

A study of Union Mandarin Version of *the Bible*

Abstract: *Union Mandarin Version, as a significant Bible translation in the early 20th century, is regarded as a milestone in the history of Chinese Bible translation, exerting a profound impact on the development of the Chinese language. Guided by Nida's functional equivalence theory, this paper explores the cultural adaptability and cross-cultural significance of this translation from four perspectives: lexical equivalence, syntactic equivalence, textual equivalence, and stylistic equivalence. By analyzing relevant translation strategies, methods, and techniques, the study aims to provide insights for the translation of classical religious texts.*

Keywords: *Bible; Union Mandarin Version; Functional Equivalence; Translation Strategies*

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I. Introduction

“*The Bible* is a remarkable book with precious value and great significance in many respects. Theologians regard it as an unparalleled religious classic, historians consider it a rare historical document in the world, and literary scholars regard it as an invaluable collection of literature.” (Zhang Chaoke, 2003) The Union Mandarin Version of the Bible is an important milestone in the history of Chinese Bible translation. Since its publication in 1919, it has become one of the most widely used Chinese Bible versions. The birth of this translation was rooted in Chinese society from the late 19th century to the early 20th century, when China was undergoing a critical period of cultural transformation and intellectual exchange. The influx of Western missionaries brought an increase in the dissemination of Christian culture and a growing demand for Chinese Bible translations. However, early translations had shortcomings in linguistic uniformity, cultural adaptability, and religious expression, making it difficult to meet the needs of localization. The Union Mandarin Version was jointly translated by Chinese and foreign scholars. It adopted a concise and standardized Mandarin style and sought to incorporate Chinese cultural characteristics while remaining faithful to the theological meaning of the original, making the translation both accessible and aesthetically appealing. From the perspective of Nida's functional equivalence theory, this paper examines the Union Mandarin Version of *the Bible* in conjunction with relevant translation strategies, methods, and techniques, with the aim of revealing its distinctive value in linguistic expression, cultural adaptation, and cross-cultural communication.

II. Background and Translation Principles of the Union Mandarin Version of *the Bible*

2.1 Translation History of the Union Mandarin Version

2.1.1 Background

Both the Jingjiao version of the Tang Dynasty and the Ming-Qing versions that began to appear in the late 16th century belonged to the initial stage of Bible translation into Chinese. During this period, there were few translations, their quality was relatively rough, and no independent translation principles had yet been established (Fu Jingmin, 2008). The origins of the Union Mandarin Version of the Bible can be traced back to the late 19th century, when China was undergoing a critical period of social transformation and cultural interaction between China and the West. As Western missionaries became increasingly active in China, the spread of Christianity created an increasingly urgent need for a unified Chinese Bible translation. According to Jost Oliver Zetzsche, from 1822 to 1919, a total of 36 Chinese Bible translations were published. However, most of these translations failed to achieve widespread circulation because of obscure language or inconsistent styles, and they also caused difficulties for missionary work.

In 1890, Protestant missionaries in China held a conference in Shanghai and decided to launch the translation and publication of the Chinese Union Version of *the Bible* in response to the growing need for the popularization of the national language. The Union Version was based on accessible Mandarin. It remained faithful to the theological meaning of the original while also accommodating Chinese cultural understanding. The translation project was completed jointly by Chinese and foreign scholars over nearly 30 years and was officially published in 1919. Once published, the Union Version became a standard Chinese Bible version and remained the most popular Chinese translation for nearly a century after its publication (Gong Yichao, 2010). The translation

not only met the needs of religious dissemination through concise language and precise expression but also provided valuable practical experience for the development of modern Chinese, becoming a classic example of the integration of religious texts and culture.

