



# Interpretation as a factor influencing translation: the case of a biblical metaphor

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## Abstract

This paper identifies interpretation as a crucial factor influencing translation of biblical metaphors. Data are drawn from five Chinese Bible translations. Qualitative analysis is conducted. The results show that it is highly likely for translators' interpretation of biblical metaphors to affect the metaphor translation. More researches probing into translation variations of biblical metaphors in Chinese Bible translations are called for.

**Keyword:** Bible translation, biblical metaphor, Chinese Bible, interpretation, metaphor, translation.

## 1. Introduction

Translating metaphors has been one of the central issues in translation theory and practice. Varying positions are held on metaphor translatability and transfer methods. Dagut (1976:22) suggests that metaphor is not translatable. Manson (1982) considers that metaphor is translatable. Newmark (1998:58) proposes that metaphors are translatable but there are inter-linguistic and inter-cultural limits for it. Newmark (1998:58) suggests several ways to translate metaphorical figures: (1) To preserve the metaphor; (2) to substitute it with another metaphor; (3) to change it to a clear comparison; (4) to add an explanation; (5) to paraphrase. Mandelblit (1995) suggests similar ways to translate metaphors: (1) To translate metaphor by comparison; (2) to paraphrase; (3) to add an explanation in the footnote; (4) to remove it. Hence, the consensus was either to preserve the metaphor of the original text (by substitution, comparison, paraphrasing, or adding explanation), or to remove it. Venutti (1995:17), however, disagrees with the removal of metaphors of the original text for the comfort of readers and asserts that keeping the metaphor allows us to touch culture of the original text.

In the studies of Chinese-English translation, Ye and Shi (2010:101) suggest four principles for translating metaphors: (1) Keep the original metaphor, (2) use a new metaphor, (3) replace a metaphor with a non-metaphor, or (4) use a metaphor to replace a non-metaphor; and they further suggest that these principles have to be considered in conjunction with other factors, such as readability, fluency, type of text<sup>1</sup>, as well as freshness and originality<sup>2</sup> of the metaphor. Ye and Shi (2010:99-100) also identify two types of metaphors: visible and not-so-visible metaphors. They observe that not-so-visible metaphors would easily become conventional and deeply embedded in our everyday language that we hardly realize we are using them (cf. Lakoff and Johnson 1985) and that since most of such conventional metaphors have already lost much of their color, it is not always necessary to retain them in the target text. They consider that more attention should be placed on the readability and idiomatic quality of the final translation. Wang (2013) suggests five ways of translating metaphors, based on three principles of translation: faithfulness, smoothness, and elegance. (1) Literal

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<sup>1</sup> For example, literary writing is composed of various carefully thought-out metaphors characterizing the style and distinguishing features of the author. Therefore, when translating literary writing, it is important to keep these metaphors in the translation. (Ye and Shi 2010: 101)

<sup>2</sup> Concerning freshness and originality, Ye and Shi (2010:101) argue, "The more striking it is, the greater the importance of retaining it."

translation approach (preserve the metaphor)<sup>3</sup>; (2) vehicle-converted translation approach (convert images and vehicles in order to translate the same intended meaning and to render the version faithful and easily understandable)<sup>4</sup>; (3) free translation approach (give up the original image or vehicle and find an appropriate way to express the intended meaning of the original metaphor)<sup>5</sup>; (4) translation with addition (by simile, retaining the image<sup>6</sup>; into simile plus sense or occasionally a metaphor plus sense<sup>7</sup>); (5) literal translation plus free translation.<sup>8</sup>

We see that various methods and factors are available for translators to consider when translating metaphors. However, for a translator to decide which metaphor translation principles to apply, the translator needs to first know what the metaphor refers to. Without such knowledge, it is impossible to translate a metaphor. This problem rarely occurs in most types of text. However, such problem is not uncommon when translating biblical metaphors. There are times, when it is difficult for a translator to “know” exactly what the author wants to convey through a given metaphor. Without understanding the original metaphor, one could not translate it into the target text. Understanding, however, is a subjective process that differs from one person to another. Different interpretations of a given metaphor would in turn produce variation in translation. The variation would then lead to variation in readers’ interpretation of the Scripture. Variation in readers’ interpretation of the Scripture would consequently, result in differences in the knowledge of God. It is, therefore, of great importance to identify examples of such variations and to explore reasons behind these variations. This paper attempts to do exactly, this. It is done by comparing different Chinese versions of the Bible on their translation relating to the “body” metaphor, in particular, “The head of every man is Christ”, “Christ is the head of the church” and “the church is the body of Christ.” We posit the following research question: Would a translator’s interpretation of a metaphor affect the translation’s outcome? Hypotheses are postulated as follows:

1. If a translator interprets a biblical metaphor as reflecting a physical reality, then the translation would be taken care of to reflect the physical reality.
2. If a translator interprets a biblical metaphor as reflecting a spiritual truth, then the translator would endeavor to reflect such a spiritual fact.
3. If a translator interprets a biblical metaphor as reflecting a divine reality, then the translator would seek to convey such divine reality through carefully-chosen words or even innovated words.

In what follows, we shall first define the term metaphor and biblical metaphors. We shall then review the Scripture commentaries on the body metaphor before embarking on the analysis. Finally, the conclusion is drawn.

