

## Between Texts, Beyond Words

Intertextuality and Translation

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# Translating the Bible into Chinese

## Characteristics and Features of the *Sigao Shengjing*

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**Abstract** The translation project of the *Sigao Shengjing* 思高聖經 was developed by Gabriele Allegra, given the absence of a complete Catholic Bible in the Chinese language. Allegra started to translate in 1935, and in 1945 assembled a team of Chinese Friars to revise the Old Testament and translate the New one. Subsequently, a biblical research centre was founded, and from 1946 to 1961 it published the first Catholic Bible in Chinese in eleven volumes. The single-volume version was issued in 1968. This paper will present the translation process and the features of the *Sigao Shengjing*. A brief presentation of the translations of the Chinese Bible will precede a description of the general characteristics of the biblical text. Moreover, the phases of the translation and the publication of the *Sigao Shengjing* will be examined through the analysis of archival material and the main characteristics and features of the first Chinese Catholic Bible will be outlined.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Features and Translations of the Bible. – 2.1 Bible Translation in Chinese. – 2.2 Languages and Translation of the Biblical Text. – 3 The *Sigao Shengjing*. – 3.1 The Phases of the Translation. – 3.2 Characteristics and Features. – 4 Conclusion.

**Keywords** Bible translation. Chinese Bible. Missionary linguistics. Franciscans in China.

## 1 Introduction

In 1928, the Franciscan Friar Gabriele Maria Allegra, while studying missiology and theology in Rome, became acquainted with the missionary activity of his confrere of the 13th century John of Montecorvino. He learned that Montecorvino, first bishop in China, had translated the New Testament and the Psalms into Mongolian language, and that, unfortunately, no copies of those manuscripts had been preserved. Furthermore, Allegra came to know that the Chinese Catholics did not have a complete version of the Bible in their language and decided to ask his superiors to go to China as a missionary and translate the Scriptures in Chinese.

Allegra was appointed as rector of the Minor Seminary in Hengyang (Hunan) and arrived there in 1931. He immediately committed himself to the study of the Chinese language and gradually developed the project of

the translation of the Catholic Bible in Chinese. He started on the translation of the Book of Genesis in 1935. Ten years later the missionary formed a team of Chinese Friars to revise the translation of the Old Testament and to work together on the version of the New Testament. The group set up a biblical and research centre, the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Sinense or *Sigao Shengjing Xuehui* 思高聖經學會. The teamwork led to the publication of the whole Bible in eleven volumes between 1946 and 1961 and to the revision and the issue of the single volume version in 1968. The first venue of the Studium was in Beijing, but in 1948 it was moved to Hong Kong, where it still operates today.

In this paper, the translation process and the features of the 1968 volume known as the *Sigao Shengjing* 思高聖經 or *Sigao Bible* will be presented and analysed. Before introducing these phases and characteristics, the features of the biblical text and the translation matters related to it will be outlined to provide the general context in which the issue of Chinese biblical translation and the translating process of the Sigao Bible must be set. The analysis of the translation process and of the features of the Sigao Bible is provided according to the results of various research sessions conducted in the Archivio Vice-Postulazione where all the documents concerning Allegra and his translation activity are preserved.

After Allegra's death, some of his brethren and relatives believed that there were sufficient reasons to start a Cause of Beatification and thus began to draw up documents and testimonials from four dioceses: Hong Kong, Taipei, Rome, and Catania. When in 1986 the process was concluded, the remains of the Friar, some personal belongings, and all his documents were moved to Acireale, a town in the South of Italy where Allegra had spent his first years as a Friar. There, a small archive was set up in a room of the Franciscan convent, under the name of Archivio Vice-Postulazione - Convento San Biagio dei Frati Minori - Acireale (CT). The main purpose of the collection of these papers was that of preparing the needed information material for the Beatification process, nevertheless, the Archive still constitutes today a precious source of documents because, though the aim of the collection of the documents was to verify the Friar's Christian virtues and the organisation of the material in the Archive focuses around his spirituality and the aspects that could testify his sanctity, there are many documents concerning Allegra's activity as a translator. In September 2017 the whole Archive in Acireale was transferred to Palermo, to the Historical Archive of the Sicilian Province of the Friar Minor.<sup>1</sup> The work done in Acireale up to that moment was preserved, and all the writings are still available for consultation.

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1 The material stored in Palermo is the same as that stored in Acireale. All the documents therein included will be further referred to as 'Archive'.

The documents in the Archive cover Allegra's entire life, the earliest dating back to 1926 and the latest to 1976. The writing languages are Italian, English, Chinese, Latin, French, and German, with some notebooks with pages in Greek and Hebrew. A rich epistolary, many autograph handwritten or typewritten papers, all the published material by Allegra himself and articles by other authors on his life and activity are included in this collection. The documents are written both on simple notebooks or on official letterhead paper of the Studium Biblicum or of other associations. The letters are mostly addressed to Allegra's relatives, his superiors or other people relevant for the translation and for his mission. A large part of the unofficial documents consists of notebooks or diaries with drafts of letters or notes on several aspects of his daily life. Many documents examined in the Archive include references to the history and process of this Bible translation not found elsewhere to date.

