

Divine Simplicity and the Chinese Translation of *Theos*^{*}

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Realism is the rational foundation for the translation of the Bible. To translate *Theos* in Chinese, the distinct terms 神, 上帝, and 天主 co-exist and they can be assessed by divine simplicity rationally and spiritually. One of the most difficult problems in Medieval philosophy, divine simplicity is caused by reason serving faith. Reconciling Aristotelian metaphysics with the ultimate object of faith, Aquinas defines that God is being itself and therefore he builds an ontological foundation for Christian theology and perfects divine simplicity. Related concretely with divine simplicity is the simplicity of *Theos*, so this paper argues that 神 is the best Chinese translation of *Theos* to reflect both the truth and the gospel.

Keywords: *Theos*, Chinese, translation, simplicity

Introduction

Accurate Biblical translation requires a best possible agreement with the original revelation of God in Hebrew and Greek, and thus reason is needed.¹ Realism, a rational theory originated by Plato (428-348 BC), believes a concept expressed in a certain language like Greek is only a symbol for or pointer to its correspondingly ultimate object which is the truest, such as the relation between a bed and the form of bed which exists eternally before the first bed was made by a carpenter. In the Chinese Union Bible, which has been the most influential translation among Chinese Protestants since its first publication in 1919, *Theos*² is translated as 神 (*Shen*) or 上帝 (*ShangDi*) in its respective versions; while the Catholic Bible uses 天主 (*TianZhu*) instead. When Protestant missionaries were first spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ in China in the early 19th century, there were already abundant written classics in Chinese and earlier, Catholic Jesuits had already translated part of the Bible into Chinese. For the ancient Chinese, there could be more than one *Shen* and *Di* (帝), and later *Shen* could be even used as a family name for a person. The Chinese began to adopt family names much earlier than the Jews and the people in Europe, such as Confucius (551-479 BC) who had *Kong* (孔) as his family name. However, there was only one *ShangDi* since *Shang* (上) here means supreme and unique; *ShangDi* is an expression of two words but *Shen* is a simple concept with one word only. For modern Chinese Protestants, *Shen* and *ShangDi* have nearly the same meaning so they can be interchangeable in standing for the Creator. Nevertheless, in Chinese we use an expression of three words, 造物主, to stand for

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¹ For related verses and historical dates, this paper refers to the *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan Bible Publishers, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506, USA, 1978.

² Terms from Greek, Hebrew, and Latin are all used by transliteration in English; terms from Chinese are given in both pinyin and original form.

the Creator which in English means the Lord who creates. However, normally, we say 神父 (*ShenFu*, Catholic Father), 神迹 (*ShenJi*, miraculous sign), and 神州 (*ShenZhou*, kingdom of God) rather than 上帝父 (*ShangDi Fu*), 上帝迹 (*ShangDi Ji*), and 上帝州 (*ShangDi Zhou*), since naturally the former are simpler than the latter respectively. In English, a much younger language, the term “God” refers to *Theos* in Greek and *Elohim* in Hebrew; all three terms are similar to *Shen* in Chinese, in not being an expression or a compound concept. Therefore, not only does a link to the *Theos* who reveals himself in the Bible add new meanings to *Shen* and *ShangDi* as used in Chinese before the Bible was translated, but the term also may prompt people to meditate rationally on divine simplicity which is related to ontological expression.