## 2. Defining “metaphor”

The word metaphor derives from the Greek μεταφορά ‘transfer’, from μεταφέρω ‘to carry over’ or ‘to transfer,’ and from μετά ‘across’+ φέρω ‘to bear’ or ‘to carry’. Therefore, the

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<sup>3</sup> e.g. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. 以眼还眼，以牙还牙。(Wang 2013: 534)

<sup>4</sup> e.g. To me, it’s only a piece of cake. 对我而言，这只是小菜一碟。(Wang 2013: 534)

<sup>5</sup> e.g. Don’t cross the bridge till you get to it. 不要过早担忧。(Wang 2013: 534).

<sup>6</sup> e.g. Speaking without thinking is shooting. 说话不经考虑，犹如射箭不用瞄准。(Wang 2013: 534).

<sup>7</sup> e.g. Sorrow for a husband is a pain in the elbow. 丈夫的悼亡,就象肘部的一阵剧痛，剧烈却短暂。(Wang 2013: 534).

<sup>8</sup> e.g. Today a man, tomorrow a mouse. Literal translation: 今天是一个人，明天是一头鼠。Free translation: 今天得志，明天落魄。(Wang 2013: 534).

term “metaphor” implies that there are two entities involved in a given metaphor and that the relationship between these two is “carrying or transferring.”

Viewing metaphor from different perspectives, scholars propose that metaphors have varying functions: (1) to reflect the reality that is independent of human perceptions (Plato); (2) purely rhetorical (Aristotle); (3) to re-describe the reality that we see in the world (Ricoeur 1977); (4) part of human thought processes used to conceptualize the world (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Their views are summarized as follows.

### *2.1 To reflect the reality that is independent of human perceptions*

The term metaphor in Platonic language is included in the term eikon (figure, image, likeness), which is used as a general term for images, comparisons, and likeness. For Plato, images could be used to reflect or represent reality. However, images and reality are not exactly the same. He considers that the reality is always and in all cases superior to the image, that is, the image, as an approximation of reality, is forever unable to match the reality (Plato, *Republic* 514a-521c). The contrast between image and reality, in Plato’s vocabulary, is equal to that between form and Form. Plato considers Form as a mind-independent abstract object; he considers forms as consisting of properties that can be seen as copies of Form. For example, a particular strawberry could be said to be a copy of the form of Strawberryhood and the strawberry’s redness is an instance of the form of Redness. That is to say, Form possesses the highest and most fundamental kind of reality, which does not exist in space or time, and which is therefore entirely non-physical and non-mental; rather, it exists in a realm that is independent of our perceptions, conceptual schemes, linguistic practices, beliefs, etc. To adopt Plato’s view, one may say that a metaphor consists of form and Form, whereby forms are used to reflect Form, which is independent of our perceptions.

### *2.2 Purely rhetorical*

Aristotle defines metaphor as “the application of an alien name by transference” or as “the application to one thing of the name of another thing.” (Aristotle, *Poetics* 1457b: 7-8) He considers that “the greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor” (Aristotle, *Poetics* 1459a) and that “ordinary words convey only what we know already; it is from metaphor that we can best get hold of something fresh.” (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1410b). Therefore, in rhetoric, metaphor is referred to as a figure of speech used to describe a subject by comparison with unrelated object. For example, “Bob’s head is full of rocks” is a metaphor. When someone says that “Bob’s head is full of rocks,” we instantly recognize it as a metaphorical statement. For Aristotle, the function of metaphor seems to be purely rhetorical.

### *2.3 To re-describe the reality that we see in the world*

For Ricoeur (1977), metaphor is living, in that it is the principle which revives our perception of the world and through which we become aware of our creative capacity for seeing the world anew. For Ricoeur, the function of metaphor is not purely rhetorical; rather, it seems to have an extraordinary power of re-describing reality.

### *2.4 Part of human thought processes used to conceptualize the world*

Lakoff and Johnson (1980:7) define metaphors as part of human thought processes. For them, metaphor is not just a matter of language or mere words. They consider human thought processes are largely metaphorical, that is, the human conceptual system is metaphorically structured and defined. Therefore, metaphor means metaphorical concept. Conceptual metaphor consists of two conceptual domains, in which one domain is understood in terms of another. For Lakoff and Johnson, the function of metaphors is not purely rhetorical; rather, it is a concept that preexists in human conceptual system.

### 3. Biblical metaphors<sup>9</sup>

#### 3.1 Definition

Most of the Christians believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. In fact, in the Old Testament, God has explicitly said that He shall speak to men metaphorically by using similitudes<sup>10</sup>, through prophets as well as Son of Man<sup>11</sup>. In the New Testament, we see the fulfillment of God's commands given to Son of Man in the Old Testament in Jesus' use of parables for teachings.<sup>12</sup> In the parables, Jesus speaks metaphorically, using earthly things to explain the heavenly things, as he considers that it is difficult for men to understand heavenly things.<sup>13</sup> If the Bible is regarded as the inspired Word of God, then biblical metaphors could be seen as metaphorical speaking of God by way of likening or comparison, such as an image, a simile, parable, metaphor, or allegory.

