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Catholic intellectuals in modern China and their Bible translation: Li Wenyu and Ma Xiangbo

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Abstract

Li Wenyu and Ma Xiangbo were two influential Catholic intellectuals in modern China who each undertook a translation of the Bible into Chinese. This article surveys their participation in contemporary ideological debates and investigates their thoughts on the inculturation of Catholicism, including ‘evangelisation by writing’ and ‘scholastic mission’, as well as their beliefs and practices regarding Bible translation. An in-depth comparison of their translations is also provided, illuminating the different approaches taken by Li and Ma in dealing with terminology, sentence structure, linguistic style, and theological implications. Li conformed to Chinese biblical terminology established by the Catholic missionaries who preceded him and adhered to the syntax of Classical Chinese; in contrast, Ma’s linguistic style is approximate to *Easy Wenli*, and he adopted words and phrases from traditional Chinese culture to transmit the Catholic faith. The two translators demonstrated two choices of indigenising Catholicism and the Bible in China: ‘mirror-type’ and ‘bridge-type’.

Keywords: Chinese Christianity; Chinese Catholics; Bible translation; Li Wenyu; Ma Xiangbo

Introduction

Biblical texts in China have a history of more than 1,400 years, beginning with the small number of translated pericopes which appeared in Nestorian literature. A wide range of texts exists. A comparison of Bible translations associated with each of the Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Christian faiths reveals significant variations both in number and type. Protestant missionaries adopted various linguistic styles, including Classical Chinese, Mandarin Chinese, and Chinese dialects to render the Scripture, resulting in a body of work that is numerous and diverse. Though likewise diverse in style, there are significantly fewer Catholic translations in both number and completeness, and they tend to be limited to segments of the Bible, for example, the Four Gospels, Gospels and Acts, or the New Testament as a whole. As for Orthodox Christians, only Gury Karpov (1814–1882), Flavian Gorodetsky (1840–1915), and Innokentii of Beiguan (1864–1931) offered contributions. Notably, despite Catholic missionaries being early to arrive in China, and despite their production of numerous works in Chinese on wide-ranging issues, their translations of the Bible into Chinese were slow to arrive due to the restrictions imposed by the Vatican and some missionary directors.¹ Even so, there was no lack of

¹ In 1615, Pope Paul V permitted translation of the Bible into ‘the language suitable for scholar-officials’, but Jesuit missionaries in China faced restrictions by their directors. See Louis Pfister 費賴之, *Zaihua Yesuhui liezhuan*

masterpieces, among which were a collaborative translation of the New Testament by Jean Basset (白日昇, 1662–1707) and Johan Xu (徐若翰, d. 1734), and Louis Antoine de Poirot's (賀清泰, 1735–1814) version of most of the canonical books.²

Regardless of the variety of Christianity, the enterprise of Chinese Bible translation was initiated by foreign missionaries and then carried out by native translators. On the Protestant side, local assistants had played an active role in translation projects since the pioneering works of Joshua Marshman (馬士曼, 1768–1837) and Robert Morrison (馬禮遜, 1782–1834), but their endeavours did not become independent until the beginning of the twentieth century.³ Comparatively, starting in the second half of the nineteenth century, some Catholic projects of Bible translation were undertaken entirely by Chinese translators. Moreover, their translations, both in Classical and Colloquial Chinese, were much more appropriate for their target readers as they manifested the qualities of faithfulness and expressiveness. This achievement was undoubtedly a reflection of the translators' educational background and social context. Most were clergy who had not only received Western philological and theological training in missionary schools from an early age, but had also studied the Chinese classics. This mixture of Western and traditional Chinese education equipped them with an incomparable advantage in terms of language conversion and biblical interpretation. Some translators participated in various ideological disputes and even social-political causes, with Bible translation becoming part of their expression of both cultural philosophy and political aspiration.

The most eminent among these translators were Li Wenyu (李問漁, 1840–1911), a prolific Catholic writer, and Ma Xiangbo (馬相伯, 1840–1939), a thinker, educator, and politician. While Li and Ma had very similar backgrounds, they eventually chose very different paths, particularly in how they balanced their Catholic faith with Chinese culture and contemporary political questions. Li devoted his whole life to religious belief, propounding 'Catholicism in China'; Ma, however, struggled with his identity as both a Catholic and a Chinese, thinking more about how this foreign religion could be accommodated in Chinese society, which led to his important contribution to the inculturation of Catholicism. This difference also influenced their practice in Bible translation. While they both played important roles in modern history and have aroused scholarly interest, little research has focused on their accomplishments in Bible translation.⁴ This article

ji shumu [在華耶穌會列傳及書目 The Biographies and Bibliographies of Jesuits in China] (Beijing, 1995), p. 117. Father Louis le Comte reported to King Louis XIV's confessor that, in the Pope's opinion, publishing a Chinese Bible and making it accessible to the public would be 'rash imprudence'. See Marshall Broomhall, *The Bible in China* (San Francisco, 1977), p. 41.

² Relevant discussion can be found in A. C. Moule, 'A manuscript Chinese version of the New Testament', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 85 (1949), pp. 30–31; Tan Shulin 譚樹林, 'Shengjing Erma yiben guanxi bianxi [《聖經》二馬譯本關係辨析 An Analysis of the Relation between Marshman's and Morrison's Bible Versions]', *Shijie zongjiao yanjiu* [世界宗教研究 Studies in World Religions] 1 (2000), pp. 109–116; Zhao Xiaoyang 趙曉陽, 'Erma Shengjing yiben yu Bairisheng Shengjing yiben guanxi kaobian [二馬聖經譯本與白日昇聖經譯本關係考辨 Investigation of the Relation among Marshman's, Morrison's and Jean Basset's Bible Versions]', *Jindaishi yanjiu* [近代史研究 Modern Chinese History Studies] 4 (2009), pp. 41–59.

³ The first four chapters of the Gospel of Mark, translated into Chinese by Yanfu 嚴復 in 1908, were published by the British and Foreign Bible Society. Though being the first Protestant Bible translated independently by a Chinese (the translator was not a Protestant), it is only a partial version. The first complete version was completed by Wang Xuanchen 王宣忱 and published by the Chinese Christian Church in Qingdao 青島 in 1933.

⁴ Very little research has been done on the life and works of Li, and in spite of there being many studies on Ma, they mainly focus on the areas of politics, education, and religion, exploring his life and thought. See Chen Caijun 陳才俊, 'Wenhua huitong yu zhongguo jiaoyu xiandaihua de changshi. Yi Ma Xiangbo jiaoyu zhexue linian wei zhongxin [文化會通與中國教育現代化的嘗試—以馬相伯教育哲學理念為中心 The Attempt of Cultural Integration and Chinese Educational Modernism. Centred on Ma Xiangbo's Educational Philosophy]', *Jinan xuebao* (*Zhexue shehui kexue ban*) [暨南學報 (哲學社會科學版) Jinan Journal (Philosophy and Social Science)] 6 (2010),

centres on the thoughts and practices of Li's and Ma's Bible translation, against the historical backdrop of the ideological disputes in modern China, as well as their views on 'evangelisation by writing' and 'scholastic mission'. Through discussing their lives and achievements, we will also examine their perspectives on how to indigenise Catholicism and Christianity more generally in China. By comparing the two we will see how, despite possessing the same identity as Catholic intellectuals in modern China, they made different choices in their missionary work, especially in Bible translation: Li highlighted the differences between Chinese culture and Christianity, while Ma focused more on their similarities. Taken together, they provide us with two intriguing windows into this special group in the history of Chinese Christianity.