The development of the Union Mandarin Version should also be understood in relation to the changing linguistic situation of China at that time. The use of Mandarin was becoming increasingly important as communication across different regions and social groups developed. *A Bible* translated into a relatively standardized form of Mandarin could therefore reach readers beyond specific local communities. This linguistic choice was closely related to the practical purpose of the translation. Instead of relying heavily on classical Chinese or regional dialects, the translators sought to establish a form of expression that could be understood by a wider readership. At the same time, the translation had to deal with concepts, images, and expressions that originated from a Western religious tradition. The translators consequently faced a continuous tension between linguistic accessibility and cultural unfamiliarity. The history of the Union Mandarin Version shows that translation is influenced not only by the source text but also by the social and linguistic needs of the target culture.

2.2 Translation Principles

In the course of its dissemination, *the Bible* not only transformed the spiritual world of the West but also influenced the cultures of other parts of the world to some extent. From the Septuagint Greek text more than two thousand years ago to the present, *the Bible* has been translated into more than two thousand languages. The Union Mandarin Version (Xie Tianzhen, 2009), with its elegant language, high readability, and faithfulness to the original, surpassed all previous Chinese translations. This achievement was largely attributable to the establishment of the following translation principles: 1) the translation should use vernacular Chinese and genuinely reflect spoken language; 2) the target language should use the language commonly understood throughout the country rather than dialects or colloquial local expressions; 3) the style should be plain and clear while remaining elegant and concise; 4) the wording and sentences of the translation must be faithful to the original; and 5) metaphors in the original should be translated as literally as possible rather than reduced to their general meaning (Xie Tianzhen, 2009). Overall, the first three principles emphasize the readability of the translation, while the latter two emphasize faithfulness to the meaning of the original. The implementation of these principles ensured the fluency and readability of the Union Mandarin Version while preserving the literary quality and accuracy of the original.

From the perspective of translation principles, the translation practices of this period fully reflected an increasing emphasis on missionary work, as shown in the principles that “the translation should use the language commonly understood throughout the country” and “the translation must be simple enough for people of all social classes to understand” (Fu Jingmin, 2008). This indicates that the target audience of missionary work had expanded from the aristocratic classes of the early period to ordinary people and people of different ethnic groups. The unification of language not only met the need for popularized dissemination but also, to some extent, reflected a tendency to integrate the thinking of people speaking languages of the Sino-Tibetan language family. This translation strategy effectively promoted the widespread dissemination of *the Bible* and also exerted a far-reaching influence on cultural and intellectual exchange.

These principles reveal a relatively clear balance between readability and faithfulness. If the translators had focused exclusively on literal accuracy, the resulting text might have preserved more of the original linguistic form but become difficult for ordinary Chinese readers to understand. On the other hand, excessive adaptation could have weakened or changed important religious meanings. The principles adopted by the Union Mandarin Version attempted to avoid both extremes. The emphasis on plain and widely understandable language helped reduce the linguistic distance between *the Bible* and its Chinese readers, while the requirement of faithfulness placed limits on unnecessary adaptation. This balance is particularly important for religious texts because their meanings are often closely connected with established theological concepts. From the perspective of functional equivalence, these principles also indicate an awareness that an effective translation should consider both the message of the source text and the response of the target reader.

III. Nida's Functional Equivalence Theory

3.1 Overview of Nida's Functional Equivalence Theory

Eugene Nida proposed the theory of functional equivalence in 1969. Unlike traditional translation theories, this theory focuses on the response of target-language readers rather than direct correspondence between the source and target languages at the lexical and grammatical levels. “If the most appropriate translation is sought, the closest equivalence to the source language must be achieved.” (Nida, 2003) Functional equivalence is essentially a relatively objective theory of translation equivalence. It pursues the effect of the translation and emphasizes that the response of target-language readers to the translation should be basically equivalent to that of source-language readers to the original, taking this as a criterion for evaluating the quality of a translation (Nida, 1964: 159). This theory breaks with the limitations of excessive pursuit of literal correspondence in traditional

translation and emphasizes the functional and communicative nature of translation. Nida's functional equivalence theory is one of the important guiding theories for Bible translation. Its core is to make the translation as close as possible to the original in meaning and effect, so that target-language readers can perceive the content of the text in a way similar to source-language readers, that is, "a good translation should make the receptors of the target language respond to the translation in a manner similar to the receptors of the source language" (Nida, Taber, 2004).

