

# Bible Translations for Asian Audiences: Nestorian Experiment in T'ang Dynasty China and Mongolian Equivalents for Diety

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This paper is dealing with the problem of Nestorian hermeneutics in its Bible translation in T'ang dynasty China<sup>1)</sup> and Mongolian Equivalents for Diety. Nestorian experiment with Bible translation in T'ang dynasty and Mongolian equivalents for Diety could be explained as an experiment to communicate the Biblical concepts to Asian audiences.

The first section of this paper is to introduce the study Bibles intended for situations and audiences other than Christian, that is, the two study Bible projects of The West Asia South Asia and India (henceforth: WASAI) and the East Asia South Asia (henceforth: EASA) text committees and their activities. For this purpose, Kenneth Thomas' paper "Study Bibles for Religious Audiences" and Gam Seng Shae's EASA report "Communicating Concepts: Preparatory Steps" will be summarized. In the second and the third sections, the problem of hermeneutics in Bible translation for Asian audience will be introduced, and specifically Nestorian hermeneutics will be investigated in Bible translation with a comparison of terms used in the Nestorian Bible and the Union version of the Chinese Bible. For Mongolian equivalents for Diety, the opinion of Mongolian Bible Translation Committee will compare with the view of Bible Society of Mongolia in the fourth section. Through this process, finally, the necessity of positive appropriation will be proposed in the fifth section.

## 1. A New Experiment to Communicate the Biblical Concepts to Asian Audiences

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1) When I visited the Amity Foundation in Nanjing with the Korean Bible Society Board members in April of 1994, Bishop Ting presented us with a rubbed copy of the Chinese Nestorian Inscription. Since then, this rubbed copy has been kept as a treasured collection of the Information Resource Center for Biblical Studies of the Korean Bible Society.

There have been a number of study Bibles, including annotated Bibles, published both by national Bible societies and by other publishers. Most of those study Bibles are intended exclusively for Christian audiences. The only exceptions are two study Bible projects within the Asia Pacific Region for situations and audiences other than Christian. The WASAI text project is intended for use by those who live in Moslem cultures, and the EASA text project is for those in Buddhist areas.<sup>2)</sup>

The EASA text committee is preparing study notes on the Gospel of John for audiences who are under the influence of Buddhism. As soon as Christian readers open the first chapter of John, they are confronted with the question of how the EASA audiences will understand such concepts as “beginning,” “the Word,” “existence,” “God,” “life” and “light.” All the Asian members of the committee grew up in EASA environments, but we came to the realization that our understanding of the EASA concepts was woefully inadequate. It was necessary for us to attain a better understanding of the EASA beliefs and world view, thus enabling the committee to communicate the biblical concepts intelligibly to the EASA audiences of the Christian Scriptures.<sup>3)</sup> 1) The same terms mean different things in different religions. Thus there is a need to develop a glossary of religious terms with multi-religious meanings. 2) There are many EASA terms in the Bibles in Asian languages, and many of these terms are alive with EASA meaning. Therefore, there is a need on the one hand to find new vocabulary to communicate the Christian message intelligibly to EASA readers, and on the other hand to educate Christian readers regarding the Christian meaning of words borrowed from other religions. 3) There is a need for translation officers to be involved not only in the developing of model notes in English, but also to be involved in the translation of the notes into various local languages to make sure that the ideas behind the notes may be conveyed as accurately as possible in the translations.<sup>4)</sup>

## **2. The Problems of Hermeneutics in Bible Translation for Asian Audiences**

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2) Kenneth J. Thomas, “Study Bibles for Religious Audiences,” 1995 Mini-workshop Paper, 1.

3) The committee invited five EASA scholars to its May 1994 meeting for an enlightening dialogue.

4) A summary of Gam Seng Shae’s “Communicating Concepts: Preparatory Steps,” *EASA NEWS-LETTER* 6 (June 1994), 1-2.

The problems of hermeneutics are related to the fact that when the Scriptures of a religion enter into an alien country, and when they are translated into the language of that land, the translation cannot avoid borrowing terms from other religions. It is also related to the fact that when a new concept is introduced, a similar concept of the native religion or culture is used. As a result of the cultural intercourse between the two religions, the original concept of the new religion experiences a creative reduction or expansion of its meaning.