#### 3.2 Functions: Literary, figures of speech, a tool to contain truth and to reflect divine reality

Various functions of biblical metaphors are observed by scholars: literary (Fryer 2006), figure of speech (Fryer 2006; Walker 1998); a tool to contain truth (Aquinas, 13<sup>th</sup> century; Gunton 1988; Wright 1992; The Chinese Union Version Editorial Committee 1988-1989); a tool to reflect divine reality (Lewis 1967; Walker 1998). Fryer (2006:71) observes that the Bible is not primarily literally; it is full of figures of speech. For example, the word "light" in Psalms 119:105 Thy word [is] a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path is the metaphor of truth. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Thomas Aquinas pointed out that it is absolutely rational to use the visible to explain the invisible in order to comprehend spiritual truth revealed in the Bible. Both Gunton (1988:37-38) and Wright (1992:63) assert that "...metaphors are the most appropriate means of expressing truth." The United Bible Societies also suggest that a figure of speech in the Scripture is often used to explain a "spiritual truth"<sup>14</sup> (The Chinese Union Version Editorial Committee 1988-1989:52). Walker (1998:215-218) identifies two types of metaphor in the Scripture: (a) a purely literal or rhetorical metaphor; (b) a metaphor that contains truth. A purely literal metaphor describes things in a picture language and it could be replaced by another description without loss of the intended meaning. A metaphor containing truth refers to a rhetorical use of language, in which the meaning is embedded and such meaning is of fact or truth<sup>15</sup> and the text of Scripture gives such metaphor a unique meaning. Such metaphor is

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<sup>9</sup> Unless otherwise stated, verses in this paper are based on The Holy Bible, King James Version (King James Bible Online 2014).

<sup>10</sup> Similitude is defined as "an imaginative comparison; Correspondence in kind or quality; a point of comparison; an imaginative comparison (simile), a visible likeness (image); likeness, comparability, Correspondence, likeness, parallelism, resemblance, similarity." (Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 2014)

<sup>11</sup> For example, in Hosea 12:10, God said, "I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets." In Ezekiel 17:2, the word of the Lord said, "Son of Man, put forth a riddle, and speak a parable unto the house of Israel." In Ezekiel 24:2-3, the word of the Lord said, "Son of man, write thee the name of the day, [even] of this same day: the king of Babylon set himself against Jerusalem this same day. And utter a parable unto the rebellious house, and say unto them."

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 13:34-35 write that "All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world."

<sup>13</sup> In John 3:12, He said to Nicodemus, "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you [of] heavenly things?"

<sup>14</sup> Original text in Chinese; our translation.

<sup>15</sup> Or of a literal statement of fact, to be understood as the truth about the way things are. Takes "God is a father" as an example. On the one hand, "God is a father" offers itself as a literal statement of fact, in that

determined by the text in which it is found and it cannot be replaced by something else.

Some scholars considered the biblical metaphors not only as a tool to contain or express truth but also as a tool to reflect a divine reality. (Lewis 1967; Macky 1991) Lewis (1967:61) suggests that reality and truth should not be confused. Reality is what is there. Truth is always something linguistic, a statement that is “the reflection of reality.” Another way of noting this distinction is this: “Truth is always about something, but reality is that about which truth is” (Lewis 1970:65). Macky (1991:244) asserted that knowing truth (contemplation, knowledge about) is not the same thing as tasting reality (enjoyment, knowledge-by-acquaintance); for Lewis, the purpose of the Bible is not primarily spectator knowledge, but participant knowledge, tasting the reality of God himself.

### *3.3 Types of biblical metaphors*

Some scholars classify biblical metaphors into types on the basis of different functions or significance. For example, McFague (1982:26-27) identifies two types of metaphors. One is called a “root metaphor”, while another is called “lesser metaphor.” A root metaphor is typically built up and fed by the narrative of the Scripture. An example of a root metaphor is “the Kingdom of God.” In the Scripture, Israel was a kingdom, presided over by the House of David, and is continued in the parable of Jesus and especially in his self-proclamation as king...the kingdom of God becomes the most important way of describing God’s activity in and through Christ.” An example of a lesser metaphor is “the identification of Israel with a threshing-sledge.” Because the metaphor is not used for the same purpose or with the same frequency and consistency, it is called lesser metaphor. (Walker 1998:216) Another example is seen in Gunton’s classification of biblical metaphors, in which an initial metaphor was later regarded as a literal meaning. For instance, “the kingdom of God” was initially taken as a metaphor describing God’s activity in and through Christ, but later it was considered as a literal meaning describing God’s activity in the world in Christ. For Gunton, therefore, a biblical metaphor might lose its metaphorical function over time.

### *3.4 Interpretation of biblical metaphors*

Scholars suggest that the interpretation of biblical metaphors lies in the overall context and the narrative of the Scripture itself. For example, Walker (1998:216) suggests that “it is clear that our discussion of biblical metaphor must be governed by the narrative of Scripture itself, and not by some abstract theory about the nature of language in general.” Gunton (1988:44) suggests that the meaning of a biblical metaphor cannot be decided apart from its context, but must be understood in the light of Scripture as a whole.

## **5. A brief review on the interpretation of the body metaphor**

### *5.1 On “the church is the Body of Christ”*

Apostle Paul used “the church as the body of Christ”<sup>16</sup> to depict the relationship between Christ and the church. The metaphor has given rise to a number of heated debates.

#### *(a) Supernatural body vs. spiritual body*

One of the centered issues of the debates is whether the metaphor “the church is the body of

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God really did produce children from his loins. On the other hand, “God is a father” can be read as an absurd statement, because it is absurd to suggest that God’s children are the fruit of his loins. This type of metaphor thus contains both an “is” and an “is not” element, and “it exists by refusing to be polarized into either reading.” Walker (1998:215-218)

<sup>16</sup> A summary of references on the body of Christ is given in Jewett (1971: 201-304).