Functional equivalence requires equivalence between the translation and the original to fall between two levels: the lowest level of equivalence and the highest level of equivalence (Nida, 2003). The lowest level of equivalence means that, through interpreting the translation, target-language readers can imagine how source-language readers understand and appreciate the original, whereas the highest level of equivalence requires target-language readers to understand and appreciate the original in the same way as source-language readers. The former is a basic requirement, and a translation below this standard is inadequate; the latter represents the ideal state of functional equivalence, but few translators can reach the highest standard. Nida holds that a qualified translation always lies between these two levels. To achieve these levels of equivalence, translators need to continuously strengthen their practical experience and improve translation quality.

An important feature of functional equivalence is that equivalence does not necessarily require identical linguistic forms. Languages differ in their grammatical structures, vocabulary, rhetorical conventions, and cultural associations. As a result, a translation may need to change the form of the original expression in order to preserve its communicative function. This point is particularly relevant to Bible translation because the source text contains various forms of narrative, instruction, poetry, and religious discourse. In the Union Mandarin Version, changes in vocabulary, sentence structure, and style can be understood as attempts to achieve such functional effects. The translators did not simply reproduce the surface structure of the English text; instead, they adjusted expressions when necessary so that Chinese readers could understand the intended meaning in a natural way.

3.2 Application of Functional Equivalence Theory in the Translation

Nida divides "functional equivalence" into four levels: lexical equivalence, syntactic equivalence, textual equivalence, and stylistic equivalence, and states that "translation needs to convey information from the source language through appropriate, natural, and equivalent language." (Nida, 2003) In Bible translation, the Union Mandarin Version fully demonstrates the application of functional equivalence theory at these four levels. The theory emphasizes the central role of information transmission rather than mechanically imitating the form of the source language. It requires translators to focus on conveying meaning, pursue equivalence beyond the minimum level, and approach the highest level of equivalence as closely as possible, so that the translation can achieve the greatest possible correspondence with the original in both semantic and cultural terms. Functional equivalence theory provides translators with a systematic guiding principle and helps ensure the accuracy and fluency of Bible translation.

The Union Mandarin Version of *the Bible* was based on the English Revised Version published in 1885 (Deng Jie, 2012). However, its translation process was not simply a word-for-word conversion. Instead, it incorporated the characteristics of the Chinese language and Chinese cultural understanding, making the translation faithful to the original while conforming to Chinese linguistic conventions and aesthetic preferences. This paper will compare specific passages from the English Revised Version and the Union Mandarin Version to examine how the translation reflects the core ideas and practical effects of functional equivalence theory.

IV. Application of Nida's Functional Equivalence Theory in the Union Mandarin Version

4.1 Analysis of Translation Examples of Lexical Equivalence

Lexical items are basic linguistic units for constructing sentences and texts. Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family, while English belongs to the Indo-European language family. Although the two languages share some similarities, they differ considerably in word usage and linguistic conventions (Yu Yaping & Zhang Chun, 2022: 4). If translators mechanically and rigidly translate word for word, serious misunderstandings can easily arise. Nida argues that the greater the difference between the source-language culture and the target-language culture, the greater the need for adjustment (Nida, Taber, 2004). Therefore, when translating lexical items, translators should understand and select meanings according to the text type and linguistic context on the basis of faithfulness to the original, and adopt appropriate translation techniques to achieve equivalence of meaning.

At the lexical level, functional equivalence is especially important because individual words often carry meanings beyond their basic dictionary definitions. A word may contain cultural, historical, religious, or emotional associations that cannot always be transferred directly into another language. Therefore, lexical translation requires the translator to consider the context in which a word appears and the knowledge that target readers are likely to possess. In the Union Mandarin Version, some lexical choices show an effort to replace unfamiliar

expressions with forms that are more recognizable to Chinese readers. Such choices do not necessarily mean that the translators ignored the source text. Rather, they demonstrate an attempt to reproduce the communicative effect of the original through resources available in the target language. The following examples illustrate how free translation and literal translation were used differently according to the lexical and cultural characteristics of the source expressions.

