

**BECOMING THE PEOPLE’S BOOK:
A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BIBLE IN CHINA**

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The Third World is rising in the geo-political order of our time, and its most ascendant member is Mainland China. It is a nation of over 1.3 billion people, with at least one hundred cities of over a million persons spreading out across its landscape. The country is developing at a spectacular rate. Futurists agree that the next one hundred years will almost certainly be China’s century.

In *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, historian Philip Jenkins has shown that the center of Christianity is also shifting from the West to the Third World. And David Aikman, among others, has recently sketched the remarkable growth of Christianity in China, despite official opposition, just as that nation is poised for global ascendancy.¹

In God’s providence, the dominant nations in recent centuries—Great Britain in the nineteenth, and the United States in the twentieth, have been known for their robust Christian faith.² So inevitably the question comes up: Will the same pattern of providence extend into this new century? Will China’s rising geo-political influence be matched by a vibrant Christian formation of its national soul?

¹ Jenkins, *The Next Christendom* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power* (Washington: Regnery, 2003).

² We note this without minimizing or sanctioning the many abuses perpetrated by these colonial and global powers.

To a large extent the answer will hinge on whether the Bible will ever become more than a suspicious foreign artifact, or a mere literary curiosity, in this officially-atheist nation. The answer will depend on whether the Bible becomes truly “the people’s book” of the People’s Republic of China. The struggle to make it such has been a long one, and it continues to this day.

OBSCURE FIRST CONTACTS

No one knows how long ago the Bible was first introduced to Chinese civilization. Some argue that many biblical concepts, especially ones from Genesis 1-11, are already mysteriously present in the characters of Chinese writing.³ Admittedly, certain of these characters do seemingly resonate—sometimes startlingly so—with biblical themes. Such parallels are intriguing, and from a pragmatic evangelistic perspective may serve well as discussion-starters with Chinese seekers today. But from a historical perspective most are problematic, since the ideograms of Chinese writing had already coalesced long before the Bible was written. Moreover, a lot of these interpretations of Chinese characters are highly contrived. Nonetheless it is at least possible that some characters reflect a shared cultural memory of ancient Near Eastern stories, and, if original Chinese ideograms continued to evolve through more recent redactions, it is possible that some witness to early Christian influence as well.

There are intriguing suggestions that Christianity may have reached China as early as the end of the first century. There is an Indian tradition, for example, that the

³ For example, see C. H. Kang and Ethel Nelson, *The Discovery of Genesis: How the Truths of Genesis Were Found Hidden in the Chinese Language* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1979).

intrepid Apostle Thomas ventured as far as China.⁴ Supplementary evidence, recently reported in the *Chinese People's Daily*, consists of tombstone carvings dated around 86 AD that depict Bible stories and Christian designs.⁵ But of this stage of Sino-Christian contact we have very little conclusive evidence.

We do have firm data, however, from the 8th-century Nestorian Monument (or Tablet) discovered in the neighborhood of Xian.⁶ In 635 AD Nestorian Christian Bishop Alopen, following the Silk Route of the traders, was welcomed by Chinese emperor Tai Zong to his Tang dynasty capital of Xian, now world-famous for its Terracotta soldiers. The mission-minded Bishop Alopen and his followers were loyal to the tradition of Nestorius, one-time patriarch of Constantinople, who was deposed at the Council of Ephesus for his defective understanding (or at least tragically clumsy articulation) of the relationship between the two natures of Christ.

Historian John Foster has commented suggestively that “when Christianity arrived in China, it was greeted as a ‘scriptural religion.’”⁷ It would be worth exploring further the basis for this assessment. How earnestly the Nestorians promoted the Bible is not known, but manuscripts from their time in China, as well as the aforementioned Nestorian Monument, reflect a Bible-based theology.⁸ Under later persecution, however,

⁴ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), 46-51; for more recent assessments of the pre-Protestant years, see Ian Gillman and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, *Christians in Asia Before 1500* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 265-305, and Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, vol 1. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), 287-323, 442-69.

⁵ Ted Olson, “Under the Sun,” *Christianity Today*, 7 Oct. 2002, 13.

⁶ Whenever possible, the modern names of the historic sites referenced are used.

⁷ Quoted by R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 22.

