) text function(s), the target-text addressee(s), the (prospective) time and place of text reception, the medium in which the text will be transmitted, and the motive for the production or reception of the text (Nord 1997, 60). The role of the source text is seen basically as an offer of information,¹ or raw material, on which the translator works to yield the target text which fulfils the *skopos* (Nord 1997, 37).

Second, “adequacy,” rather than “equivalence,” is the criterion to judge the target text produced in this process. “‘Adequacy’ refers to the qualities of a target text with regard to the translation brief: the translation should be ‘adequate to’ the requirements of the brief” (Nord 1997, 35). In other words, a target text produced according to a particular translation brief (hence, a particular *skopos*) is not necessarily adequate, and can be inadequate, to the requirements of a different translation brief. In *skopos* theory, the end justifies the means.

Third, the concept of adequacy leads the functionalists to pay attention to different communicative interactions and corresponding translation processes. In Nord’s view, there are two basic types of translation processes:

The first aims at producing in the target language a kind of *document* of (certain aspects of) a communicative interaction in which a source-culture sender communicates with a source-culture audience via the source text under source-culture conditions. The second aims at producing in the target language an *instrument* for a new communicative interaction between the source-culture sender and a target-culture audience, using (certain aspects of) the source text as a model. Accordingly, we may distinguish between “documentary” and “instrumental” translations. (Nord 1997, 47)

Nord sees four different forms of translation in documentary translation: interlinear translation, literal translation, philological translation, or exoticizing translation (Nord 1997, 47-50). She also sees three different forms of translation in instrumental translation: equifunctional translation (to achieve the source-text functions for the target audience), heterofunctional translation (to achieve similar functions to those of the source text), or homologous translation (to achieve a similar effect to that of the source text; Nord 1997, 50-52). These forms of translation should not be seen as seven discrete ways of translation. It is more appropriate to view them as forming a continuous spectrum, from the interlinear translation at one extreme to the homologous translation at the other. In a particular translation, it is possible to use more than one form of translation. The *skopos* of the translation determines whether the translation should be document-oriented or instrument-oriented and in which part of the translation which form of translation is to be used.

Last, to yield an adequate target text, the functionalists are concerned more with the issue of the “loyalty” of the translators than with the issue of the “faithfulness”

1 Actually, in the functionalist view a text, source or target, is seen as an offering of information.

of the target text to the source (Nord 1997, 123ff.). This is because the issue of faithfulness cannot be separated from the expectation(s) of the readers in the target culture. As a result, to one group of target readership, faithfulness can mean faithful reproduction of the form of the source text; while to another, it can mean the target text should reproduce exactly the author's opinion (Nord 1997, 124-25). In such situations, what is more crucial is probably whether the translators can operate in a way loyal to the *skopos* given to them (or, to the people who commission the task and the people whom the *skopos* is to serve, as loyalty implies interpersonal relationship) and, hence, yield products according to the translation brief. If translators can do so, readers who know the *skopos* of a particular translation task can use the translation with confidence within the parameters defined by this *skopos* while the readers also know that they need to resort to other translations if their expectation goes beyond the scope of that particular *skopos*.

***Skopoi* of the Chinese Protestant versions: From Morrison to the Chinese Union Version²**

The above sketch of the basics of the functionalist approach to translation should suffice for our discussion. Phenomena and issues that Nida's theory and later the functionalist approach try to deal with existed long before the formation of these theories. With the publication of the Today's Chinese Version (TCV; 《現代中文譯本》; 1979) and the Contemporary Bible (CB; 《當代聖經》; 1979), we saw Nida's equivalence theory being applied either explicitly (the former) or implicitly (the latter). But the dilemma of translating either the form or the meaning had struck the Protestant translators of Chinese versions already in the nineteenth century since the earliest Protestant endeavor in Chinese Bible translation; and the dilemma had also been mingled with the issue of style. From the decisions made and principles adopted for these early Chinese versions, we can reconstruct their possible *skopoi* even though the concept of *skopos* is very much a later invention. The identification of the *skopoi* of these earlier Chinese versions will help us to understand the concerns of the early translators, and these concerns will be used as the starting points when we contemplate the future of Chinese Bible translation.