Christ” is used by Paul to refer to the supernatural body of Christ (Pius XII 1943) or the physical body of Christ (Robinson 1952); or the metaphor is used merely as a figure of speech to project a spiritual relationship between Christ and the Christians (Best 1955; Gundry 1976). Pius XII (1943) of the Roman Catholic Church holds the view that the Church is the mystical body of Christ, because the body is neither a purely physical nor a purely spiritual unity, but supernatural.<sup>17</sup> Robinson (1952:48) considers the church is the physical body of the risen Christ. Gundry (1976:228), however, rejects the idea that the church is equal to the physical body of Christ. He regards “the church as the Body of Christ” as a “figure of speech” (p228) and “metaphor” (p230) through which the church is compared to the body of Christ, for the purpose of projecting the relationships among the Christians (p23-32). This point is further elaborated by Best (1955:16) that although the physical term body is used as a metaphor, it does not imply that the reality behind the metaphor is physical.

*(b) Mystical and spiritual body, a living and organic body, a living organism*

Many commentators, however, believes that Paul’s use of “the church as the body of Christ” is not merely a figure of speech and suggests that there is a mystical, spiritual, organic, and living relationship between the church and Christ (Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown 1871; John Gill 1746-1748; Matthew Henry 1706-1721; John Calvin 1548, trans. 1854; John Darby 1857-67; Geneva Study Bible 1560; Marvin Vincent 1886).

Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown (1871) considers that Christ is really, though spiritually, the Church’s Head. They consider Eph 1:23 and comments that

“his body refers to His mystical and spiritual, not literal body. Not, however, merely figurative, or metaphorical. He is really, though spiritually, the Church’s Head. His life is her life. She shares His crucifixion and His consequent glory. He possesses everything, His fellowship with the Father, His fullness of the Spirit, and His glorified manhood, not merely for Himself, but for her, who has a membership of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones (Eph 5:30).”

Both Matthew Henry (1706-1721) and John Gill (1746-1748) believe that the metaphor suggests that Christ’s body is his mystical body. John Gill suggests that the mystical body

“becomes his by Father’s gift to him, and by his own purchase; to which he is united, and of which he is the only head; and which he loves as his own body, and supplies, directs, and defends.”

Matthew Henry (1706-1721) also considers Eph 1:23 as Christ’s “*mystical body*” and

“Jesus Christ filleth all in all; he supplies all defects in all his members, filling them with his Spirit, and even with the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:19). And yet the church is said to be his fullness, because Christ as Mediator would not be complete if he had not a church. How could he be a king if he had not a kingdom? This therefore comes in to the honour of Christ, as Mediator, that the church is his fullness.”

Geneva Study Bible (1560) considers Ephesians 1:23 and suggests that

“for the love of Christ is so great towards the Church, that even though he fully satisfies all with all things, yet he considers himself but a maimed and imperfect head, unless he has the Church joined to him as his body.”

John Calvin’s commentary (Calvin 1548; 1854; 1999) considers Ephesians 1:23 and suggests that it is

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<sup>17</sup> For a modification of this view, see: L. Cerfaux (1959:267). For a summary of the Roman Catholic discussion about the Body of Christ, see: Jewett (1971:202-207).

“the highest honor of the Church, that, until He is united to us, the Son of God reckons himself in some measure imperfect. What consolation is it for us to learn, that, not until we are along with him, does he possess all his parts, or wish to be regarded as complete! Hence, in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, [1 Cor 12:12-31] when the apostle discusses largely the metaphor of a human body, he includes under the single name of Christ the whole Church.”

John Darby (1857-67) considers that God

“has established [Christ] as Head over all things, uniting the assembly to Him as His body, and raising up the members from their death in sins by the same power as that which raised up and exalted the Head-quickening them together with Christ, and seating them in the heavenly places in Him, by the same power that exalted Him. Thus the assembly, His body, is His fullness.”

Marvin Vincent (1886) regards the Body in Eph 1:23a (Which is His body) as

“a living organism of which He is the head (Col 1:18). He is before all things and in whom all things consist.”

Seemingly influenced by previous commentators, Nee (1978:1) proposes that “the Body of Christ is a living reality” that is founded on life and built on a living relationship among its members (believers) as well as with the Body’s Head (Christ). Nee (1986:43-49) believes that

“...the church is the Body of Christ, and the Lord is presently nourishing and cherishing His church...as to the union of Christ with the church, the church is His Body...in the eyes of Christ, the church is His own Body...the church is Himself.”

The above commentaries imply that there is an organic relationship between Christ and His mystical body, that is, the church.

### *(c) Other projections of the metaphor*

Bruce (1984) believes that Paul uses the metaphor to emphasize “the need for unity in diversity as each individual plays a part in the church.” Ferguson (1996) considers that the metaphor might have been used to refer to corporate personality, which is rooted in the Old Testament idea. Schmid (1919) believes that the metaphor is used to reflect the image of a community, as it is used in Hellenistic popular philosophy.