⁸ P. Y. Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents and Relics of China* (Tokyo: Academy of Oriental Culture, 1937); John Foster, *The Church of the T'ang Dynasty* (London: SPCK, 1939), 43.

the Nestorians greatly declined in number and influence. The remnant that survived after 845 AD consisted mainly of foreigners.⁹

CATHOLIC BEGINNINGS

The first documented encounter of orthodox Christianity with China occurred during the Yuan (Mongol) dynasty. Around 1271 Venetian trader and adventurer Marco Polo returned from the Mongol court near Beijing with an invitation from occupying ruler Khubilai Khan for one hundred Christian teachers of science and religion. The opportunity was not seized by the European Christian leadership with any special alacrity or vision, and ended up being essentially squandered.

An intriguing artifact from this period is the Laurentian Bible, a badly-worn 13th century Latin Vulgate version now preserved in a Venetian library. It was deposited there in the 17th century by Philippe Couplet, a Belgian Jesuit missionary to China, who claimed to have collected it from a Chinese home in the province of Jiangsu. This Bible, still wrapped in Chinese silk, had been, according to Couplet, a gift to a Chinese family from Marco Polo himself. This claim is improbable; a more likely explanation is that it was taken to China by the first Franciscans in the 13th or 14th century.¹⁰

The Franciscans' most prominent figure, John of Montecorvino, appears from 1294 onwards. Evidently he had some success in his missionary endeavors. Of special interest to us are extant reports from Montecorvino back to the Vatican, indicating that he had translated the New Testament and the Psalms into the court language of the Mongol rulers. By the end of the Mongol dynasty in 1368 there may have been up to one hundred

⁹ Latourette, 65.

¹⁰ Boleslaw Szczesniak, "The Laurentian Bible of Marco Polo," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 75, no. 3 (July-Sept. 1955): 173-79.

thousand Christian converts. But what happened to this infant church during the subsequent Ming dynasty of nationalistic Han rulers is unknown. Once again, as with the Nestorians, the Christian faith and its sacred book failed to gain a permanent niche in Chinese culture and society.¹¹

It was like starting all over from scratch in the post-Reformation era with a Jesuit initiative spearheaded by Francis Xavier. He died off-shore in 1552, but three decades later his successor Matteo Ricci managed to enter China, via Portuguese Macao, and by 1601 had reached the Middle Kingdom's command center of Beijing. His strategy was to appeal to the elite by consciously imitating the ways of Buddhist monks and Confucian scholars. But the Jesuits were shortly followed by Dominicans and Franciscans, and these orders were deeply suspicious of the contextualizing methods of Ricci and the Jesuits. In 1634, for example, Franciscan friars marched through the port city of Fuzhou, "holding crucifixes in the air, shouting that 'the idols and sects of China are false, and deceits by which the devil leads them to hell forever.'"¹² Conversions occurred, despite this internal row among the Roman Catholic missionaries themselves, and by the start of the 1700s there may have been up to two hundred thousand Chinese Christians.

However, for the third consecutive time things ended in tragedy. The contextualizing approach espoused by the Jesuits was bluntly condemned by the Vatican, and the alternative—now empowered by Rome's endorsement—became a growing affront to the Chinese themselves. In 1724, the Qin (Manchu) emperor banned the Christian faith altogether as insulting to the Chinese, and the indigenous church was obliged to go more or less underground.

¹¹ Latourette, 63-77.

¹² Henry Chadwick and G. R. Evans, eds., *Atlas of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Equinox, 1987), 122.

By this time there had been an active and continuous Roman Catholic presence in China for well over a century. During this span of time Ricci himself had not engaged in Bible translation, and it was not a high priority for his successors either. The sporadic attempts that were made were based, of course, on Jerome's Latin Vulgate, rather than on the original languages of the Bible. It was true that "selections, elegantly illustrated, were published,"¹³ but the translation work was partial at best, and even more serious, kept virtually hidden from the general public and ordinary believers. It was a deliberate strategy of the Roman Catholic effort in China to keep the translated text of the Bible out of the public eye, lest it be misinterpreted by the uninformed. Yet the partial results of certain Roman Catholic translation efforts later came to the attention of Protestant Bible translation pioneers, and provided them with a valuable foundation for, and jump start on, their own work.