The Chinese Bibles done by Robert Morrison and William Milne (1823) and Joshua Marshman and Joannes Lassar (1822) marked the beginning of Protestant Bible translation. From the very beginning, the translators faced the issue of the choice of appropriate Chinese style in translation. In discussing the Chinese style chosen by Morrison for his New Testament, Morrison's colleague Milne identified three kinds of style: (1) a high style which is represented by the classical works *Wujing* (《五經》) and *Sishu* (《四書》), (2) a low style which is colloquial and can be found in fiction of the lighter sort and in the imperial text *Shengyu* (《聖諭》), and (3) a middle style which is used in the historical novel *Sanguo* (《三國》; 《三國演義》; see Zetzsche 1999, 33). For the middle style, Milne seemed to distinguish further two different types: in addition to the elegant and elevated style of *Sanguo*

² The discussion will be mainly based upon Jost Oliver Zetzsche's detailed account of the history of Chinese Bible translation (1999).

《三國》), there is also the grave style of Zhu Xi's (朱熹) commentaries (《四書集註》). In Milne's view, they were the models for the Chinese style used in Morrison's Bible translation (Zetzsche 1999, 35; see also 33-34). Although in practice Morrison did not follow this middle style strictly in the translation of the NT (Zetzsche 1999, 35-37), the adaptation of the middle style, at least in principle, shows the intention to reach a wider readership while at the same time to avoid colloquial coarseness (Zetzsche 1999, 34).

The responsibility for the revision of Morrison's version was laid upon Walter Henry Medhurst, Morrison's chosen successor; and the actual work for the NT was mainly divided between Medhurst and Friedrich August Gützlaff (Zetzsche 1999, 59-62). In terms of style, Medhurst generally maintained the middle style used by Morrison; but Medhurst, being aware of the cultural difference between the Western and the Chinese, tried in his translation to convey the meaning of the text instead of being bound to its letter. For example, in John 1.5b, "darkness" was translated with 居於暗者 "those that live in darkness," and in John 1.23 "Isaiah the prophet said" was translated with 古聖人以賽亞預言 "the old sage Isaiah prophesied" (Zetzsche 1999, 64). In functionalist terms, this is a typical heterofunctional approach in which the concepts and terms in the target culture are employed to achieve in the target culture functions similar to those of the source text in the source culture.

Medhurst's innovative approach eventually, along with other factors, contributed to the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) decision in 1836 not to print this NT (Zetzsche 1999, 65). From the functionalist point of view, the issue here has to do with the different ways in which Medhurst and the BFBS understood the communicative interaction of the translation. Medhurst understood the task as producing an instrumental heterofunctional translation by which the Chinese who were not familiar with Christian culture would understand it from their own cultural experiences, while his commissioner, the BFBS, very likely expected more or less a documentary one in which the form and content of the source text were to be preserved. As a result, the rejection became unavoidable.

The rejection by the BFBS caused Medhurst to retire from the revision committee of the OT and left Gützlaff to complete the OT alone (Zetzsche 1999, 67-68). Gützlaff finished the OT and then came back to revise the NT done by Medhurst and himself. The first edition of the OT was published in 1838, and in general the direction was towards greater formal similarity to the original and also a higher classical style (Zetzsche 1999, 68-70). However, Gützlaff was criticized by Medhurst for not consulting and availing himself of the assistance of learned natives; and, as a result, the version was still very defective in Medhurst's view (Zetzsche 1999, 70). Surely Medhurst had a point in his criticism regarding minimal use of learned natives, and his criticism also showed his preference for a heterofunctional approach, which reappeared when he started his next translation project: the Delegates' Version (DV).

