

## **An Impossible Possibility**

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All who work in the publishing sector know that producing translations of classics is a difficult work with low if any prestige. It is difficult because a relevant translator needs to be a high quality scholar in the appropriate area. You must try hard to find them but may not succeed. It is with low prestige because the cost is high and you may not even make a balanced financial sheet. I still remember the situation when I met LIU Xiaofeng in the early 1990s and we discussed a great deal about how to construct a "contextualized Chinese Christianity" (this is the objective of Tao Fong Shan). And he urged me to start the ministry of translating Christian classics. At that time I had just begun my work here after quitting a job at a publishing firm. My brain is just like any ordinary person's: how many people would have interest in this kind of book? And I also remembered the immediate responses of LIU Xiaofeng and HE Guanghu: take a look of the history of the translation of Buddhist classics, and you will understand the relationship between it and the birth of Chinese Buddhism and the interaction of the eastern and western cultures. Thus I tried my best to retrieve the historical materials and it really surprised me!

The stories of the Chinese translation of Buddhist classics are not only fascinating; every story of the monks is filled with a high spirit of working out great difficulties. The time span of translation is more than a thousand years; the human and material resources dedicated are difficult to calculate. It includes gigantic translation projects supported by the empire, and there also emerge four great translators: Kumarajiva (4th century ce), Parramatta (6th century ce), Xuan Zhuan (7th century ce), Amoghavajra (8th century ce). From the 1st to 11th century CE there were more than 6000 volumes of Buddhist classics translated. During the 7th century there came Master Hui Neng the 6th patriarch and a new trend of Chinese Buddhism which was different from its Indian predecessors: Zen. According to the unofficial statistical data of LIANG Qichao, the translation process of

Buddhist classics into Chinese introduced about 35,000 Sanskrit words into Chinese. The influence on the whole spectrum of Chinese thought can hardly be neglected.

Learning from this history, I felt that the construction of Sino-Christian theology could not be done without the translation of Christian classics into Chinese. Therefore since we started ISCS Xiaofeng and I reported to the director's board that publication is an important enterprise. Five remarks were thus made: 1. The Chinese Academic Library of Christian Thought (CALCT) is not a short-term project of an individual at some moment; it should be a ministry over centuries. 2. The classics should not be confined to any denominations but embrace the holistic ecumenical tradition. 3. The selection criteria should not only follow the western perspective, but should regard the vision of Chinese academia as the primary reference (thus there are an international committee and a Chinese academic committee and the latter make the final judgment). 4. CALCT is aimed at providing a literary resource of Christian thought to the world of Chinese academia. Thus in the selection of titles process the contemporary research trends must be brought into consideration. 5. CALCT encourages Chinese scholars to reinterpret the Christian classics from the perspective of their own experience. We hope that it will complement the traditional ecclesial reading but not create conflict. Moreover, we hope that this experience may contribute to the reading of Chinese classics, resulting in a reconstruction of Chinese cultural tradition.

CALCT has stepped into its 14th year and published its 100th title in June. I am surprised by the courage it took to start this project when looking back. There was not much past experiences and limited resources, but with a simple heart we tried to do something comparable to the translation of Buddhist classics. The three most difficult points worth mentioning are: 1. translators: since the first readers of CALCT are supposed to be those living in Mainland China, and in view of the linguistic differences between the Mainland, Taiwan and Hong Kong, Mainland scholars are of priority. How to let those working in the humanities acquire relevant Christian vocabularies and knowledge was a big challenge in the beginning. Recently this problem is gradually being solved because the Mainland scholars have become more mature in Christian studies and young scholars have even continuously emerged. Some recent publications may even claim to be better than western translations. 2. Whenever possible, we try to do the translation from the original languages. They include English, German, French, Russian, Japanese, Italian, Latin, Greek, etc. To find a suitable translator is not easy.

3. The translated manuscripts are to be proofread by another group of scholars. How to organize experts from different areas to cooperate on one task is another art of management.

The first tide of CALCT is *De Deus absconditus* translated by Prof. LI Qiuling of Renmin University of China from Latin. After 14 years, the 100th title *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness* is translated by Prof. SUN Zhong and proofread by Prof. BAO Limin, both from Zhejiang University. I am grateful for the fact that the translators and ISCS have established a close relationship through the years. More than good quality of translation and co operation, we have gained immense friendship. It is coincidental that the 1st and 100th title point to two directions, indicating that the Christian studies of Chinese academia is so inclusive and polyphonic in the present stage.

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