Divine simplicity is on the attributes of God, and it is used to study God rationally outside of the Bible. However, atheist Chinese would say that 神 in their ancient classics is not the same as God the Creator. I hold that the term 神 itself is a proof that the people who first designed the written form knew the creation story since all were descended from Adam and 神 was one of the earliest words. This word was written on ancient oracle bones, as was discovered only in the last hundred years, by unnamed people who were not moved authoritatively by the Holy Spirit who once worked with Moses (1526-1406 BC). According to popular myth, *HuangDi* (黄帝, 黄 means yellow), one of the five *Dis*, ordered Cang Jie (仓颉) to design the first characters of Chinese and the latter did it according to the footprints of birds and animals and figures of visible things. But how did Chinese characters for abstract ideas come about? God confused the language of people at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:9), speaking new languages similar to what happened when the Holy Spirit was poured down (Acts 2:8-10). If each language group formed because of the Tower of Babel, then an oral story should exist about the origin of each language and its possible relation with God, although the story might not be the exact truth as time went by and the people were scattered. When there was no state and king, written language was still needed because people could have a written symbol for God which was easier to remember than an altar to be built (Genesis 8:20, 12:7). In the time of Abraham (2166-1991 BC), there were kings in Canaan where people worshiped many gods, and among them, there was God Most High. Melchizedek king of Salem was a priest of God Most High, the Creator of heaven and earth (Genesis 14:18-20). We can notice the similarity to conceptions of *Shen* or *ShangDi* of the ancient Chinese although Melchizedek did not claim to be a son of God Most High and Chinese kings never acted as priests of *Tian* (天, heaven). Even now the world still has primitive tribes that have no written languages. According to Chinese myth, Cang Jie lived in the land near the middle reaches of the Yellow River where Chinese civilization began. Before the first emperor, formerly the king of the powerful Qin State (秦国), who conquered the other six warring kings in 221 BC, different states had inconsistent forms of writing although they did not differ very much. Then the Qin Empire (秦帝国, 221-207 BC) unified the forms of writing. It was not until the East Han Dynasty (东汉, 25-220) that Xu Shen (许慎) compiled his *ShuoWen* (《说文》), the first Chinese dictionary.

In Medieval Western philosophy, divine simplicity is one of the most difficult and important problems. For Aquinas (1224/5-1274), divine simplicity belongs to natural theology; in fact, it studies the object of faith with reason. “*God being completely simple*” was again assured at the First Vatican Council in 1869 (Davies, 2002, p. 56). However, we can also note that divine simplicity can be accurately realized in translation, such as a supreme idea being the object of faith in Chinese. Because *Shen* is a simpler concept than *ShangDi* and *TianZhu*, it can express ontological purity and unity better. For the realism that Augustine (354-430), Anselm (1033-1109), Aquinas, and I myself hold, *Shen* or *ShangDi* is similar to *Deus* in Latin and God in English, pointing to the ultimate living object represented first by *Elohim* and then by *Theos*; it is not an analogical term

of *Elohim* and *Theos* although in Chinese the gender of 神 is not directly indicated.

The Simplicity of *Theos*

Being masculine in Hebrew, *Elohim* was an absolute concept for the Israelite but its meaning was mainly a Creator (Genesis 1:1). When Moses (1526-1406 BC) wrote the book of Genesis under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the first verse was about the creation of the heaven and earth by *Elohim*. In Hebrew, Moses used the term *el* to stand for other gods or false gods (Exodus 15:11) while in Chinese they are translated as 众神 (many gods), an expression that has the same term *Shen* which has no plural form itself, just as there is just one true God represented by *Elohim* as the Creator in Hebrew. Therefore, *Elohim* expresses the basic meaning of *Shen* in Chinese. More specific than *Elohim* is the Lord whose Hebrew name is *Yahweh*, a name which literally means “he is” or “he will be”³ and is often incorrectly spelled “Jehovah”. *Yahweh* was the covenant name of *Elohim* with the Israelite, his chosen people. “He is” or “he will be” is the third-person form for “I am” or “I will be”. The Lord made a covenant with the Israelite and has an intimate relationship with them like a husband and wife in marriage. In Chinese, “the Lord” is translated as 耶和华 (yehehua). For Moses, the name of the Lord came not from people but from the revelation of *Elohim*. Before the Lord appeared to Moses in the fiery bush vision (Exodus 3:1-6), he could know the concept of the Lord from the oral tradition of the Israelite; it was 430 years before when last time the Lord spoke to Jacob in a vision (Genesis 46:1-4).

Since there are no earlier extant written works in Hebrew than the book of Genesis, Moses gave no new meanings to the concept of *Elohim*. Thus, the Law of Moses, with Genesis as its first book, became the earliest living dictionary and grammar guide of Hebrew. In contrast, for the Greeks, centuries before the New Testament period (ca. 45-100 AD), Greek works like the Epic of Homer used the word *Theos* to stand for gods and so did Plato (428-348 BC) in his dialogues and Aristotle (384-322 BC) in his *Metaphysics*. Even in Athens during apostolic times, the Greeks were still using *Theos*, such as in the name of an unknown god whose altar was mentioned by Paul (Acts 17:22-23). However, the Greeks had no idea of creation from nothing and the Demiurge of the *Timaeus* by Plato was only a maker who did not create.

