

PROTESTANT BIBLE TRANSLATION AND MANDARIN AS THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE OF CHINA. By GEORGE KAM WAH MAK. pp. 413. Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2017.

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Belief in God reaches beyond boundaries whereas loyalty to a nation is sustained within borders. In China a tension between Christianity and anti-colonial nationalism is perceived. Critiques of Christianity attacked Jesus in the 1920s and both Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai openly stated that Christianity was inseparable from imperialists' encroachment on China. The assertion that aided the Chinese people's bitter struggle against imperialism and for nation-building is still met with scepticism today. Nonetheless, George Kam Wah Mak's new monograph—*Protestant Bible Translation and Mandarin as the National Language of China*—provides well-researched evidence to demonstrate its efficacy in nation-building. He argues that the history of multiple translations of the Mandarin Bible in fact contributed to fabricating the Chinese national language (*guoyu*), a vernacular evolving from Mandarin. That is, Christian translation practices fuelled China's development of nation-building.

In the early 1930s, Hu Shi, who was prominent during the May Fourth Movement, explicitly stated “the Mandarin translations of the Bible played ‘no part’ in preparing the way for the modern use of *baihua* (vernacular) as a literary medium” (p. 204). Zhou Zuoren, another May Fourth intellectual, had a different perspective. He praised the Union Version of the Mandarin Bible (*heheben*). He believed it was able to facilitate the search for China's national language. “The European translations of the Bible fostered the unification and development of European national languages. . . . I am certain that the reformation of Chinese language and literature can be greatly helped and facilitated [by the Mandarin Bible]” (p. 5). The Union Version was a vital component in modern Chinese Christianity. It came into existence in 1919 and became extensively circulated in the Chinese-speaking world after the peak of the vernacular language movement. One might want to echo Hu Shi and disagree with Zhou Zuoren. For it seems to Chinese nationalists self-evident that the Union Version chose the already existing vernacular to be its medium. It scarcely had input into the formulation and unification of China's national language. Anti-Christian thought further marginalised Christianity in the national narrative, so that it has become more difficult to appreciate the significance of the Mandarin Bible. How could it help the Chinese people's search for their national language and thus realise Benedict Anderson's notion of “horizontal comradeship”?

Mak reveals and traces the multiple origins of the Union Version back to the second half of the 19th century. It evolved from various translation practices. Since the 1850s, Protestant missionaries had endeavoured to translate the Bible into Mandarin; the Nanking Version (in 1856 and 1857) and the Peking Version (in 1872) are two such attempts. The spoken Mandarin in Nanking was slightly different to that of Peking. The two versions had variance. So did other Mandarin and dialect versions. This easily caused confusion. Encountering more and more discrepancies, there emerged among Protestant missionaries a demand for a unified version produced for China. Thus “the ultimate goal of missionary Bible translators was to produce a union Chinese Bible to avoid confusion of the Chinese about Christianity that arose from different Bible versions” Stephen L. Baldwin of the American Methodist Episcopal Mission explained in 1877 that a standard translation was necessary to “secure a fixed nomenclature for all the divine names, and all proper names of persons and places”. Accordingly, “the missionaries' unity of purpose in their work would be impressively manifested and their sphere of influence be greatly enlarged” (p. 60). After the 1890 General Conference of the Protestant Missionaries of China, on the basis of their previous achievements, the missionaries and their Chinese associates worked together towards the Union Version—a unified version that mixed different spoken

Mandarin to create an “everywhere current” for all Chinese. As Mak argues, “the idea of *one Bible for China*” was born and persisted into the Republican Era. (pp. 60, 65–66)

In addition to the missionaries’ collective effort, the British and Foreign Bible Society, according to Mak, played an essential role in the translation practices. The society had come to China and sponsored the translation and circulation of the Literary Chinese Bible since Robert Morrison’s 1810s and 1820s. (p. 83) While the missionaries endeavoured to translate the Bible into Mandarin, the society provided funding to enable their work. It “contributed about £6,300 in total” and “the largest part was appropriated for” the Union Version. (p. 98) This financial support enabled the society to push through its theological preferences in the translation practices. The King James Version was therefore selected to be “a model biblical translation” and “the belief that the Bible is self-sufficient” was also reinforced. (p. 128) Furthermore, the society also set up an effective colportage system to facilitate the dissemination of the Mandarin Bibles. “For example, in 1875 only about 30,000 copies were sold through the BFBS’s colportage in China, but after a decade that number had increased to more than 206,000”. The growth continued. “It once reached over five million in 1929”. (pp. 127–128) This allowed the Mandarin Bibles to reach as many ordinary Chinese as possible. In short, the success of the Mandarin Bibles was rooted in the patronage established by the British and Foreign Bible Society.

