

CULTURAL PRIMER OR *BIBLE STORIES* IN CONTEMPORARY MAINLAND CHINA

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In the PRC, where the *Bible* can only be bought through the church, and religious propaganda is prohibited, are *Bible Stories* read as a substitute for the *Bible* or for its literary and historical value. The aim of this study is to analyze some of approximately twenty collections of these stories, which seem to be in favor with Chinese readers.

The publication of *Bible Stories* is a topic that does not generally spawn academic interest or analysis. *Bible Stories* are traditionally published by church-related institutions for the propagation of Christianity, and most of them are written for children in a simplified language which makes these stories more accessible than the actual Bible. China's situation, however, is unique: though the propagation of religion is illegal, there have nevertheless been a great number of Bible story collections published throughout the last years, and, indeed, they prove to be significantly different from the prototype versions of American or European *Bible Stories*. These Chinese *Bible Stories* are published by distinctly secular publishing houses like the *Red Flag Publishing House* (*Hongqi chubanshe* [1]) or the *China Social Sciences Publishing House* (*Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe* [2])¹ and written exclusively for an adult audience. The Bible itself is available in China – since 1980 it is again being printed and sold² – but it can only be bought through the church and in the somewhat antiquated *Union Version* (first pub. 1919).³ These conditions raise the following questions, among others: Who is reading these stories and why? Are *Bible Sto-*

¹ The only versions known to the author that show any connection with the church are WU (see below) and *Peitu shengjing gushi* [3] (*Bible Stories with Pictures*) (Chengdu: Sichuan meishu chubanshe [4] 1992) by Jin Ping [5] and Shi Qinfen [6], who acknowledge the help of a pastor of the “Three-Self-Church” in Chengdu for their version.

² By April 1997, 15 million Bibles had been issued by the Amity Press in Nanjing (see *China heute* 16, 1997, 3–4, pp. 77 f.

³ In Hong Kong there are presently at least seven different Protestant Bible translations available, many of which are sold both in religious and secular book stores.

ries in China being read as a substitute for the Bible? What picture of the Bible is represented in these books? In a country like China where Christianity has experienced such an immense growth in recent years, these questions are loaded with significance.

Common Features

Throughout the last two decades, approximately twenty collections of Chinese *Bible Stories*, *Shengjing gushi* [7], have been published in widely differing formats.⁴ While some are mere translations of existing *Bible Stories*,⁵ most are newly written and collated; some are slim volumes without any introduction or illustration,⁶ while others have elaborate introductions or illustrations. In fact, some have so many accompanying pictures that they are reminiscent of comic strips or the Chinese form thereof, *lianhuanhua*. From 1982 to 1994, one of the earliest and the most successful of all versions, ZHANG,⁷ went through 13 editions and more than 1.1 million published copies.

The various versions of *Bible Stories* can be grouped according to their different approaches, for which typical examples have been chosen for this study. However, there are common attributes to almost all of the *Bible Stories*. One is the justification of their existence. ZHANG writes in the preface to his first edition:

In other countries, *Bible Stories* of this kind are written for children, with easily understandable language. Adults are hardly interested because they for the greatest part have read the Bible. China is different. The greatest part of its people have not had any contact with Christianity, therefore it is very unlikely that they would be so enthusiastic to carefully read the Bible with its more than a million characters from beginning to end.

And then he continues:

If we Chinese want to understand Europe's and America's literature, history, economics, and law we cannot but want to be acquainted with the Bible.

⁴ The apparently first version was Wu Guorui's [8] *Shengjing de gushi* [9] (*Bible Stories*). Beijing: Waiyu jiaoxue yu yanjiu chubanshe [10] 1980. (see Gálik, M.: "The Reception of the Bible in Mainland China (1980–1992): Observations of a Literary Comparatist." *Asian and African Studies* ns 4.1 (1995), p. 24–46: 44).

⁵ See *Manhua shengjing* [11] (*Random Talk about the Bible*) (Beijing: Sanlian shudian [12] 1988) which is a translation of the very critical *Story of the Bible* by H. van Loom (New York: Boni & Liveright 1923), or *Xinyue de chuanshuo* [13] (*Legends of the New Testament*) (Harbin: Haerbin heilongjiang renmin chubanshe [14] 1992), a translation of a Polish original.

⁶ See for instance the version by Shi Fuzong [15] (*Shengjing gushi xinbian* [16] (*New Compilation of Bible Stories*)). Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe [17] 1993).

⁷ Zhang Jiuxuan [18]: *Shengjing gushi* [7] (*Bible Stories*). 1st ed.: Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe [2] 1982, rev. ed.: 1987; Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe [19] 1993; 2nd rev. ed.: Beijing: Hongqi chubanshe [1] 1994.

This argumentation can be found in almost all versions: the importance of the Bible for China lies in the fact that it is a medium for understanding Western culture and civilization.

As ZHANG mentioned, *Bible Stories* in the West are usually for children; however, there are also English editions for adults. In one of them, written by P. S. Martin,⁸ the preface contains a completely different reason for the publication:

If the book is to be written for young children, one may easily justify his effort – the Bible contains language and symbolism which must be “translated” into a child’s language in order for him to understand them. In the case of older children or adults – the group for which this book is intended—the situation is somewhat different. One might suggest that the Bible itself is sufficient for them. On the other hand, I have found that even intelligent teenagers and adults find it difficult to grasp immediately the plot and message of certain scriptures. For them, a clearly-written story can lead effectively to a deeper study of the Bible itself.

The difference between these two approaches is striking. The Chinese authors see their effort as a contribution to a deeper understanding of the West, whereas the Western author hopes to contribute to a deeper understanding of the Bible itself.