Since the Chinese worshiped “heaven” (*Tian*, 天), the Jesuit missionaries thought that being a metaphysical concept, *Tian* in Chinese is close in meaning to the Creator who reveals himself in the Bible. Although the Chinese theory regarding *Tian* is a kind of natural theology, it is much weaker in logical argumentation compared with that of Aquinas because *Tian* is not a first cause of the existing world. Ancient Chinese kings who ruled during Zhou Dynasty (ca. 1046-256 BC, 周朝) began to claim that they were *TianZi* (天子), sons of Heaven, indicating somewhat that Heaven is personal; this idea continued with the emperors of later dynasties who usually ruled a much bigger territory. Historically, the kings of early Zhou began to distribute lands to their sons or subordinates among descendants of whom some finally became actual kings of Warring States; this practice led to the gradual weakening and final downfall of the Zhou Dynasty. Not far away from the Forbidden City in southern Beijing, the Temple of Heaven (天坛) is now a famous tourist attraction but it was where the Ming Dynasty (明, 1368-1644) emperors and then those of the Qing (清, 1644-1911) Empire worshiped *Tian* annually since they claimed to be sons of Heaven. Heaven is not sky (天空) but beyond the visible sky. Neither is it spirit, although it may give people imaginations of the spirit. Hence, the Temple of Heaven did not need to be built on the top of a hill which seems to be closer to the sky but it was just

³ Notes on Exodus 3:14 and 3:15, *NIV Study Bible*, p. 91.

on the plain ground. Similar to the Israelite (Matthew 5:9), the Chinese people can emotionally call *Tian*, the Heavenly Father (老天爷), without knowing the name or the person of God. For the Israelite who could have kings according to Mosaic Law (Deuteronomy 17:14-15), their kings were closer to them than God but kings were not sons of God, since God spoke through his prophets. Although the legitimacy of Israelite kings like Saul (1 Samuel 10:1), David (1 Samuel 16:13), Solomon (2 Samuel 12:24-25, 1 Ki 1:29-40), and even Jeroboam (1 Kings 11:29-33) who split the United Kingdom came by the will of God, kings were still under the Law. This is evidenced by the fact that David was fearful of punishment from God after his adulterous relation with Bathsheba and murdering of Uriah (2 Samuel 12:5-6). In contrast, emperors in China were actually above its law although they could be murdered or overthrown by ambitious people who might continue the old dynasty or begin a new one of their own. Historically, Matteo Ricci (利玛竇, 1552-1610) and other early Catholic missionaries did not translate *Theos* as *XiAoSi* (西奥斯) or *Deus* as *DiuSi* (丢斯) according to the original Greek or Latin pronunciation but rather translated it as *TianZhu* (the Lord of heaven). Obviously, *TianZhu* is not the name of the Creator in Chinese since the Creator had not made a covenant with any people other than the Israelite.

The union with *Tian*, for a Confucian follower who pursues it as the highest vision and goal in one's life, does not mean salvation; the One of Plotinus (204-270) is closer to the Triune God in whom Christians believe, than *Tian* which is ineffable. In late antiquity, Plotinus revised the Platonic metaphysics with the One which is above the forms and is being above being (1991, p. 521). A mystic union with the One through meditation means salvation from bodily prison in time. If the One is understood and written in Chinese, it has simplicity both numerically and metaphysically, since one (一) has only one stroke in Chinese and is the easiest word to write while *Tian* (天) is composed of four strokes with two horizontal lines (二) above a person (人). The Chinese had no reverence for the One and even in Chinese Daoism philosophy One is begotten by *Dao* (道), a cosmic principle. In any case, *Tian* is awesome and beyond One although One is more abstract, but the elusive will of *Tian* (天意) can be traced emotionally according to human behaviors, weather changes, natural disasters, and so on. Looking at the blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience which God promised to the Israelite (Deuteronomy 28:1-68), the Chinese feeling about the will of *Tian* is very vague and subjective.

Divine Simplicity

God is a spirit (John 4:24). When Moses writes of the Spirit of God in his first stage of creation (Genesis 1:2), the Spirit (灵) was *ruah* in Hebrew, a term that means breath (气) which in Chinese is also related to life. The heaven is not a spirit but only the loftiest creation above the visible. Correspondingly, *Tian* is not a spirit. Moreover, the ancient Chinese had no concept for angels, which are created spirits (Hebrew 1:14).