Divergent views on the concept of the Body of Christ are said to have resulted from certain discrepancies in the definition of metaphor (Perriman 1990). Some scholars, however, are cautious about extending Paul’s notion of the Body of Christ beyond Paul’s thought and teaching in the New Testament as well as Paul’s usage of the phrase (Davies 1978). For example, Best asserts that “Paul’s phrase “the Body of Christ”...can only be discussed against the background of the whole compass of Paul’s thought, and in particular against the background of the teaching he imparts about the togetherness of believers with one another and with Christ.” (Best 1957:122-128)

### *5.2 On “Christ is the Head of the Body”*

Apostle Paul used “Christ is the Head of the Body” to depict the relationship between Christ and the church. This metaphor has given rise to a variety of views.

Geneva Study Bible (1560) considers Ephesians 1:21 and suggests that

“we should not think that the excellent glory of Christ is a thing with which we have nothing to do, he witnesses that Christ was appointed by God the Father as head over all the Church, and therefore the body must be joined to this head, which otherwise

would be a maimed thing, without the members. However, this is not because of necessity (seeing that it is rather the Church which is made alive and sustained by the holy power of Christ, so it is far from being true that he needs the fullness of it), but because of the infinite goodwill and pleasure of God, who condescends to join us to his Son. (b) Insomuch that there is nothing that is not subject to him.”

Barton Warren Johnson (1891) considers that Christ was

“made the Head of the church; not merely its ruler, but the Head of the Body, which derives its life from the Head....He was, when raised from the dead, exalted to be the ruler of all things and made the Head of the church.”

Marvin Vincent (1886) considers Col 1:18 and Eph 1:22, and suggests that

“[t]he Church is described as a body (1 Cor 7:12-27; 10:17), by way of illustrating the functions of the members. Here the image is used to emphasize the position and power of Christ as the head. Compare Col 2:19; Eph 1:22, 23; 4:4, 12, 15, 16; 5:23, 30.”

John Wesley (1754) comments that

“Christ is a head both of guidance and government, and likewise of life and influence, to the whole and every member of it. All these stand in the nearest union with him, and have as continual and effectual a communication of activity, growth, and strength from him, as the natural body from its head.”

John Calvin (1548) comments that Christ

“was made the head of the church, on the condition that he should have the administration of all things...it was not a mere honorary title, but was accompanied by the entire command and government of the universe. The metaphor of a head denotes the highest authority.”

Mathew Henry (1706-1721) comments that God gave Christ to be head over all things.

“It was a gift to Christ...to be advanced to such dominion and headship...God gave Christ to be head over all things is a gift to the church, to be provided with a head endowed with so much power and authority.”

Based on the review above, two types of interpretation are revealed: (a) Kingship: Ruler and his people (human domain); (b) living and organic relationship (divine realm), as summarized below.

*Type I: Kingship: Ruler and his people (human domain)*

- (1) Christ is the Head of the church: Christ is the supreme ruler of the church.
- (2) Church is the body of Christ, in the sense that church is a place of assembly or a gathering of individual believers for worshipping the Lord.
- (3) The relationship between Christ and the church is spiritually based. There is a “King” versus “His people” relationship between Christ and the church.

*Type II: Living and organic relationship (divine realm)*

- (1) Christ is the Head of the church: Christ is the head, in the sense that He is the central commander and the source of life of the church. As the Head, He imparts life and gives directions to move the body parts.
- (2) Church is the organic body of Christ.
- (3) There is a living and organic (life and growth) relationship between Christ and

the church (the call-out ones) in the divine realm.

In what follows, we will see that the above interpretation types are indeed reflected in the translation.

## 6. Analysis of the translation of biblical metaphors in "body"

In what follows, we shall analyze the translation of biblical metaphors in "body" in five Chinese versions of the Scripture: 《文理和合譯本》, 《和合本》, 《新譯本》, 《呂振中譯本》, 《恢復本》. The King James Version [KJV] is provided for reference.

### 6.1 Verses compared: Colossians 2:19 and Ephesians 4:15-16

Colossians 2:19

1. 固持元首、夫元首、乃全體所由、以節以維、而得資助聯絡、以上帝之長而長也、○(文理和合本)
2. 不持定元首、全身既然靠著他筋節得以相助聯絡、就因 神大得長進。(和合本)
3. 不與頭緊密相連。其實全身都是藉著關節和筋絡從頭得著供應和聯繫，就照著神所要求的，生長起來。(新譯本)
4. 不緊聯著那頭; 反而是從這頭、全身才藉著關節和筋絡而得供應、彼此聯結、以上帝所賜的長大而長大的。(呂振中)
5. 不持定元首；本於祂，全身藉著節和筋，得了豐富的供應，並結合一起，就以神的增長而長大。(恢復本)
6. And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God. [KJV]

Ephesians 4:15-16

1. 惟須居愛崇實、萬事漸長于彼、彼乃元首、即基督也、由彼全體結構聯絡、百節相承、各依其功用而運動、俾之滋長、而自建于愛、(文理和合本)
2. 惟用愛心說誠實話、凡事長進、連於元首基督。全身都靠他聯絡得合式、百節各按各職、照著各體的功用、彼此相助、便叫身體漸漸增長、在愛中建立自己。(和合本)
3. 卻要在愛中過誠實的生活，在各方面長進，達到基督的身量。他是教會的頭，全身靠著他，藉著每一個關節的支持，照著每部分的功用，配合聯繫起來，使身體漸漸長大，在愛中建立自己。(新譯本)
4. 但我們總要以愛心持守真理，各方面長大、直到長成了基督：基督就是元首。本著他，全身藉著所供應的各關節、照每一部分、依其分量、所運用的效力、互相聯接，彼此結聯，使身體漸漸長大，在愛中建立自己。(呂振中)