4.1.1 Free Translation

Example 1: Ruth 3:15

Original (ERV): “Bring the mantle that is upon thee, and hold it. And she held it; and he measured six measures of barley, and laid it on her: and he went into the city.”

Union Mandarin Version: “打开你所披的外衣。她打开了，他就撮了六簸箕大麦，搭在她肩上，便进城去了。”

“six measures of barley” should literally be translated as “六份大麦” but the Union Mandarin Version adopts a measurement familiar to target readers based on traditional Chinese units of measurement, rendering “份” as “簸箕”. This is because “簸箕” was a common tool in everyday Chinese life, especially in an agricultural society. Through free translation, the expression can evoke associations among target readers while retaining the quantitative meaning of the original.

Example 2: Isaiah 9:6

Original (ERV): “For onto us a child is born, onto us a son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

Union Mandarin Version: “因有一婴孩为我们而生，有一子赐给我们。政权必担在他的肩头上。他名称为奇妙、策士、全能的神、永在的父、和平的君。”

“prince of Peace” can be literally translated as “和平的王子”, emphasizing Jesus as the embodiment of peace. The Union Mandarin Version, however, renders it as “和平的君”. “君” is an important concept in traditional Chinese culture and carries the meaning of a benevolent leader. This translation not only conveys the image of Jesus as a messenger of peace but also strengthens the understanding of his authority in the Chinese cultural context. In addition, translating “counsellor” as “策士” is closer to the traditional Chinese designation for a wise person, enhancing the familiarity and cultural adaptability of the target language and enabling readers to associate the text with their own life experiences. This conforms to the standard of lexical equivalence in which “the responses of target-language audiences are similar to those of source-language audiences.” (Zhou Haohui & Chen Fu, 2024)

4.1.2 Literal Translation

Example 1: Matthew 6:9

Original (ERV): “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.”

Union Mandarin Version: “所以，你们要这样祷告：我们的父，愿人都尊你的名为圣。”

The Union Mandarin Version adopts literal translation by rendering “Hallowed” as “尊为圣”, directly expressing reverence for God and preserving the religious idea and meaning of honoring God’s name in the original. The translation is concise and direct and conforms to Chinese linguistic conventions.

Example 2: Romans 12:2

Original (ERV): “And be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

Union Mandarin Version: “不要效法这个世界，乃要心意更新而变化，叫你们察验何为神的善良、纯全、可喜悦的旨意。”

The Union Mandarin Version literally translates “fashioned” and “transformed” as “效法” and “变化”, conveying the appeal for Christians to undergo moral and spiritual renewal. The phrase “心意更新” directly corresponds to “renewing of your mind” in the original and maintains structural consistency. Through literal translation, the Union Mandarin Version accurately conveys the core idea of spiritual transformation and moral renewal in Romans, allowing the information of the original to be transmitted clearly and directly to Chinese readers.

Literal translation was widely used in the translation of the Union Mandarin Version, especially for conveying core religious ideas and ensuring clarity of expression. It not only preserves the theological meaning of the English original but also uses concise and direct expressions that conform to Chinese linguistic conventions. Through literal translation, the Union Mandarin Version faithfully conveys the core religious content of *the Bible*. This strategy plays an important role in preserving the spirit of the original and ensuring the accuracy of religious expression.

4.2 Analysis of Translation Examples of Syntactic Equivalence

Syntactic equivalence generally refers to equivalence in sentence structure (Li Junye & Li Jinyi, 2023). Translators need to make appropriate adjustments according to the sentence structures of the original, flexibly apply translation techniques, and find expressions that both correspond to the original and clearly convey its ideas and emotions (Ma Kailin, 2022). English sentence structures are complex and follow subject-verb agreement, with close connections within and between sentences. Chinese sentence structures are relatively loose, with weaker grammatical constraints, and rely more heavily on context and logic for interpretation. In Bible translation, grammatical structures can be adjusted and changed by “appropriately splitting sentences and changing voice while keeping the meaning of the sentence unchanged” (Han Limei et al., 2017). These adjustments not only make the translation more consistent with the reading habits of target readers but also enable target-language readers to experience the text in ways similar to source-language readers in terms of understanding and emotion, thereby achieving the intended effect of translation.