## 2 Features and Translations of the Bible

### 2.1 Bible Translation in Chinese

The New Testament<sup>2</sup> commonly used by Chinese Catholics at the beginning of the twentieth century had been published only in 1922 and was the translation from the Latin Vulgate by the Jesuit Xiao Jingshan 蕭靜山.<sup>3</sup> It was the first publishable Catholic translation in Mandarin Chinese, a clear indication that things were changing. Despite their arrival in China at the end of the thirteenth century, Catholic missionaries had never actually committed themselves to the translation of the Bible into Chinese. When they had attempted to do so, prevailing circumstances hindered all efforts to complete, publish or distribute any piece of translation. The absence of a complete translation of the Bible in Chinese until the twentieth century may be due to two key factors. Firstly, European missionaries did not translate the Bible in Chinese because of its position and the role of the Bible itself in the life of the clergy and of the laymen according to the historical context. Furthermore, there was scarce use and distribution of the Bible among Catholics worldwide as well as specific restrictions on translating the Bible into languages other than Latin. The Bible itself as a missionary instrument is worthy of discussion as Buzzetti argues:

2 The following three paragraphs are adapted from Chapters 1.2 and 3.2 of: De Gruttola, Raissa (2017). *And the Word Became Chinese". Gabriele Allegra and the Chinese Catholic Bible: History, Process, and Translation Analysis* [PhD dissertation]. Venice: Ca' Foscari University of Venice.

3 Xiao 1922. See also Choi, Mak 2014, 110.

The nature of the Bible is not such as it can be directly used as an efficacious missionary or apologetic instrument [...] it is not regarded as means of communication for those who are unbelievers, but rather as a collection of texts recording, remembering, and expressing the historical moments of faith [...] a common use of the Bible may be otherwise indicated – such as, for example, in preaching – only prior to thorough knowledge of the focal elements of faith itself. (1973, 264; Author's translation)

Buzzetti, therefore, illustrates the reasons behind the reluctance or vacillation to translate the Bible in the early missionary periods, but his text does not unfold the rationale of such a prolonged delay. The second reason for the absence of the Chinese version of the Catholic Bible is the position assumed by the representatives of the Catholic Church hierarchy. The few attempts at translation were, indeed, prevented from being completed, published or distributed by the superiors of those who undertook the task or by the directives of Propaganda Fide.

There are three relevant translation experiences into colloquial Chinese occurring before the twentieth century that are worth mentioning. Jean Basset (1662-1707) of the Paris Foreign Mission Society arrived in Canton by the end of 1689. He translated almost the whole of the New Testament from Latin Vulgate into colloquial Chinese. When he died in 1707, only the end of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Book of Revelation had not been translated. The 1655 decree of Propaganda Fide forbidding the printing of any book without the permission from Rome, however, prevented the publication and distribution of this version. Nevertheless, some copies of the manuscript were made and one of them was later conserved in the British Museum. In the first half of the eighteenth century two Franciscan missionaries, Francesco Jovino (1677-1737) and Carlo Orazi of Castorano (1673-1755), exchanged some letters on the translation in vernacular Chinese of the first books of the Old Testament. This version had been started by the Franciscan Friar Antonio Laghi (1668-1727) and was continued by Jovino himself. However, Castorano firmly prohibited his addressee from distributing the text, regarding the translation of the Scriptures into the local language premature for the Chinese converts. By the end of the same century, the French Jesuit Louis Antoine de Poirot (1735-1813) was translating both the Old and the New Testament from Latin into colloquial Chinese, compiling more than 34 volumes. In 1803, he completed the *Guxin shengjing* 古新聖經 (Old and New Testament) where only the Song of Songs and some of the books of the Prophets were not translated. Despite the appreciation of the work, Propaganda Fide prohibited its printing and circulation, and the version of Poirot was stored in the Jesuit library in Beijing. Furthermore, it is worthy to underline that the Catholic missionaries had written or translated a large amount of books in Chinese

such as catechisms, collection of biblical episodes, illustrated books, or explanations of the life of Jesus (see Standaert 1999).

The first Catholic translation of a part of the Bible was published in Shanghai by the Tushanwan Press in 1887. It was the *Zongtu dashi lu* 宗徒大事錄, the book of the Acts of the Apostles, translated into literary Chinese by the Jesuit Li Wenyu 李問漁. Choi and Mak report that:

All Chinese versions of the Catholic Bible published between the second half of the nineteenth century and the 1920s were partial translation of the New Testament, particularly the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. Most of them were in literary Chinese, the standard Chinese for publications at the time, which was commonly adopted for Chinese Catholic literature. (2014, 106)

Nevertheless, the missionaries arriving in Beijing after 1860 gradually recognised the role of Mandarin as a *lingua franca* and used it to preach the Gospel. Furthermore, the status of the written vernacular changed at the turn of the century in connection with the growth of Chinese nationalism, the creation of the modern school system (1902), and the abolition of the examination system (1905) (Kaske 2004, 272-84). At the beginning of the twentieth century, the *baihua* 白話 became the language used in newspapers and journals to circulate new ideas promoting the modernisation of China, to open these ideas to less educated people, and to spread the vernacular language and the formation of a national identity for the Republic of China founded in 1911. In this complex historical context “the missionaries were passively driven by Chinese linguistic realities” (Kaske 2008, 65). The attitude of the missionaries toward the Chinese language changed according to their background, their denomination, their education, and the group of Chinese people they related to. Some missionaries only preached orally through local dialects; the ones in the North enthusiastically learned and used Mandarin; others created systems to Romanise the Chinese characters, while those intending to convert the higher classes continued to write and translate texts into literary Chinese. The issue of translating the Bible using these different approaches was thus considered. Nevertheless, the tendency towards literary or vernacular Chinese is evident in the changes arising from the boards responsible for the translation of the Protestant Bible known as the *Union Version*. The term ‘union’ was to indicate the joint efforts in the translation of numerous representatives of many different churches among the Protestant denominations present in China. In the first conference in 1890, the attendants decided to prepare three translations differing in style, assuming that a version in the classical language was required, as well as a version in a lower form of literary Chinese. As far as the Mandarin version was concerned, however, few missionaries were willing to work on it, despite acknowledgment of