PROTESTANT PASSION AND PARTISANSHIP

For all this it is remarkable how recent China's *substantive* exposure to the Bible has been.¹⁴ And it is equally remarkable that after millennia of Chinese inaccessibility to the Bible, *two* independent (and inevitably competing) versions should finally emerge within a single year of each other. The 1800s were the great century of Protestant missions, and the departure for India of English Baptist shoemaker William Carey in 1792 is often regarded as its launch. Protestants have always been characterized by confidence in the power of the unleashed Word of God, and their 19th century missionaries could count on support from the great Bible societies of Britain, America

¹³ Marshall Broomhall, *The Bible in China* (London & Philadelphia: China Inland Mission, 1934), 41.

¹⁴ For a general overview of this period, see Daniel Bays, ed., *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).

and Scotland.¹⁵ Carey’s prodigious language-learning, dictionary-writing, and international Bible publication operation in Serampore, near Calcutta, embodied this Protestant prioritization of the Scriptures. Joshua Marshman, one of Carey’s first companions in the field, with the help of a Macao-born Armenian assistant by the name of John Lassar, took on the challenge of a Chinese Bible translation. It ended up taking sixteen years—all outside of China—but they finished in 1822.

Meanwhile, in 1807, a younger Englishman, Robert Morrison (1782-1834) of the London Missionary Society (LMS), became the first Protestant missionary to stand on China’s soil.¹⁶ For years he shuttled seasonally between Guangzhou (formerly known as Canton) on the mainland and nearby Portuguese Macao, devoting himself, amid considerable opposition in both places, to language-learning and Bible translation. His Bible, completed in collaboration with William Milne, his friend and fellow LMS missionary in Malacca, was published by the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) in 1823, just one year after Marshman’s version came off the mission press at Serampore. The work of Morrison and Milne was recognized as superior, but there was one ticklish discrepancy between the two that would loom large for years to come. Marshman, who, like Carey, was a Baptist, had chosen for “baptize” (*baptizo*) a Chinese phrase that suggested immersion explicitly (*jinxili*). Morrison, on the other hand, representing Presbyterians and Congregationalists, had predictably opted for the more non-committal term (*xili*). Thus the seeds of Protestant partisanship were sown early on.

¹⁵ See, for example, John Hykes, *The American Bible Society in China* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1915).

¹⁶ J. Barton Starr, “The Legacy of Robert Morrison.” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (April 1998): 73-76.

Another translation issue that bedeviled Chinese reception of the Bible was establishing consensus on the best word for “God.” This had already been controversial among Roman Catholics in the 17th and early 18th centuries,¹⁷ and the Vatican’s unwillingness to opt for the term most commonly used by the Chinese to designate deity led eventually to the banning of the foreign missionaries. The problem resurfaced again with the second generation of Protestant Bible translations, and most notably with the Delegates’ Version of the New Testament, which was pushed through by British missionary Walter Medhurst, and published by the BFBS in 1852. Unlike Morrison before him, Medhurst preferred *Shangdi* to designate “God” (*elohim* or *theos*), which flew in the face of the more conservative Protestants’ preference for the less value-laden, but also more generic, term *Shen*. At root the debate was over whether the existing Chinese conception of the supreme God, and the Chinese name for him, could be validated by Christians as the Triune God imperfectly understood. This so-called “Term Question” was never definitively resolved.¹⁸ Bibles to this day are published using one term or the other.

DISCOVERING CHINA’S *LINGUA FRANCA*

The Roman Catholic Bible translation efforts of the 17th and 18th centuries, and those of the earliest Protestant translators, like Marshman and Morrison, were all undertaken in the classical Chinese (high Wenli) or lower classical (easy Wenli) styles.

¹⁷ The Chinese emperor, and the Jesuits who followed Ricci’s contextualizing approach, favored the traditional Chinese designations of *Tian* (Heaven) and *Shangdi* (Supreme God) for the Christian God. But the Pope, like more conservative Catholic missionaries, was suspicious that these were links to unworthy conceptions of the divine. He ruled accordingly by insisting on a relative neologism: *Tian-zhu* (Lord of Heaven).

