

The "Term Question"

By Irene Eber

A major issue for the Peking Translating Committee in the 1860s and 1870s, indeed for translators before and after them was which Chinese term best translated God.¹

Translatability, the transposition of a concept from one language and cultural context into another, involves the question whether the concept should remain the same in the receptor language or whether it changes and if so, how? The Term Question that had plagued the Jesuits in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries continued to plague the Protestants in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By the time the Peking translators got down to work, the controversy over the terms to be used in the Protestant version of the Bible was twenty-years old.

For the committee, and for Schereschewsky, the issue was whether to use a neologism or an existing Chinese term with similar, and it was to be hoped, the same meaning. However, the question was neither a mere linguistic or theological matter for either the Jesuits or the later Protestants. It raised a host of other questions, some having to do with Chinese monotheism, polytheism and pantheism. It also brought up issues related to belief in Creation and the "idea of God", as well as questions regarding the nature and content of Chinese religion. By which name Chinese Christians addressed God, and what that name meant to them, what they thought and believed when uttering the name of God in Chinese, was the crucial problem. This topic was hotly debated in missionary circles in China and among theologians in Europe and America.

In the course of the debates, some Protestant missionaries embarked on extensive research projects, with the indispensable help of their Chinese coworkers, to discover whether China's religious vocabulary had a name that might serve to represent God. This was by no means disinterested scholarship since Chinese religious traditions continued to be most frequently interpreted within a Western-Christian framework, as they had been earlier by the Jesuits. In addition, and as a result of the Term Question controversy, the Bible's cross-cultural journey eastward was augmented, as had also been the case [200] with the Jesuits, by a westward cross-cultural journey of knowledge about Chinese thought and religion.

My aim in this chapter is to broadly outline some of the major issues raised in the course of that controversy. Begun by the Jesuits in the seventeenth century, the term question surfaced anew after the first Bible translations appeared in print in the nineteenth century. By the time Schereschewsky arrived in China the major positions were already well defined and were the direct cause of the Peking committee's advocacy of Lord of Heaven (*Tianzhu*) for translating God. However, since the larger missionary community did not consider this a solution, the debate continued ever more vociferously in the following decades, in which eventually also Chinese Christians participated.

The Problem of Terms and the Jesuits

The story of the Term Question necessarily begins with the Jesuit mission in China, both because the Jesuit fathers were the first to raise it and because a number of Protestant missionaries, obviously acquainted with Jesuit writings, referred to the earlier arguments. The London Missionary Library in Shanghai contained a surprising number of Jesuit works in Chinese alongside works by their Chinese converts.² When the Peking committee began its deliberations, copies of Jesuit writings were still extant in the homes of Catholic families in Peking. John Wherry, who saw one such work in the 1880s or earlier, described it as being written "in a simple though not uniform style," but not much different from spoken Chinese of

his day.³ The writings of Xu Guangqi (Paul Xu, 1562-1633), the well known Christian literatus, who hailed from the vicinity of Shanghai,⁴ were also likely to have still been preserved in private libraries of the area. In addition, both Blodget and Schereschewsky probably had access to Jesuit works by Jean-Francoise Foucquet (1665-1741) and Alexandre de la Charme (1695-1767). And Protestant missionaries were no doubt also familiar with L'Abbe Huc's 1857 work which dealt with Jesuit history in China, the Rites Controversy and the end of the China mission.⁵ [201]

The Jesuit presence in China is an early chapter in Sino-Western relations. Founded in 1534, the Society of Jesus was the Roman Catholic answer to the Protestant "heresy" in Europe and the heathen world beyond. Members of the Society were highly disciplined and intensely devout men who were well versed in secular and sacred studies. Jesuit contact with Asia began in 1549 when St. Francis Xavier (1506-1552) landed on the shores of Japan. But the China mission was slow in getting started. From Macao (with its Portuguese settlement since 1557), the China mission first spread to the southern provinces. Finally, in 1601, Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), the most prominent among the Jesuits, was permitted to reside in China's capital Peking. Well known for his command of Chinese and knowledge of the Chinese Classics, Ricci particularly stressed accommodation of Christianity to Chinese ways and sensibilities.

At the inception of the China mission in the 1580s, neither Michele Ruggieri (1543-1607) nor Matteo Ricci raised the term issue. Although Lord of Heaven was the preferred term for God,⁶ Ricci also used Heaven (*Tian*) and High Lord (*Shangdi*), both of which had designated belief in a transcendental power in Chinese religious vocabulary since the Shang (1766-1122 B.C.E.) and Zhou (1027?-221 B.C.E.) dynasties. Which term was the more appropriate was questioned only after Ricci's death, when it was raised in conjunction with the problem of Chinese rites, that is, whether Christians can participate in rituals honoring Confucius and ancestors, or perform the required sacrifices. After Niccolo Longobardi (1565-1655) launched his 1623 attack on all other terms except *Tianzhu*,⁷ the Rites Controversy together with the Term Question raged on for almost one hundred [201] years, until it was conclusively terminated by papal decree of 1742 ordering Roman Catholics to use *Tianzhu*.