Buddhism in China is known to us as a hermeneutical Buddhism. For this reason some scholars try to find the oriental “hermeneutics” of Nestorianism in China as a hermeneutical Christianity. The concept of “hermeneutics,” and the reason that both Buddhism and Nestorianism in China are called hermeneutical religions, is well summarized by the following quotation.

The historical encounter of Christianity with the Orient started when Christianity spread into India and China through central Asia. In the process, Christianity discovered a new identity which it had not realized in the West. The Gospel of Christianity experienced the formation of its own Asian identity, different from that of the West. Nestorian Christianity in China is a typical model of Oriental Christianity. Through Nestorianism one can find the characteristics of “hermeneutics” of every foreign religion. “Hermeneutics” refers to the universal phenomenon that when the system of a religion or a culture is transferred from one region to another it can become deeply rooted in the new soil only by putting on the clothes of the culture in which the new religion will be unfolded. One can find such a typical model in Buddhism’s move from India into China. When Buddhism came into China from India in about the 4th century A.D., the Chinese people preferred to understand it from the perspective of similar Chinese thoughts and to relate the new concept to familiar Chinese concepts. Accepting Buddhism, the Chinese people understood the new religion in connection with their traditional terms and their own way of thinking. This phenomenon is in accord with the hermeneutical awareness that understanding is impossible without a concrete horizon of understanding or *Vorverständnis*. Such a Buddhism is called “Hermeneutical Buddhism.”<sup>5)</sup>

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5) Seng-Chul Kim, *Land and Wind - An Attempt at Molding Oriental Theology* (Seoul: Dasan Gelbang, 1994), 193 (Korean).

### 3. Nestorian Hermeneutics in Its Bible Translation

#### 3.1. Nestorian Church in Asia

The proper name of the Nestorian Church is the ancient Church of the East. “Nestorian” is an appellation dating from the fifth century. By “East” is meant those ancient territories lying east of the former Byzantine empire comprising modern-day Iraq, Persia, and the southeastern part of Turkey. By the second century, Christianity had spread throughout the East, from Arabia, through Turkey and Iraq, to Persia. In the third century, Christianity also spread to the Indian Ocean.

In the first half of the fifth century the Church of the East was rocked by a theological controversy so serious that it resulted in schism. This was the so-called Nestorian controversy. Nestorius taught that Jesus Christ had two distinct natures: divine and human. Nestorius was condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431, but his teaching spread, and by 451 the Nestorians were almost completely cut off from the rest of the patriarchate of Antioch.<sup>6)</sup>

A very ancient tradition, given in the third century Acts of Thomas, makes Thomas the Apostle to India, so that the Indian Christians are commonly termed Christians of St. Thomas. China received Christianity in seventh century from Persia. According to the Chinese Nestorian Inscriptions (大秦景教流行中國碑) built in 781, it was in 635 that the Nestorian missionaries including Alopen (or Abraham, 阿羅本) came to 長安, the capital city of T’ang dynasty, and in 638 they built the 大秦寺 temple. At that time there were 21 monks in the temple.<sup>7)</sup>

The Nestorian Church generally prospered until the fall of Baghdad to the Mongols in 1258, when the widespread disruption in the Middle East drained its vitality. The most detrimental effect of the Muslim conquest on the Nestorian Church in the countries lying between Persia and China was that its missionary activity, begun among the Mongols, Turks, and Chinese, was cut off. Eventually the early blossom of Christianity in China died.<sup>8)</sup>

Under the Mongols, the conditions of the Nestorians were generally peaceful.

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6) Information from Matti Moosa, “Nestorian Church,” Mircea Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 10 (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), 369-372, esp. 369-370.

7) Kwang-Soo Kim, “Nestorianism,” Ki-Moon Lee, ed., *The Christian Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (Seoul: Christian Literature Press, 1980), 597-601, esp. 594 (Korean).

8) Matti Moosa, “Nestorian Church,” 370.

Hulagu Kahan, who took Bagdad in 1268, and most of his successors favored the Nestorians. K. Kessler points out that Mongol khans favored Nestorians not only because they were opposed to the Mohammedans, the political foes of the Mongols, but also on account of the superficial similarity between Nestorian Christianity and the Mongol type of Buddhism; and Nestorianism influenced some of the khans through the Christian wives. Certain Mongol rulers are known to have become converts to Christianity, particularly in the district of the Keraites south of the Lake of Baikal.<sup>9)</sup>

### 3.2. Jesus' Teaching on Almsgiving (世尊布施論)

The following text is quoted from the Nestorian *Jesus' Teaching on Almsgiving*.