5. 惟在愛裏持守著真實，我們就得以在一切事上長到祂，就是元首基督裏面；本於祂，全身藉著每一豐富供應的節，並藉著每一部分依其度量而有的功用，得以聯絡在一起，並結合在一起，便叫身體漸漸長大，以致在愛裏把自己建造起來。(恢復本)
6. But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: {speaking...: or, being sincere} From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. [KJV]

*Analysis:*

It is observed that 《文理本》 is the only version which translates the metaphor “all the body” or “the whole body” to 『全體』. The phrase 『全體』 in modern Chinese is a collective noun, meaning the whole body or group (of students, representatives). Contextually, the phrase 『全體』 appears to describe church as the collective of a group of church members. In contrast, other versions translate it as 『全身』 or 『全身體』<sup>18</sup>. The phrase 『全身』 or 『全身體』 in modern Chinese means “the whole body (covered with mud, etc.)” Contextually, the phrase 『全身』 or 『全身體』 seems to project church as a living organism. Type I interpretation may have given rise to the translation 『全體』; type II interpretation may explain the translation 『全身』 or 『全身體』.

Furthermore, the translations concerning the functions of the parts of the body also vary considerably. The metaphor, carried by “fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth,” is translated as 『資助聯絡』 and 『結構聯絡』 in 《文理本》 and as 『相助聯絡』 in 《和合本》. 『資助』 means “subsidizing or assisting financially.” 『結構』 means “constitute, or compose, or form.” 『聯絡』 means “keep in contact.” 『相助』 means “help each other.” The translations here seem to agree with type I interpretation. In contrast, the translations in both 《呂振中》 and 《恢復本》 seem to agree with type II interpretation. The meaning of 『供應、彼此連結』 in 《呂振中》 or that of 『供應、並結合一起』 in 《恢復本》 is corresponding to “having nourishment ministered, and knit together.”<sup>19</sup> The translated words here seem to have been carefully chosen by the translators to reflect an organic relationship between Christ and the church.

The above analysis is summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1 Comparison of Chinese translation of Col 2:19 and Eph 4:15-16**

	全體	以節以維	資助聯絡 相助聯絡	全身	關節和筋絡	供應、結合
文理	全體	以節以維	資助聯絡 結構聯絡			

<sup>18</sup> In this paper, the meanings of Chinese characters are based on Lin Yutang’s Chinese-English Dictionary of Modern Usage Online (2014).

<sup>19</sup> 供應 ‘supply’; 連結 ‘to bind, join up together (threads, clues, societies)’; 結合 ‘join together, be united’; 彼此 ‘each other, mutually’; 一起 ‘together.’

和合	相助聯絡	全身	筋節、百節、各體	
新譯		全身	關節和筋絡每部分	供應和聯繫
呂振中		全身體	關節和筋絡每一部分	供應彼此連結
恢復		全身	節和筋	供應，並結合一起、聯絡在一起

《文理本》 translates the metaphor “body” to 『體』 (‘body’) in Col 2:19, Eph 4:16, Col 3:15, Eph 1:23, and to 『身』 (‘material human body’) in Col 1:18, and to 『全體』 (‘the whole body or group (of students, representatives)’) in Eph 5:23. The inconsistency would have confused the reader, as to whether or not the body metaphor reflects a material human body, a group of church members, or a mystic organic body. It seems that 《文理本》 does not consider “the church as the body of Christ” as a metaphor reflecting a divine reality, but as a purely rhetoric device. 《和合本》 translates the word “body” to 『全身』, seemingly because of the contextual element of the verse: 『筋節』 ‘muscles and joints,’ which are parts of the human body. However, the translated word 『相助』 ‘helping each other’ does not reflect the same image. It appears that the translators of 《和合本》 might not have considered “the church as the body of Christ” as a metaphor reflecting an organic relationship between Christ and the church.

In contrast, we see from Eph Col 2:19 and 4:15-16 that the translators of 《新譯本》, 《呂振中》, and 《恢復本》 seem to regard “the church as the body of Christ” as a metaphor or an image used to map unto a divine reality – an organic relationship between Christ and the church, in that the phrases used contain the words related to the organic human body, such as 『全身, 全身體, 關節和筋絡, 節和筋, 關節的支持, 供應的各關節, 供應的節, 供應, 供應和聯繫, 彼此連結, 並結合一起』.

#### 6.2 Verses analyzed: Colossians 1:18

##### Colossians 1:18

1. 教會乃身、彼為首、為元始、自死而首生、致為萬事倡、(文理和合本)
2. 他也是教會全體之首。他是元始，是從死裡首先復生的，使他可以在凡事上居首位 (和合本)
3. 他是身體的頭，這身體就是教會。他是元始，是死人中首先復生的，好讓他在凡事上居首位；(新譯本)
4. 他是身體、教會、的頭:他是元始，是從死人中首先活起來的，好使他在萬事上居首位，(呂振中)
5. 祂也是召會身體的頭；祂是元始，是從死人中復活的首生者，使祂可以

在萬有中居首位；(恢復本)

6. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. [KJV]

*Analysis:*

It is observed that there are two types of translation: I. 『全體之首』；II. 『身體的頭』。《和合本》 translates ‘the head of the body’ as 『全體之首』 ‘the head of the whole body or the head of a group of church members,’ seemingly due to its agreement with type I interpretation. Other versions’ translation is 『身體的頭』 ‘the head of the body,’ possibly due to its agreement with type II interpretation. 《和合本》 translates “he is the head of the body, the church” to 『他也是教會全體之首』。Thor Strandenaes (1987:86) interpreted this Chinese translation as “And he is the head/first leader of the whole body of/everybody in the church.” 《和合本》 seems to agree with type I interpretation and see Christ as the head of the church, an administration organization, which consists of a group of believers and Christ as the head/first leader in the church. That is to say, 《和合本》 seems to treat “Christ as the head of the church” merely as a figure of speech, but not as a metaphor that reflects a divine reality.