Syntactic adjustment is not simply a matter of making a sentence shorter or grammatically correct. It can also affect the emphasis, rhythm, and focus of information. English often organizes information through relatively explicit grammatical relationships, while Chinese can rely more heavily on context and semantic connections. When translating a long English sentence into Chinese, therefore, the translator may need to reorganize the order of information or divide the sentence into several smaller units. Such changes can make the relationship between actions and events easier for Chinese readers to follow. At the same time, syntactic adjustment should not result in the loss of important information. The examples show that the Union Mandarin Version generally attempts to preserve the central meaning of the source text while modifying its grammatical form. This approach is consistent with the basic requirement of functional equivalence, which prioritizes the communicative effect of the translated message rather than formal similarity alone.

4.2.1 Sentence Splitting

Example 1: Romans 8:28

Original (ERV): “And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose.”

Union Mandarin Version: “我们晓得万事都互相效力，叫爱神的人得益处，就是按他旨意被召的人。”

Example 2: Exodus 3:2

Original (ERV): “And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.”

Union Mandarin Version: “耶和华的使者从荆棘里火焰中向摩西显现。摩西观看，不料，荆棘被火烧着，却没有烧毁。”

The English original is a relatively long compound sentence, whereas Chinese tends to favor concise and clear expressions. The translation adopts a sentence-structure adjustment strategy by rendering subordinate clauses as short sentences, which conforms to Chinese linguistic conventions, makes the translation more natural and fluent, and improves its readability.

4.2.2 Conversion

One major difference between Chinese and English is that passive constructions occur more frequently in English, whereas Chinese uses passive constructions relatively less often. In Chinese linguistic and cultural contexts, the passive voice is still mainly used to express negative meanings (Li Yuan, 2020: 234). To accommodate the reading habits of target readers, the Union Mandarin Version adopts voice conversion to facilitate the dissemination of biblical content and ideas.

Example 1: Matthew 5:5

Original (ERV): “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.”

Union Mandarin Version: “温柔的人有福了，因为他们必承受地土。”

Example 2: 1 Corinthians 1:19

Original (ERV): “For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.”

Union Mandarin Version: “就如经上所记：我要灭绝智慧人的智慧，废弃聪明人的聪明。”

English makes extensive use of passive constructions, whereas Chinese commonly uses active constructions. To achieve functional equivalence at the syntactic level, the Union Mandarin Version adopts voice conversion, naturally transforming passive constructions into active ones. In Example 1, “blessed are” is rendered as “有福了,” while in Example 2, “it is written” is rendered as “经上所记.” This better accommodates readers’ linguistic habits while retaining the semantic and pragmatic functions of the original.

Example 3: Isaiah 53:5

Original (ERV): “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our bruised for our iniquities.”

Union Version: “哪知他为我们的过犯受害；为我们的罪孽压伤。”

The passive constructions “was wounded” and “was bruised” in the English original emphasize the passive nature of the actions and highlight Jesus’ suffering. The Union Version translates these passive constructions as “受害” and “压伤.” Although the passive meaning is still conveyed, the expressions are transformed into more natural Chinese verb-object structures. This approach avoids the obscurity that passive sentence structures may cause in Chinese, improves the readability of the text, and retains the religious meaning of the pain and sacrifice endured by Jesus for human sins.

4.3 Textual Equivalence

On the basis of maintaining the logical coherence of the original, attention should be paid to paragraph transitions, contextual coherence, and the transmission of information as a whole. Readers’ reading habits and ways of thinking should be fully considered while ensuring the logical coherence and semantic consistency of the translation.

4.3.1 Sentence Segmentation

Example 1: Luke 10:30

Original (ERV): “Jesus answered and said, A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among rubbers, who both stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead.”