Divine simplicity mainly focuses on being rather on spirit, and being (存在) is a difficult term for ontological explanation in ancient Chinese. On God being simple, Augustine made a famous statement: "The reason why a nature is called simple is that it cannot lose any attribute it possesses, that there is no difference between what it is and what it has" (1984, p. 441). God is simple since God never changes. The will and power of God are the same as God himself (1993, p. 110). Later, Anselm also defends divine simplicity in *Chapter 17, Monologion*: "Since, then, the supreme nature is not composite at all, and yet really is all those good things, it is necessary that all those good things are not many, but one" (1998, p. 30). Although simplicity is a kind of perfection, not every simple thing is more perfect than a complex one. Thus, divine simplicity is not a concrete simplicity but a metaphysical simplicity. In Medieval times, the Latin Church used the Latin Bible where *Theos*

is translated as *Deus* by Jerome (ca. 347-420). Being masculine in gender, *Deus* was an original Latin concept which was used to stand for the Roman gods in the Latin language. The Romans gods were similar to the gods in Greek myths although the Romans had not developed a highly rationalized philosophy of their own as did the Greeks.

For Aristotle, metaphysics is of the highest branch in philosophy since it studies being as being, not any specific being which is studied by concrete science (1973, pp. 103-104). He coined the term *substance* as the basic unit of being. In his specialized metaphysical work, *On Being and Essence*, Aquinas develops Aristotelian theory based on substance. He treats God as a substance in which there is no distinction between being and essence (1968, p. 56). For substance, it was Tertullian (ca. 160-225) who coined the term *substantia* in Latin according to *ousia*, its Greek original. Later in his *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas holds that the name of God best represents the essence of God (1981, pp. 70-71, A. 11, Q. 13). In his earlier work *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Aquinas has arguments on divine simplicity also. Since there is no accident in God, God is simpler than any other substance (1975, pp. 121-123). The essence of God is his being, intellect, will, understanding, etc. On divine simplicity, Aquinas means that intellect is logically prior to will (Farthing, 1988, p. 9). In Aristotelian terms, God is full actuality without potentiality and matter. Since there is no change in God, God does not move and is not in time.

Using English as a paradigm, we have a sentence structure like “S is P” when we make a definition. Unlike S and P that can change from Socrates to Plato and man to philosopher in “Socrates is a man” and “Plato is a philosopher”, the linking verb “is” has no change. What is “is” or “is-ing”? Back to its more general form, it becomes: What is to be or being? The Lord, the covenant God of the Israelite, meaning “He is” in English, completes the meaning of “is-ing” or being metaphysically since as Aquinas says, the Lord is being itself and without cause.

Hence, Parmenides (515-445 BC) begins Greek ontology by his axiom generally expressed as “Being is not non-being”. However, the ancient Chinese language lacks such vigor and that is why its users wandering about the origin of the world could not independently develop logic, ontology, metaphysics, and philosophy in general like the ancient Greeks who were later surpassed by Latin scholars like Augustine and Aquinas serving faith with reason. In explaining the image of God by which a human being is created, Aquinas understands it as the intellect and being is the most basic conception of the intellect (2003, p. 13). The basic activity of the intellect is to form conceptions about specific beings. If the first concept of the intellect is being, the second one should be non-being accompanied by the first judgment; being is not non-being. We can notice the Law of Non-Contradiction as the ultimate law of reason.

The *Theos* of Aristotle is an Unmoved Mover and pure form without a will (1975, pp. 204-205); the *Theos* who reveals the Bible is a spirit without matter. Although the first, without moral traits, is not the cause of the existence of the world but only the cause of the movement of the world, the two have a purity which is comparable. The purity of God is defined by Aquinas as divine simplicity. God does not belong to any genus, but he creates all things according to their kinds. Therefore, God cannot be defined as a species by Aristotelian formula, genus plus difference. Normally, the name of a thing should stand for its essence. Since the name, *I Am Who I Am* (Exodus 3:14), spoken by God himself, most stands for his essence, Aquinas holds that God is being itself and is not any specific being in a genus (1975, pp. 126-128). Since we cannot find a genus greater in range than being itself, God cannot be a concept directly experienced. When God says “He is”, it does not mean that God is in time because time was created by God in the beginning (Genesis 1:1). What we directly

experience is concrete being which draws its being from being itself, the source of being. Being itself is neither a universal being nor an infinite being, although God is omnipresent (Psalms 139:7-9). Furthermore, being itself is a concept of concepts and the most abstract concept. Nevertheless, divine simplicity can be expressed in the name of God.