Chinese Catholic intellectuals and modern ideological disputes

There are many similarities between Li Wenyu's and Ma Xiangbo's backgrounds: both were born in 1840, around the time of the First Opium War in China and the beginning of modern Chinese history. Both were born in Jiangsu Province: Li in Chuansha 川沙 (present-day Pudong 浦東, Shanghai 上海), Ma in Danyang 丹陽 (present-day Zhenjiang 鎮江, Jiangsu 江蘇). Both came from Catholic families of several generations' standing, studied at College St Ignace in Shanghai (founded by French Jesuits), became Jesuits after graduation, and were ordained into the priesthood around the age of 30. From this point on, however, they took separate paths.⁵

After obtaining a doctoral degree in the theology, Li moved to Anhui 安徽 for six years of missionary work, before returning to Shanghai to teach Chinese and Latin, first in Zikawai Seminary 徐家匯修院 and then in Dongjiadu Seminary 董家渡修院. In 1879, Li started the semi-monthly (later weekly) journal *Yiwen lu* 益聞錄 (lit. collections of beneficial information), which covered basic Catholic doctrine, history, geography, and the latest news in science and education. The spirit of the journal was to 'take what is beneficial to the world and humanity, and let them be known to the public' (蓋取其事之有益於世道人心者, 使天下之人, 皆樂於聞見). *Yiwen lu* was merged with *Gezhi xinbao* 格致新報 (Gezhi Newspaper) in 1898. In 1887, Li founded another journal, the monthly *Shengxin bao* 聖心報 (Sacred Heart Newspaper), in which he elaborated on Catholic beliefs and traditions, science, philosophy, and literature. Li served as the chief editor of these two newspapers until his death. Besides these two publications, he took great pains to advance and advocate his own theories, with nearly 60 pieces of writing, translations, and edited works, among which were *Liku* 理窟 (A Cave of Philosophy), *Xu Liku* 續理窟 (A Sequel to A Cave of Philosophy), *Tiyanlun boyi* 天演論駁議 (A Refutation and Discussion of the Theory of Natural Evolution), and *Xinjing yiyi* 新經譯義 (Translating the Meaning of the New Testament). In addition to being a prolific writer, Li also replaced Ma as the president of Aurora College in 1906. Li lived most of his life in a nearly monastic manner, and his work centred on defending and interpreting Catholic beliefs.⁶

pp. 137–143; Xue Yuqin 薛玉琴, 'Minguo chunian youguan zhixian wenti de zhenglun. Yi Ma Xiangbo de jingli wei shijiao de kaocha [民國初年有關制憲問題的爭論—以馬相伯的經歷為視角的考察 The Debate on Constitutional Issues in the Early Years of Republican China. From a Perspective of Ma Xiangbo's Experience]', *Fudan xuebao. Shehui kexue ban* [復旦學報 (社會科學版) Fudan Journal (Social Science)] 2 (2012), pp. 112–122; *idem*, 'Ma Xiangbo dui Feijidujiao yundong de huiying (1922–1927) [馬相伯對非基督教運動的回應 (1922–1927) Ma Xiangbo's Response to Anti-Christian Movement (1922–1927)]', *Shijie zongjiao yanjiu* [世界宗教研究 Studies in World Religions] 6 (2014), pp. 117–129.

⁵ For an overview of Li's and Ma's lives, see Fang Hao 方豪, *Zhongguo Tianzhujiao shi. Renwu zhuan* [中國天主教史: 人物傳 The History of Chinese Catholic Church. Biographies] (Beijing, 2007), pp. 650–653, 656–660.

⁶ For Li Wenyu's life, see also Xu Zongze 徐宗澤, 'Li Wenyu Siduo shishi ershiwu zhounian jinian [李問漁司鐸逝世二十五週年紀念 A Memorial for the 25th Anniversary of Li Wenyu the Priest's Passing Away]', *Shengjiao zazhi* [聖教雜誌 Journal of the Holy Church] 25.12 (1936), pp. 722–729; Zhang Ruogu 張若谷, 'Guwenjia Li

In contrast, Ma upheld his Catholic faith in an alternative way, playing the role of ferryman between the sacred and the profane, and leading a life full of struggle. A crucial turning point in his life came when he was 37: in that year, he abandoned the priesthood and left the Society of Jesus, due to his conflicts with its French director over the latter's racist treatment of Chinese followers and priests. After leaving the church, Ma entered politics and had a career of mixed success spanning over 20 years. He was an aide to Li Hongzhang (李鴻章, 1823–1901) and Yu Ziyuan 余紫垣, was sent on a diplomatic mission to Japan and Korea, visited the United States in pursuit of a loan, and participated in other foreign affairs related to the 'Westernisation Movement' (*yangwu yundong*, 洋務運動). However, Ma never rose to a position of power in the Qing Court and nearly all the political movements he took part in were eventually defeated. At the age of 58 he returned to the church and donated all his family property to establish Aurora College (*Zhendan xueyuan*, 震旦學院) and Fudan College (*Fudan gongxue*, 復旦公學). Meanwhile, he frequently communicated with Kang Youwei (康有為, 1858–1927) and Liang Qichao (梁啟超, 1873–1929), two leading advocates of constitutional reform. He delivered speeches supporting this political movement all over the country and was honoured as 'the first public speaker in China'. After the Revolution of 1911 (*Xinhai geming*, 辛亥革命), Ma was appointed the governor of Nanjing. In his later years, he continually voiced support for democratic movements, freedom of religious belief, and the inculturation of Catholicism, in addition to publishing his Bible translation. When Japan instigated the war on China in 1939, he organised several resistance efforts against the Japanese invasion. He passed away on 4 November 1939 in Lang Son, Vietnam.⁷

Born into a troubling time in Chinese history, both Li and Ma faced severe challenges as Catholic intellectuals. During their lifetime, several trends of thought swept through China, including the theory of evolution, nationalism, socialism, liberalism, and democratic revolution.

Some of these ideas, particularly the theory of evolution, were a challenge to fundamental Christian doctrine. After the Jiawu Sea Warfare (1894), Yan Fu's (嚴復, 1854–1921) *Tianyan lun* 天演論 (On Natural Evolution) dominated Chinese discourse, and 'survival of the fittest' became a widely accepted concept. Nonetheless, Yan's translation misinterpreted Thomas Henry Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics and Other Essays*. In his translation, all kinds of evolution are regarded as progression, and Huxley's criticism of Social Darwinism is omitted. For this reason, many intellectuals reacted critically to *Tianyan lun*. One of them was Li Wenyu, who published a rebuttal entitled *Tianyanlun boyi*.⁸ To demonstrate that the theory of natural evolution 'does not conform to the principle of metaphysics, the evidence of experiment and the opinions of all the people',⁹ Li cited archaeological evidence and biological and chemical experiments, in

Wenyu zhuan [古文家李問漁傳 A Biography of Li Wenyu, Who Composed in Classical Style], *Shengjiao zazhi* 27.6 (1938), pp. 420–422. Li's translations and monographs are listed in Hu Duan 胡端, 'Yiwei Gongjiao zuojia Li Wenyu Siduo [一位公教作家李問漁司鐸 Li Wenyu the Priest: A Catholic Writer]', *Wocun zazhi* [我存雜誌 Wocun Journal] 5.1 (1936), pp. 33–36.

⁷ For Ma Xiangbo's life, see also Zhu Weizheng 朱維铮 *et al.*, *Ma Xiangbo zhuanlv* [馬相伯傳略 A Brief Biography of Ma Xiangbo] (Shanghai, 2005), which includes an abridged table of Ma's life written by Liao Mei 廖梅.