世尊曰  
 如有人布施時  
 勿對人布施  
 會須遣世尊知識  
 然始布施  
 若左手布施  
 勿令右手覺

*Lokajyestha* (世尊, World's most venerable: The Lord, Jesus) said, "whenever you give alms, do not let the people know what you are doing. Whenever you give alms, your almsgiving may be known only by *Lokajyestha* (世尊, World's most venerable: The Lord, God). When you give alms, do not let your right hand know what your left hand is doing."

The above text is a summary of Matt. 6:2-4.

"(2) So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. (3) But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, (4) so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

9) K. Kessler, "Nestorians," Samuel Macauley Jackson, ed., *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, vol. III (New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1910), 121.

(NRSV)

We can pay attention to the terms which the Nestorian text borrowed from Buddhism. The Lord Jesus is translated as 世尊 (*Lokajyestha*), one of the highest titles of Buddha, literally meaning “world’s most venerable, lord of worlds.” God is also translated as 世尊 (*Lokajyestha*). Both Jesus and God have the same Chinese equivalent, 世尊 (*Lokajyestha*). This may be a reflection of the theological view that both God and God’s Son Jesus are one and the same person<sup>10</sup>). In Matthew those who give alms are warned not to let their left hands know what their right hands are doing, but in *Jesus’ Teaching on Almsgiving*, those who give alms are forbidden to tell their right hands what their left hands are doing. Some critics explain this as the influence of Taoism in which the left hand is more important than the right hand in function.<sup>11</sup>

### 3.3. Jesus the Messiah (序聽 迷詩所經)

In this book, God is translated as “Buddha(佛陀),” and sometimes as “天尊”. The word “Buddha(佛)” is derived from “Buddh,” which means “to be aware of, conceive, observe, wake”. Buddha means “completely conscious, enlightened”, and came to mean the enlightener. The Chinese translation is 覺 to perceive, be aware, awake; and 智 *gnosis*, knowledge. There is an Eternal Buddha, and multitudes of Buddhas, but the personality of a Supreme Buddha, an Adi Buddha, is not defined.<sup>12</sup> 天尊 means the most honoured among devas, a title of Buddha, i.e., the highest of divine beings. This title was applied by the Taoists to their divinities as a counterpart to the “Buddhist 世尊”.<sup>13</sup>

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10) Nestorius’ Christology, for which he was eventually condemned, was elaborated in relation to the question of the legitimacy of the term *theotokos* (‘bearer of God’, commonly translated ‘mother of God’) in reference to the Virgin Mary. He declared the designation unscriptural and going ‘best with those who deny Christ’s true humanity’. Instead Nestorius preferred *anthropotokos* (‘bearer of man’) or *Christotokos* (‘bearer of Christ’). He made a clear-cut distinction between the human and the divine natures in Christ, denying any real organic union between the man Jesus and the indwelling divine Logos. For details, see H. D. McDonald, “Nestorius,” Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright, ed., *New Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 457-458.

11) Kami, Naomichi, *Introduction to Nestorianism* (Tokyo: Kyobunkan, 1981), 98-99 (Japanese).

12) DCBT, 225.

13) *Ibid*, 145.

誰見天尊生於衆生 無人得見天尊  
 皆諸佛爲此風流轉 世間風流無處不到  
 誰報佛慈思 計合思量明知  
 天尊受許辛若 始立衆生 衆生理佛不遠  
 始有人受刑 及不柏天尊 此人及一依佛法 不成受戒之所 郎是返羊之人  
 先遣衆生亂諸天 佛爲佛受若置立  
 聖上宮殿 於諸佛求得