¹⁸ Irene Eber, “The Interminable Term Question,” in *Bible in Modern China: The Literary and Intellectual Impact*, ed. Irene Eber and others (Sankt Augustin, Germany: Institut Monumenta Serica, 1999), 135-61.

These were the styles used in Chinese classics and favored by society's elite. Even the elegant *Delegates' Version*, an outstanding rendition for its time, and a product of what would now be called a "dynamic equivalence" approach to translation, was still published in the classical style.

To be fair to the translators, the classical styles (high and easy Wenli) were for a time the only styles they knew to exist. But Mandarin's scope and potential eventually dawned on them as they moved northward and then inland. By mid-century they understood that the nation's chief living tongue was something other than Wenli. Mandarin was the dialect of the expansive north, and its corresponding written characters were intelligible throughout most of the south as well. It was a relatively coarser vernacular distained by the more educated upper classes as mere *baihua* (plain speech), but the Protestant missionaries recognized it as the living language of the vast majority of Chinese. Today around 800 million Chinese speak Mandarin; it may be the most spoken language in the world.¹⁹

One of the remarkable features of Mandarin is that its written characters remain consistent even where different dialects of Chinese are spoken. Orally, for example, the Cantonese, Fukien, and Amoy dialects spoken by millions in southern China are virtually separate languages. Yet for the most part they share a common Chinese written script. As Bob Whyte explains, "For Chinese culture, throughout its four-thousand-year-old history, the written language has provided a focus of unity through the use of ideograms in which phonetic elements are incidental. The same written character is used for all Chinese

¹⁹ This is not to underestimate the significance of Bible translations for other minority language groups within the geographic boundaries of the People's Republic of China (for example, Tibetans, Mongolians, Manchurians, and numerous smaller tribes). For profiles of these groups, see Paul Hattaway, *Operation China: Introducing All the Peoples of China* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2000).

spoken dialects, with the result that people from the North and from the South can write to each other but may not be able to converse!”²⁰

Evangelicals have always had a disposition that favored the populace over the elites, and probably in the back of their minds was the fact that the New Testament itself was written in *koine*, not classical, Greek. And so the first Mandarin translation of the full Bible, the *Nanking Version*, was finally published in 1856, a half-century after Morrison’s arrival—during the infamous Opium Wars, and on the very eve of the Christian advance up China’s great rivers and inland for the first time in centuries. Since the 1920s classical Chinese has been waning in significance. Only Mandarin Bible translations have received continuous attention and updates. It is definitely the language of the people and of the future.

THE UNION BIBLE OF 1919

It was a source of embarrassment to Christian missionaries that throughout China many competing versions of the Bible were circulating, and sometimes colliding, to the detriment of the overall credibility of the faith.²¹ In 1890 delegates to a national missionary summit in Shanghai agreed to unite behind a single new translation of the Bible. Creating consensus among highly-autonomous missionary types can be akin to herding cats, so the agreement reached was regarded as something of an ecumenical triumph. The resultant Mandarin-style *Union Version* (NT, 1905; full Bible, 1919) proved enormously successful, and acquired a stature, both within China and among the worldwide Chinese Diaspora, similar to that enjoyed until recently by the King James

²⁰ Bob Whyte, *Unfinished Encounter: China and Christianity* (Glasgow: Collins, 1988), 97.

²¹ For a careful listing of these, see the excellent appendices to Jost Oliver Zetzsche, *The Bible in China: The History of the Union Version* (Sankt Augustin, Germany: Institut Monumenta Serica, 1999), 405-25.

Version in the English-speaking world. With characteristic prescience, Robert Morrison wrote back in 1819: “The duty of a translator of any book is two-fold; first, to comprehend accurately the sense, and to feel the spirit of the original work; and secondly, to express in his version faithfully, perspicuously, and idiomatically (and, if he can attain it, elegantly), the sense and spirit of the original.”²² To some extent the *Union Version* captured Morrison’s ideals, even that of literary elegance. That continues to be something valued in Chinese culture, despite the Philistine impact of modern communications technology.

Parallel to the ongoing life of the *Union Version* have been other smaller-scale translation initiatives.²³ These include efforts to replicate the translation philosophies of a number of popular English versions and paraphrases.²⁴ It remains to be seen whether any of these will obtain a significant market share in China itself. The illegality of imported Bibles remains a huge obstacle. So far the *Union Version* retains a position from which it will be difficult to dislodge it.