Another common feature of the Chinese *Bible Stories* is the Protestant perspective.⁹ This becomes apparent in their view of the canonization of biblical books – though the Apocrypha is included in some of the versions, it is marked as the Protestant Apocrypha and not as part of the Catholic Old Testament. The Protestant perspective also becomes apparent in the use of Protestant terminology for theological terms as well as proper names, the areas in which Catholic and Protestant terminology differ the most.¹⁰ “God” is interestingly translated in all versions with *shangdi* [22] (“Emperor above”), one of the two terms in Protestant use. The other term, *shen* [23] (“spirit” or “god”), predominantly

⁸ Martin, Patricia S.: *Bible Stories That Live*. Nashville: Southwestern Company 1966. A newer, somewhat different form of *Bible Stories* for adults is Wangerin, W.: *The Book of God: The Bible as a Novel*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1996.

⁹ Only one exception is known to the author. *Ai de qishi* [20] (Revelation of Love) by Xiao Xiao [21] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe [2] 1994) is based on the Catholic Bible. Its stated intention is to distinguish it from the “selectiveness” of existing *Bible Stories* and to present a more comprehensive and objective picture of the Bible. Though the poetic books of the Old Testament are not included and the New Testament section only consists of the Gospels, Xiao still succeeds in giving a more comprehensive and at the same time more positive picture of the Bible than most of the other authors.

¹⁰ See Zetzsche, J.: “Aspekte der chinesischen Bibelübersetzung.” In: “*Fallbeispiel China*”: *Ökumenische Beiträge zu Religion, Theologie und Kirche im chinesischen Kontext*. Ed. R. Malek. St. Augustin: China-Zentrum; Nettetal: Steyler Verlag 1996: p. 29–88; “*Tianzhu, Shangdi oder Shen?* Zur Entstehung der christlichen chinesischen Terminologie.” In: *Chun (Chinesischunterricht)* 13 (1997): p. 23–34.

used in mainland China, apparently did not fit as well with the concept of a God of stories, being somewhat too spiritual and impersonal.¹¹

Most of the versions pay some tribute in their preface to the *Union Version*, by far the most commonly used Chinese Protestant Bible translation; however, they also criticize its somewhat stilted language. As a result, the authors of the *Bible Stories* strive for greater comprehensibility through the use of a more modern style.

The beginning of the New Testament narrative starts in all versions with the story of Elizabeth and Zechariah (Luke 1). Though the opening sentence of this story does not contain any relevant theological information, the stylistic differences from the *Union Version* become readily apparent. Luke 1:5 in the *Union Version* reads:

Dang Youtai wang Xilü de shihou, Yabiya ban li you yige jisi, ming jiao Sajialiya; ta qizi shi Yalun de houren, ming jiao Yilishabai.
[24]¹²

The *Bible Stories* read as follows:

Da Xilü wang zai Youtai zhizheng de shihou, Yabiya ban li you yiwei jisi, ming jiao Sajialiya, ta you yige qizi, ming jiao Yilishabai, shi Yalun de houdai. [25]¹³ (ZHANG (1994), p. 435)

Xilü wei Youtai guowang shiqi, zai Yabiya you yi ming jiao Sajialiya de jisi, ta he yiwei Yalun jisi de houdai, ming jiao Yilishabai de nüren jie le hun. [26]¹⁴ (GUO¹⁵ : p. 379)

Xilü wei Youtai guowang shiqi, zai Yabiya you yi ming jiao Sajialiya de jisi, ta he yiwei ming jiao Yilishabai de nüren jie le hun.
[28]¹⁶ (JIANG¹⁷ : p. 301)

¹¹ The translation of “God” into Chinese was one of the most controversial questions in the history of the Chinese church. Though today both terms, *shangdi* and *shen*, are used, the Bibles sold in mainland China employ only *shen*.

¹² “In the time of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest in the division of Abijah with the name of Zechariah; his wife was a descendant of Aaron with the name of Elizabeth.”

¹³ “In the time that Herod the Great was ruling in Judea, there was a priest in the division of Abijah with the name of Zechariah, he had a wife with the name of Elizabeth who was a descendant of Aaron.”

¹⁴ “In the period when Herod was king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah in Abijah. He was married to a woman named Elizabeth who was a descendant of the priest Aaron.”

¹⁵ Guo Chenghui [27]: *Shengjing gushi* [7] (Bible Stories). Shanghai: Sanlian shudian [12] 1995.

¹⁶ “In the period when Herod was king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah in Abijah. He was married to a woman named Elizabeth.”

¹⁷ Jiang Weidong, Liu Zhao, Feng Lan, Xiao Yuan, Wei Qing [29]: *Shengjing gushi* [7] (Bible Stories). Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe [19] 1996.

Xilü wang tongzhi Youda de shihou, you yiwei ming jiao Sajialiya de jisi, ta qizi ming jiao Yilishabai. [30]¹⁸ (ZENG,¹⁹ p. 526)

Zai Youda guowang Xilü nianjian, you yige ming jiao Sajialiya de jisi, ta de qizi jiao Yilishabai . . . [32]²⁰ (XIAO,²¹ p. 485)

Zhengdang Da Xilü zuo Youtai wang shi, Youda zhipai de Yuta cheng, you yiwei jisi, ming jiao Sajialiliya, quqi Yilishabai, . . . [36]²² (WU,²³ p. 266)

The language of the *Union Version* is far more literary than the style of the other versions. That of Zhang is very similar, yet the use of *zhizheng* [40] in the first part of the sentence shows the preference for modern terminology (comparable is *tongzhi* [41] in ZENG or *jiehun* [42] in GUO and JIANG), as well as the syntax used. In GUO, JIANG, and XIAO, modern genitive constructions with *de* [43] are used. The only version which tends to use more literary language is WU (see below). In the versions of ZHANG, GUO, and JIANG, *Elizabeth* is not transliterated in the traditional Protestant way ([44]) but in the revised form ([45]).²⁴ Changes of this kind are applied to names which are misunderstandable, such as *Yilishabai*'s old form as "Uncle of Yilisha".²⁵

To differentiate between the various versions of *Bible Stories*, it is illuminating to discover what stories in the Bible are considered worthy of inclusion – or exclusion – by the Chinese authors. In the process, clues to the motivation behind the publication can also be detected.