The extent to which the distribution of the Mandarin Bibles influenced the use of language in China has remained in question. The Mandarin Bibles undoubtedly had impact on believers. However, the Christian population was modest. One may wonder whether or not the influence went beyond a believer’s religious community and became one of the factors contributing to the emergence of China’s national language. Meticulously examining textbooks, Mak demonstrates that the influence did exist. For instance, *A Hundred and Eight Chinese Language Lessons (Guowen bai ba ke)*—a popular textbook in junior secondary schools in the 1930s—included “the first story of creation in Genesis” of the Union Version. (p. 214). While *Theory of Chinese Grammar (Zhongguo yufa lilun)*, published in the mid-1940s, aimed to “be an undergraduate textbook of Chinese grammar, or a reference work for Chinese language teachers in secondary schools”. (p. 222) The Union Version was one of the sources for the book, and its editor cited examples from the Union Version to explain the grammatical compositions of the Chinese language (p. 221). Lexicographical and grammatical features of the translations were lauded by scholars so that they were used as exemplars in textbooks. Thus, the Mandarin Bible’s reach went beyond the Christian community and occupied a key position in the national education of Chinese language. In other words, the translation practices did foster the shaping of China’s national language.

Overall, Mak polishes Zhou Zuoren’s remark and dismisses Hu Shi’s. The Union Version and its previous versions were the result of continuous, collaborated translation practices. The Mandarin Bibles influenced new terms and grammatical structures to enrich and transform Mandarin into China’s national language. What is more, Mak argues the Mandarin Bibles made an indispensable contribution to China’s nation-building. The cost was the neglect of other dialect Bibles such as Hakka, Shanghaiese, and Cantonese, which Mak does not discuss in detail. Theoretically, nation-building is grounded in the awareness of identity. If a people perceive distinctions between Self and Other, they have become consciously involved in nation-building. Had the Chinese people had no shared cultural and ethnic identity, how could they have imagined “horizontal comradeship” with one language? Putting it another way, it seems to me that Mak prioritises the unification of language. China’s nation-building, to his mind, was an unexpected result of Bible translation practices and Protestant missionaries’ participation was passive and incidental. Nevertheless, was the proliferation of a national language (Mandarin) a more substantial building block to national identity than anti-colonial emotion and national awareness? It is debatable. Still, his argument is sophisticated and compelling. It is worth our

attention. Mak's work not only challenges our current understanding but also encourages us to rethink the dialectic relationship between Christianity and China's nation-building. <johnfeng@cuhk.edu.cn>

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THAI SILVER AND NIELLOWARE. By PAUL BROMBERG. pp.232. River Books, Bangkok, 2019.
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Technically sophisticated and rich with symbolism, the objects explored in *Thai Silver and Nielloware* consist mainly of luxury items made for the personal use of Thai royals, minor nobles, officials and wealthy merchants in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, during the Rattanakosin Kingdom (1782–1932). Unlike contemporaneous silverwares from neighbouring India, Burma, and the Malay Peninsula—which were widely exported and promoted by colonial authorities during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—relatively little is known about these objects outside of Thailand. Important reference works such as Sylvia Fraser-Lu's *Silverware of South East Asia* and Naengnoi Punjabhan's *Silverwares from Thailand* are now dated, and publications on Asian silver in general are far rarer than those about the fine arts, so *Thai Silver and Nielloware* has been eagerly awaited and will be enthusiastically received. The author is the editor of the *Journal of the Siam Society* and draws on his years of experience as a collector of Thai silver. It is, therefore, a book intended for both specialist collectors and a general audience, and loses and gains for accommodating each perspective.

Bromberg divides the book into eight chapters, organised thematically rather than chronologically, prefaced by an introduction in which he sensibly excludes silverwares made before the eighteenth century and the material culture of various culturally distinct 'hill tribes' from the scope of the book—both have received much attention in other publications. The first chapter opens with a general overview of the usage of silver, which historically has been worked in villages across Thailand, but primarily in the regional centres of Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Nakhon Si Thammarat. Much attention is paid to the influence of immigrant craftsmen in the development of the silverworking industry, particularly from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, when an influx of Chinese craftsmen spread Chinese forms and designs throughout Thailand. A major theme throughout the book, the author sensitively deals with issues surrounding the 'Thai-ness' of objects produced within an environment of competing foreign influences and interests. A concise introduction to the major decorating techniques of repoussé, openwork, filigree, etc., is informative, but would perhaps have better served general readers with accompanying photos of the various processes.

More detail is dedicated to the production of niello, an enamel-like mixture that is applied to incised lines on a metal surface and fired to produce a glossy black appearance. Until recently a major industry in Thailand, the material receives its own chapter, in which Bromberg outlines the manufacturing process and examines the history of the technique, which was probably introduced to the southern port of Nakhon Si Thammarat via Portuguese or Indian traders in the sixteenth century. He explores several alternative theories regarding its arrival in Thailand, colourfully illustrated by extracts from the writings of foreign diplomats, each of whom had their own ideas about its origins. The chapter concludes with a personal account of visits to niello workshops in Nakhon Si Thammarat in 2014 and 2015, which