### 3.4. A Comparison of Terms used in the Nestorian Bible and the Union Version of the Chinese Bible<sup>14)</sup>

Nestorian Bible	Union Version	English Versions
彌師訶	彌賽亞	Messiah
彌施訶		
迷師訶		
阿羅訶	耶和華	LORD
慈喜羔	神的羔羊	God's Lamb
聖子端任父右座	耶蘇坐在神的右邊	Christ, seated at the right hand of God
序數	耶蘇	Jesus
多惠	大衛	David
明 <sup>15)</sup> 泰	馬太	Matthew
摩矩辭	馬可	Mark
盧伽	路加	Luke
瑜罕難	約翰	John
岑穩僧伽	西門彼得	Simon Peter
三常	信 望 愛	Faith, Hope, Love
八境	八福	Beatitudes
天尊 <sup>16)</sup> 法	神的律法	the Law of God
鳥黎師斂	耶路撒冷	Jerusalem
天上飛仙 <sup>17)</sup>	天使	Angels

14) The New Chinese Bible Centre, ed., *A Brief Survey of Chinese Bible Translation History* (Hong Kong: Tien Dao Publishing House, 1986), 6.

15) *Vidya*, knowledge. *Ming* means bright, clear, enlightenment. It represents Buddha-wisdom and its revelation. It means also the manifestation of Buddha's light or effulgence.

16) A title of Buddha.

17) Literally, "a benevolent wizard flying in the sky" from Taoism.

It is very interesting that the word “彌 (*me, mai*)” in “彌師訶 (Messiah)” reminds the Asian audience of “彌勒 (*Maitreya*),” the Buddhist Messiah, or next Buddha, now in the *Tusita* heaven, who is to come 5,000 years after the nirvana Sakyamuni, or according to other reckoning, after 4,000 heavenly years, i.e., 5,670,000,000 human years. According to tradition, he was born in Southern India of a Brahman family. His two titles are “慈氏 (Benevolent),” and “阿逸多 (Invincible).” He presides over the spread of the church, protects its members and will usher in ultimate victory for Buddhism. His image is usually in the hall of the four guardians facing outward, where he is represented as the fat laughing Buddha, but in some places his image is tall, i.e., in Peking in the Yung Ho Kung.<sup>18)</sup>

The Nestorian name of Simon Peter is *Sangha* (僧伽), a Buddhist term which means (1) an assembly, collection, company, society, (2) the corporate assembly of at least three (formerly four) monks under a chairman, empowered to hear confession, grant absolution, and ordain, and (3) the church or monastic order. The term *Sang* (僧) used alone has come to mean a monk, or monks in general.<sup>19)</sup> The Nestorian name of Simon Peter associates him with a Buddhist monk.

The Tetragrammaton יהוה is translated as 阿羅訶. “a (阿)”, the first letter in 阿羅訶 is the first letter of the Sanskrit Siddham alphabet. From it are supposed to be born all the other letters, and it is the first sound uttered by the human mouth. It has, therefore, numerous mystical indications. It also indicates Amitabha Buddha (阿彌陀佛), the Buddha of infinite qualities, known as “boundless light (無量光)” and “boundless age (無量數).” This name indicates an idealization rather than an historic personality, the idea of eternal light and life.<sup>20)</sup>

## 4. Mongolian Equivalents for Deity

There are two groups of opinion of this matter.

### 4.1. The Opinion of Mongolian Bible Translation Committee

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18) DCBT, 456.

19) Ibid, 420.

20) ibid, 287.



One of the controversial problems in Mongolian Bible translation is related to the Mongolian equivalent for the Deity. On the one hand, the Mongolian Bible Translation Committee composed of foreign missionaries in Mongol maintains that the Hebrew *Elohim* and Greek *Theos* should be translated into Mongolian *Burkhan* (佛汗) not only because the term was used by early Mongolian versions<sup>21)</sup>, and the term is understood as mentioning to the Deity among the Mongolian people in their long history, but also because there is no guarantee that the newly coined word for God will take a deep hold upon the popular mind. On the other hand, the John Gibbens translation team of the Bible Society of Mongolia insists that Christianity cannot use the Buddhist term *Burkhan*, not only because it is the title of Buddha but also because it is necessary for Mongolian Christians to have a Mongolian equivalent for Deity which can convey the biblical concept of God fully. The Gibben's team made a new expression for God in Mongolian *Yertunztin Ezen*  $\text{EP T } \theta \text{ H } \Pi \text{ I } \text{ I } \text{ H } \text{ } \ominus \text{ } \exists \text{ } \ominus \text{ H}$ , which means "Lord of the Universe."

It is necessary to refer to the experiences of neighbour countries, i.e., China, Korea, and Japan. In any country, and in any time, one of the most important matters to be decided in every translation of the Bible is the proper equivalent of Deity, because it is not easy for translators to find a word which has functionally the same meaning in the receptor language.