¹⁸ "As King Herod reigned over Judah, there was a priest by the name of Zechariah, his wife's name was Elizabeth."

¹⁹ Zeng Chuanhui, Qiu Fengxia, Zhong Li, Zhang Lingling [31]: *Shengjing gushi* [7] (Bible Stories). Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe [2] 1994.

²⁰ "In the years of king Herod of Judah, there was a priest named Zechariah, his wife was called Elizabeth . . ."

²¹ Xiao Lianbing, He Nong, Cheng Ying [33]: *Quanyi huihua shengjing gushi* [34] (Completely Translated Bible Stories with Pictures). Beijing: Beijing shifandaxue chubanshe [35] 1991.

²² "When Herod the Great was the king of Judea, in the city Juttah of Judah, there was a priest with the name Zechariah who had married Elizabeth. . ."

²³ Wu Enpu [37]: *Shengjing chuanqi* [38] (Bible Legends). Hohhot: Neimenggu renmin chubanshe [39] 1994.

²⁴ This can be found in the revised edition of the *Union Version* (*Chinese Union Version with New Punctuation*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Bible Society 1989), as well as in other modern Bible translations (see for instance *Today's Chinese Version*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Bible Society 1980, 1984 and 1995). In mainland China, a moderately revised edition of the New Testament that was published in 1996 also has some revised transliterations (*Shengjing jianshiben* (*Xinyue*) [46]. Nanjing: Zhongguo jidujiao xiehui [47] 1996).

²⁵ For some reason the adoption of new transliterations was not done consistently in the *Bible Stories*. *Nigedimu* [48] for instance, understandable as "Mother of the Elder Brother of Ni," was left as such and not in its modern form *Nigedemu* [49].

The Popular Approach

The version of ZHANG, by far the most popular and successful of the Chinese *Bible Stories*, served as a model in its choice of stories for the versions of JIANG and GUO. In the Old Testament, the stories from creation to the founding and division of Israel are covered almost identically in the three versions.²⁶ For the kings of the divided kingdom, the story of Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kings 21; 2 Kings) is most prominently covered (the story of the evil queen Jezebel only too obviously fits the pattern of the evil empress in Chinese historiography).²⁷ The captivity in Babylon and the restoration of the temple (2 Kings 25, 2 Chron 36, Ezra-Esther) are again described in great length.

Most revealing about the method of retelling the Old Testament is the way the prophets are handled. Elijah and Elisha, whose stories form part of the historical books in the Old Testament, are treated elaborately; of the others prophets, only the stories of Daniel and Jonah are told. Only in ZHANG is a short chapter devoted to the Messiah prophecies of Isaiah.

Of the poetic books of the Old Testament, Job appears in all three, even completely translated in its poetic form in ZHANG.²⁸ Only GUO leaves out the Song of Songs, which is completely translated by both ZHANG and JIANG. None of the other poetic books, such as the Psalms, Proverbs or Ecclesiastes, appear.

The Old Testament is thus for a great part presented as a historical book. Much of the spiritual content – in the prophetic as well as in the poetic books – is lost. Though the stories give a picture of people who are in a relationship with God (or lack thereof), it emphasizes people and their actions rather than God, an emphasis that differs significantly from what the Old Testament stands for in Christian or Jewish understanding.

²⁶ The stories include creation (Gen. 1–2), original sin (Gen. 3), Cain and Abel (Gen. 4), Noah (Gen. 6–9), tower of Babel (Gen. 11), the patriarchs (Gen. 13–50), Moses and the Exodus (Exod. 2–18), laws (Exod. 20–39), bronze serpent (Num. 21), Balaam (Num. 22–24), crossing of the Jordan (Josh. 1–3), Jericho (Josh. 6), Joshua’s battles (Josh. 7–12), Deborah (Judg. 4–5), Gideon (Judg. 11–13), Samson (Judg. 14–16), murder of Levite’s concubine (Judg. 19–21), Ruth (Ruth), Samuel, Saul and David (1–2 Sam.), Solomon (1 Kings 1–11), and the division of the kingdom (1 Kings 12).

²⁷ Other stories include that of Jeroboam (1 Kings 12–13), Menahem (2 Kings 15) (not in GUO), or Hezekiah (2 Kings 18–20, 2 Chron. 29–32).

²⁸ The preface to the second edition points to this as the major change from the first edition of 1982, where the story of Job was only retold, to the second edition in 1985, where the new translation appears for the first time. The first and later editions differ in more significant ways, however. The first edition has much more the character of a mere collection of coherent stories by the exclusion of all the poetic parts (like the Song of Deborah or the Song of Songs), some of the “obscure stories” (like the story of Judah and Tamar (Gen. 38), the murder of the Levite concubine (Judg. 19–21), or Absalom (2 Sam. 13–18)), the laws (Exod. 20–39), or the stories of Ruth and Jonah.