Union Mandarin Version: “耶稣回答说：有一个人从耶路撒冷下耶利哥去，落在强盗手里，他们剥去他的衣裳，把他打个半死，就丢下他走了。”

In this passage, the translator uses appropriate segmentation to make the sentence more consistent with Chinese linguistic structure and conventions of expression. The multiple coordinated verb phrases in English, such as “fell among rubbers, who both stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead,” are combined in Chinese as “落在强盗手里，他们剥去他的衣裳，把他打个半死，就丢下他走了。” This segmentation expresses a complex sentence in a concise and clear manner, avoiding unnecessary length and repetition and better reflecting the concise characteristics of Chinese. The technique of segmentation involves not only adjustment of linguistic structure but also consideration of contextual fluency, cultural adaptation, and the conciseness of the target language.

4.4 Stylistic Equivalence

Stylistic equivalence is a higher-level requirement of functional equivalence theory. *The Bible* has a variety of styles, including narration, instruction, and poetry. In translation, the style of the target text needs to be adjusted according to the stylistic features of the original so as to convey the corresponding emotions and cultural meanings. Different styles require different translation strategies to ensure that the stylistic effect of the translation is equivalent to that of the original.

4.4.1 Retaining the Solemn Style of *the Bible*

Example 1: Genesis 1:1

Original (ERV): “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

Union Mandarin Version: “起初，神创造天地。”

The translation retains a concise and solemn stylistic quality, which is consistent with the characteristics of *the Bible* as a religious text. This expression also corresponds to the poetic mode of expression in Chinese, maintaining stylistic equivalence and conveying a sense of solemnity.

4.4.2 Reproducing Poetic Rhythm

Example 1: Psalms 23:1

Original (ERV): “The lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.”

Union Mandarin Version: “耶和华是我的牧者，我必不至缺乏。”

The translation reflects the rhythm of poetry and enhances the solemnity and expressive power of the religious text. Its sentence structure is balanced and its language is elegant. It retains the poetic quality of the original while conforming to the rhythm and parallelism commonly found in Chinese, and it is also consistent with the stylistic features of the original.

V. Significance of the Union Mandarin Version in Cross-Cultural Communication

The influence of the Union Mandarin Version extends beyond the translation of individual biblical passages. As a translated religious text, it became part of a broader process of cultural exchange between Western Christianity and Chinese society. Its influence was closely connected with the way religious concepts were

presented through familiar Chinese linguistic forms. In this process, translation served as a bridge between two different cultural systems. The translators had to make decisions about terminology, sentence patterns, rhetorical style, and cultural references, and each decision could affect how Chinese readers understood the foreign religious tradition. Therefore, the significance of the Union Mandarin Version should be considered from both linguistic and cultural perspectives. Its widespread use suggests that successful cross-cultural translation depends not only on accurate transfer of information but also on the ability of a translated text to establish meaningful connections with its target readers.

5.1 Dissemination and Adaptation of Religious Ideas

The Union Mandarin Version of *the Bible* is of great significance for the dissemination of religious ideas. It expressed Christian doctrines in concise Chinese and promoted the spread of Christianity in China. Through localized religious terminology, it made Christian teachings easier for believers to understand while also promoting the integration of Christianity with Chinese culture. The Union Version played a foundational role in the formation and development of Chinese theology and provided linguistic support for the subsequent dissemination of religious ideas, deepening the exchange and integration between Christianity and traditional Chinese culture.

5.2 Contribution to the Development of Modern Chinese

The Union Mandarin Version of *the Bible* made an important contribution to the development of modern Chinese. It helped standardize the grammar and vocabulary of written Chinese and promoted the popularization of modern Chinese. By adopting a concise Mandarin style, the Union Version provided the general public with an accessible form of language and enriched Chinese expression. The Union Version introduced more than 1,000 new Chinese expressions and created 87 new Chinese characters, injecting new vitality into the development of the modern language (Hu Jie, 2008). At the same time, it introduced a large number of religious and philosophical terms, such as “道” and “天国,” promoting the creation of new vocabulary. Many of its expressions became common structures in modern Chinese, contributing to the development of Chinese literature and everyday communication.