In 1843 a general committee was formed for the translation of a commonly translated Chinese Bible, and Medhurst was elected to be its chairperson (Zetzsche

1999, 77-80). Among other decisions for the translation principles, it was decided that “any translation of the Sacred Scriptures into Chinese, issued with the approbation of the body of Protestant missionaries, be in exact conformity to the Hebrew and Greek originals in sense; and so far as the idiom of the Chinese language will allow, in style and manner also” (Zetzsche 1999, 79). Medhurst’s interpretation of this principle was revealed in the DV NT (1850), which was mainly the outcome of the efforts of Medhurst and his British colleagues with the decisive influence of Wang Tao (王韜) in its Chinese style (Zetzsche 1999, 91-92). The style employed was a more classical one, a “scholar-like style,” with the consideration of gaining possible influence among the literati (see Zetzsche 1999, 94, 99). In the translation, again, the sense of the source text was given precedence over the letter (see examples in Zetzsche 1999, 95) as Medhurst had done in his revision of Morrison’s NT. As a result, the *skopos* of the DV NT can be seen as aiming at providing a heterofunctional translation for the Chinese elite, but not for a wider readership.

Various reasons eventually split the committee with the resignation of Medhurst and his British colleagues in 1851, after the NT was completed and the work of the OT had reached Deut 9 (Zetzsche 1999, 98). Medhurst and his British colleagues, who were all missionaries of the London Mission Society (LMS), continued the translation of the OT by following the same translation principles as for the DV NT; the OT was published by BFBS in 1854 (the London Mission Version [LMV] OT) and together with the DV NT in 1858 (Zetzsche 1999, 97-100, 102). The style of the DV NT and the LMV OT attained much critical praise, especially from the literati (Zhao 1993, 21; Zetzsche 1999, 102-3). In this regard, Medhurst and his colleagues can be seen as having achieved the *skopos* of their heterofunctional translation.

On the other hand, these versions also received the criticism of not being faithful enough to the original text (Zhao 1993, 21; Zetzsche 1999, 103). From the functionalist point of view, this criticism may not necessarily be appropriate because the reproduction of the form and content of the source text is not the function envisioned in a heterofunctional translation. This does not mean that there is no room in a heterofunctional translation to reveal to the target audience the form and content of the source text. The situation here is that in a heterofunctional translation, the reproduction of the form and content of the source text should give precedence to other functions to be fulfilled in the *skopos*. This criticism, however, does draw attention to the fact that there were (and probably still are) several *skopoi* to be fulfilled in Chinese Bible translation and it was for this reason that other missionaries in China adopted different translation principles in Chinese Bible translation.

After the departure of Medhurst and his colleagues, their former American colleagues under the leadership of Bridgman and Culbertson restarted their work from Genesis with a different set of principles. The *skopos* was to use “a plain and simple style of translation, such as can be read and understood by men of moderate education” (quotation in Zetzsche 1999, 99) and also to achieve greater faithfulness to the original text than the original DV NT did (see examples in

Zetzsche 1999, 106). From the functionalist viewpoint, it is necessary to clarify the *skopos* as either documentary or instrumental before a definition of faithfulness can be reached. A faithful translation in a documentary sense normally has to do with the reproduction of the formal features of the original in such a way that the translation is not always easy to understand for a target audience who know very little about the source culture. But faithfulness in an instrumental sense normally has to do with the reproduction of the sense. What Bridgman and Culbertson adopted, in functionalist terms, was a documentary approach. As a result, it is very understandable that this Bridgman/Culbertson version (1863) suffered with respect to readability, though its formal faithfulness to the original text was well recognized (see Zetzsche 1999, 105-7). This is not to say that readability and reproduction of the formal features of the original are two goals irreconcilable with each other. As the 1853 Baptist version of Goddard and its revision by Lord demonstrated, a balance could be reached between good style and formal faithfulness (Zetzsche 1999, 118). However, the balance will never be achievable if faithfulness is understood in a documentary way as reproducing exactly the syntactic structure of the original without consideration of the different syntactic requirements of the target language, as exemplified by the NT translated by Hudson (1867; see the example in Zetzsche 1999, 122 n. 55).