Additionally, the prophetic books—many of which provide very lively storytelling material²⁹—build an important bridge between the Old and the New Testament, a bridge which is lost in these *Bible Stories* versions. The authors of ZHANG, JIANG, and GUO try to compensate for this by adding the Apocrypha. ZHANG’s preface to the second edition (and similar remarks in JIANG and GUO) explains that

the importance of these works [the Apocrypha] lies in their lively reflection of Jewish history, life, thinking, worship and religion in the centuries before the begin of the Common era. Only with this historical and cultural background can one have an easy understanding of Jesus’s life and teaching.

Again, the historical and cultural background is emphasized rather than any spiritual connection between the Old and New Testaments. Of course, Zhang Jiuxuan, the author of ZHANG, may have had a special motivation for the inclusion of the Apocrypha as its first modern Chinese translator (from a Protestant perspective).³⁰ Still, the length of the narrative (more than 100 pages) and the fact that in both JIANG and GUO a relatively large space is reserved for the Apocrypha (75 and 67 pages respectively) indicate a significance of including the Apocrypha beyond Zhang’s personal preference.

The New Testament narrative is dominated by two stories, that of Jesus’s life and teaching and that of the early church. The stories of the New Testament are nearly identical in GUO and JIANG. This similarity, along with the fact that GUO was printed in Changchun, where JIANG was printed and published a year later,³¹ suggests a likelihood that GUO was plagiarized during that time. This is also supported by the fact that GUO has several chapters that JIANG does not in-

²⁹ English *Bible Stories* prove this by integrating the stories of the prophets into their tale. See Martin and Wangerin (see fn. 8) as well as the “classical” children’s *Bible Stories* by E. Egermeier (*Bible Story Book*. 1st ed. 1922. Anderson, Ind.: Warner Press 1955) or A. S. Maxwell (*The Bible Story*. 10 vol. 1st ed. 1953. Mountain View, Ca.: Pacific Press et al. 1979).

³⁰ Zhang Jiuxuan [18]: *Shengjing houdian* [50]. Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan [51] 1987. In his first edition of 1982, the Apocrypha is not only not included but are mentioned as only belonging to the Catholic Bible (p. 1).

The very first Protestant translation of the Apocrypha into classical Chinese was undertaken by the Anglican missionary Montgomery Hunt Throop and Waung Yih-t sien in the twenties; in 1933, the first Mandarin edition, based on the earlier classical edition, was published by H. F. Lei (see Spillett, Hubert W.: *A Catalogue of Scriptures in the Languages of China and the Republic of China*. London: British and Foreign Bible Society 1975, pp. 48, 102). In 1995 another translation of the Apocrypha was published in China (Zhao Peilin, Zhang Jun, Yin Yao [52]: *Shengjing cijing* [53]. Changchun: Shidai wenyi chubanshe [54] 1995). Both modern versions of the Apocrypha were translated on the basis of the English *Good News Bible with Deuterocanonicals/Apocrypha* (New York: American Bible Society 1979).

³¹ JIANG’s publishing house also republished ZHANG in 1993, *Jilin wenshi chubanshe* (see fn. 7).

clude.³² These chapters not only include the Epistles (see below), but also the chapter on the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7, GUO p. 397–404) and the story of Peter’s confession and Jesus’s teaching on discipleship (Matt. 16:13–28, GUO p. 455–457), both of which are of great theological relevance.

The story of Jesus’s life is retold quite similarly in the three (or rather two) versions,³³ with the exception that in ZHANG Jesus’s life and teaching is additionally summarized in a chapter (entitled: *qiankun zuji* [55] – “footprints in heaven and on earth”, p. 567–575). The story of the disciples and the early church also is similarly retold (only that for some reason the authors of GUO (/JIANG) insist on calling Paul (Chin. *Baoluo* [56]) Saul (Chin. *Saoluo* [57]), the name used in the Bible before his conversion (see Acts 13:9).³⁴ However, ZHANG’s and JIANG’s narratives end with the story of Paul in Rome (Acts 28), whereas GUO’s continues with a summary of nine of the 21 Epistles.³⁵

The historical books of the New Testament, the Gospels and Acts, obviously contain more material for *Bible Stories* than the Epistles or Revelation, but Revelation particularly contains a great number of images which have even found their way into Chinese literature.³⁶ The choice of the Gospels and Acts for use in the *Bible Stories* has an effect similar to the choice of the Old Testament stories. Theological and prophetic aspects, which obviously form an important part

³² See also the quoted passage from the story of Elizabeth and Zechariah where the authors of JIANG edited the text of GUO.

³³ In ZHANG the narrative includes: birth of Jesus and John the Baptist (Luke 1), flight to Egypt (Matt. 2:13–23), twelve year old Jesus in the temple (Luke 2:41–52), Jesus’s baptism and temptation (Matt. 3:13–4:11, et al.), call of the Apostles (John 1:35–51, Matt. 4:18–22, et al.), wedding in Cana (John 2:1–11), cleansing of the temple (John 2:13–22, et al.), Nicodemus (John 3:1–21), Samaritan woman (John 4:1–42), several (chapters on) healings (John 4:46–54, Matt. 8:5–13, et al.), sermon on the mount (Matt. 5–7), Jesus and the woman sinner (Luke 7:36–39), Jesus’s return to Galilee (Luke 4:14–30, 8:19–21, et al.), feeding of the 5,000 (Matt. 14:13–21, et al.), walk on the water (Matt. 14:22–36, et al.), transfiguration and questions concerning Jesus’s identity (Luke 7:18–35, 9:18–45, et al.), Jesus and the Pharisees (Luke 10:1–12, Matt. 22 et al.), several parables (Matt. 9:14–17, 10:25–37, et al.), parables on the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 13 et al.), in Bethany (John 11:1–12:11, Luke 10:38–42, et al.), entry into Jerusalem (John 12:12–12:26 et al.), announcement of the second advent (Matt. 24 et al.), last supper (Matt. 26:20–46, et al.), betrayal (Matt. 26:47–56, 27:3–10 et al.), suffering (26:57–68, 27:1–56, et al.), and the resurrection (Matt. 28 et al.).