One such initiative warrants brief mention. The *Union Version* translators had retreated from the bold dynamic (or, functional) equivalence philosophy of the *Delegates’ Bible* to a more conservative formal equivalence approach.²⁵ Some observers, including linguist Eugene Nida of the American Bible Society, were concerned that this philosophy had diminished reader access to, and comprehension of, the meaning of the biblical text. Consequently Nida got involved in the production of a Chinese equivalent to

²² Quoted by Broomhall, 12.

²³ For example, the *New Chinese Version* (also known as the *Shengjing xinyiben*) of 1992 was produced by a committee of more than 30 Chinese translators from Hong Kong and elsewhere outside of China.

²⁴ For example, *The Bible in Modern Chinese* (1956) follows *The NT in English* by J. B. Phillips; *The Contemporary Bible* (1979-93) follows the *Living Bible*; and the *Chinese New International Version* (ca 2000) follows the *NIV*.

²⁵ For an explanation of these and related categories, see Glen Scorgie, Mark Strauss, and Steven Voth, eds., *The Challenge of Bible Translation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).

the *Today's English Version* (1976). The resultant work, actually produced in New York, was called the *Today's Chinese Version* (1980). It was not accepted, as its creators hoped it would be, as a replacement for the *Union Version*. Instead, off-shore discussions, with United Bible Society involvement, began in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore in 1983 about a very modest revision of the old *Union Version*. These led to a series of editorial updates of the text from 1986 onwards.²⁶

Since 1919, the greatest challenge has not been translation but circulation. The distribution efforts of Christian organizations and churches have been considerable through the years. The American Bible Society claimed that in 1914 alone it had distributed almost two million Bibles or Bible portions distributed, and estimated that the total distribution in China (of all the Bible Societies) for that year was over six million.²⁷ Much of the practical impact of the Bible on China has been through the efforts of courageous, and often heroic, colporteurs who have worked their way along hostile paths and door-slamming streets and alley ways.

UNDER COMMUNISM SINCE 1949

Since 1949, most aspects of Christian faith and practice, including Bible distribution and reading, has been squeezed by the officially-atheist and xenophobic Communist regime. The nature and intensity of this opposition has varied regionally and chronologically in “the new China,” so that it has been difficult for outsiders to obtain an accurate picture of conditions at ground level. But no one doubts that the most difficult

²⁶ Zetzsche, 348-56.

²⁷ Hykes, 2, 14.

period was the terrible years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), when Red Guards confiscated Bibles and punished readers.

For awhile the critical need for replacement Bibles was addressed by Bible smugglers.²⁸ Eventually a measure of calm returned to China. Around 1987 the Amity Printing Press was established in Nanjing as an independent commercial operation with ties to the Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM). In cooperation with the United Bible Societies (UBS) it resumed printing of the old 1919 edition of the *Union Version*. A total of 46 million copies of Bibles and New Testaments have been printed by Amity Press since. In 2005, for example, 5.2 million Bibles and New Testaments were produced—3 million for Mainland China and 2.2 million for export.²⁹ It is still illegal to import Bibles into China, but David Neff, editor of *Christianity Today* recently claimed that “legal Bibles are not in short supply” in China today.³⁰

Not all China observers agree.³¹ The capacity of this one small press to serve the needs of the entire nation is questionable. And there are enormous distribution challenges. The Bible is not readily available in local bookstores or easy to order on-line. Availability, and for the poorer classes affordability, remain serious obstacles.³² The text of the *Union Version* is also becoming problematic. In 1980 the TSPM of the Protestant churches in China, along with the China Christian Council, was able to resume printing of the original 1919 edition of the *Union Version*, but still with the old non-simplified

²⁸ In a daring provocation in 1981, the Open Doors organization attempted to smuggle a million Bibles into China (Whyte, 376-77).

²⁹ “The Bible by Numbers: Change, Church and China” [doc. on-line]; available from http://www.biblesociety.org/wr_399/399_17.htm; accessed 27 Dec. 2006.

³⁰ David Neff, “Chinese Puzzle,” *Christianity Today*, March 2003, 9.