Only when missionaries were able to enter the interior of China and Peking (Beijing) and Tianjin in the 1860s did they start to appreciate the potential of Mandarin in Chinese Bible translation (Zetzsche 1999, 139-41). The employment of Mandarin in Bible translation, as the missionaries correctly saw it, opened the door to reach the illiterate majority of Mandarin-speaking people, who could understand the Mandarin Bible when it was read aloud (Zetzsche 1999, 140). Both the British and American translators of the DV engaged in the translation of the NT into Mandarin (Zetzsche 1999, 141). The most noteworthy in the early endeavors were the Peking Version NT done by Burdon, Schereschewsky, Blodget, Edkins, and Martin (1872), as well as Schereschewsky's Mandarin OT (1874/75). These Mandarin versions aimed at the majority of the Chinese people, an audience different from the literati that the classical Chinese versions, from Morrison's version to the DV, aimed at.

Since in the south of China Mandarin was not widely understood, due to the diversity of dialects and the significant differences among them, some missionaries started to seek another form of Chinese that would be between the classical style of the DV and Mandarin. The topic was discussed for the first time in 1877, and Griffith John was the first to publish a translation of the NT into a lower form of classical Chinese in 1885 (Zetzsche 1999, 161). Missionaries held diversified opinions on the definition of the lower form of classical Chinese (also known as "Easy Wenli"), but the aim of using the lower form, no matter how it was defined, was clear: to meet the need for a literary form or style which would be understood not merely by the elite and would not have the dialect barrier existing between Mandarin and the southern dialects (see Zetzsche 1999, 162). This form/style was expected to be the *lingua franca* which could be used in translating the Bible for

the majority of the Chinese people. With this readership in mind, John adopted some non-literal principles for his version since, in his view, a version that would be literal in every instance “would be of no value to either the heathen or the Christian. To the one it would be a mere laughing stock, and to the other a serious stumbling-stone” (Zetzsche 1999, 165). In the functionalist view, his approach was clearly a heterofunctional instrumental one and, as Zetzsche rightly observes, it was very much in line with the approaches adopted for the DV and Peking Version (Zetzsche 1999, 167).

Mandarin and a lower form of classical Chinese were apparently the two competing forms for Chinese Bible translation from the 1860s to the 1880s. Some of the translators of the Mandarin Peking Version, after its completion, produced their lower classical versions (e.g., Burden and Blodget’s lower classical NT [1884] and Schereschewsky’s lower classical translation [1899, 1906, 1910]) and, on the other hand, John’s Mandarin NT, which was based on his lower classical version, was also published in 1889 (see Zetzsche 1999, 170-83). It was in this atmosphere that the missionaries held the 1890 general conference to discuss the direction of a Union Version (UV). Only because of the high esteem bestowed upon the DV by the British missionaries and BFBS, a higher classical version on the basis of the DV was included alongside the lower classical version and the Mandarin version in the design of the UV (Zetzsche 1999, 194-95).

The eighteen principles adopted for all three versions of the UV (see Zetzsche 1999, 225-26) revealed that the expectation in the new versions was to maintain the strengths of earlier versions, such as consistency, naturalness of the Chinese, and readability, while at the same time to seek a more literal approach than that of the DV. The lower classical (Easy Wenli) UV of the NT (1902), which was regarded as the most important of the three, turned out to be a slavish imitation of the Greek text and, as a result, the intention to be faithful to the original eventually undermined the design of the lower classical translation, that is, to be understood by people of limited classical culture or when read aloud (see Zetzsche 1999, 227, 232-35). In functionalist terms, the Easy Wenli translators had a loyalty issue which eventually contributed to the failure. Two committee members of the higher classical (High Wenli) UV of the NT, John Chalmers and Martin Schaub, adopted an approach similar to that of the Easy Wenli UV, and the difference between their translation principles and their colleagues’ eventually led them to publish their own translation with private funds in 1897, in which they wanted to correct the greatest criticism of the DV, the lack of (formal) fidelity to the original (Zetzsche 1999, 243-47).