³⁴ GUO first uses “*Baoluo*” in the Epistles of Paul, where Paul is identified as Saul in the story of the Apostles (p. 605).

³⁵ GUO includes a short chapter each on the Epistle to the Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, 1 Timothy, Hebrews, James, 1/2 Peter, 1 John.

³⁶ See Gálik, M.: “Parody and Absurd Laughter in Wang Meng’s *Apocalypse*. Musings over the Metamorphosis of the Biblical Vision in Contemporary Chinese Literature.” *Das andere China. Festschrift für Wolfgang Bauer zum 65. Geburtstag*. Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer (ed.). Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 1995, 449–461.

In the English versions of Martin, Egermeier, and Maxwell, Revelation is included, and the Epistles are mentioned.

of the New Testament, are considered only to a minor degree. And though Jesus talks about the Heavenly Kingdom in all three versions, it is merely as a part of a story, without the personal approach of the Epistles or the dramatic vision of Revelation.

In the beginning of the story of Elizabeth and Zechariah quoted above, an important difference between ZHANG and the other two versions becomes apparent. ZHANG's style is much more exalted and more similar to that of the *Union Version*, making this version the only Chinese collection of *Bible Stories* to be praised by Chinese critics for its "beautiful style and graceful language".³⁷ The same quotation also points to a discrepancy in the biblical scholarship of the other versions: ZHANG has the correct "division of Abijah" of the *Union Version*, whereas the authors of GUO (and JIANG) misunderstand it as a place name ("in Abijah").

The version of ZHANG also includes other information. Its first chapter (*Shengjing genggai* [60]) is an introduction to the biblical books, and its appendix contains historical overviews of biblical times and of the translation history of the Bible.³⁸ The 1994 edition also has 120 well-reproduced woodcuts by Julius Schnorr von Carlsfeld (1794–1872).³⁹

GUO's preface also includes a short introduction to the biblical books, but has none of the other supporting materials of ZHANG's version. JIANG has only a very short introduction to the biblical books, but he does have 12 full-color pictures of Western origin at the beginning of the book (which are interestingly not all correctly labeled: "The Crucifixion of Saint Peter" by Rubens (1577–1640) is labeled as "The Sufferings of Jesus" (*Yesu shouan* [61])).

The common features of these three versions are that the chosen stories are very similar – ZHANG surely served as a model for the other two – and that they have no overt agenda connected with their publication (although it could be shown that the Bible is not adequately represented). However, these versions differ significantly in their levels of scholarship. In his choice of language, his understanding of the original texts, and his supporting materials, the author of ZHANG displays a much more scholarly approach to the Bible than the other two.

The Scientific Approach

The respected *Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe* [2] (China Social Sciences Publishing House) published ZHANG in the early eighties; in 1994 its publication of ZENG added the most voluminous version of *Bible Stories* to the Chinese mar-

³⁷ See Liang Gong [58]: *Shengjing wenxue daodu* [59] (Introduction of Biblical Literature). 2nd vol. Taipei: University of Wisdom 1992, p. 224.

³⁸ The 1982 edition does not have an appendix.

³⁹ In the 1987 edition the 60 reproductions are so unclear that they are barely intelligible.

ket.⁴⁰ Besides an overview of the biblical books and a survey of Bible translation in China, the introduction includes an explanation of the importance of the Bible for China. A century ago, the explanation states, Chinese either “blindly believed (*mixin* [62]) or resisted (*kangju* [63])” the Bible: for those who placed their blind faith in it, the Bible was one with the West and thus with modernity and progress; in the eyes of those who rejected it, on the other hand, the Bible was introduced with the help of gunboats and opium traders. But, according to the authors, who identify themselves as scholars of religious studies, none of the above opinions is suitable for an open and internationally oriented society. Today it is obvious that knowledge of the Bible is essential for the understanding of spiritual ethics (*jingshen daode* [64]), literature, philosophy, religion, language, and art. Of course, it continues, everybody knows that the biblical story of creation is not compatible with modern science, yet people still enjoy talking about the story of the Garden of Eden and other legends. The Bible has so many facets that Engels could see its revolutionary character, Freud its psychological value, and the famed Chinese author Ba Jin [65] (b. 1904) could draw from it inspiration for creating literature.⁴¹ Besides, according to the authors, the Bible does have some value in its inherent wisdom, and knowledge of it would help China to prevent misunderstandings with the West, which bases its entire culture on the Bible. The value of this version, conclude the authors, lies in the new systematization of the stories and reduction of the original text (from approximately 1.6 million to 1 million characters), both efforts to make the Bible more comprehensible.

On the next 11 pages a timetable provides the reader with information about the biblical events in comparison to “real” (scientifically proven) events.

The actual narrative is somewhat different from the other *Bible Stories*. The biblical books each form a chapter containing the retold stories. Besides the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, all the historical books appear as separate chapters.⁴² The poetic books, with the exception of Job, are copied from the *Union Version*,⁴³ Proverbs and the Song of Songs completely, Psalms and Ecclesiastes only in a selection. Of the prophetic books, the major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel) are given as a short summary, of the twelve minor prophets only three (Hosea, Jonah, and Zechariah) appear. Five of the 15

⁴⁰ The same publishing house additionally published the Catholic version by Xiao (see fn. 9).