The Divine Nature of Jesus

In the Trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, only the second person, the son, has had human nature and Jesus is the name of God by human nature (Matthew 1:22-25). The three persons in one substance of God share the same name. The Greek philosophy did not have such a concept of person which means a being with intellect, will, emotion, and so on (Mondin, 1991, p. 6). Nor did the people in ancient China. Among the relationships of father and son, mother and son, father and daughter, and mother and daughter, the one of father and son is the purest theologically according to *Chapter 42, Monologion*, since they are all masculine in gender and father is the origin (Anselm, 1998, pp. 55-56).

For the Catholic and Protestant Christians, there is an agreement in the Chinese translation of Jesus, which is 耶稣. Jesus' human nature was begun from his conception in the body of Mary, and it was in time. However, his divine nature was from eternity. For Plato, time is the moving shadow of eternity; and Stoics like Chrysippus (ca. 279-ca. 206 BC) defined time as the extension of the motion to the cosmos (Gerson, 2005, pp. 206-207). By human nature, Jesus was a descendant of King David (Matthew 1:1) but his kingdom was not an independent nation state of Israel in its historical land, although Jesus himself spent most of his life there. Like the Lord in the Old Testament,⁴ Jesus also made a covenant with people who believe in him (Matthew 26:25-28) and left disciples a great mission to accomplish in his name (Matthew 28:18-20). The beginning of John's Gospel uses *Logos*, the metaphysical notion of Stoicism to indicate the divine nature of Jesus (John 1:1-3); Stoicism and Epicureanism were popular schools of philosophy in Athens at that time. *Logos* came from Heraclitus (540-480 BC) in ancient Greece and later it became one of the two basic Stoic concepts together with nature. For the Stoics, *Logos* is equivalent to *Theos*. Heraclitus holds that *Logos* put the cosmic structure in order through active wisdom and the result came from using that wisdom (Ring, 2000, p. 63). Catholics translate *Logos* into 圣言 (*ShenYan*, Holy Word) in Chinese, while the Protestants use 道 (*Dao*, the Word) thereby giving new meanings into the original notion of 道 in Chinese Daoism. In using *Logos*, the writer of John's gospel obviously takes into account the assumed philosophical background of his readers.

Aquinas believes that God has given us double revelations, one inside the Bible and the other outside scripture; the latter is natural revelation and can be studied by reason. No doubt Aquinas raises the status of non-Biblical languages. Unlike Anselm, who searches for God internally through memory and defines God "that thing than which nothing greater can be thought" (1973, p. 244), Aquinas rejects the idea that man is born with an innate idea of God. Besides the truth about God which exceeds human reason and should be accepted by faith, such as the virgin birth and the resurrection of Jesus, he holds that the overlapping part of theology and philosophy is natural theology which deals with some basic creeds like the existence of God, only one God, and so on (Aquinas, 1975, pp. 63-64). Without a prior concept of God, he has arguments for the existence of God in Five Ways outside the Bible, from this life experience and concrete beings (Aquinas, 1981, pp. 13-14, A. 3, Q. 2). Even though Aquinas's arguments are not perfect, they demonstrate that reason can offer the starting point

⁴ Note on Deuteronomy 28:58, *NIV Study Bible*, pp. 278-279.

of faith for Christians, the existence of God. Moreover, in so doing, Aquinas gives atheists, who are now more common in China than in Medieval Europe, five definitions of God: the first Mover, the first cause, the necessary being, the perfect being, and the ultimate goal. However, it is not difficult for us to notice that all five names are expressions and concepts about concepts and thus not suitable for the definition of God. According to natural theology, the god from the Five Ways should help people better understand the God who reveals the Bible and at the same time help them come to know the revelation of God outside the Bible.

The Gospels were written in the common Greek of the East Mediterranean while Jesus in his lifetime spoke Aramaic, a language similar to Hebrew. Now, considering John's Gospel, does it give Judaic terms recorded in the Old Testament new meanings because it was written in Greek? For instance, the *Logos* is God (John 1:14), although Stoicism is more inclined to pantheism. Another example is that Matthew's Gospel also employs *Logos* to stand for the words spoken by Jesus (Matthew 13:20) but in this case, the term has no metaphysical symbolism. No doubt, the use of *Logos* indicates the universality of the redemptive work of Jesus (John 3:16). Also, it is proof that John's Gospel was not written for the Jews who were already divided because of Jesus (John 20:19), but for new Christians who were still influenced by Greek philosophical concepts at the same time.