#### 4.2. The view of Bible Society of Mongolia

The Bible Society of Mongolia is composed of Mongolian believers. John Gibbens is purely assisting them in the field of exegesis. But the terminology and principles are whole Mongolian decision, and not John Gibbens.

The first observation is that Mongolian is shamanist. Their gods were called Tenger, which term comes from Sanscrit *tngrī*. It means sky. Mongolians used to worship gods of the earth also. One of these was called natigay. By the time of Chinggis Khan, Bud had already swept into Mongolia and virtually died out several hundreds of years previously. However, the various Sanscrit loan words from Buddhism remained in the Mongolian language, and thus even in Chinggis' time, there were mountains called "mount Buddha (*burhan uul*).” Thus Chinggis and the

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21) For example, *Mongolian Old Testament*, translated by Isaac Jacob Schmidt (1779-1847), and published at Sanktpeterburg in 1840. The Hebrew *Elohim* is translated into Mongolian *Burkhan*.

Khans after him already knew of the religions of Shamanism, Budd, Islam, and Nestorianism. The terms of each were familiar to them. Basically, these were “tenger” for the pantheon of shamanist deities, and the word “*burhan*” for the person of Buddha and the various idols of him.<sup>22)</sup>

According to celebrated Soviet Academician and scholar of Mongolian, Lev Gumilev, when talking of Christianity, Chinggis and other Khans used the Persian term *hudai* for referring to the God of the Bible. This was in spite of the fact that all the terms of Shamanism and Buddhism were fully known to them. Gumilev, an atheist to the end of his days, states that this term was used because the Mongols wanted to use a clearly monotheistic term for the Biblical God. Even today, in Pushto, the term “Hudai” means “the one who exists from himself” and is used for Allah/God. The term is retained in such as the modern day Bible translation in Khazakh — “Hudei.”

The summation of this, is that Mongols understood there is a difference between monotheistic Christianity and polytheism, and signalled this.

The second observation is that there is no evidence that the term of either “tenger” or “burhan” were used by Mongols for the Christian God. Even in the early 19th Century initial translations of the Bible into Kalmyk Mongolian by Father Schmidt, in Elistia (between the Black and Caspian Seas), they called God “Deed Geegen” — “high lama,” rather than Burhan. It is not until some years later in the 19th Century that Scottish missionaries Swann, Stallybrass and Yuielle in Selenhinsk (modern day Buryatia) started to call the Biblical God “burhan.” According to Mongolist scholar Charles Bawden, University of London, in his book “Shamans, Lamas and Evangelicals,” Mongolians were utterly confused by this, and suggested the Scottish missionaries should limit their discussions to the Buddhist lamas, as they were all talking about the same deities! Their translation of both the OT and NT was hailed as a success in the West, yet Mongols claimed it was incomprehensible, having far too many words which were transliterated from English in the translation. These were the words for “testament,” “demon,” “heaven,” “hell” and so on!

The next point is that when in 1972, modern Bible translation, taking the lead

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22) According to the Buddhist Research Institute of the Soviet Union, the term “burhan” is derived from the Sanscrit spelling of the proper noun “Buddha,” and was never used as a generic term for any kind of deity, being just a proper noun.

from the Buryat translation of 1842 (OT) and 1846 (NT) and the revision of the NT into “Inner Mongolian” dialect (1952), the Buddhist terms such as “burhan” were initially used. At that time, the work was being done in Ulaanbaatar, at the Mongolian Studies Department of the Mongolian State University, involving well known lecturers and scholars. When the terminology for “God” was discussed, these very people unanimously rejected the term “burhan,” declaring it to be a Mongolian Buddhist term exclusively, and not usable for the God of the Bible. This was very much in the spirit of Chinggis Khan many hundreds of years previously!

There was a time when no one really could come up with many other ideas. In the end, the “Concise English-Mongolian Dictionary” (Ulaanbaatar 1968, Mongolian State University, compiler — Nyam-suren) was consulted. This contains the two entries:

god	burhan, tenger
God	Yertunztin Ezen

The interesting thing was the capitalization on the second entry. It should be noted that Nyam-suren, an accomplished linguist, had been amongst the very first of Mongolian scholars to visit England in the 1960’s, just after Britain had opened full diplomatic relations with Mongolia, in 1967, following the acceptance of Mongolia in United Nations in 1966. Nyam-suren had been befriended in England by a church minister, and had learnt something about the God of the Bible.