Vincent comments on “who is the beginning” and suggests that “who is” is equivalent to seeing He is. “Beginning” is with reference to the church; not the beginning of the church, but of the new life which subsists in the body - the church. “The first-born from the dead” defines “how Christ is the beginning of the new spiritual life: by His resurrection.” Calvin comments that here, Paul “speaks chiefly of government. He shows, therefore, that it is Christ alone that has authority to govern the Church and that it is he to whom alone believers ought to have an eye, and on whom alone the unity of the body depends.” For Vincent and Calvin, Christ alone has the authority to govern the church and that the life of the church flows from Christ, who is the beginning of the new spiritual life. Their interpretation suggests that there is an organic relationship between Christ and the church, in which Christ is the only head.

In the translation above, 《呂振中》 and 《恢復本》 seem to see the church as an organic body, a living organism, consisting of Christ as the head and the church as his body. 《呂振中》 and 《恢復本》 seem to agree with type II interpretation.

*6.3 Verses analyzed: Colossians 3:15*

Colossians 3:15

1. 俾基督之和、主于爾心、爾為此蒙召為一體、亦宜感謝、(文理和合本)
2. 又要叫基督的平安在你們心裏作主。你們也為此蒙召、歸為一體。且要存感謝的心。(和合本)
3. 又要讓基督的平安在你們心裡作主；你們蒙召歸為一體，也是為了這個緣故。你們要有感謝的心。(新譯本)
4. 要讓基督的和平（或譯：寧靜）在你們心里指揮著；你們蒙召做一個身體、也是為了這個。你們要有感謝的心。(呂振中)
5. 又要讓基督的平安在你們心裏作仲裁，你們在一個身體裏蒙召，也是為了這平安；且要感恩。(恢復本)
6. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in

one body; and be ye thankful. [KJV]

*Analysis:*

There are two types of translation: I. 『蒙召為一體』；II. 『在一個身體裏蒙召』。Type I translation corresponds to type I interpretation. Type II translation agrees with type II interpretation. Type I translation seems to see the church as a collection of believers. Type II translation seems to see the church as an organic body. Type I translation is observed in 《文理本》, 《和合本》, and 《新譯本》。Type II translation is seen in 《呂振中》 and 《恢復本》。

Here, type I interpretation is held by JFB, John Gill, and Geneva Study Bible. JFB suggests that “the unity of the body is a strong argument for ‘peace’ among the members.” John Gill comments that “but they are called ‘in one body’; though they are many members, yet they are but one body; and therefore ought to be in peace,” Geneva Study Bible states that “you are joined together into one body through God’s goodness, so that you might help one another, as fellow members.” The above commentaries can be grouped into one category. They seem to consider the metaphor “in one body” as reflecting a personal relationship between believers in the church, where they should help each other as they belong to the same organization, the church.

Type II interpretation is held by Vincent and Darby. Vincent comments that “so that you are in one body according to your call... The body is the invisible Church, the mystical body of Christ: the Spirit, the Holy Spirit.” For Vincent, the metaphor “in one body” is not about the earthly relationship between the believers in the world, but the spiritual and mystical relationship between Christ and the church. Darby comments that “the apostle does not speak here of our union with Christ, but of our life, of the fact that we are dead, and that our life is hid with Him in God. He does not speak of the assembly with regard to our position; he speaks, no doubt, of Christ as being its Head, as to His personal glory, but not of it as to us. He speaks of us individually. Each one has his own life in Christ truly, but as his own; it is not union with other Christians. We have this life in Christ, but it is not here our union as one body with Him. It is the individual character of the Christian, to whom Christ, the Head, is everything.”

*6.4 Verses analyzed: Ephesians 1:22-23*

Ephesians 1:22-23

1. 且服萬有於其足下、使為萬有之首於教會、教會為其體、乃充乎萬有者之所充也、(文理和合本)
2. 又將萬有服在他的腳下、使他為教會作萬有之首。教會是他的身體、是那充滿萬有者所充滿的。(和合本)
3. 神又使萬有都歸服在他的腳下，並且使他作教會至高的元首。教會是他的身體，是那充滿萬有者所完全充滿的。(新譯本)
4. 上帝又使萬有順服在他腳下，並使他做教會的至上元首。教會是他的身體，是那正在完完全全被充滿者之充分完滿。(或譯：是那正在完完全全充滿萬有者之充分完滿)(呂振中譯本)
5. 將萬有服在他的腳下，并使他向著召會作萬有的頭；召會是祂的身體，是那在萬有中充滿萬有者的豐滿。(恢復本)
6. And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all

things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.  
[KJV]

*Analysis:*

There are two types of translation: I. 『是那充滿萬有者所充滿的』；II. 『是那在萬有中充滿萬有者的充分完滿』 or 『豐滿』. The Chinese translation 『是那充滿萬有者所充滿的』 means that the body is filled by him that fills all. 『是那在萬有中充滿萬有者的充分完滿』 or 『豐滿』 means that the body is the fullness of him that fills all in all. Whether the “fullness” (πλήρωμα) 『豐滿』 has been translated or not is quite significant. Type I translation observed in 《文理本》, 《和合本》, and 《新譯本》 seems to convey a spiritual truth that the church as the body of Christ is filled by Christ. It is quite objective because Christ fills all in all and surely fills the Church. In contrast, type II translation seems to project a divine reality, in which the church is an organic body of Christ, which is the fullness of Christ. Type II translation corresponds to type II interpretation.