³¹ For example, Nora Lam, *The Battle for the Chinese Bible* (San Jose, CA: China Today Books, 1997).

³² To address this latter problem, the United Bible Society helps to subsidize the cost of Bibles for Amity Press; see http://www.ubscp.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12&Itemid=48; accessed 8 Jan 2007.

characters. It was not until 1989 that the full Bible was finally available in newer simplified characters and arranged in horizontal lines—in other words, that it finally adapted to the modern public’s established reading expectations.³³

In 1979 Ding Guangxun, the chairman of TSPM and president of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary (the flagship school of the registered church) initiated a committee process for an indigenous Chinese update of the 1919 *Union Version*. The progress of the committee was followed with interest, and it was clear that its work would be contextually-nuanced and independent of the work of the off-shore UBS translators. To the dismay of everyone anticipating this revision, it was inexplicably cancelled at the very end. One should not be considered paranoid if they suspect that this failure to publish may have a political explanation.³⁴ The bottom line is that while Mandarin continues to morph in a context of brisk social change, the *Union Version* has not received a complete revision in more than seventy-five years.

BECOMING THE PEOPLE’S BIBLE

Somewhat penitently Marshall Broomhall of the China Inland Mission dedicated his history of *The Bible in China* to the memory of “the goodly company of unknown Chinese scholars (who labored with the missionary-translators) and to the noble army of colporteurs whose names are in the Book of Life.”³⁵ Back in 1934 he was aware of how easily the devout missionaries had overlooked the role of the Chinese themselves in the

³³ Zetzsche, 356-57.

³⁴ Ibid., 357-61.

³⁵ Broomhall, v.

work of bringing the Bible to their own people.³⁶ Even in photographs from that time the Chinese workers often remained unnamed and unknown.

This slowly changed over time. Gradually the Chinese themselves gained more of a voice. But such unintentional prejudice at the individual level was matched by a widespread ideological disposition of suspicion toward the larger culture, and linguistic designations for God, of the Chinese people as a whole. This greatly complicated, and may continue to impede, the effective translation of the Bible and the contextualization of the Gospel for the Middle Kingdom.³⁷

On the positive side, the 19th-century Protestant Bible translators' discovery of Mandarin, and their pioneering decision to use this "coarser" vernacular for their purposes, put Christianity at the forefront of all China's progressive trends toward education, literacy and a more egalitarian society. By a fortunate coincidence, 1919, the very year the Mandarin *Union Version* was published, was also the year the Chinese government announced a new literary epoch in which Mandarin should henceforth be used as a modern literary language.³⁸

Even so, Harold Rattenbury, a Wesleyan Methodist missionary, noted on the occasion of the publication of the Mandarin *Union Version* that it was probably "the last and the greatest translation of the Scriptures where the burden of the work ultimately rests on foreigners." He went on to predict that "the final Chinese version will never come until we have Chinese scholars, deeply versed in the original tongues, masters also of Mandarin, translating into their own native tongue." That day may no longer be far off,

³⁶ Zetzsche, 137.

³⁷ On the general principles involved, see Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989).

³⁸ Zetzsche, 332.

but the work will need to be done by Chinese who are not under any government-imposed restrictions, or artificial pressures, in their deliberations.³⁹

The world powers of the last two centuries have been recognizably Christian in their religious orientation. It remains to be seen whether China's growing international clout will be matched by a broadening Christian influence on its national ethos and conduct. Another way to phrase this question is to ask: Will the Bible become truly the "people's book" of China? For it to become this will require sustained efforts in contextually-sensitive translation, creative (and courageous) initiatives in Bible distribution, and formational education in the truths and values of the Christian Scriptures. How China will use its broadening powers, for good or for evil, depends on whether China will be baptized into a biblical way of seeing and living life.⁴⁰ The world may anticipate great blessing when the God-breathed text of Scripture is seen through China's eyes, grasped by its imagination, and obeyed with all its fervent resolve.

³⁹ Carol Lee Hamrin, "A New Framework for Promoting Religious Freedom in China," *Brandywine Review of Faith & International Affairs* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 3-10.

⁴⁰ Already the impact has been considerable; see Eber and others, eds., *Bible in Modern China: the Literary and Intellectual Impact*.