Thus what became the Bible Society of Mongolia translation, derived its terminology from recommendations from Mongolian State University personal. After the full New Testament was printed in 1990 and copies received in Mongolia, there were just a few Mongolians who raised negative comments about the terminology for God. They were:

- a. those who believed that the God of the Bible was identical to the gods of all other religions, and that the same god is called “Allah” by Muslims, “Buddha” by Buddhists and so on. This was a prevalent idea in the communist era in both Soviet Union and Mongolia, believing that society creates god in their own image. It was part of the anti-religious propaganda in those days. Thus, in Mongolia, some Mongolian workers in some of the evangelical churches have had articles printed in Mongolian newspapers that the Mongols also had a virgin birth in the

person of the brother of Chinggis Khan, just as Jesus had, and the gods worshipped by Chinggis were in fact the same as those in the Bible. Lately, this has gone further, with some Mongolian workers in some of the evangelical churches taking up the New Age position, and explaining the miracles of Jesus in such terms as extra sensory perception and so on. b. just a very few Mongolian nationalists. Quote from Mr. Damdin, Mongolian TV reporter: (atheist) “I can understand why some would object to calling the Christian God, ‘Lord of the Universe.’ The problem is the term is too high. It sounds as though the gods of Chinggis and the Buddhist burhans are just nothing, against one who made and rules the universe. I think you should change it so that the Bible God is on the same level as all the others.”

The next point is that the most authoritative dictionaries state:

burhan	Buddha, image of the Buddha
burhan religion	Buddhism
burhan teacher	Gutama Buddha

Of all the dictionaries, only one gives:

burhan - Buddha, God

This dictionary (Altangerel) was co-edited by New Zealand missionary H. Kemp in 1991! All the rest do not give this definition at all. Mongolian newspapers now often capitalize the word ‘Burhan,’ and use it exclusively for ‘Buddha’ and ‘Buddhism.’ In a recent interview with a noted Russian heart-surgeon, he was asked, “do you believe in God?” Interestingly, the newspaper did not use the term “burhan,” but instead, like Chinggis Khan, borrowed a foreign term, in this case, the Russian word “Bog!” Observation — Mongolians do not like a polytheistic term when referring to the Biblical God. They prefer to use a foreign word rather than do this!

One observation has been that although missionaries have tried to persuade Mongolians to adopt the word “burhan,” by far, Mongolians just use the term “Yertuntzin Ezen.” Use if the term ‘burhan’ is rare, and generally limited to just a few people.<sup>23)</sup>

Charles Corvin, in the appendix of his book “A Biblical encounter with Japanese

Culture,” 1952, says that rather than cause lasting confusion using a polytheistic term in Bible translation, it is better to use a clear, even if less well known monotheistic term, and although it may take time, in the end the result is far better. Some have theorized that the reason for the greater appeal of Christianity in Korea has been influenced by the fact that their term for God is monotheistic, as against the polytheistic Japanese term.

As the Bible Society of Mongolia has got on the job of translating the OT, so they have felt the case against the polytheistic term ‘burhan’ is far clearer. Whereas the situation in the NT it perhaps could be taken either way, taking into account the term ‘burhan’ is a proper noun of a historical person, they have found it clashes seriously with OT exegesis.

When the issue is raised with rank and file church attenders in Mongolia they have said:

“I can’t see what the problem is. We all know ‘burhan’ is just Buddha. We can’t see why missionaries are deliberately trying to create confusion. Surely they know the God of the Bible is not Gutama Buddha?”

“I call God ‘burhan’ because I could lose my job otherwise. But I know God is not burhan, and when I pray I call him ‘Yertunztin Ezen.’”

“I only say ‘burhan’ in public with missionaries. At home, with my children, I only use the term ‘Yertunztin Ezen.’”

Thus, the term ‘burhan’ and even for that matter the shamanist term ‘tenger’ are in fact specific terms for specific deities. Neither has been proved to be a generic term as are elohim and theos. It is also clear that both ‘burhan’ and ‘tenger’ are alive and current names of deities in Mongolian consciousness. The question then, is whether Mongolians can accept what is a specific proper noun of Buddha for the generic elohim and theos of the Bible, which then have to take on the specific of the Bible meaning of those terms in the person of YHWH. The history of Chinggis Khan and many after him has been to avoid doing just that.