Since the Word (*yan*, 言) is what was spoken by God, it is the rational power of God in the opinion of Anselm. According to *Chapter 34, Monologion*, God is a spirit, and the supreme "spirit" itself is the supreme reason (1998, pp. 50-51). Being the Son of God, Jesus is the substance of the Father in human nature. Therefore, the Son is the reason of reason. Jesus, in his Passion obeying the will of the Father (Matthew 26:39), is the Lord who revealed the Old Testament since the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit share the same name (Matthew 28:19-20).

The Kingdom of God

Ancient China claimed to be the kingdom of God (神州, *ShenZhou*) and even now the term 神州 is still commonly used. The so-called kingdom of God actually occupied only a part of the culturally core area of present China. Was its land similarly promised as God did to Abraham, Isaac (2066-1886 BC), and Jacob (2006-1859 BC) who were the patriarchs of the Israelite (Genesis 12:7, 26:2-5, 28:13-15)? Certainly not. Despite that, the Israelite can serve as a pattern to understand the Chinese, who usually like to talk about their history but make little distinction among land, nation, and people. Geographically, the land of Israel was the center of the ancient world. Because of physical barriers, China (中国) with a literal meaning of central kingdom existed in a state of isolation from the ancient center of the world although it had long been the center of the Far East. According to Biblical records and historical facts, only the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans, in turn, were world powers who once conquered the land of Israel. Since God made his covenant with his chosen people as a whole (Deuteronomy 4:13), the individual Israelite, such as Apostle Paul (Romans 9:3-5), emotionally has the most sense of personal relationship with his whole nation than one of any other ethnic group which includes the Chinese. In the Kingdom of God, the Law of God which is righteous should prevail. Unlike the Israelite, however, the Chinese have no correct understanding of history such as the Israelite could learn from the word of God through their prophets in the Old Testament times.

According to Christianity, the Kingdom of God has come since Jesus Christ, the Son of God, through his sacrificial death on the cross and then the resurrection has destroyed the greatest enemy, death, that ruled the world since Adam broke the command of God in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:16-17). Before Jesus began

preaching, John the Baptist proclaimed, “the Kingdom of God is near” (Matthew 3:1). The religious Jews are still longing for the Messiah (Isaiah 53:1-9) to come since they do not accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour. According to Biblical history, the Israelite kingdom had only one dynasty, which in Chinese term was first ruled by David (reigned 1010-970 BC) and then by successive kings who were all descendants of his house and who, after Solomon (reigned 970-930 BC), ruled only the Southern part of the former kingdom until its final ruin by invading Babylonians in 587 BC. The modern state of Israel (1948-) is not a kingdom although it was rebuilt on the promised land. It is manifest that the orthodoxy of past dynasties in Chinese history was paradoxical if the rulers claimed to be sons of God. Most brazenly, during the Taiping Rebellion (太平天国, 1851-1863) in the late Qing Dynasty (1664-1911) when millions lost lives in southern China, Hong Xiuquan (洪秀全) its leader, claimed to be king of the Heavenly Kingdom. Traditionally, the Chinese had no concept of the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament only to the Israelite and thus the Chinese version of the kingdom of God was not as spiritual as the Christian one.

The Greeks love truth (1 Corinthians 1:22), and the Israelite should love God (Deuteronomy 6:5). Rationally, the ancient Chinese lacked a theory of truth comparable to that defined by either by Plato or Aristotle, and meanwhile, they had no ontological meditation on abstract concepts like being and time. In the West, Aquinas developed Aristotelian truth theory, God is truth because his being is not only conformed to his intellect, but it is the very act of his intellect (1981, p. 92, A. 5, Q. 16).

For the Israelite who had no philosophy, the word of God is truth (John 1:14) because God is true and the Lord is good (Jeremiah 33:11). It is a fact that the Chinese since ancient times have had no love for truth or God or both, and even now they would more often say that they love their land and people, which are visible and can be detected by physical senses. Despite this, God is love (1 John 4:16) and he extends grace even to people who are not thankful (Matthew 5:45). Truly, the Chinese are proud of their written language which has not undergone radical changes since its beginning. The Chinese view their language as the most beautiful written language in the world since calligraphers who write with traditional water brush and ink are still welcomed and they can make a fortune through artistic handwriting. Nevertheless, the Chinese never say their written language is the most holy or a holy language in the world. The beauty of Chinese has a cost since Chinese is not as grammatically precise as Greek, Latin, or a younger Western language like English which is now the most international.