⁸ See Xue Yuqin 薛玉琴 and Xu Huabo 徐華博, 'Qingmo minchu zhishijie dui Yanyi Tianyanlun de pipan yu fansi. Yi Li Wenyu de Tianyanlun boyi wei zhongxin' [清末民初知識界對嚴譯《天演論》的批判與反思—以李問漁的《天演論駁議》為中心 Criticism and Reflection on Yanfu's Translation of *Evolution* from the Intellectual Circle in the Late Qing Dynasty and the Early Republican Period. Centred on Li Wenyu], *Tianyanlun boyi*, *Shijie zongjiao yanjiu* 1 (2016), pp. 109–125.

⁹ Li Wenyu, *Tianyanlun Boyi* [天演論駁議 A Refutation and Discussion on the Natural Evolution] (Shanghai, 1932), 'Introduction', p. 2.

combination with Christian theology, to refute and criticise the four principles of Darwinism.¹⁰ It was undeniable that Li's motivation for refuting this theory was basically apologetic, for it was not only a serious challenge to the theory of creation, but also the foundations of Christian cosmology, and it could easily be regarded as the victory of science over religion in a context short on Christian tradition. In view of this, Li started from the perspective of metaphysics—the 'First Cause' of the cosmos—in his rebuttal:

Everything has its cause. To further deduce, there must be a 'First Cause'. Is the first cause ingenerate or not? If yes, it means there existed some creature, for it was nothing else but the self-existing First Cause. If not, it means there had been another cause, for there must be something ingenerate. It is ridiculous that the later cause can occur without the former cause...Therefore, creation is a theoretical necessity. All people know it is good deeds rather than wickedness that one should do, since there is someone in charge of rewarding and revenge. It is what creation implies.¹¹

As Li points out, the denial of the First Cause would ultimately destroy the foundation of ethics: both weal and woe, both merit and fault become indistinguishable, leaving human society in the hands of the 'law of the jungle'. His opposition to the theory of natural evolution is based on Christian theology.

Generally, the doubts about Christianity in the late Qing Dynasty can be viewed as a continuation of those aroused by the European Enlightenment. In this context, Li argued against the opinion that religion and education are incompatible. In his *Xu Liku* he wrote, 'at that time, it was only clergy who read the Scriptures, studied literature and conducted folk education, reserving various kinds of knowledge. The survival of Western knowledge should be greatly credited to the clergy.'¹² 'It is self-evident that the new knowledge came from religious people. If we look back at history, similar things happened occasionally.'¹³ Li listed numerous distinguished religious figures in the areas of philosophy, astrology, geography, biology, and physics, in order to argue that 'new knowledge' was inseparable from religion.

Ma joined this debate at another historical point: around the May Fourth New Cultural Movement, a secular trend with a strong nationalist sentiment that weaponised democracy and science, with the purpose of opposing imperialism and feudalism, and inevitably joined hands with the Anti-Christian Movement in 1922–1927. During this period, rational discussions gradually escalated into violence, frustrating the already struggling Christian churches in China. In this context, Ma, who was influential among educators, academics, and politicians, defended Christianity by insisting that it was not against science. He argued that 'we should know that among Europeans and Americans, there are a lot of Christians. So there are also a large number of famous scientists who are also Christians...Now you hate Christianity but read its scientific books at the same time. Notwithstanding, hatred means disagreement, leading to failure in understanding. Should you worry about it?'¹⁴ As for the claim that 'Christianity provokes wars', Ma pointed out that Christianity never started wars but instead was involved in wars against its will.

While Ma also joined the debate against the theory of natural evolution, his focus was on promoting the idea that religion was a remedy for humanity. After witnessing two

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 31–33.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹² Li Wenyu, *Xu Liku* [續理窟 A Sequel to A Cave of Philosophy] (Shanghai, 1936), pp. 141–142.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

¹⁴ Ma Xiangbo, 'Youqi fandui Jidujiao liyou shu hou' [《尤其反對基督教理由》書後 A Response to 'Reasons for Particularly Opposing Christianity'], in *Zhongguo jindai sixiangjia wenku. Ma Xiangbo juan* [中國近代思想家文庫·馬相伯卷 A Library of Thinkers in Modern China. Issue on Ma Xiangbo], (ed.) Li Tiangan 李天綱 (Beijing, 2014), pp. 388–391, esp. p. 388.

world wars, Ma advocated the view that religion was the cure for wounded morality. In the articles ‘*Zongjiao zai liangxin* 宗教在良心 (Religions are Based on Human Conscience)’, ‘*Zongjiao zhi guanxi* (宗教之關係 Relations among Religions)’, and ‘*Xinjiao ziyou* (信教自由 Freedom of Religious Belief)’, Ma suggested that human conscience was the root of ‘true religion’. He wrote, ‘if one religion goes against human conscience, it cannot be a true religion. Since human conscience comes from God, this true religion comes from God as well.’¹⁵ Ma believed that Catholicism was the only ‘true religion’. He explained, ‘Catholicism is a widely-spread religion and serves the public. So all kinds of people are sheltered by Catholicism, which is incomparable to Confucianism and Buddhism, since these two confined themselves to a group of people.’¹⁶ Despite his apologetic tone, what Ma stressed was the universal value of Catholic belief. Influenced by the world wars, he took a universal view of the functions of religion, rather than limiting himself to saving one country.

In sum, Li Wenyu and Ma Xiangbo, with their rich knowledge of the West and profound theological attainment, firmly defended Catholicism as the ‘true religion’, which legitimised its propagation in China. At the same time, they made it their responsibility to spread new knowledge, to sharply denounce fallacies, and to take pains for the welfare of their own nation and humanity as a whole. The differences between them, however, are noticeable: Li’s main purpose was apologetic, though his intended audience was Chinese; Ma aimed at coordinating relations between Catholicism and Chinese society, and took a public stance on religion. In other words, Li took a clear-cut stand regarding the differences between Christian believers and non-believers, whereas Ma showed more open-mindedness and flexibility.

Evangelisation by writing, scholastic mission, and Chinese Bible translation

To understand Li’s and Ma’s translation styles, we need to look at their missionary practices in the latter halves of their lives. The thread that ran through Li’s life was religious faith and writing. One anonymous commentator summarised Li’s missionary work as ‘evangelisation by writing’ and said

to evangelize by writing is extremely important. The reason is evident: China is an ancient civilisation...Evangelisation in China should rely on writing, using books, newspapers and magazines to reach out to the intellectuals and upper class, gradually leading them to learn about God. In the past one hundred years, in this parish, there was an excellent model of evangelisation by writing—Father Li Wenyu.¹⁷

Historically, ‘evangelisation by writing’ had been practised by some Jesuits, for example, Matteo Ricci (利瑪竇, 1552–1610), Michele Ruggleri (羅明堅, 1543–1607), and Giulio Aleni (艾儒略, 1582–1649), starting in the Late Ming Dynasty, which left behind a huge collection of Chinese Christian literature.¹⁸ To some extent, Li was a follower of his Jesuit predecessors. But biographically, his faith in evangelisation by writing originated from his three years of missionary work in Anhui when he ‘was attacked by the officials and

¹⁵ Ma Xiangbo, ‘*Zongjiao zai liangxin*’, in *Zhongguo jindai sixiangjia wenku. Ma Xiangbo juan*, pp. 129–133, esp. p. 132.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 132–133.

¹⁷ Xuhui zhongxue Shengmuhuiyou 徐匯中學聖母會友 (A church member of Xuhui Middle School Notre Dame Association), ‘*Xiezuo chuanjiao de Li Wenyu shenfu* [寫作傳教的李問漁神父 Father Li Wenyu Who Evangelized by Writing]’, *Ciyin* [慈音 Merciful Voice] 19 (1940), pp. 251–260, esp. p. 251.