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23) R. Foster has presented at the Bible Translation committee of the Interdev Conference in May 1996, “The most recent survey has not produced any clear result.”

## 5. The Necessity of Positive Appropriation

- 1) The Biblical message cannot be conveyed without the hermeneutical process.
- 2) In Bible translation, borrowing words is inescapable.
- 3) Sometimes it is better to borrow terms from the indigenous religions to express the Biblical message than to coin new words.
- 4) The Biblical message expressed with borrowed terms sometimes experiences the formation of a new identity, different from that of other cultures.
- 5) In the case of Mongolian Bible translation, both Burkhan and Yertunztin Ezen are likely to be used as being the Mongolian equivalents for deity for the time being among the different Bible translation teams.
- 6) After such an examination, the Mongolian Christians should decide which symbol can convey the Biblical idea more effectively. Both Burkhan and Yertunztin Ezen are the symbols of ideas.
- 7) They may either choose one of those symbols, or both.

Since Mongols have used the term Burhan as the proper noun for Buddha it remains to be seen as to whether people are going to accept it in the long run for the generic term for deity and the specific monotheistic concept of the Biblical terms for God.

### \* **Keyword**

Biblical Concepts, WASAI, EASA, Nestorian Hermeneutics, Bible translation, Mongolian equivalent for Deity

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<Abstract>

## 아시아 독자들을 위한 성서 번역

-중국 당나라의 네스토리우스파 연구와 몽골어 하나님 명칭 번역 문제-

민영진

(대한성서공회 총무)

이 글은 대진경교(大秦景教)라는 이름으로 중국 당나라에 소개되었던 네스토리우스파(635년)의 성서 해석과 몽골성서 번역에 있어서 “하나님” 명칭에 관한 문제를 다루는 글이다.

모슬렘 문화권에 살고 있는 이들을 위한 서남아시아와 인도(WASAI) 본문 프로젝트와 불교 문화권에 살고 있는 이들을 위한 동남아시아(EASA) 본문 프로젝트를 하고 있는 것을 소개하고, 아시아 독자들을 위한 성서 개념 전달에 관하여 다룬다. 이를 위하여 아시아 독자들을 위해 성서 개념을 전달하는 새로운 연구들을 정리하고, 아시아 독자들을 위한 성서 번역에 있어서 제기되는 해석학적 문제들을 살펴본다. 또 성서 번역에 있어서 네스토리우스파적 해석을 다루면서, 네스토리우스파 교회가 아시아 지역에 세워지게 된 경로와 네스토리우스파의 『시혜(施惠)에 대한 예수의 가르침』과 『예수 메시아』에서 하나님을 가리키는 명칭을 살펴본다. 그리고 네스토리우스파의 성서와 중국의 화합역본의 용어들을 비교함으로써 불교의 영향을 받은 하나님 명칭을 짚어본다.

몽골의 하나님 명칭 번역 문제로는, 존 기븐스(John Gibbens)를 중심으로 한 몽골성서번역위원회가 ‘우주의 주’라는 의미의 ‘유르튼칭 에쟁(Yertunztin Ezen)’으로 번역한 것과, 몽골성서공회가 불교의 영향을 받은 ‘보르항(burkhan)’으로 번역한 것을 살펴본다. 구체적으로는 몽골어 사전과 신문 등에서 하나님 명칭을 어떻게 소개하고 있는지와, 몽골인들이 인식하고 있는 하나님 명칭에 대하여 논한다.

마지막으로 성서의 메시지는 해석학적 과정 없이는 전달될 수 없으며, 성서 번역에 있어서 차용어는 불가피하며, 차용어로 표현된 성서 메시지가 가끔 새로운 독자적 의미를 가지게 된다는 점을 밝힌다. 그리고 몽골 성서 번역의 경우, 두 가지의 하나님 명칭이 서로 다른 성서 번역 팀에서 사용되고 있는데, 몽골 기독교인들이 스스로 성서의 개념을 좀더 효과적으로 전달할 수 있는 상징을 결정하되 두 가지 모두이거나 그 중 하나를 선택할 수 있을 것이라는 전망을 한다.