⁴¹ For Ba Jin and Christianity, see Robinson, L.S.: *Double-Edged Sword. Christianity & 20th Century Chinese Fiction*. Hong Kong, Tao Fong Shan Ecumenical Centre 1986, pp. 154–171.

⁴² The books of Chronicles are not separately covered, for many of their stories are told in the books of Samuel and Kings.

⁴³ The copyright to the original *Union Version* text ran out in 1979, 60 years after its publication.

books of the Apocrypha – though barely mentioned in the introduction – are included.⁴⁴ The New Testament section consists of one chapter for the four Gospels, one for Acts, and one for Revelation.

A different emphasis than in the other *Bible Stories* is apparent. The authors have a more analytic approach to the Bible, organizing its stories according to the order of the biblical books and including much more than other authors have done, especially in the poetic part of the Old Testament. At the same time, however, it is a more distanced approach to biblical writing. This becomes evident not only in the introduction, where the authors so clearly state their view of biblical writing as inferior in comparison to modern science, but also in their actual narrative where they use phrases like “according to the biblical view”.⁴⁵ With this they identify themselves as commentators rather than storytellers, a role which complements their perspective on the (lack of) “truthfulness” of biblical writing.

Despite the authors’ “analytical approach,” much of the theological contents of the Bible is excluded with the omission of the New Testament Epistles. The isolated book of Revelation loses much of its prophetic character and mutates into the poetic realm, making it more consistent with this version’s poetic emphasis.

The Political Approach

The version of XIAO represents yet a different perspective in the stories that it includes and the way its goals are defined. A paragraph in the introduction to Genesis points out that this version, based on the Bible and several other earlier published *Bible Stories*, intends to cleanse the Bible from its superstitious aspects and reveal its true character as a book of fairytale-like stories. This was apparently not enough of a preface, and so each copy was later furnished with a loose leaflet entitled “Explanation of Publication” (*chuban shuoming* [67]).⁴⁶ The authors of XIAO put the ubiquitously quoted statement that the understanding of the Bible is fundamental for an understanding of the West (see above) into a new context, by pointing out that even the great revolutionaries like Marx and Engels used biblical allusions (the literary examples quoted in ZHANG, for example, include Shakespeare, Dante, Milton, Goethe, and Tolstoy). Another important reason given for its publication is the systematization of the Bible.

⁴⁴ Tobias, Judith, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, and 1 Maccabees.

⁴⁵ See, for instance, the summary of Hosea (p. 462–463) where the authors talk about unrest in the time of the reign of Jeroboam and then continue: “According to the biblical view this was because the Israelites had abandoned the agreement with the Lord . . .” (*Anzhao shengjing de kanfa, zhe shi yinwei Yiselieren beiqi le yu zhu de liyue* [66])

⁴⁶ The book was issued in August of ’92, and the “Explanation” was added two months later, at the end of October.

This version is the only one which positively denies any possible truth in biblical writing, thus – according to the authors – allowing a deeper understanding of the biblical truths than the actual superstitious Bible. Though this version relies much more on its pictures than its text, which in comparison to the other versions is extremely meager,⁴⁷ it covers more biblical books than any other (an implication contained in its title: *Completely Translated Bible Stories*). It makes mention of the prophetic books of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, as well as most of the New Testament Epistles and Revelation. However, XIAO's attempt at "systematization" means that those books are integrated in the stories surrounding them, often investing them with a new meaning, especially in the case of the prophetic books (including Revelation). They are stripped of their prophetic contents and turned into "non-superstitious" stories – very much like Elijah and Elisha in the other *Bible Stories*.

The illustrations in XIAO, which, according to the "Explanation," are added "to increase the artistic and tasteful character of this book," are most revealing. In the front there are eight full-colored reproductions of paintings by European artists, mostly Italian renaissance painters. Only three of the eight reproductions have biblical content; others, like the "Birth of Venus" by Botticelli (1445–1510) or the "Flower Goddess Flora" by Titian (1477–1576), display figures of Greek and Roman mythology rather than the Bible. In the authors' eyes Western culture is synonymous with Christianity and therefore even Greek and Roman mythology have their place in a book of *Bible Stories*. The approximately 300 drawings that accompany the actual stories are done by two Chinese artists, Liu Xueli and Wang Zhixue, in a Western painting style. The mixture of somewhat romanticized ink-drawings and more pictures resembling figures from Greek and Roman mythology⁴⁸ adds to this version's appearance as a collection of fairytales.

In XIAO an interesting and – given the somewhat delicate position of Christianity in mainland China – highly political picture of the Bible is presented. Its authors attempt to strip the Bible down to its essence – a collection of fairytales – and declare Christians either to be highly romantic people who could as well believe in Greek or Roman mythology, or people who are simply misled by "false" teaching.

⁴⁷ See quotation from the story of Elizabeth and Zechariah, which is the comparatively shortest of all versions. In this quotation, XIAO (as well as ZENG) makes no distinction between "Judah" (*Youda* [68]) and the Roman form "Judea" (*Youtai* [69]). However, during the time period of Herod the difference is significant, because "Judea" then denotes an area including all of Palestine, beyond the borders of Judah.

⁴⁸ Many of the chapters in the New Testament end with a picture of Cupid, depicted as a winged child with a bow.