VI. Limitations and Challenges of the Union Mandarin Version

6.1 Limitations of Language Change Over Time

Although the linguistic style of the Union Mandarin Version was standardized and widely accepted at the time, the grammar, vocabulary, and modes of expression of modern Chinese have changed significantly over time. Some words and sentence structures in the Union Version no longer conform to the language habits of modern readers, making parts of the text difficult to understand and affecting its effectiveness in contemporary dissemination.

6.2 Conflict between Faithfulness to the Original and Cultural Adaptation

Although the Union Version remains faithful to the theological ideas of the original, it faces certain challenges in terms of cultural adaptation. Some Western religious terms and concepts cannot be fully aligned with traditional Chinese culture. In the process of cultural transformation, translators may place too much emphasis on faithfulness to the original, making some complex religious ideas difficult for Chinese readers to accept and understand.

6.3 Clash of Different Cultural Values

During the translation process, differences between Western Christian values and traditional Chinese culture become apparent. For example, Christianity emphasizes the relationship between the individual and God, whereas Chinese culture places greater emphasis on harmony within the collective and society. Such differences in cultural values have not been fully reconciled in some translations and may create obstacles to understanding for readers from different cultural backgrounds.

VII. Future Research and Development Directions

7.1 Optimization of Translation Strategies

Research on the translation can improve its adaptability by optimizing translation strategies. Greater attention can be paid to dynamic equivalence and functional equivalence, strengthening the modernity and accessibility of the translation while avoiding overly rigid literal translation. By combining an in-depth understanding of the original with localized expression, the translation can be brought closer to the language habits of contemporary Chinese readers while ensuring the accurate transmission of religious ideas.

7.2 Promoting the Development of Diverse Translations

With increasing social and cultural diversity, the development of diverse translations should be promoted. In addition to maintaining traditional authoritative versions, multiple versions and styles can be developed according to the needs of readers from different cultural backgrounds, faith communities, and reading groups, thereby meeting diverse comprehension needs and improving dissemination effectiveness.

7.3 Innovation through the Integration of Technology and Translation

With the development of artificial intelligence and natural language processing technologies, Bible translations can incorporate modern technology for innovation. Corpus-assisted translation, translation software, and machine translation can improve translation efficiency and quality. In particular, modern technologies can be used for more refined optimization of lexical selection and sentence restructuring, further improving the accuracy and readability of the translation.

VIII. Conclusion

Since its publication, the Union Mandarin Version of *the Bible* has played a pivotal role in Chinese Christian circles. Guided by Nida's functional equivalence theory, this paper compares the English Revised Version of *the Bible* with the Union Mandarin Version and analyzes the application of various translation methods and strategies, including literal and free translation, at the four levels of equivalence proposed by Nida's functional equivalence theory. During the translation process, translators should continuously improve their practical translation skills, balance equivalence between the source and target languages, and accurately convey the ideas and meanings of *the Bible*, thereby promoting a deeper understanding of *the Bible* among target-language readers. Through an in-depth study of the translation, this paper aims to provide a useful reference for research on the translation of classical religious texts and further promote target-language readers' understanding and appreciation of *the Bible*.

Overall, the translation practice of the Union Mandarin Version demonstrates that functional equivalence can be achieved through a combination of different translation methods rather than through a single fixed strategy. Literal translation helps preserve important religious meanings and textual information, while free translation and structural adjustment make unfamiliar expressions more acceptable to Chinese readers. The treatment of vocabulary, syntax, textual organization, and style also shows that equivalence operates at different linguistic levels. More importantly, the translation reflects an ongoing negotiation between fidelity to the source text and adaptation to the target culture. This balance contributed to the readability and influence of the Union Mandarin Version. Although the version has limitations related to language change and cultural differences, its translation practices remain valuable for the study of religious and cross-cultural translation. The analysis also suggests that functional equivalence is not a rigid formula but a flexible principle that allows translators to make appropriate choices according to textual context and communicative purpose.

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