¹⁸ For an overview of these Jesuit literatures, see Xu Zongze 徐宗澤, *Mingqingjian Yesuhuishi yizhu tiyao* [明清間耶穌會士譯著提要 A Bibliography of the Jesuit Translation and Writing in the Ming and Qing Dynasties] (Beijing, 1949).

intellectuals. They criticized and even slandered this new missionary and his teaching.¹⁹ Li's judgements on Confucianism and Buddhism in *Xu Liku* were partially the fruit of the thinking he developed in these three years.²⁰ 'On the one hand, he paid close attention to the discourse of those intellectuals and their mistakes; on the other hand, he studied our country's traditional thoughts expressed in some ancient books, and paid great efforts to research into writing skills.'²¹

Ma, in contrast, often advocated the inculturation of Catholicism. He consistently demanded respect and accommodation of Chinese culture from foreign missionaries, which led to conflicts with his mother church. Apart from his years in politics, during which he seldom talked about his faith due to the court's discrimination against Christians, his standpoint can be summarised as 'scholastic mission', that is to say, 'carrying [on] missionary work in Chinese', 'consecrating many Chinese bishops and allowing Chinese to manage domestic church affairs', 'developing Chinese missionary enterprise with the help of Chinese brethren and in Chinese vernaculars', and emphasising 'that friars should study hard and focus more on Chinese books, in order to become informed of local customs'.²² Compared to Li's approach of 'evangelisation by writing', which emphasised spreading the Catholic faith in China, Ma's 'scholastic mission' paid more attention to cultural exchange and universal values. His article '*Shengjing yu renqun zhi guanxi* 聖經與人群之關係' (The Relation between the Bible and the Crowd') provides a glimpse into his motivation for translating the Bible: 'the soteriological message enclosed in the Bible targets all human beings, but is particularly pertinent to us Chinese people. Why? Because the Bible lays the foundation for all laws.'²³ *Jiushi Fuyin* 救世福音, the title of his Bible translation, which literally means 'Gospels that Save the World', captures his vision of saving China from its problems through Christianity. In his later years, he returned to the Catholic Church and often spoke for Christianity, especially after Kang Youwei started the debate on 'state religion'. In Ma's later writing are several essays aimed at defending Christianity against Chinese cultural and historical contexts: '*Yuefa shang xinjiao ziyou jie* 《約法》上信教自由解 (An Analysis on Freedom of Belief in Provisional Constitution of the Republic of China)', '*Shi Jingjiao* 釋景教 (An Introduction to Nestorianism)', and '*Shijie xulun* 十誡序論 (A Prologue to the Ten Commandments)'.

There used to be a misleading assumption that Martin Luther broke the ground for vernacular Bible translation and was responsible for challenging the dominance of the Latin Vulgate. Thousands of German Bibles produced before 1522, the year when Luther published his 'September Testament', were ignored. In fact, according to recent research, both German and English Bible translations emerged as early as the end of the eighth century, and almost all the major European vernacular languages had versions of the Bible before the Reformation. Thus, the oppression of the Roman Catholic Church was not always effective or aimed at the translations themselves. Rather, what really troubled the Holy See was the misinterpretation of the Scripture by laypeople, which threatened the authority of church tradition or even developed into heresy.²⁴ After the Council of

¹⁹ Xuhui zhongxue Shengmuhui you, 'Xiezu chuanjiao de Li Wenyu shenfu', p. 253.

²⁰ Li criticised Buddhism for absurdity, Daoism for being far-fetched, and Confucianism for failing to threaten retribution after death. See Li Wenyu, *Li Ku* [理窟 A Cave of Philosophy] (Shanghai, 1936), pp. 138–292.

²¹ Xuhui zhongxue Shengmuhui you, 'Xiezu chuanjiao de Li Wenyu Shenfu', p. 253.

²² Ma Xiangbo, 'Xueshu chuanjiao [學術傳教 Scholastic Mission]', in *Zhongguo jindai sixiangjia wenku. Ma Xiangbo juan*, pp. 532–533.

²³ Ma Xiangbo, 'Shengjing yu renqun zhi guanxi' [《聖經》與人群之關係 The Relation between the Bible and the Crowd], in *Zhongguo jindai sixiangjia wenku. Ma Xiangbo juan*, pp. 162–192, esp. p. 162.

²⁴ For an overview of Bible versions translated from Latin into major European vernaculars, see Richard Marsden and E. Ann Matter (eds), *The New Cambridge History of the Bible. Volume 2: From 600 to 1450* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 198–308.

Trent, which reacted against the influence of the Reformation and Protestantism, Catholic Bible publishers were required to ensure that all published editions were approved by local bishops. Vernacular versions, regardless of whether they were in Western or non-Western languages, and no matter whether they had been produced in European or colonial countries, were not totally forbidden by the Vatican. Due to competition and cooperation with the Protestant mission in the nineteenth century, the Roman Catholic Church gradually accelerated the distribution of vernacular versions of the Bible to the laity. This trend became more evident in the first half of the twentieth century.²⁵ Globally, Li Wenyu and Ma Xiangbo contributed to this enterprise at just the right time.

Before Li and Ma, some attempts had been made by Catholics to translate the Bible into Chinese. Jean Basset and Louis A. de Poirot were two pioneers, and a French Jesuit named Père Francois Xavier d'Entrecolles (殷弘緒, 1664–1771) followed.²⁶ These three versions were not published. Since the Late Qing Dynasty, many Chinese Catholic clergy had undertaken Bible translations. The first two were Wang Duomo 王多默, who translated the Four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles into Mandarin Chinese, and Xu Bin (許彬, 1840–1899), who translated the Four Gospels into Classical Chinese. These two manuscript versions are stored in Zikawei Library 徐家匯藏書樓, and had not been examined by scholars until recently.²⁷ The first published Catholic Chinese Bible was Li Wenyu's version of the Acts of the Apostles, *Zongtu dashilu* (宗徒大事錄), in 1887. Though in the Prologue Li described the work as a translation, a close reading of the text reveals that it is more of a paraphrase than a translation that keeps close to the literary meaning. Nevertheless, Li tried to preserve the meaning of every verse in the original text without numbering them, although he left some sentences out, for example, 1:1–2.²⁸ In the Prologue, Li explained his motivation for translating this book of the Bible, saying that

I think reciting this book is greatly beneficial to spirituality. If one knows God loves all the people, he will show more respect to sacred things. If one can trace the originality of the sacred religion, his faith will be firmer. There used to be more miracles and people were more pious to God. The church has been struggling with difficulties but is prepared to overcome. Nowadays we have a lot of Bible translations, but none of them are published. So we Chinese have no way to get a glimpse of the Scripture, feeling it hard to follow the teaching in it.²⁹

From Li's point of view, how the first generation of disciples opened up Christian history through the guidance of the Holy Spirit could be a long-lasting stimulus for later generations of Chinese believers, equipping them with the piety to overcome their own obstacles. He added, 'since Chinese and Western characters vary greatly, it is difficult to concord the meaning and the text of the translation may be too obscure to read through. I am not sure if the clever readers will understand and forgive me.'³⁰

²⁵ On the production and distribution of vernacular versions of the Bible by the Roman Catholic Church, see Leslie Howsam and Scott McLaren, 'Producing the text: production and distribution of popular editions of the Bible', in *The New Cambridge History of the Bible. Volume 4: From 1750 to the Present*, (ed.) John Riches (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 49–82, esp. pp. 51, 57, 60–61, 71–73.