The Evangelical Approach

The very opposite approach motivates Wu's volume of *Bible Stories* (here: *Bible Legends*). The author, Pastor (as is explicitly stated) Wu Enpu [70], was commissioned in 1961 by a conference of evangelical Christian authors in Hong Kong to write a *Shengjing yanyi* [71], a "Historical Novel (*yanyi* [72]) of the Bible".⁴⁹ The *Sanguo yanyi* [74], the "Historical Novel of the Three Kingdoms" by Luo Guanzhong [75] (c. 1330–1400), written in a mixture of the colloquial Chinese of early Ming China and literary Chinese, was to serve as a model for this enterprise.⁵⁰ The intention of this publication is clearly stated to "enhance the interest of non-Christians in the Bible," for which the popular indigenous Chinese form of the *yanyi* was chosen.

The prologue (*xiezi* [76]) supports this aim very strongly. Two quotations from classical Chinese sources – *Liezi* [77] and the *Yijing* [78] – stating that the being came out of the void are confronted with the first verse from Genesis: "In the beginning God created the world" (*qichu shangdi chuangzao tiandi* [79]), followed by quotations from the book of Romans (1:20) and Psalm 104, both supporting the biblical view on divine creation. The actual story of creation does not start with the biblical first day of creation, but explains how Satan came into being (before the creation of the world): as a Cherub whose pride caused his fall.⁵¹

The story from creation to the restoration of the temple is similar to the accounts in the "popular" versions, and yet there are distinct differences. Wu has more specific information that goes beyond the character of a story (but is very well in the spirit of a *yanyi*): for instance the number of each tribe of Israel going to war (p. 105, Num. 1) or a list of kings of the Northern Kingdom (p. 205). The stories of the kings of the divided kingdoms are not retold in detail (the story of Jezebel, for example, is omitted), but a long prophetic quotation from Deuteronomy 28 is included explaining why God made Israel fall because of the corruption of its kings.⁵² The prophets also are treated differently. In a separate

⁴⁹ See foreword by Ye Guxu [73] in Wu. The foreword is dated May 1974, 20 years before the publication date. There certainly can be no doubt that this version could not have been published in mainland China during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). An interesting question is whether the choice of the somewhat remote publisher (Neimenggu renmin chubanshe – Inner Mongolian People's Press) of today's edition has anything to do with the religious content of this book.

⁵⁰ The *Sanguo yanyi* was interestingly most often quoted as an ideal model for a Bible translation into Chinese in the history of Chinese missionary Bible translation (see Zetzsche, Jost: *The Bible in China: History of the Union Version*. Publication pending with Monumenta Serica Monograph Series).

⁵¹ Apparently an interpretation of Ezek. 28.

⁵² "But it shall come about, if you will not obey the LORD your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you . . ." (Deut. 28:15ff.) (translation from *New American Standard Bible*).

chapter (*Xianzhi liezhuan* [80] – “Biographies of the Prophets”), the stories of Elijah, Elisha, Daniel, and Jonah are narrated individually, giving them more emphasis than in other *Bible Stories*. The New Testament ends with an 11-page account of Revelation, again investing more significance in the prophetic books than the other versions do.

Other features of the *Bible Legends* are also reminiscent of the *Sanguo yanyi*. In the New Testament, as in the *Sanguo yanyi*, the headlines of the chapters consist of two verses.⁵³ Even more outstanding is the common use of poems. In Wu’s Old Testament part, David recites Psalms⁵⁴ and Solomon recites from the book of Ecclesiastes (pp. 199–201). In the New Testament, poems and church hymns are inserted,⁵⁵ most of them introduced with phrases like *shi yue* [81] (“the poem says”) or *houren zuo shi yue* [82] (“later generations wrote a poem which said”) – exactly the way the numerous poems in the *Sanguo yanyi* are introduced. Wu’s language has a strong literary tendency, like that of the *Sanguo yanyi*. The above-quoted introduction to the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth continues as follows:

... *liangkou zi xiang qin xiang ai, shuo bu jin changsui zhi le; you fu tongxin shifeng Shangdi, zunshou lüfa, qinqi pengyou, mo bu chengzan tamen de weiren.* [83]⁵⁶

Not only does the storyteller seem to know more about this couple than the biblical writer, he truly states it in a very literary manner.

The author of Wu is very clear in stating his evangelical agenda, and he attempts to fulfill this agenda by reaching his audience with a new form of biblical narrative, one that is well-known and -liked and that is truly indigenous. His purpose – to convince his audience of the truth of Christianity – is also conveyed through a slightly different choice in stories. The prophetic books, especially the book of Revelation in the New Testament, are given a greater emphasis, and he tries to explain what God chose to do with his people rather than what the people did, an approach that is exactly opposite that of the other *Bible Stories*.

Summary

There is a great variety of *Bible Stories* available now in China, and, as shown in this paper, it is possible to form different groups of these versions by

⁵³ With the exception of the last two chapters.

⁵⁴ See p. 171 where David sings a song of lamentation from 2 Sam. 1, or p. 191 where Psalm 30 is cited.

⁵⁵ See pp. 270, 298, 303, 306f., 311, 313, 325, 316, 330, 336f., et al.