the need for translation in that language. Many missionaries rejected the assignment because it was considered an undertaking that would not grant them merit or power. Nevertheless, it took so long to complete the three versions that, during the years, too many circumstances had changed, and the literary translation was no longer imperative. It was in 1919 that the complete Union Version was published in two editions, the classical and the Mandarin one, but the historical context had changed by then, bringing with it new events and features. The two editions of the Union Version were published in April (*baihua* version) and June (*wenli* 文理 version) 1919, when the new tendency towards using Mandarin, unpredictable thirty years before, had already set in. For these reasons, the Mandarin version was well accepted by all, not only among Christians (see Zetzsche 1999). Furthermore, it must be underlined that this debate concerning the issue of translating the Bible in literary or colloquial Chinese was already concluded when Allegra arrived in China and started his translation in 1935.

## 2.2 Languages and Translations of the Biblical Text

The term 'Bible' indicates the collection of books considered as sacred by all the Christian denominations, which is divided into two main sections, the Old and the New Testament. The three branches of Christianity, the Catholic, the Eastern Orthodox, and the Protestant all include the same books in the New Testament, but follow different criteria when defining the canonical books of the Old one. Furthermore, the books in the Old Testament are considered sacred by the Jews too, whose religious authorities had been conferring upon the issue of the translation of these texts since the first set of canonical writings.

The three authoritative sets of scripts for the Jews were the Torah (the five books of the Pentateuch), the Prophets, and the Writings. The first two sections were characterised by a fixed composition, while the books included in the Writings varied according to the doctrine of different groups of believers. The need to translate the sacred texts into a different language arose under the reign of Alexander the Great (r. 336-323 BC), when Palestine and many other areas of the Eastern Mediterranean coast were undergoing Hellenization and Greek became the *lingua franca* for many Jewish communities. It was probably in the city of Alexandria, between the third and the first century BC, that the Torah, and subsequently the other sacred texts, were translated into the Greek language, constituting what today is known as the *Septuagint*. The Greek edition of the Old Testament would be the first text to convey the biblical contents from a Semitic context to a Hellenistic one. The importance of the Septuagint is also connected to the fact that it became the source text for several other versions of the Old Testament such as the Old Latin, the Syriac, and the

Slavonic, and today continues to be the version used in the liturgy of the Greek Orthodox Church. Furthermore, the majority of the quotations from the Old Testament in the Greek New Testament are taken from the Septuagint. During the long process of translation of the Hebrew texts, some books in the Greek language were added to the corpus of the Septuagint before the Canon had been established. These would be later defined as 'deuterocanonical' and included seven books and some additions to already accepted texts.<sup>4</sup> The acceptance of these texts was variable up to the fifth century, when both the Hebrew canon and the Christian one were eventually set. In 393 and 397, the provincial Councils of Hippo and Carthage III issued documents in which the deuterocanonical books were included in the Christian canon, defining in this way a tradition that has continued ever since.

The New Testament is a collection of twenty seven books accepted by all three major Christian groups today. It consists of four books, known as the Gospels, presenting the life and teachings of Christ, one book on the creation of the Church and the activity of the first apostles (Acts of the Apostles), some letters written by Paul of Tarsus and other apostles, and the book of Revelation. All these texts were written in the first two centuries of the Christian era and their canonicity was established by the end of the fourth century. The main criteria used to define the canon of the New Testament in the first centuries were three: the apostolic origin, the consistency of the message, and the liturgical use. According to these features, other contemporary texts on the life of Jesus and his disciples were thus defined apocryphal.

The books of the New Testament are written in a language defined as 'New Testament Greek.' This peculiar language, together with the Greek used to write the Septuagint, constitutes what is known as 'biblical Greek' and is a variant of the *koine* ('common standard') Greek. Greek was the dominant liturgical language in the Roman Empire, but Latin was also widely used. From the second century, some Christian communities in Northern Africa, Southern Gaul and Italy began to translate passages of the Bible into Latin for private use. By the fourth century, the number of these translations had significantly increased and the collection of all these Latin versions of the Bible are now known as *Vetus Latina* (Old Latin Bible). As Latin gradually replaced Greek in the life of Christians, these translations spread among the believers, often causing confusion. For this reason, in

4 The seven books are: Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach, and Baruch. The additional passages are extracts found in the books of Esther and Daniel. Studies following the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (1946-1956) show that the composition language of Tobit, Judith, 1 Maccabees, and Baruch was Hebrew or Aramaic. The book of Sirach was written in Hebrew, while the additional passages to Esther and Daniel, together with the books of Wisdom and 2 Maccabees were written in Greek (Fabris 1994, 299).