The other committee members, however, did not follow what Chalmers and Schaub did. After Chalmers’s death in 1899, the committee reconvened and the High Wenli UV NT was published in 1907. In this version, extreme literalism was rejected, and style and readability were regarded as more important in translation (see Wherry’s explanation quoted in Zetzsche 1999, 252-53). The Mandarin UV NT had its own hurdles to cross but eventually the end product of 1907 was seen by the translators as “distinctly literal and faithful to the original” while “smoothness

of style has been more or less sacrificed” (see Mateer’s remark quoted in Zetzsche 1999, 273).

In the 1907 general conference, the decision was made to combine the two classical projects and leave only one to be alongside the Mandarin project (see Zetzsche 1999, 285ff.). The Wenli UV published in 1919 comprised a revised High Wenli UV NT and an OT following translation principles similar to those of the NT (see Zetzsche 1999, 297ff.). The Mandarin UV also came out in 1919 with an extensively revised NT and used a slightly higher language than that of the 1907 NT (Zetzsche 1999, 322-29). Despite the revision and the change of language level, the 1919 version continued the tradition of the 1907 NT, but using a more natural indigenous Mandarin and not blindly imitating the form of the original, so that it could be understandable by all (Zetzsche 1999, 324-25).

From this brief historical review, we can see that the issue of target audience and the issue of adaptation to that audience were very much at the core of the considerations of the translators. This is revealed not only by the attempts to use different Chinese styles in translation but also by the emphasis on translating the sense, not the form, in Medhurst’s several efforts (the revision of Morrison’s NT, the DV NT, and LMV OT), Peking Version NT, Schereschewsky’s Mandarin OT, Griffith John’s two versions, and even the 1919 Wenli and Mandarin UVs. This heterofunctional instrumental approach to Chinese Bible translation was sensible when taking into account the historical context—a time when nearly all Chinese people were unfamiliar with Christianity and the Judeo-Christian culture was very foreign to them. The positive responses from the target audience to these versions proved the value of this approach.

However, there were also translators who were unsatisfied with this *skopos* and adopted a different one in translation: to provide for the target audience versions through which the formal features of the original could be appreciated. Bridgman/Culbertson’s Version, Hudson’s Baptist NT, and the Easy Wenli UV NT were some of the outcome of this *skopos*. Due to the historical context, these versions did not gain strong support, but this *skopos*, as we shall see, became a greater concern in Chinese Bible translation after the publication of the Wenli and Mandarin UVs.

Skopoi for future Chinese Bible translation: Some observations

What can we learn from this history for future Chinese Bible translation? We need to consider first which of the issues the early translators faced still persist today and which ones do not, and also whether there are emerging needs which did not exist before.

Since translating is considered an intercultural communicative action from the functionalist point of view (Nord 1997, 22-25), the change of time, space, or culture will affect the way that translating is conducted. The year the UV was published was also the year of the “May Fourth Movement” (五四運動), which coincided with and was closely associated with the “New Culture Movement” (新文化運動; 1915-1923 or 1917-1921), in which Mandarin was promoted as the written form for modern Chinese literature. The latter movement brought an irreversible change

to the way that Chinese literature is written, up to the present day. The effect could be seen from the sales of the two UV translations: in ten years of the publication of the UV, more than a million copies of the Mandarin NT had been sold and half a million complete Mandarin Bibles had been issued, while in 1939, twenty years after the publication of the UV, not a single copy of the Scriptures was printed in Wenli (Zetzsche 1999, 331). Since then, Mandarin has become the only style for modern Chinese writing, and the issue of style that the missionaries struggled with in the nineteenth century has ceased to be an issue for Chinese Bible translation.

This should not lead to the conclusion that the issues of target audience and adaptation to it have also ceased to be issues, however. Even with the same written form, there still exists a variety of readerships which come with different expectations. Since the written form is the same, these issues should be analyzed in a way different from the analysis of styles. In the functionalist view, it is the “functions” that the target audience expects the target texts to perform that differentiate between different readerships, and to realize the function(s) in an adequate way it is necessary to delineate who the target-text addressees are as well as their possible temporal, geographical, and cultural locations in reception. This is why the translation brief, which starts with the description of the intended function(s), should also contain information regarding the addressees and the time and place of text reception (Nord 1997, 50). For future Chinese Bible translation, we may then have the following questions to answer:

How many different readerships need to be served now, and in the foreseeable future? Does the distinction between the intellectual and the general public need to be maintained? Should children be seen as a distinct readership? Should Christians and people outside the church be seen as two distinct readerships? Or can these two readerships be served together in certain ways? For the Christian readership, should the distinction between the Protestant and Roman Catholic be maintained? Or, is an interconfessional solution needed for both readerships and the readership outside the church? Is there a need to consider service to the Orthodox readership in Chinese Bible translation?