Just as Matthew Henry commented, “Christ is the One who fills all in all. However, He needs His fullness to the honour of Him.” Type II translation is seen in both 《呂振中》 and 《恢復本》, in which the word “body” has consistently been translated as 『身』 or 『身體』 in Col 1:18, Col 2:19, Col 3:15, and Eph 1:23, 4:15-16. The consistency suggests that they might indeed regard the metaphor “church as the body of Christ” as an image used to map unto a divine reality, in that the phrases they used contain body-related words, such as 『全身體才藉著關節和筋絡得供應』, 『全身藉著節和筋』, 『得了豐富的供應』; 『全身藉著所供應的各關節』, 『全身藉著每一供應的節』, 『充分完滿』, 『豐滿』. Here, we see that if a translator interprets a metaphor as reflecting a divine reality, then the translator would seek to convey such divine reality through carefully-chosen words.

*6.5 Verses analyzed: Ephesians 5:23*

Ephesians 5: 23

1. 蓋夫為婦首、如基督為教會首、亦為全體之救者、(文理和合本)
2. 因為丈夫是妻子的頭，如同基督是教會的頭；他又是教會全體的救主。(和合本)
3. 因為丈夫是妻子的頭，好像基督是教會的頭；基督又是教會全體的救主。(新譯本)
4. 因為丈夫是妻子的頭，正如基督是教會的頭。他就是那『身體』的拯救者。(呂振中)
5. 因為丈夫是妻子的頭，如同基督是召會的頭；祂自己乃是身體的救主。(恢復本)
6. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. [KJV]

*Analysis:*

In this verse, the comparison between two metaphors is composed of a simile or analogy, which uses the connecting word “as” 『如、如同、好像、正如』. The metaphor “the husband is the head of the wife” is a purely rhetoric usage. In contrast, the metaphor “Christ is the head of the church,” is not a purely rhetoric usage, but a tool to contain spiritual truth.

This is because the sentence, immediately following the metaphor “even as Christ is the head of the church,” is also a metaphor (“he is the saviour of the body”), which contains spiritual truth. As Vincent comments, “the comparison lies in the fact of headship alone; the husband’s love and protection cannot be called salvation, in which respect Christ’s headship is peculiar to Himself.” However, the translation 『全體的救主』 in 《文理本》, 《和合本》, and 《新譯本》 seems to see the church as a group of believers, but regard the metaphor 『基督是教會的頭』 as a purely rhetoric usage. In contrast, the translation 『身體的救主』 in both 《呂振中》 and 《恢復本》 sees the church as an organic body, a divine reality.

## 6.6 Discussion

The above analysis shows that 《和合本》 translated “body” to 『身』 in both Col 2:19 and Eph 4:15; to 『身體』 in both Eph 1:22 and Eph 4:16; to 『全體』 in both Col 1:18 and Eph 5:23; and to 『體』 in Col 3:15. Such inconsistency might have influenced readers’ understanding or interpretation of the metaphor - “the church is the body of Christ” in view of the modern Chinese usage. However, this inconsistency has been improved in 《和合本修訂版》, the revised version of 《和合本》. In the revised version, the translation 『全體』 has been revised to 『身體』 in both Col 1:18 and Eph 5:23. The revision suggests that the translators’ interpretation of the body metaphor might have changed.<sup>20</sup> One possible reason behind such change might lie in the advancing of theological understanding of the body metaphor in recent years.

Overall, the above analysis suggests that the translator’s interpretation of a biblical metaphor would affect the translation. If a translator interprets a biblical metaphor as reflecting a spiritual truth, then the translator would use comparable words to reflect such spiritual truth. In contrast, if a translator interprets a metaphor as reflecting a divine reality, then the translator would seek to convey such divine reality through carefully-chosen words.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper presents the first investigation of interpretation as a crucial factor affecting the translation of biblical metaphors in the Chinese Bible translations. We find that in the Chinese Bible translations, biblical metaphors, though composed of figures of speech in human language, could sometimes be regarded as a pure rhetorical device, while at other times, as a tool to project “divine reality.” Differences in translators’ interpretation of a biblical metaphor would result in variation in translation. Furthermore, inconsistency in the translations of a biblical metaphor might affect the reader’s understanding of the metaphor. We conclude that it is highly likely for interpretation variation to have caused the variations in the Chinese Bible translations. Further researches probing into the translation variations of Chinese Bible translations and the causes behind the variations are called for.

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<sup>20</sup> The goal of 《和合本修訂版》 is to update 《和合本》 while keeping the original translation as much as possible, ultimately resulting in an update of 15% of the New Testament and 20% of the Old Testament. The principle for the revision of CUV is to keep the revision to the minimum, that is, the revision would not be made unless it is absolutely necessary. (cf. Wong 2010; Hong Kong Bible Society 2010)

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