382 the Pope Damasus I asked the scholar Jerome (347-420) to prepare an official Latin version of the Bible. The complete work of Jerome circulated under the name of *Vulgata* that means ‘popular, common’ (from the Latin *vulgus* ‘the common people’), and, despite an initial phase of strong critics against it, this text slowly replaced all the other Latin versions of the Bible. In the subsequent centuries, the Vulgate would become the only Bible acknowledged by the Church, even though its central and exclusive position was to be established only during the Council of Trent (1545-1563).

Latin was the language of the Roman Empire and also of Christendom, but it was gradually replaced by the various vernaculars according to the geographical areas after the fall of the Western Roman Empire (476). During the Middle Ages, throughout Europe, Latin remained the only *lingua franca* used among sovereigns, in universities, and during ecclesiastical events, becoming a formal and official language, nonconforming to the language spoken in the regions of the previous empire, which were experiencing an independent evolution of the Romance languages. This linguistic development was perceived by the Christians who, in the twelfth and thirteenth century, began to partially translate the Bible into German, French, and Italian. These translations used the Vulgate as the source text and were distributed in the form of manuscripts among small groups of believers. Nevertheless, the translation of the Bible into modern languages and its subsequent accessibility and significance in the lives of Christians was one of the controversial issues raised by Martin Luther (1483-1546) in the events that prompted the Protestant Reformation at the beginning of the sixteenth century. In 1522, Luther printed and distributed his German version of the New Testament. The Catholic Church considered the issue of the vernacular translations of the Bible during the Council of Trent. First and foremost, the congregation of bishops defined the canon of the biblical books and declared that the Vulgate would be the one and only Latin text and in 1590, the *Vulgata Sixtina* (from the Pope Sixtus V, 1567-1590) was published. It was revised by a body of biblical scholars and republished in 1592, 1593, and 1598. This last version is known as *Vulgata Clementina* (after Pope Clement VIII, 1592-1605) or Sixto-Clementina, and would be the official Latin Bible of the Catholic Church until 1979 (see Fragnito 1997, 2005).

From the seventeenth century onwards, the different Protestant groups continued to translate the Scriptures in different languages, also in the missionary stations they had founded in Asia, while the Catholics showed little interest in this activity. In China, the Catholic missionaries Basset MEP and Poirot SJ (eighteenth century) had been banned from publishing their translations whereas Robert Morrison, the first Protestant missionary in China, set out to undertake the task of translating the Bible even before leaving for China. The translation by Morrison was published in 1823 and, in the following century, fifteen Bibles and other volumes of the Old and



New Testament were prepared, printed and distributed. For the Catholics, only at the end of the nineteenth century did a new document addressing matters concerning the Bible come to light. In 1893, Pope Leo XIII issued the encyclical letter *Providentissimus Deus* (The God of all Providence) on the study of Holy Scripture. Nevertheless, in the same document, the centrality of the Vulgate in the life of the Church was reasserted. The next decree on the translation of the Bible was issued only in 1943 in the encyclical letter on promoting Biblical Studies, *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (Inspired by the Divine Spirit), issued by Pius XII on September 30, 1943. In the document there were some references to the translation issue, and it asserted that the Sacred Scriptures could be translated:

Whenever the liturgical laws permit [...] with the approval of the Ecclesiastical authority, into modern languages. (*Divino Afflante Spiritu* 1943, 9, 51)

These two encyclicals vaguely hinted at the translation question while discussing matters concerning liturgy and Scriptures in general. The official documents on the Bible and its translation would be issued only as reports of the meetings of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), namely, the constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (This Sacred Council) and the dogmatic constitution on divine revelation *Dei Verbum* (The Word of God). The latter defined the importance of translating the Bible from the original texts, the utility of explanatory notes, and the relevance of collaborating with the Protestant Churches:

Since the word of God should be accessible at all times, the Church by her authority and with maternal concern sees to it that suitable and correct translations are made into different languages, especially from the original texts of the sacred books. And should the opportunity arise and the Church authorities approve, if these translations are produced in cooperation with the separated brethren as well, all Christians will be able to use them. [...] Editions of the Sacred Scriptures, provided with suitable footnotes, should be prepared also for the use of non Christians and adapted to their situation. (*Dei Verbum* 1965, VI.21, 25)

These documents were issued by the Holy See in 1963 and 1965. In 1961, Allegra and his team had published the eleventh volume of the complete Catholic Bible in Chinese, translated from 1935 onwards, according to modern principles, despite they were not yet official.

### 3 The *Sigao Shengjing*

#### 3.1 The Phases of the Translation

In a report written for the Apostolic Delegate in Beijing, on May 6, 1941, Allegra responded to four points of issue (1914, 10-1). The first point concerned the necessity of the translation, and he wrote that the necessity stemmed from the need of the priests and the faithful to know the contents of the ‘revealed truth,’ with the consensus of other missionaries and bishops besides. This point explains the high degree of details and exegetical features of the translation notes written by Allegra and his team, and also the strict adherence of the Chinese text to the original. In fact, the main aim of the translators was to encourage the Chinese clergy to deepen their knowledge of the doctrine and transmit it subsequently, so it does not come as a surprise if common Christians found the translation too difficult to understand. The second point of issue regarded the source text, mentioning the Vulgate as a possible option. Allegra’s response was that this would have been possible only if the Hebrew or Greek texts were wanting. He stressed once more the importance of an adequate mastery of biblical languages, considering Greek and Hebrew, as well as other Semitic languages, such as Syriac. After more than fifteen years, Allegra still wanted to continue and accomplish the aims set out in the final documents of the Plenary Council of Shanghai (1924), which was the essence of the third point of issue. He wrote that the commission requested by the Council could be formed in those years, choosing six or seven members, Chinese and foreigners.<sup>5</sup> The final question was on the possibility of overcoming the different kinds of obstacles, such as linguistic problems, hermeneutical knowledge, lack of time and appropriate space, need of money. Allegra’s reply to this ultimate point was that every problem had to be faced with trust in Providence, hard work and faith in the Virgin Mary. This is the earliest document on the Studium found in the Archive, and despite it being written four years before the foundation of the institute, it confirms that Allegra already had a clear idea of his translation plan. In particular, some years later, the Friar explained the reason why he had chosen to establish a research institute rather than a translating commission:

A Commission could accomplish its task in a decade, and cease to exist when the work is finished. A Studium, on the other hand, should be open to revision, the publishing of updated commentaries, biblical monographies and other auxiliary works, even after the completion of the translation. (Allegra 1953, 7)

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5 On the First Plenary Council of Shanghai in 1924 see Lam 2008, and *Primum Concilium Sinense, anno 1924 etc.* 1930.

After its foundation, the first purpose of the Studium was to revise and publish the Book of Psalms - task accomplished on September 15, 1946 in Beijing, with the publication of the first volume of the Old Testament books, the *Shengyong ji* 聖詠集.

Concerning the translation method, many accounts written by Allegra himself are available in the Archive, and some of them were also published. However, it must be underlined that the first document found on the topic was written in 1944. The indications to follow were: 1) translation of original text; 2) 'word-for-word' translation (*verbum ad verbum*); 3) exegetical notes to be placed at the end of translation. Concerning the language to use, Allegra mentioned the *guoyu* 國語 used by Lu Xun 魯迅, Zhou Zuoren 周作人, Hu Shi 胡適, Ba Jin 巴金, Lao She 老舍, and Bing Xin 冰心. In this document Allegra exposed the different styles used in the translation of different sets of books. He chose clarity for the historical books, elegance for the poetics, earnestness for the wisdom books, while legal texts were strong and straightforward. To sum up:

The style will be one and different according to the variety required by the different literary genres. (Allegra 1945, 5)

The lengthy paragraph that follows in the report deals with the *terminologia sacra* (sacred terminology) and indicates the principles of its translation. The translator discouraged the use of new words, inviting to keep the Chinese Church's customary terminology. Where words needed to be changed or corrected, other Chinese Catholic books should be consulted, such as liturgical texts, the missal, various editions of the catechism, some lives of saints, and Chinese translations of books in European languages containing the words needed. Allegra suggested to create the indices of the transliterated names, dividing them into three groups, namely: proper names; technical names, such as plants, animals, weight and measurement units; and 'strictly sacred terms' (*terminorum sacrorum sensu stricto*). In the latter group, it is argued that the various transliterations, by Nestorians, Manicheans, Muslims, and Protestants, should be reported to choose the most appropriate. These indices can be found in the 1957 edition of the Gospels and, with more details and some modifications, in the appendices of the single volume edition of 1968. In this document Allegra also confirmed his approval of the plain transliteration of Semitisms, bringing to mind that their seemingly 'barbarous' sound would gradually become familiar, as occurred in the languages of Europe. On the dubious passages of the original texts, the translator stated that the contemporary exegetes were to be consulted and followed. Only if the ambiguity were to persist, could the Vulgate be consulted and used as source text. This position confirms the will of Allegra of being faithful to the tradition of the Church and his reluctance to discard the authority of the Vulgate, highlighting, at the

same time, the intention of following the new exegetical and hermeneutical methods.

While the translation method employed remained almost constant during the whole translation process, the position of the members of the Studium regarding the commentaries on the biblical books changed during the years. Allegra noted that no Catholic Chinese commentaries of the Old Testament existed, and only some explanations of the New Testament were available. He described the situation in these words:

However useful and pious such explanations were, they must be considered more as devotional than as literal and doctrinal explanations of the Sacred Text. To translate the Bible into a modern language and to write a kind of commentary designed to nourish the devotion of the faithful by indulging in accommodations and pious considerations would not, it seemed, meet the real needs of the Church. What was needed was a modern scientific version and a sound scientific commentary. (Allegra 1965, 351)

In a document written by Allegra on September 30, 1960 some important standpoints to prepare the commentaries are listed (Allegra 1960). The requirement of remembering the explanations of all the other books, while commenting a single one, in order to create unity and consistency, is noteworthy. Other points regard the importance of following the instructions of the Church on translation and of bearing in mind the historical context and details of the first edition of the original texts, so as to appropriately understand and translate the more difficult passages. As often argued by Allegra and his collaborators, the adherence to a scientific translation and exegetical method was fundamental. However, another key element was loyalty to the Catholic doctrine, with the commentaries necessarily delineating “the voice of the Church” and the “clear and theologically solid exposition of the Sacred Text” (Allegra 1960, 1). In a later document Allegra defined the commentaries as a “translation of the existing Catholic exegesis” (Allegra 1959-60, 9; Author’s translation).