²⁶ He finished the first single-book Chinese Bible—the Book of Tobias—but it is a paraphrase rather than a translation in the strict sense. The basic information of this version can be seen in Daniel Kam-to Choi 蔡錦圖, *Shengjing zai Zhongguo. Fu zhongwen Shengjing lishi mulu* [聖經在中國：附中文聖經歷史目錄 The Bible in China: With a Historical Catalogue of the Chinese Bible] (Hong Kong, 2018), pp. 44–46.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 30–31.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

²⁹ Li Wenyu, *Zongtu dashilu* [宗徒大事錄 The Book of Acts] (Shanghai, 1887), 'Introduction', p. 1.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Ten years later in 1897, Li published *Xinjing yiyi*, his version of the Four Gospels, staying close to text of the Latin Vulgate. In the Prologue Li explained that he had decided to translate the Four Gospels because they

detail Jesus's life story, so every word is highly valuable...St. Ambrose compared the *Evangelium* to the ocean, in which the grace of God fills and on which the foundation of the church lies. I take Jesus as the true light that shines upon human beings in the world and was concealed in the New Testament. Jesus is like a broad way, on which people walk and will not fall down. Where is this way? It is shown by the New Testament.³¹

Li added an introduction to the author of each Gospel, and left short comments between verses or on the page header. For both works, *Zongtu dashilu* and *Xinjing yiyi*, Li chose to use Classical Chinese. His linguistic style, which will be closely examined in the next section, is more approximate to High *Wenli* 深文理 (profound Classical Chinese) rather than Easy *Wenli* 淺文理 (plain Classical Chinese).³²

Much later than Li, in 1919, Ma published his first translation, *Xinshi hebian zhijiang* 新史合編直講. He named it 'hebian 合編' (lit. a collection) as he had rearranged the content of the Four Gospels chronologically, and 'zhijiang 直講' (lit. explicit explanation) as he offered explanatory notes in Colloquial Chinese next to the main text (in Classical Chinese). In 1923, Ma also published his translation of the Gospel Harmony in Classical Chinese. These two works are compilations rather than Bible translations in the strict sense. In the last few years of his life, Ma translated the Four Gospels into Classical Chinese (thus described as the 'Wenli 文理 version') and named it *Jiushi Fuyin* 救世福音 (lit. Gospels that Save the World; originally *Fuyin jing* 福音經 only contained the Gospel of John), which was finished in 1937 and formally published in 1949.³³ Before Ma's *Jiushi Fuyin*, Joseph Hsiao Ching-Shan (蕭靜山, 1855–1924), a Chinese Jesuit, translated and published his versions of the Four Gospels (1918) and the New Testament (1922). The latter became a standard version among Chinese Catholics before the appearance of the *Sigao Bible* (思高聖經, the Studium Biblicum Version). Comparatively, Ma's version was rather a personal work with the purpose of embodying his thoughts on translation and creativity. He made it clear on the title page that it was 'a translation parallel to the four accounts of the sacred history in the Roman official version', that is, the Vulgate.³⁴ Before starting this version, Ma had clear ideas on how to deal with terminological issues in the Scripture and how to adjust his translation style to cater to his audience, which was summarised in the article '*Tongyi jingwen chuyi* 統一經文芻議 (An Attempting Discussion on Uniting the Scripture)':

There are four principles for translating the Scripture. First, it should be concise and coherent. Second, it had better present a solemn style, and suit both the refined and the popular tastes. Third, the exactness is especially important and no violation against the Christian faith is allowed. The truth of our faith is hard to translate,

³¹ Li Wenyu, *Xinjing yiyi* [新經譯義 Translating the Meaning of the New Testament] (Shanghai, 1907), 'Introduction', pp. 3–5.

³² High *Wenli* and Easy *Wenli* are two terms used by Western missionaries (mainly the Protestants) when referring to the linguistic styles used in Chinese Bible translations: the former is more archaic than the latter and more demanding for the reader.

³³ See Choi, *Shengjing zai Zhongguo*, pp. 59–61.

³⁴ Ma mentioned his base text in the Prologue, saying that the Vulgate version he referred to was published by J. B. Glaire in 1904. See Ma Xiangbo, *Jiushi Fuyin* [救世福音 Gospels that Save the World] (Shanghai, 1949), 'The Prologue', p. 2.

not only in Chinese, but also in Western languages at first. It only results from its transcendency that people from this world are unable to describe it by words. It took a long time to decide the meaning of a certain word and its connotation before everyone could understand it.³⁵

In this last sentence, Ma explains why previous Catholic missionaries frequently used transliterated lexicons in their writings. As for linguistic and literary styles, Ma had some doubts about translating the Bible using colloquial language even though the Mandarin Chinese Union Version (CUV) prepared by Protestant missionaries had been widely circulated. He offered two reasons: first, he considered that colloquial language lacked solemnity; secondly, it was more difficult to translate in colloquial language than in *Easy Wenli*, because some dialects were understood only in limited areas. Hence, from Ma's point of view, 'the translation of the Scripture should not contain colloquial language or dialects, while notes can be added to explain its profound meaning'.³⁶ With regard to rendering proper nouns, he also appealed for 'urgent unification'.³⁷

A comparative analysis of Li's and Ma's translations

In line with the tradition passed down by most European predecessors in the Middle Ages and missionaries who came to China in the Late Ming and Early Qing dynasties, most Chinese Bible translations undertaken by Catholics were based on the Latin Vulgate, including Li's and Ma's versions. It was not until the translation of the *Sigao* Bible, initiated by the Italian Franciscan friar Gabriel Maria Allegra (雷永明, 1907–1976), that the Hebrew and Greek texts would be translated. This is a fundamental difference between most of the Catholic and Protestant versions. Both Li and Ma were highly proficient in Latin, thanks to years of training and teaching experience, which enabled them to translate the Bible directly and accurately from the Vulgate. But even so, the translator's strategy can still influence the translated text, particularly in terms of rendering, phrasing, linguistic style, and theological implication. As discussed in the last section, both Li and Ma had profound thoughts on Catholicism against the backdrop of social reform in modern China, and both were motivated by domestic demands. In this section, we will see how their attitudes and beliefs were reflected in their renditions. Specifically, the versions of the Gospel of John from Li's *Xinjing yiyi* and Ma's *Jiushi Fuyin* will be compared—from how they rendered key terms to how they chose different sentence structures. Furthermore, the characteristics of their linguistic style and how they differ from each other will be explored, along with the theological implications of some passages in their translations.

Term rendering

Translating theological terms is extremely critical and a thorny issue in preparing Chinese Bible versions, while rendering proper nouns always involves balancing the social-historical and cultural differences between the original and the translated texts. Although Chinese Catholics were rather late to translate the Bible, numerous earlier Chinese Catholic writings, including translations and original works, provided them with examples for rendering terms, proper nouns, and particular passages. After the decision made by the Holy See as a result of the Ritual Controversy, Catholics in China no longer had problems with the 'Term Questions' which beset Protestant translators. For

³⁵ Ma Xiangbo, 'Tongyi jingwen chuyi [統一經文芻議 The Attempting Discussion on Uniting the Scripture]', in *Zhongguo jindai sixiangjia wenku. Ma Xiangbo juan*, pp. 433–434, esp. p. 433.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 434.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

example, the translations of *Deus* and *Spiritus* were standardised, so ‘*Tianzhu* 天主’ was the only legitimate rendering of *Deus*,³⁸ ‘*Shangdi* 上帝’ and ‘*Tian* 天’ were forbidden, and ‘*Shen* 神’ and ‘*Shengshen* 聖神’ were adopted as the standard renderings of *Spiritus*.