Not all the questions will come with definite answers. Questions as such, nevertheless, can help the translators and those who commission translation tasks to clarify the scope of readership for a particular translation project and also identify possible new readerships. Once the readership is identified, the questions to be answered are as follows:

What will be the intended function: an instrumental one or a documentary one? If instrumental, to what degree is it allowed or expected to use the target culture in translating the source text? For example, should Chinese (or contemporary) measurement and monetary units be used in places where ancient units are used, as the Mandarin UV sometimes does? Or, can ancient styles of Chinese poetry be employed in the translation of the Psalms, like what Chalmer did for Psalm 23 in the style of *Chuci* (《楚辭》; Zetzsche 1999, 213 n. 82) or Wu Jingxiong’s (吳經熊) *Shengyong yiyi chugao* (《聖詠譯義初稿》, 1946)?³ Or, should inclusive language

3 These are good examples of the “homologous translation” identified by Nord (1997, 52).

be used in the translation when masculine forms are used to represent both men and women in the source text? If documentary, to what degree is it expected to reveal the formal features and the unique features of the source culture in the translation? And to what degree is it allowed to use unnatural Chinese sentences and phrases and to invent new Chinese terms in the translation?

The above questions are certainly not exhaustive but their answers will be useful in generating concrete translation briefs by which the adequacy of the translations can be evaluated later.

Being an established tradition, the Mandarin UV and revisions and new translations based upon this tradition will continue to serve the Chinese church. Its instrumental inclination is still a needed function both for Christian mission and for people who are not familiar with the content of the Bible but interested in its content. Of course, this instrumental function does not need to be realized within the tradition of the Mandarin UV especially when we think of the dramatic change that the Chinese language has undergone since 1919. The TCV (1979, 1995) and the CB (1979) are two good examples of instrumental translation aiming at the wider readership identified above while they do not follow the tradition of the Mandarin UV.

On the other hand, since the publication of the Mandarin UV, the voices calling for a Chinese Bible which is more formally faithful to the originals have never fallen silent. Many Chinese versions after the Mandarin UV, especially those done by Chinese, were focused on the reproduction of the form and features of the originals. Having been a committee member of the Mandarin UV OT but feeling the translation to be neither colloquial nor faithful enough, Absalom Sydenstricker worked with his Chinese assistant Zhu Baohui (朱寶惠) and published his own NT in 1929 (Zetzsche 1999, 308-11). After Sydenstricker's death Zhu continued the revision of the text that they started together and produced the Re-translated NT, *Chongyi xinyue quanshu* (《重譯新約全書》, 1936), which was planned to be a literal and consistent translation (see Zetzsche 1999, 340-43). Lu Chen-Chung (呂振中) also adopted a literal approach to Bible translation and yielded his first version of the NT in 1946, the revised NT in 1952, and the complete Bible in 1970. In several Chinese versions published recently, "faithful to the originals" (忠於原文) or similar expressions have been used in the explanatory section of the translation principles.⁴ This emphasis on faithfulness shows that there has been a need that was not met by the heterofunctional instrumental approach adopted by the Mandarin UV. When the Chinese church grew with the help of the Mandarin UV, the need to have a Bible that could be used for serious studies and even for research also emerged. This need, however, was beyond the *skopos* of the Mandarin UV and could only be fulfilled by a certain form of documentary translation. The influence of Yan Fu's (嚴復) prominent translation theory—fidelity, communicability, and elegance (信-達-雅)—was probably also underlying the Bible translators' quest

4 See, for example, the preface of the New Chinese Version (《新譯本》, 1992), the preface of the NT of the Revised Chinese Union Version (《和合本修訂版》, 2006), and the translation principles of the NT of the Chinese Standard Version NT (《中文標準譯本》, 2008).

of faithfulness⁵ because the first criterion of a good translation, according to Yan, is to be faithful to the original.