The translation and publication process can be divided in two phases, one concerning the Old Testament, and the other concerning the New Testament. When the Studium was founded in 1945, the translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew had been completed by Allegra himself, therefore, only the revision of the Chinese text and the editing of the paratext needed to be prepared. The publication of the volume of the Psalms in 1946 started the issue of the Old Testament Books and was followed by the print and circulation of the *Zhihui shu* 智慧書, the Books of Wisdom, on October 4, 1947. On the same day, one year later, the Chinese Pentateuch, *Meise wushu* 梅瑟五書 was published, this being the last work of the Studium printed in Beijing. The first book prepared and published in Hong

Kong was the first volume of the Historical Books, *Shi shu shang ce* 史書上冊, when the team of translators was still in the Franciscan residence of Waterloo Road (October 4, 1949). In Kennedy Road, the second volume of the Historical Books was published (*Shi shu xia ce* 史書下冊, November 8, 1950) followed, one year later, by the first volume of the Prophetic Books, *Xianzhi shu shang ce* 先知書上冊 (November 8, 1951). This first volume included only the Book of Isaiah, while the second volume of the Prophetic Books was composed of the Books of Jeremiah, Lamentations, Baruch, and Ezekiel and was published on December 8, 1952: *Xianzhi shu zhongce* 先知書中冊. The third volume of the Prophetic Books, *Xianzhi shu xia ce* 先知書下冊 was published on May 31, 1954, and included the Book of Daniel and the Twelve Minor Prophets. This was the eighth volume published by the Studium Biblicum and completed the first edition of the Catholic Old Testament in Chinese.

In the month of October 1955, the translation of the New Testament began. The first books to be published would be the four Gospels (*Fuyin* 福音, 1957): after the translation of the texts of the Gospels, the Friars had to prepare other sections of the volume, namely the chronological table of the life of Jesus Christ, a table on the use of the Gospels during liturgy, maps of the places mentioned in the texts, and the index of the proper names. The next volume included the Acts of the Apostles and the letters by Saint Paul, and was published on December 2, 1959 (*Zongtu jing shu shang ce* 宗徒經書上冊, Writing of the Apostles, vol. 1); the last volume of the New Testament was published on August 2, 1961 (*Zongtu jing shu xia ce* 宗徒經書下冊, Writing of the Apostles, vol. 2), with the Catholic Epistles (James, Peter, John, and Jude) and the Book of Revelation. The issue of this book concluded the edition of the eleven big volumes containing the first complete translation of the Catholic Bible in Chinese.

In the year 1962, the complete New Testament was printed and distributed in one volume. This included the translation of all the twenty seven books, together with introductions presenting each book, and explicative notes at the side of each left page, next to the translated text. The appendices include a table with the main events of the New Testament, a table of the weights, measures, and currency systems used at the time, a list of the passages of the Gospels used during the liturgy of Sundays and main holy days, and a thematic index. The maps reproduce those included in the volume of the Gospels, namely those of the Roman Empire, the Palestine and Jerusalem during the events described in the New Testament, the Passover of Jesus, and add the missionary travels of Saint Paul, replacing the picture of the room of the Last Supper reported in the volume of the Gospels.

Soon after the completion of the edition of the eleven volumes of the whole Bible, Allegra and his team started the revision phase with the aim of publishing the single volume Bible. The criteria of the revision were established and followed up for five years from 1963. One new criterion

used in the revision of the two testaments was that of rendering the text accessible to anyone willing to approach the volume, so that many comments, particularly those concerning the textual critic, meant only for a literate reader belonging to the clergy, were deleted. Each book was to be revised by one member of the Studium and later discussed by all the other translators of the team. This kind of team-work and draft review included the method of identifying the incorrect or difficult passages and discussing them among the translators; the translation would be fixed only after the approval of each component of the team. The aim of this process was that of achieving consistency through the whole Chinese text translated, still respecting the differences in style of the several books composing the Bible. From the Latin preface to the 1968 version, we know that the New Testament was modified according to the recent critical text edition of 1966, assenting to the ecumenical view proposed in those years. Furthermore, some passages of the Old Testament were corrected following the recently discovered Dead Sea Scrolls (1946-1956). The first Catholic Bible in Chinese language in a unique volume was distributed on December 25, 1968 and is therefore known also as *Bethlehem Bible* or *Christmas Bible*. In 1969 the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments approved that the version published by the Studium Biblicum could be used as the official text in liturgical celebrations in Chinese language. Furthermore, after some revisions and editing, the Sigao Bible is the official text for Catholic liturgy in Chinese language still today.

### 3.2 Characteristics and Features

The issue of the single volume Bible, the first complete text in Chinese for the Catholics, was warmly welcomed and soon became a landmark for the Catholic Chinese speaking communities. Besides the good quality of the translation, what enriched the volume were some useful appendices carefully prepared by the members of the Studium. Among these, worthy of mention are the chronological tables, including one that brings together the significant events all over the world and those in the Bible, one listing the events described in the Old Testament, and one listing those of the New Testament. Another table presents the events in the world in relation to the events of the life of Jesus, while the next table reports Jesus' three years of public ministry. There is also a table comparing the weights, measures, and currency systems cited in the Bible with those currently used. Two charts report the Judean, Greek and Roman calendars, and the holy days for the Jews during one year. In the autobiographical memoirs, Allegra mentioned that the most appreciated appendices for the Chinese readership were those containing historical features. Furthermore, despite acknowledging that it needed amendments, as well as being the most

demanding appendix to prepare, Allegra was content with the *Shengjing jiaoyi suoyin* 聖經教義索引 (Index of Biblical Doctrine), an index presenting the explanation of twelve topics, covering all the main biblical themes and abridging the whole salvation history. The twelve small chapters were condensed in thirty pages and included themes as the revelation of God, the nature of God, the role of God as Creator, Savior and Redeemer. Three chapters concerned the Church, the sacraments and the prayers. The maps reproduce Palestine, the Roman Empire, the Assyrian Empire, and the Persian one, together with its process of Hellenization. Several illustrations are distributed in the text, in the places where they are pertinent. There are, for example, the pictures of the original scrolls of the Bible, or figures of the twelve tribes of Israel, and the reigns of David and Salomon in the sections where they are mentioned in the Old Testament, while pictures such as the official residence of Pilate or the structure of the cross as an instrument of punishment at the time of Jesus are found in the chapters of the Gospels narrating the Passion episodes.