For the Israelite, keeping the Law of Moses makes them holy since the Law was of the highest moral standard in the ancient world (Exodus 20:1-17; Leviticus 18:1-5). For regenerated Christians who have no regard for one's racial background, obeying the Holy Spirit makes them holy (Galatians 5:22-23). According to realism and Aquinas, the true and the good are metaphysical attributes of being because every being is true and good, although logically being true is prior to being good (Genesis 1:31). Hence, truth and goodness are beyond beauty metaphysically. God is true; God is good. Beauty means a harmony of relations. Interestingly, ancient China never developed a deductive theory about geometry which gives people an aesthetic sense of beauty in architectural design, although in practice they used some such techniques. The pronunciations of *Elohim* in Hebrew and of *Theos* in Greek bring less clarity and also less beauty in Chinese if they are translated according to their syllable sounds, while not only does 神 keep harmony but it also adds the meaning of truth and goodness to the original concept 神 and thus makes the term holy most properly. Interestingly, 神 (*Shen*,

with the second tone)⁵ has few homonyms in Chinese where distinct single words with the same pronunciation are extremely common. For example, the words 帝, 地 (ground), 弟 (younger brother), 第 (order), 递 (pass), and 蒂 (bud) all sound the same, being pronounced *dì* with the fourth tone in Mandarin, but these have unrelated meanings. Identical sounds with varying meanings abound, although when written Chinese was first designed, the vocabulary was very limited.

Being worthy of worship, God was not as well understood by ancient people in the Zhou Dynasty as he was by the Israelite. Since Confucianism holds an agnostic view on the existence of God and truth, the kingdom of God is only an image, and truth is easily confused with culture by many Chinese. If the core of a culture consists of language and religion, the Chinese culture lacks a prominent religion. The Chinese identity has no physical symbol comparable to the circumcision of the Jewish male (Genesis 17:9-14) but is mainly related to the ability of the Chinese language which is unified in writing although it varies with many dialects in speaking. Culture in a broad sense covers all kinds of customs and ways of living. I would argue that, among all cultures, none can be compared to that of the Israelite since their Sabbath, festivals, dietary laws, and so on were decreed by God (Romans 9:3). It is the Jews who have kept the longest lasting customs in the world. Definitely, Israel was first a name of a patriarch (Genesis 32:28) and later the name of a nation (Exodus 12:37-40), land, and country because the Israelite were descendants of Israel, and the land of Israel is the land God promised to Israel and his descendants (Genesis 28:13-15). The ethnic group called Han (汉) is the dominant group in China but the Han people are not descendants of Han and there had never been a patriarch named Han in history or myth, although there have been two Han Dynasties (204 BC-220). Since God blesses those who keep the commands of God, the Jewish culture can be raised to the level of truth although observing such laws cannot bring righteousness before God, since no sinner can be saved through works. Believing in God but disowning Jesus Christ as God and Savior brings no salvation (John 20:31).

One cannot enter the kingdom of God unless he is born again by the Spirit (John 3:5), and one can only enter the kingdom of God through the gospel (Matthew 24:14). While still living on earth, regenerated Christians are citizens of the kingdom of God with true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:22-24). It is true that the gospel saves sinners including those who live outside the Greek and Hebrew world and hear it in their native languages, for the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power (1 Corinthians 4:20).

Conclusion

At the Tower of Babel, God confused the people's language (Genesis 11:9) so that people began to speak new languages without first being taught. I agree that Hebrew is the holy language because in this language the revelation of God was first recorded and *Elohim* without being translated into any other language stands for the Creator most authoritatively. However, other languages can also be used spiritually and convey perfect understanding. When Aquinas served faith with reason in the 13th century, the Latin West in philosophy was already well above the Greek East where Western philosophy was first developed and later prospered. Similarly, compared with the present English-speaking or Chinese-speaking world, both the Hebrew and the Greek worlds are comparatively tiny groups in number and power.

If one denies natural theology, the saving testimony by Christians outside the Bible would be invalid.