The problem, however, is how faithfulness should be realized in practice. Without clear guidelines, we are unlikely to see a consistent application of this criterion in translation. For example, Zhu's translation of Luke 3.24-37⁶ preserves as much as possible the form of the Greek and it is also probably the model used by the New Chinese Version (NCV; 《新譯本》) in translating this section. However, if faithfulness is to be defined as preserving the form of the original, in both versions we find that in Luke 1.1-4 "Theophilus" (提阿非羅) still stands at the beginning of v. 1 as in the Mandarin UV, while in Greek the name actually occurs at the end of v. 3. It is interesting to note that in Lu's translation, the name "Theophilus" does occur at the end of Luke 1.3 while for Luke 3.24-37 Lu's translation follows the Mandarin UV and does not try to preserve the form of the Greek as Zhu's translation does. For 1 John 1.5, where the translation of the Mandarin UV⁷ reverses the order of the clauses of the Greek, Zhu, Lu, and the NCV all follow the clause order of the Mandarin UV without any attempt to reproduce the sentence structure of the Greek in translation. Nevertheless, in the TCV, which is not supposed to be a literal translation, the sentence structure of the Greek is faithfully reproduced.⁸ So, how should the readers who do not know Greek judge which of the above versions is more consistently faithful than others in terms of reproducing the form of the original? Unless there is a consistent application of a certain principle or guideline in translation, it is very hard for the target readers who do not know the source language to be confident in reconstructing the form of the original through the translation.

The issue illustrated by the above example may be resolved by identifying the translation form according to the *skopos* defined for the translation (see Nord 1997, 48, 51). Nord lists four possible forms in documentary translation (1997, 47-50), each having different degrees of readability and revealing the linguistic characteristics of the source text to different degrees. As mentioned earlier, it is more appropriate to see these translation forms not as four discrete options but as forming a continuous spectrum of possibility in translation. A clearly stated *skopos* will help the translator decide where in the spectrum the translation belongs. In this way, it is possible to generate a set of guidelines concrete enough to yield a translation that is consistent in its handling of the reproduction of the formal features of the source text.

5 It appeared first in the preface of his translation of T. H. Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* (《天演論》). A study of his theory can be seen in Shen 2000.

6 由希里以上，就是馬塔。利未。麥基。……馬勒列。該南。以哪士。—"to trace back from Heli: Matthat. Levi. Melchi. . . . Mahalaleel. Cainan. Enos."

7 上帝是光，在他裏面毫無黑暗；這就是我們從他那裏聽見，現在傳給你們的信息。—"God is light. In him there is no darkness. This is the message that we heard from him and now proclaim to you."

8 現在我們要把從上帝的兒子所聽到的信息傳給你們：上帝是光，他完全沒有黑暗。—"Now we are proclaiming the message heard from the Son of God to you: God is light; he does not have darkness at all."

This is especially essential for the production of a consistent Chinese Bible translation in view of some of the unique syntactic characteristics of the Chinese language. In both Hebrew and Greek (especially the latter), modifiers (adjectives and adverbs) can appear either before or after the modified (the nominal and the verbal) and relative clauses can be used as modifiers standing after the modified. In Chinese, the modifiers nearly exclusively appear before the modified and there is no relative. As a result, the more the translation tries to reveal the formal features of the originals, the more likely it is to use unnatural Chinese; sometimes, especially in dealing with complex relative clause structures, it is impossible to reproduce the formal features of the original in meaningful Chinese. It can therefore be misleading to claim a Chinese translation to be “faithful to the original” (忠於原文) without expounding how that is defined in the first place.⁹ The identification of the form of translation with a well-defined *skopos* and its accompanying translation brief may help in clarifying this.