Li and Ma not only adopted some of these sanctioned renderings, but also made their own decisions in some textual instances, which offer us an opportunity to see the differences in their approaches. For instance, *Verbum*, occurring in John 1:1 three times, is rendered by Li as *Wu’erpeng* 物爾朋, a transliterated noun originally coined by Emmanuel Diaz Junior (陽瑪諾, 1574–1659), a Portuguese Jesuit who entered China in the Late Ming Dynasty.³⁹ Ma, on the other hand, renders *Verbum* as ‘*Zhenyan* 真言’ (lit. true word), highlighting its basic meaning, ‘words’. ‘*Zhen* 真’ (lit. true), however, stems from the translator’s theological conception rather than the original text. Additionally, Ma adds *Wu’erpeng* when the term first occurs, integrating transliteration with paraphrase. This is one of the many instances where the two translators diverge, and Table 1 provides more examples of how they adopted different Chinese terms.

From Table 1 we can observe that whenever they differ, Li’s treatment leans towards concision: he frequently adopts Chinese words and phrases which can convey the primary meaning of the Latin original and keeps the translations consistent and coherent. However, Ma incorporates more terms from Chinese traditional culture to render biblical terms, for example, *Fazang* 法藏 from Buddhist terminology; *Tianqing Jie* 天慶節, the name of a festival celebrated in the Song Dynasty; and *Lai fuqi* 來復七 from *I-Ching* 易經 (The Book of Changes).⁴⁰ From Ma’s rendering of biblical terms and nouns, we can see his ‘scholastic mission’, which advocated applying Chinese language and culture to missionary work, for ‘it is a great pity to discard the treasure stored at home’.⁴¹ In addition, more ‘creativity’ is detectable in Ma’s version, for he repeatedly diversified his renderings of one specific term, not yet putting into practice his suggestion about the ‘unification of terminology’.

Sentence structure

Classical Chinese and Latin have completely different syntax. For instance, Classical Chinese primarily conforms to the word order ‘subject-verb-object’ (SVO),⁴² while Latin is an inflected language which indicates the grammatical relation of words by inflection, so that the word order is flexible. Considering these differences, translating Latin into Classical Chinese must involve some syntactic adjustments. To force a one-to-one correspondence between the original and the translated text can make the latter rigid and arbitrary, of which Morrison’s and Marshman’s are negative examples.⁴³

³⁸ Broomhall, *The Bible in China*, p. 36.

³⁹ Emmanuel Diaz Junior, *Shengjing zhijie* [聖經直解 An Exposition to the Bible], Vol. 9, pp. 23, 26, in *Fandigang tushuguan cang Mingqing zhongxi wenhua jiaoliushi wenxian congkan* [梵蒂岡圖書館藏明清中西文化交流史文獻叢刊 A Collection of Literatures on History of Sino-Western Cultural Exchange in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana], (ed.) Zhang Xiping 張西平 (Zhengzhou, 2014), Series 1, Vol. 19, pp. 52, 55.

⁴⁰ Ma explains this rendering in the Prologue, arguing that *Lai fuqi* is a Chinese festival corresponding to the Sabbath, which came down from antiquity and was associated with the custom to cease business, travel, and the emperor’s local inspection on this day. See Ma, *Jiushi Fuyin*, ‘The Prologue’, p. 3.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Wang Li 王力 mentions the general word order of Classical Chinese and its minor changes happened in history, see Wang Li 王力, *Hanyu shigao* [漢語史稿 Introduction to the History of Classical Chinese] (Beijing, 2015), pp. 347–364.

⁴³ Morrison adopted the ‘middle style’ between ‘the Four Scriptures and the Five Classics (*Sishuwujing*, 四書五經)’ and popular novels, and emphasised translation according to the literal meaning; he later admitted the deficiency of his version, attributing it to paying too much attention to the original text. Some scholars point out that this was the result of Morrison’s low level of Chinese. See Jost Oliver Zetzsche, *The Bible in China: The History*

Table 1. A comparison between Li's and Ma's translations of some key terms.

Latin Vulgate	Li's translation	Ma's translation
Christus	基利斯督	基多、基利斯督
Dominus	主	主君
Veritas	實理、真道	真實
Lex	例、律	法藏
vita æterna	常生	長生
novissimus dies	終窮日	末日、終窮日、最後之日
Synagoga	會堂	講堂
Festus	節	天慶日
Sabbatum	禮日	來復七
Paraclitum	撫慰之神、保衛神聖	慰勞呵護之神、慰護之神

Both Li's and Ma's versions are *Wenli* versions, but they take quite different approaches. Li follows the syntax of Old Chinese and adheres to the meaning of the original, so as to stay loyal to the original text but avoid a Romanised Chinese grammar. In contrast, Ma adopted 'parallel translation' and maintained the original word order, even though in this way the translated text could lose its elegance. Here are examples of the two translators' versions of John 3:17, 23 (notes omitted), with the texts of the Latin Vulgate and the Revised Standard Version (RSV) as reference:

Li's translation :

3:17 夫天主遣子入世。非以判世。乃以救世。

3:23 若翰則授洗于衡農。頗近撒陵。因其地多水。人往受洗。

Ma's translation :

3:17 蓋天主非遣其子於世，以判世，惟欲世人因以得救而已。

3:23 時若翰之授洗則在恩濃，鄰近撒領：其地多水，有來就，有受洗者。

Vulgate :

3:17 Non enim misit Deus Filium suum in mundum, ut judicet mundum, sed ut salvetur mundus per ipsum.

3:23 Erat autem et Joannes baptizans, in Ænnon, juxta Salim: quia aquæ multæ erant illic, et veniebant et baptizabantur.

RSV :

3:17 For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

3:23 John also was baptizing at Æ'nnon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people came and were baptised.

In the above examples, for John 3:17, Li topicalises the sentence 'Fu Tianzhu qian zi rushi (夫天主遣子入世)' (lit. God sent the Son into the world), so the negation ('Non' in

of the Union Version or the Culmination of Protestant Missionary Bible Translation in China (Sankt Augustin, 1999), pp. 36–37, 44, 48, 56–57.

Latin, ‘*fei* 非’ in Chinese) only scopes over the purpose clause (‘*yipanshi* 以判世’, lit. to condemn the world). Ma, on the other hand, keeps the original sentence structure in Latin, leaving the negation scope over both the purpose clause and the main predicate, creating a ‘garden-path sentence’⁴⁴ that is hard for native speakers to parse. As a reference, RSV agrees with Li’s version. For Verse 23, Li chooses the locative preposition ‘*yu* 于’ while Ma selects the preposition ‘*zai* 在’; the former is more common in Classical Chinese. Additionally, ‘*et veniebant et baptizabantur*’ (English literal translation: ‘and coming and being baptised’) in Li’s version is rendered as a conjunction of two verb phrases with a shared subject (as in RSV). Ma, in contrast, faithfully translates the Latin text as a conjunction of two sentences as ‘*You lai jiu, you shouxizhe*’ (有來就, 有受洗者).