⁵⁶ “. . . this couple loved each other devotedly and had the most harmonious life (verbatim: one could not say enough about their joy of antiphonal singing); with one heart they served God and kept the law, and relatives and friends could not but praise their conduct.”

categorizing them according to their distinct agendas. Still, there are some agendas that are common to all the versions with the exception of WU. WU presents an indigenous “Chinese Gospel” in the hope of convincing his reader of Christianity. None of the other versions shares that goal. Christianity, or rather Protestantism, is defined by their authors as a matter only of Western culture (which apparently is understood to be the culture of Protestant North America and northern Europe). According to their definition, this culture can only be comprehended by the knowledge of the Bible which is, therefore, primarily considered as a cultural rather than a religious book. The fact that Christianity is certainly not confined to the Western world and has indeed found a strong expression in many parts of the world, including China, is ignored and to some degree denied.⁵⁷

The method of this message’s conveyance differs. Most outspoken in their aim are the authors of XIAO, who claim to reveal the true character of Christianity as a superstitious collection of stories. They try to demonstrate this by the presentation of the stories as fairytales as well as by removing any religious content of the Bible. ZENG seems to be the most thorough version of Chinese Bible stories, but its authors also distance themselves very much from the Bible as a religious book. They expend a great deal of effort in portraying the Bible as an important piece of literature by including the poetic parts of the Bible but neglecting the theological ones. The author of ZHANG has a somewhat similar approach to that of ZENG, but accomplishes it with a less distanced and analytical approach and a greater emphasis on good (and well-informed) writing. GUO and especially JIANG are the most commercial versions considered in this study, demonstrating a certain lack of scholarship and care in their production. However, they also represent a cultural rather than a religious picture of Christianity.

Indeed, the large editions of *Bible Stories* point to considerable commercial motivation for their publication. For several decades it was illegal in China to own or read the Bible, a prohibition which naturally created great interest in the Bible among the Chinese public and makes the publication of *Bible Stories* a profitable enterprise. However, this study suggests that there are more considerations for their publication.

What can be learned from the *Bible Stories*? For the reader who wants to have a quick glance at fascinating stories of world literature, these versions will be very helpful. The same accounts for the reader who desires to learn about Bible stories for a better understanding of Western (and Chinese) literature and

⁵⁷ An exception to this is *Jidujiao gushi tushuo* [84] (Illustrated Stories of Christianity) by Yan Kejia and Ge Zhuang [85] (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe [86] 1995). Its authors devote a great deal of its preface to the history of Christianity in China and the importance of the Christian church in contemporary China. This may be explained by the fact that this version not only contains Bible stories, but also stories of the Christian church, including two concerning the Catholic mission to China of Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) and Johann Adam Schall von Bell (1591–1610).

possibly other aspects of Western culture. Though they represent a limited picture of the Bible, many of the well-known stories are retold. Finally, for the reader who turns to these versions as a substitute for the Bible – which, considering the fact that the Bible in China is not easily available, will often be the case – the stories may be not entirely satisfying. The Bible as the basis for Christianity is not adequately represented, and, with the somewhat extreme exception of Wu, these books do not picture Christianity as a “believable” religious system for their Chinese audience. But, after all, it has been proven that providing such a tool of faith was surely not the purpose of the Chinese *Bible Stories*. In fact, the exact opposite may very well have been the motivating reason for their publication.

[1]紅旗出版社[2]中國社會科學出版社[3]配圖聖經故事[4]四川美術出版社[5]金平[6]史勤奮[7]聖經故書[8]吳國瑞[9]聖經的故書[10]外語教學與研究出版社[11]漫話聖經[12]三聯書店[13]新約的傳說[14]哈爾濱人民出版社[15]時富宗[16]聖經故書新編[17]中州古籍出版社[18]張久宣[19]吉林文史出版社[20]愛的啓示[21]蕭瀟[22]上帝[23]神[24]當猶太王希律的時候，亞比雅班裏有一個祭司，名叫撒迦利亞。他妻子是亞倫的後人，名叫以利沙伯。[25]大希律王在猶太執政的時候，亞比雅班裏有一位祭司，名叫撒迦利亞，他有一個妻子，名叫以伊麗莎白，是亞倫的後代。[26]希律為猶太國王時期，在亞比雅有一名叫撒迦利亞的祭司，他和一位亞倫祭司的後代，名叫以伊麗莎白的女人結了婚。[27]郭程惠[28]希律為猶太國王時期，在亞比雅有一名叫撒迦利亞的祭司，他和一位名叫以伊麗莎白的女人結了婚。[29]姜偉東，劉釗，風嵐，曉園，魏青[30]希律王統治猶大的時候，有一位名叫撒迦利亞的祭司，他妻子名叫以利沙伯[31]曾傳輝，邱鳳俠，鐘莉，張靈靈[32]在猶大國王希律年間，有一個名叫撒迦利亞的祭司。他的妻子叫以利沙伯。。。[33]肖連兵，何農，程瑩[34]全譯繪畫聖經故書[35]北京師範大學出版社[36]正當大希律作猶太王時，猶大支派的於他城，有一位祭司，名叫撒迦利亞，娶妻以利沙伯，。。。[37]吳恩溥[38]聖經傳奇[39]內蒙古人民出版社[40]執政[41]統治[42]結婚[43]的[44]以利沙伯[45]伊莉莎白[46]聖經簡釋本（新約）[47]中國基督教協會[48]尼哥底母[49]尼哥德慕[50]聖經後典[51]商務印書館[52]趙沛林，張鈞，殷耀[53]聖經次經[54]時代文藝出版社[55]乾坤足跡[56]保羅[57]掃羅[58]梁工[59]聖經文學導讀[60]聖經梗概[61]耶穌受難[62]迷信[63]抗拒[64]精神道德[65]巴金[66]按照聖經的看法，這是因為以色列人背棄了與主的立約[67]出版說明[68]猶大[69]猶太[70]吳恩溥牧師[71]聖經演義[72]演義[73]葉谷虛[74]三國演義[75]羅貫中[76]楔子[77]列子[78]易經[79]起初上帝創造天地[80]先知列傳[81]詩曰[82]後人作詩曰[83]兩口子相親相愛，說不盡唱隨之樂；又復同心侍奉上帝，遵守律法，親戚朋友，莫不稱贊他們的為人。[84]基督教故書圖說[85]晏可佳，葛壯[86]上海書店出版社