⁵ 什 has the same pronunciation and tone as 神 in Mandarin Chinese, but 什 is mainly followed by 么 and 什么 in modern Chinese is used as a pronoun in asking questions, similar to how, what, and which and so on. In ancient Chinese, 什 was a noun meaning ten people but it was pronounced as *shi*, the same as 十 (ten).

Although Christianity was first spread mainly in the Greek world in the first century, the most evangelical movement which spread the gospel to black Africa, the Far East, and the Pacific was accomplished by English-speaking evangelists in the 19th century. Since all people bear an image of God, the revelation of God transcends linguistic differences and all have innate ideas about God, which should be expressed by an internal and universal language according to Augustine (1993, p. 213), who is actually in agreement with Apostle Paul when he mentions the mysterious language in his vision (2 Corinthians 12:4). A native Chinese speaker would normally have no recollection or reaction when the term *Elohim* is heard, since the person has no knowledge of Hebrew. However, even agnostic Confucianism holds that people are born with a conscience, a fact which is best explained by Apostle Paul (Romans 2:14-15) who had no specific conception of a universal language. Born with a conscience, people would naturally admit there exists an internal sense of hearing which is a comprehension for moral truth. It seems that Paul takes the sense of sight as the most spiritual among the bodily senses (Romans 1:18-20) but when it comes to the gospel and saving faith, the priority belongs to the sense of hearing (Romans 10:17) which Jesus himself confirms (John 20:29). Even if one denies the law of causation which implies a Creator as a cause for the first existence of the world, as an inborn ability, one can discover its concrete effect through successive events and personal feelings. Therefore, the Chinese idea of God being an invisible Creator who never speaks also fits the law of causation when they wonder about the origin of the natural world around them. Unlike Paul, who used to be zealous for Judaism and the Law of Moses before his repentance, Augustine, without any Jewish ancestry, came to accept Christianity academically through translated neo-Platonism, a popular philosophy of his time, with which his understanding of divine simplicity is related. Later, *Confessions*, his recorded journey of faith, becomes a great work both in literature and philosophy in Latin. Interestingly, although Confucianism itself has a conception of God, its self-centered way of thought never has produced an understanding of divine simplicity.

The term *Theos* appears more than one thousand times in the New Testament. In the Chinese Union Version of the New Testament, there is no term for Jehovah (耶和華). The Septuagint of the Old Testament translates Jehovah in Hebrew into *kurios* in Greek which in turn becomes the Lord in English and *Zhu* (主, Lord) in Chinese. *Kurios* appears in the Greek New Testament abundantly. Hence, Jesus is *Theos* and the Lord is Jesus. Moreover, Jesus is God from God and is the true image of God himself (Hebrew 1:3). Jesus is the Lord and Savior of sinners. The Lord has a meaning in Chinese close to *kurios* in Greek. Now we can conclude, 天主 (*TianZhu*) is a better term than 天神 (*TianShen*, heavenly god) and 天帝 (*TianDi*, heavenly emperor). Measured spiritually, *Shen* (神) is far better than *Di* (帝) in Chinese since there were five named *Dis* in primitive myth, although there was only one *ShangDi*. Since Chinese, English, and Latin are not the original Biblical languages, we can compare their fitness for translation. *Theos* becomes God in English, *Deus* in Latin and *Shen* in Chinese; all three translations are not expressions, but rather are simple and pure concepts efficiently expressing a metaphysical simplicity. On the other hand, *ShangDi* and *TianZhu* are still a simple concept comparatively although they are not as simple as *Shen*. Heaven (天) was created by God (Genesis 1:1) and is only a throne of God (Matthew 5:34). In comparison, light (光) should be a better symbol for God than the heaven since God is light (1 John 1:5) and the Lord lives in unapproachable light (1 Timothy 6:16), although light was also created (Genesis 1:3). By Aristotelian categories, the heaven or the heavens should be of substance or perfect matter while the adjective 上 (supreme) shows a relation or an accident which is more abstract than a visible substance. Therefore, *ShangDi* is a better translation than *TianZhu*. It is clear that the translation of the Bible requires more reason than was needed by the original writers who were moved by the

Holy Spirit and recorded the revelation of God. Accordingly, we have *Logos*, which is a concept expressed by a single noun in Greek and is translated as Dao (道) in John's Gospel in the Chinese Union Bible because *Dao* fits the principle of divine simplicity better than *ShengYan* (圣言) and *LouGeSi* (逻各斯), both of which are expressions containing more than one word.

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