Concerning the main body of the text, it can be underlined that Allegra and the translators of the Studium chose the terminology already accepted and used by the Catholics, following the long Church tradition. Relevant words such as 'God', 'Holy Spirit', 'baptism', or 'Word (*logos*)', whose translation had been extensively debated in the preceding centuries, were translated, respectively, as *Tianzhu* 天主, *Shengshen* 聖神, *xi* 洗, and *Shengyan* 聖言.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the team adopted the same strategy to translate other words belonging to a 'sacred terminology' or well-known proper names and toponyms, maintaining the acknowledged translations for the most familiar nouns, and, when necessary, trying to reproduce the sound of the original Hebrew or Greek name, avoiding strong similarities with some transliterations used by the Protestants and based on English pronunciation. An important detail is that, in every occurrence of seemingly strange or obscure translations, the team provided clear explanatory notes or cross references to check the meaning of important words or topics. Furthermore, it is noteworthy to mention the publication by the Studium of a Chinese Biblical Dictionary (*Shengjing cidian* 聖經辭典, 1975), meant to provide a better understanding of the translation and the terminology used therein. Biblical Weeks and Biblical Expositions, the issue of a biblical periodical and other types of publications edited by the Studium after 1968 were also fundamental sources to biblical knowledge.

6 On the 'Term Question' see Eber 1999.

## 4 Conclusion

The topic of the translation of the Bible in Chinese must be set in a wider context of research where both the general issue of biblical translation and the history of missions are included. In this way, the reason for the absence of a complete Catholic translation of the Bible in Chinese at the beginning of the twentieth century becomes clear. In fact, the analysis of the previous attempts at biblical translations by Catholic missionaries, or the reference to the extensive production of other types of texts has demonstrated that the Bible itself was not considered as a primary missionary tool. Moreover, taking into account the educational background of the missionaries and the general attitude towards the use and circulation of the biblical text both in Latin or in other languages, it is evident that the approach of the missionaries in China to the Bible conformed to the directions given by the Church hierarchies all over the world. Considering that the translation of the Bible in German by Martin Luther was believed to be one of the elements leading to the Protestant Reformation, it follows that Catholic missionaries were reluctant to translate the Bible in Chinese. Other types of texts were employed to spread their doctrine, and the few attempts at translating biblical texts were prevented from being circulated.

When the Franciscan missionary Gabriele Allegra arrived in China in 1931 with the purpose of dealing with such translation commitment, the attitude of the Catholic Church towards biblical translations in modern languages was gradually changing, and the Friar had received the support of his superiors at the very beginning of the project. Furthermore, between the publication of the last of the eleven volumes of the first complete edition of the Chinese Bible (1961) and the issue of the single volume (1968), the Second Vatican Council had officially approved and sustained the spread of the Bible in every language of the world, so that the work of the *Studium Biblicum* was highly appreciated even by the Pope himself and the Church hierarchies.

The analysis of the translation method and the publication process has shown that, since its initial project, the version of the Catholic Bible in Chinese was intended to diffuse the contents of Christian doctrine among Chinese speaking Catholics, rather than to convert people. In fact, when the first eleven volumes of the complete translation were published year by year, the first addressees were the clergy and the catechists who were to explain biblical episodes and messages to the believers. Subsequently, the volume published in 1968 was meant also for personal use, and the *Studium* could provide believers a better understanding of the Bible also through other means.

To conclude, this specific translation project of the Bible in Chinese can be considered as a complex text intending to translate into the Chinese language not only some Christian words but also a composite and



manifold Christian world. Furthermore, the original texts, preceding and contemporary versions in other languages, a wide set of commentaries, and other types of texts were a continuous and rich source of intertextuality, together with the changing historical contexts over the centuries and the different positions the Church and its representatives assumed concerning the topic of biblical translation. These elements constitute the basis on which this study can be included in the present volume *Between Texts, Beyond Words. Intertextuality and Translation*, second of the series "Translating Wor(l)ds".