Linguistic style

Both Li and Ma adopted the linguistic style of Classical Chinese, but in different ways. Li’s translation tends to be coherent and concise, and his style is closer to that of the High *Wenli* translations published by Protestants. Conversely, Ma adopted a more liberal style, closer to that of the Protestant Easy *Wenli* versions. The following are their translations of John 5:28–30, with the corresponding pericopes in the Delegates’ version and Griffith John’s (楊格非, 1831–1912) Easy *Wenli* version as references:⁴⁵

Li’s translation :

28 慎勿以是為怪。因定期將至。諸葬墓之人。胥聞天主子之聲。29 為善者復活以常生。為惡者復活以受讞。30 我不克獨行。我所聞以判。我判義。因弗求我意。惟求遣我者之意。

Ma’s translation :

28 爾曹勿怪異是，蓋時期到，其在塚墓間者，將聞天主子之聲：29 而齊出者則其為善，復活以受生：但其行惡者，則復活而受判。30 我不能自我而有所為。一如我聞，我判案：我之判案定公正：緣非吾意旨是求：而惟遣使我者之意旨耳。

The Delegates’ version (1852) :

28 勿以此為奇、時至、凡墓內者、將聞人子聲而出、29 為善者、復起以得生、為惡者、復起以受罪。30 我自無所能、惟遵所聞者、而審判之。我審判以義、我不己意是求、乃父遣我者之意也。

Griffith John’s Easy *Wenli* version (1884) :

28 勿以此為奇、時將至、凡在墓中者、皆必聞其聲而出、29 行善者復活以得生、行惡者復活以被審。30 我不能從己意而有所行、乃遵所聞而審判、我之審判惟公、因我不求己意、乃求遣我之父之意也、

Among the four versions, Li’s is the most concise, with short sentences and no redundant characters. In terms of linguistic style, Ma’s version is relatively closer to Colloquial Chinese, with more polysyllabic words such as ‘*guaiyi* 怪異 (strange, odd)’, ‘*shiqi* 時期

⁴⁴ See Thomas G. Bever, ‘The cognitive basis for linguistic structures’, in *Cognition and the Development of Language*, (ed.) J. R. Hayes (New York, 1970), pp. 279–362.

⁴⁵ Among several Easy *Wenli* versions provided by Protestants, the linguistic style of Griffith John is more moderate, easier than Samuel J. J. Schereschewsky’s (施約瑟, 1831–1906), but more abstruse than the version translated by John Shaw Burdon (包爾騰, 1826–1907) and Henry Blodget (白漢理, 1825–1903); thus, it can be regarded as typifying Easy *Wenli* versions. See my forthcoming article: Hong Xiaochun 洪曉純, ‘Yanggefei qianwenli Shengjing yiben de yutixue kaocha [楊格非‘淺文理’聖經譯本的語體學考察 A Linguistic Stylistic Investigation of Griffith John’s Easy Wen-li Bible Translation]’, *Jidujiao xueshu* [基督教學術 Christian Scholarship].

(time, period), ‘zhongmu 坟墓 (tomb)’, ‘gongzheng 公正 (justice, integrity)’, ‘yizhi 意旨 (intention, will)’, and ‘qianshi 遣使 (send a messenger)’. We can also find traces of Romanised grammar in Ma’s version. Taking the same path as Griffith John, Ma combines the first two verbs in John 5:30 with the conjunction ‘er 而’, while both Li’s version and the Delegates’ version (representative among High Wenli Bible versions) break down this verse into two clauses.

The style of Li’s works has been described as ‘concise, clear and coherent’.⁴⁶ It is reported that he completed his *Xinjing yiyi* on bended knee, combining ‘prayer and writing’.⁴⁷ Relatively speaking, Ma’s translation is more prosaic and looser in structure, probably due to his frequent experience of colloquial writing in preparing public speeches. From the above translated passages, their different linguistic styles, reflected in phrasing and wording, show their different styles as Catholic intellectuals.

Theological implications

The theological significance of Bible translation deserves full attention, since many Bible versions instigated controversies and some were even banned.⁴⁸ When it comes to the translation of the Gospel of John, the task of rendering polysemy expressions brought out diverse translating methods, the most typical being the case of σὰρξ, or for Li and Ma, who based their translations on the Latin Vulgate, *caro*. *Caro* and its cognates appear 13 times in the Gospel. Table 2 presents a subset of these occurrences, that is, 1:13–14; 3:6; 6:52–57, 64; 8:15; 17:2 (verse numbers in the Vulgate, leaving out some irrelevant clauses to save space), with Li’s and Ma’s translations in the other two columns for comparison (*caro*, its cognates, and their respective renderings are in bold).

In Greek, σὰρξ primarily denotes ‘flesh’ and extends to indicate ‘humanity’, while σῶμα denotes ‘body’, but the author of the Gospel of John seems to have blurred the difference.⁴⁹ John 6 is controversial in hermeneutical history, puzzling later interpreters with the question: does it symbolise Jesus’s establishment of the Holy Communion? To be more specific, did Jesus’s discourse in 6:53–57 originate from the Eucharistic language adopted by the author’s contemporaries? Since the Gospel of John does not explicitly narrate Jesus’s establishment of the Eucharist as the Synoptic Gospels do, some interpreters hold the opinion that it was never important in the Gospel’s tradition. However, there are some scholars who regard the issue differently. Based on Jesus’s invitation to his disciples to eat his flesh and drink his blood (Chapter 6), they argue that it is an allusion to the Holy Communion.⁵⁰ The discussion of the Greek text has not achieved any solid consensus, hence how Li and Ma translated this pericope will be the focus in the analysis below.

In most cases Ma’s renderings of *caro* are closer to the meaning of its Latin original, while Li tended to paraphrase, making the phrase fit in its immediate context. Despite their different choice of words, both Li and Ma used words that indicate the wholeness

⁴⁶ Xuhui zhongxue Shengmuhui you, ‘Xiezuo chuanjiao de Li Wenyu shenfu’, p. 259.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Those that happened between Catholics and Protestants are the most representative of these kinds of debates. See Ellie Gebarowski-Shafer, ‘The transatlantic reach of the Catholic “false translation” argument in the school “Bible wars”’, *U.S. Catholic Historian* 31.3 (Summer, 2013), pp. 47–76.

⁴⁹ To some extent, the implication of σὰρξ is ‘neutralised’ in the Gospel of John, compared to that in Pauline usage. See Harold W. Attridge, ‘Flesh and spirit in John and Qumran revisited’, in *Biblical Essays in Honor of Daniel J. Harrington, S. J. and Richard J. Clifford, S. J., Opportunity for Little Instruction*, (eds) Christopher G. Frechette, Christopher R. Matthews and Thomas D. Stegman, S. J. (New York, 2014), pp. 221–236.

⁵⁰ For a discussion of the Eucharistic allusion in John 6, see D. Crossan, ‘It is written: a structuralist analysis of John 6’, *Semeia* 26 (1983), pp. 3–21; C. H. Cosgrove, ‘The place where Jesus is: allusions to baptism and the Eucharist in the Fourth Gospel’, *New Testament Studies* 35 (1989), pp. 522–539.

Table 2. A comparison between Li's and Ma's translations of *caro* (and its cognates) in the Gospel of John.

Latin Vulgate	Li's translation	Ma's translation
1:13 qui non ex sanguinibus, neque ex voluntate carnis , neque ex voluntate viri, sed ex Deo nati sunt.	非出血氣肉情亦非出男子意。然自天主所生也。	是不由血氣生，不由肉情生，亦不由男慾，而惟由天主生者也。
1:14 Et Verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis:	物爾朋降生為人。居我人間。	今真言已成形體，而介居吾儕中矣：
3:6 Quod natum est ex carne , caro est: et quod natum est ex spiritu, spiritus est.	夫生於身者身也。生於神者神也。	夫由血肉生者，為血肉：由神明生者，為神明。
6:52 Si quis manducaverit ex hoc pane, vivet in æternum: et panis quem ego dabo, caro mea est pro mundi vita.	「食此糧必永活。予將錫之糧。即是我體。為世人生命。」	「如有食此糧者，可屈永遠以生存：而吾所將予之糧，即吾形體是為世界之生命。」
6:53 Quomodo potest hic nobis carnem suam dare ad manducandum?	「此人安能以己體與我食乎？」	「是惡能以其形體給吾儕啖食乎？」
6:54 Amen, amen dico vobis: nisi manducaveritis carnem Filii hominis, et biberitis ejus sanguinem, non habebitis vitam in vobis.	「我實告汝。汝不食人子體。不飲其血。必無生命。」	「吾真切，確切語爾曹：爾苟不食人子形體，而飲其血，則無有生命在爾內。」
6:55 Qui manducat meam carnem , et bibit meum sanguinem, habet vitam æternam:	「食我體。飲我血。乃得常生。」	「其食吾形體，而飲吾血者，乃有長生：」
6:56 Caro enim mea vere est cibus: et sanguis meus, vere est potus;	「蓋我體真為糧。我血真為飲也。」	「因吾形體洵為食：而吾之血洵為飲：」
6:57 qui manducat meam carnem et bibit meum sanguinem, in me manet, et ego in illo.	「食我體飲我血。則彼在我。我在彼。」	「其食吾形體而飲吾之血者，居於吾內，而吾亦於彼內。」
6:64 Spiritus est qui vivificat: caro non prodest quidquam:	「夫生之者神也。軀體固無所能耳。」	「神乃能使生活者也：血肉則無所裨益矣：」
8:15 Vos secundum carnem judicatis: ego non judico quemquam;	「汝以人情審斷。予不斷人。」	「爾曹祇按肉情為審為判：吾則勿判一人：」
17:2 sicut dedisti ei potestatem omnis carnis ,	「如爾賜子制萬民之權」	「有如爾曾畀以威權統諸血肉之倫，」