In the functionalist view, the *skopos* of documentary type translations can also be achieved in a different way. As a general theory of translation, the functionalist approach understands translating as a form of translational interaction, which is to enable communication to take place between members of different cultural communities (Nord 1997, 16-17). It can be achieved not only by rendering the text (“translation” in the narrow sense) but also by a kind of “translational action,” such as providing cultural information or help in cross-cultural communication (Nord 1997, 17). As far as Bible translation is concerned, translating the form and content of the originals is then only one of several possible options to achieve a documentary *skopos*. It can also be achieved by using an instrumental translation with supplementary notes which provide linguistic, historical, geographical, and cultural information. In other words, the documentary *skopos* can be achieved by the translational action of producing a study Bible. For cross-cultural communication between two very different linguistic systems and cultures, such as between the Chinese and the ancient Hebrew cultures or between the Chinese and the ancient Graeco-Roman cultures, the advantage of this approach is that the provision of linguistic and background information will not be limited by the constraints that translation proper normally has and it also allows the translation proper to be a more natural and readable one, as it does not need to fulfill the function of revealing the formal features of the originals.

Conclusion: Some suggestions to consider

The functionalist approach starts with the acknowledgement that no translation can fulfill all functions that are expected in intercultural communication. A translation that claims to be able to fulfill all functions expected by the target audience is likely to fulfill only a few of them in an adequate way, or sometimes, none of them in an

⁹ This is one of the major problems in applying Yan’s translation theory. From the way that Yan translated Mark 1–4, it is very unlikely that the reproduction of the form of the source text or a word-to-word transfer was his goal. For example, in Mark 4.3, he translated “sower” with 農人 (farmer) and in Mark 4.7 “And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it” was translated as 又或入荆棘充塞，奪其土膏 (and some fell among where there were full of thorns, which took out the fertility of the soil).

adequate way. This is the reason that functionalists see the determination of the *skopos* as crucial to translating, because the *skopos* defines the very few functions that a particular translation is to fulfill, with the result that the translation can more likely fulfill these functions adequately. Therefore, it would be a blessing to the Chinese in general and to the Chinese church in particular if in the near future we could see an array of new Chinese translations and translational actions coming with a variety of *skopoi*.

Being the Bible of the Chinese Protestant church for ninety years, the Mandarin UV tradition probably needs to continue to be supported, and no doubt this will happen. In addition to the revision and new translation efforts within this tradition, consideration should be given to various types of study Bibles using it as the running text. The *skopoi* of these study Bibles can be either documentary (linguistic, historical, or cultural) or instrumental (theological, hermeneutical, or even for application).

The dramatic change of the Chinese language and the advance of biblical scholarship in the past several decades have made it impossible for the Mandarin UV to realize its original *skopos*, to introduce the message of the Bible to the widest possible Chinese readership, for today's Chinese audience. We need other instrumental Chinese translations aiming at different readerships to fulfill this *skopos*. These translations can be designed to serve people who are of average education level and not familiar with Christianity.¹⁰ They can be focused on the literary quality of the Chinese used.¹¹ They can also be designed especially for children or young people.

As to documentary translations, we expect to see something going beyond the achievement of Lu's translation in terms of greater consistency in the reproduction of the formal features of the originals. In view of the instrumental nature of the Mandarin UV, the translators for documentary Chinese translations should allow themselves to be freed from the tradition of the Mandarin UV in translating. Those documentary translations aiming at scholarly use probably also need to take into account at least the Protestant and the Roman Catholic traditions, if not also the Orthodox.

The above suggestions might raise the question whether the plethora of translations would confuse readers. In the functionalist view, the number of translations should not be a cause for confusion if each of them comes with a clearly-defined *skopos* and is translated in a way adequate to it. The readers will be confused only if the *skopoi* of the translations are not clear or if there are translations claiming to achieve certain functions when they are actually unable to do so. The purpose of this article has been to avert such confusion.

10 E.g., the Today's Chinese Version and the Contemporary Bible.

11 E.g., Feng Xiang's (馮象) *Torah or the Five Books of Moses* (2006) and *The Books of Wisdom* (2008).

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