The issue of this biblical text translating worlds and representing a complex case of intertextuality in translation can be analysed both from a historical and linguistic perspective. Concerning the historical perspective, there are two arguments to take into account, namely the changing historical and social contexts from the first writing of the texts to the specific Chinese translation case, and the developing role of the Bible in the life of the Church, of the clergy and of the lay people along the centuries. Firstly, it must be underlined that the 73 books which constitute the canon of the Catholic Bible were written in times and contexts different from those in which the events there reported took place. The causes of writing and the intended audiences (before than readers) were very different as well. Moreover, as reported above, the translation matters related to the shaping of other cultures and the affirmation of other languages soon arose, long before the first missionaries could reach China. According to historical, social, cultural, and religious needs, the canon was defined, the Old Testament was translated into Greek, and later the whole text was translated in the Latin language. Subsequently, the Latin Vulgate became the only officially accepted version for centuries reaching, without a permit of translation, every missionary destination all over the world. Documents allowing and supporting Bible translation in modern languages were officially issued only in the second half of the twentieth century. Secondly, the weak role of the Bible as a missionary tool should be considered. As already mentioned, in the first centuries of Christian missions to China, the Bible was more a source of preaching contents than a book to be translated and circulated. As a consequence, many other types of Christian texts such as catechisms, collections of stories from the Old Testament and the Gospels, books of prayers, saints' biographies were translated or directly written in Chinese. Furthermore, the absence of a Catholic Bible in Chinese along the centuries was the result of the close connection among Catholic communities in the whole world, all depending on the directions and rules established by the Pope and the hierarchies in Rome. The attitude of the higher representatives of the Church towards the translation of the Bible in Chinese - and in modern languages in general, was a consequence of the issues dealt with after the Protestant Reformation, thus resulting in the ban on the translation and circulation of the Sacred

Scriptures in languages different from Latin, and including some versions even in the Index of Prohibited Books. The reluctance shown by these hierarchies would seem to indicate a scarce awareness of the possibility of translating the sacred text in Chinese in order to transmit the Christian doctrine, nevertheless, the efforts made by the missionaries to produce and circulate Christian books in the Chinese language demonstrates that, however, the primary purpose of their mission was that of fostering the knowledge of their world. If on the one side these circumstances impeded the direct translation in Chinese words of the biblical world in its literal sense, on the other side they consented the circulation of various types of texts in the Chinese language that well transmitted the Christian world to Chinese people. Thus, for many centuries, the biblical world could be transmitted to Chinese people even if not through direct translation of the biblical text. As shown in the preceding paragraphs, the undertaking of Allegra could be accomplished also because he received approval and support from his superiors. Moreover, the Chinese speaking Catholics were finally considered prepared to receive the Word of God in their language, and not believed to be 'premature' as in the previous centuries.

Concerning the linguistic perspective, the specific case of the Sigao Bible can be examined. According to the documents written by Allegra and analysed in this study, the main aim of the translator was that of providing the Chinese with a complete version of the biblical text in their language. This meant that, through this specific book, they would have easy and, for the first time, direct access to the Word of God. In particular, some translating choices of the missionary can be underlined. In the first place, as the case of the 1919 Mandarin Union Version had clearly demonstrated, the context in which the final version would be published and distributed had to be taken into account. The long project of a unitary translation was undertaken by the different Protestant denominations in 1890 and could allow the missionaries to work on two versions of the text, one in literary and one in Mandarin Chinese. Nevertheless, the Protestants would soon witness the deep changes both in Chinese history and in the use of the Chinese language, and be able to acknowledge that the Mandarin version would be the most successful. When Allegra arrived in China and started to translate, the *guoyu* was already the standard national language and the works by Hu Shi, Lu Xun, Ba Jin, and other authors would be his reference texts. Choosing to translate in this language, Allegra intended to prepare a text which could be received and understood by his contemporary Chinese speaking world. In addition to this, in the documents analysed there is often explicit reference to the will of keeping the Chinese Christian terminology already acquired by tradition and familiar to the Chinese Catholics. In the second place, a particular concern for the correct understanding of the translated text can be observed in the analysed version. The numerous, long and detailed introductions, comments, and explanatory notes to the

translated text demonstrate the will of the translators to provide readers with all the needed support to better understand the main body of the text, offering detailed notes on words, names or events specifically belonging to the Judeo-Christian terminology. Furthermore, meeting the same needs, a rich paratext improved the final volume, with chronological and measure tables, pictures, and maps. These are all translating choices that aimed at creating a more familiar translated world. Particular reference with regard to this topic can be made to the chronological tables comparing relevant events of Chinese and Christian history, the correspondences between weights, measures, and currency systems, the pictures, the maps with the mentioned itineraries, the notes explaining Hebrew festivities or practices. It is interesting to note that, after the publication of the single volume Bible and its following revisions, the Friars of the Studium Biblicum in Hong Kong continued to work on complementary tools aimed at improving the knowledge Chinese people could have of the Christian and biblical world. Among these, the most important are the Biblical dictionary published in 1975 and the Biblical Expositions and the Biblical Weeks organised in Taiwan (1963), Hong Kong (1965), and Macau (1969). Finally, the difference between the edition of the eleven volumes published from 1946 to 1961 and the 1968 single volume translation is worthy of mention. The first edition of the translated text with bulky commentaries and explanations was intended to instruct the clergy; on the contrary, the single volume Bible published and circulated in 1968 was meant to reach every Chinese, even the non-Christians. Therefore, the series of eleven volumes included detailed exegetical and hermeneutical notes, references to the original lexicon in Hebrew and Greek and internal references intended to provide the clergy with a solid biblical knowledge. Differently, the 1968 Bible in a unique volume could be bought, read, and understood by a very wide range of Chinese speaking people, including non-believers or non-educated people.

Adopting a clear and efficient work plan and methodology, sharing translation problems, preparing explanatory notes, and providing a detailed paratext to support the main body of translation, Allegra and the other Friars of the Studium Biblicum created a unified and clear text. These efforts offered Chinese speaking Catholics an accessible, comprehensible, and complete Bible, a book that represents a well-developed endeavour of translating the Christian world into Chinese words.

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