of the body. Their choice of words is indicative of the translators' Catholic stance. Since the early period of Christian history, church fathers such as John Chrysostom, St Jerome, and Augustine regarded the consecrated Eucharist as the presence of Jesus himself, emphasising reality rather than symbolic meaning, and establishing their understanding of what Jesus says about the blessed bread—'this is my body'—in Matthew 26:26, Mark 14:22, and Luke 22:19.⁵¹ It was Matteo Ricci who used 'Shengti 聖體' (Holy Body) to refer to the Holy Communion in his *Tianzhujiao yao* 天主教要 (The Basic Principles of Catholicism).⁵² Moreover, Emmanuel Diaz paraphrased John 6:55–58 in his *Shengjing zhijie*

⁵¹ See Daniel Cardó, *The Cross and the Eucharist in Early Christianity: A Theological and Liturgical Investigation* (Cambridge, 2019), pp. 34–42.

⁵² See Zhang Xiping, 'Tianzhujiaoyao kao [《天主教要》考 A Literature Study on "the Basic Principles of Catholicism"]', *Shijie zongjiao yanjiu* 4 (1999), pp. 90–98. In the last section of this article, the original text of 'Tianzhujiao yao', which is stored in Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, is presented. The 'Four Rules set by the

聖經直解 (Explicit Explanation to the Bible) as ‘at that time, Jesus said to the crowd, “my body is the real food and my blood is the real drink. Who takes my body and drinks my blood will dwell in me and I will dwell in him”’.⁵³ Admittedly, exceptions are noteworthy: *caro* in John 6 is rendered in Jean Basset’s New Testament and Louis A. de Poirot’s *Guxin Shengjing* as ‘rou 肉’ (lit. meat), deviating from the Catholic interpretation of the Eucharist.

From childhood, both Li and Ma immersed themselves in the Catholic tradition, which stresses the importance of Holy Communion. This background is probably the reason why they were sensitive to the theological implications associated with *caro* in John 6. If one accepts this pericope as Jesus’s real discourse for establishing the Eucharist, what Jesus bestows on his disciples should be his real and complete ‘body’ rather than his ‘meat’. Consequently, the two translators do not render *caro* in this pericope as ‘rou 肉’, but instead translate it as ‘ti 體’ (body) and ‘xingluan 形體’ (lit. body meat) respectively.⁵⁴ Even though ‘luan 體’ means ‘a small piece of meat’, ‘xingluan’ highlights ‘fleshy body’ as a whole. After all, *caro* can only be understood in the context of a whole person who ‘dwells among us’ rather than as a piece of ‘meat’.

Summary

Just as they made different choices as Catholic missionaries, Li and Ma varied significantly in their Bible translations. Li tended to follow the theological terms and proper nouns used by his Catholic predecessors and tried to keep them consistent within his version. He translated his text in Classical Chinese and complied with its standard linguistic style, making his *Xinjing yiyi* similar to the High *Wenli* versions produced by Protestants. Comparatively, Ma was more flexible and innovative, attempting to convert the biblical message with words and phrases found in traditional Chinese culture. His *Jiushi Fuyin* appeared later than the successful Mandarin version of CUV, but he still preferred the Easy *Wenli* style and tried hard to keep the sentence structure in his translation parallel to that of the Latin original. Both Li’s and Ma’s versions are Vulgate-based, emphasising the importance of Catholic interpretations of specific biblical concepts and adapting the rendering accordingly. Notwithstanding this unity of faith, the former can be described more like a Chinese mirror reflecting Catholic belief and tradition, while the latter is more like a bridge between Catholicism and Chinese culture and society.

Conclusion

Before the *Sigao* Bible, Catholics had not published any complete Chinese Bible due to restrictions imposed by the Vatican. Although de Poirot’s *Guxin Shengjing* was nearly complete, it was stored in the Zikawei Library until a few years ago. Among the already-published Bible versions, Li Wenyu’s *Xinjing yiyi* and Ma Xiangbo’s *Jiushi Fuyin* are of high literary value, as they are not only faithful to the original text, but also demonstrate the translators’ theological attainments and cultural standpoints. This article attempts to draw attention to these masterfully translated texts and the translators behind them. I explored the two translators’ life experiences, religious faith, and writings, focusing on how their identity as Catholic intellectuals in modern China affected their beliefs and practices in Bible translation.

Holy Church’ include ‘Ling Shengti zhishao meinian yici [領聖體至少每年一次 Receiving the Holy Body at least once a year]’.

⁵³ Diaz, *Shengjing zhijie*, Vol. 9, p. 61, in *Fandigang tushuguan cang Mingqing zhongxi wenhua jiaoliushi wenxian congkan*, pp. 125–126.

⁵⁴ It is noteworthy that Li adds to Verse 57: ‘a man who receives the Holy Body unites with Jesus, as “Two in One”’. Thus Jesus says, ‘you in me and I in you’. See Li, *Xinjing yiyi*, pp. 30–31.

‘Evangelisation by writing’ was the major mission of Li’s life, which centred on his identity as a Catholic priest. He defended the superiority of Catholicism over Chinese culture and history with his extensive works. Li’s Bible version is concise and coherent, inheriting the Chinese biblical terminology established by former generations of Catholic missionaries and following the syntax of Classical Chinese. By contrast, Ma went back and forth between church and politics, and put all his effort into establishing modern Chinese universities, transforming his Catholic belief into universal values and a determination to save the country and its people. His vision of a ‘scholastic mission’ is evident in his style of translation: Ma’s version adopted the linguistic style of Easy *Wenli*, making Classical Chinese plain enough to transfer the message in the Latin Vulgate; he used words and phrases with Chinese traits to render terms and proper nouns in the Scripture, attempting to open a dialogue between cultural and religion. Both Li and Ma were born at a critical time in Chinese history and they represent two different approaches to indigenising Catholicism and the Bible—‘mirror-type’ and ‘bridge-type’—reminding us that there is more to explore in this special group of Chinese Catholic intellectuals who were active in modern China.⁵⁵

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⁵⁵ Some research has addressed the role of Jesuit intellectuals, including Li Wenyu and Ma Xiangbo, in modern China. For example, see Wei Mo, ‘Assessing Jesuit intellectual apostolate in modern Shanghai (1847–1949)’, *Religions* 12.3 (2021); Open Access (without exact page numbers) at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12030159> (accessed 18 August 2022).

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