Ricci had justified his use of *Shangdi* and Heaven by recourse to the Chinese Classics⁸ where, he asserted, true Confucian orthodoxy and belief in God were expressed. He believed that atheist and materialist convictions of his day could be traced to Song dynasty (906-1278) Confucian commentaries to the Classics. Ricci thus separated canon from commentary,⁹ preparing the ground for the later objection to Heaven and *Shangdi* of Longobardi and others who argued that contemporary cults to both were idolatrous and that these names could therefore not be used in reference to the Christian God.¹⁰

Study of Song orthodox thought, especially of Zhu Xi's (1130-1200) commentaries to the Classics, led the missionaries to explore Chinese ideas of Creation. At issue here was monotheism and the Christian belief in a personal Creator and an intentional act of Creation, as compared with the Chinese view of an impersonal act that unfolds in accordance with self-contained energy. According to Song dynasty Confucian assumptions, creation begins when the Great Ultimate, the Absolute, unchanging (*Taiji*) gives rise to the two principles of essential and material substance, principle (*li*) and vital energy (*qi*). It was this idea of creation without a creator that misled Longobardi to assume that the Chinese conceived of creation as purely material. His and others' reading of Song commentaries ignored the Chinese reading of these texts, in which the stirrings of creation before matter assumes form suggested a spiritual process rather than a gross material one. By separating canon from commentary, the Jesuits were also asking how the Classics should be regarded. Were they holy writ in the Western sense? And, if so, did the Chinese of the distant past believe in the One True God? Had they an original monotheism which later deteriorated into polytheism?

Michele Ruggieri and Matteo Ricci did not separate the issue of terms from these questions, or from their views on Confucianism, perhaps because both used the Confucian Classics to study the Chinese language. When Ricci interpreted the Classics to emphasize their purity he stressed the divergence of the orthodox Song com-[203]mentaries from the original sources. To Ricci, this gap between canon and commentary implied the compatibility of the Classics with Christianity. The early Confucianism of the Classics, he believed, was "a pure form of natural religion," it contained knowledge of God and other Christian beliefs. But since these were misrepresented in the commentaries, the Classics were by his time no longer understood. A correct reading of the Classics was tantamount to reading the canon, the authoritative scripture. According to Ricci, Buddhism adversely influenced Song Confucianism. Indeed, he viewed Buddhism as competing with Christianity, and was therefore even more hostile to it than to Song Confucianism.¹¹

It must be taken into account that the late Ming dynasty (1368-1644) of Ricci's days was characterized by extraordinary philosophical activity, in the course of which doubt in the orthodox Song commentaries were voiced. Some Chinese philosophers suggested circumventing the commentaries, and to return to the study of the Classics from the point of view of the present. Thus, while a new relationship to tradition was beginning to emerge, defenders of orthodoxy were digging in their heels. To what extent Ricci was influenced by these intellectual currents need not detain us here. What is important for our purposes is that he considered Song orthodoxy and Zhu Xi thought detrimental to true Confucianism as espoused in the Classics.¹²

In Ricci's view, the Classics contained the idea of God, even if He was called by a different name. Ricci's *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven (Tianzhu shiyi)*, which he began writing in 1595 as a revision and amplification of Ruggieri's earlier work, *The True Meaning [of the Doctrine] of the Lord of Heaven (Shengjiao Tianzhu shilu)*, published in 1584), would show that this was so.¹³ According to Ricci, God, *Tianzhu* and *Shangdi* differ only in name. "Our God is *Shangdi* in the Chinese language" (*wu Tianzhu, ji huayan Shangdi*), wrote Ricci, adding [204] that this God is the one mentioned in the ancient Classics (*gu jingshu*).¹⁴

But even if *Shangdi* is the same as *Tianzhu*, neither is identical to Heaven (*Tian*). Here Ricci subtly changed the argument from identity to veneration and reverence of the sky rather than of Heaven (in Chinese sky and Heaven are both *Tian*). He did this by stating that heaven merely refers to sky, which has form (*xing*) whereas *Shangdi* does not. "Since all spirits (*guishen*) have no form, how can the most venerated spirit (*Shen*, i.e. *Shangdi*) have form?"¹⁵ Ricci refused to discuss the question of belief in Heaven by pronouncing it to be no more than the physical sky, and concluding that as spirits have no form, the most divine of spirits (*Shen*) must also be formless.

Of course Ricci knew all about the worship of Heaven. It exists, he wrote, because people only think of the appearance (*si*) of heaven and earth, and do not consider the existence of a Lord (*zhu*) of heaven and earth. Yet the intelligent person, seeing the lofty and extensive form (*xing*) of heaven and earth, knows that there is a Lord God (*Tianzhu zhuzai*). And this Lord God is the great Father and Mother; the great Sovereign (*jun*); the cause of all the ancestors' appearances; the source of all the sovereigns' mandates (*ming*); the Producer and Sustainer of all things.¹⁶

Ricci cast Christianity into Confucian language, but in so doing he attributed functions usually associated with Heaven to *Tianzhu*. He wisely refrained from redefining the term *Shangdi* since the concepts surrounding that term were extraordinarily vague in the classical literature. Instead, he left it up to his readers to make the transition from *Shangdi* to *Tianzhu* by pointing out how one could be identified with the other. Ricci's description of God was of One whose

functions encompassed the social, political and created world, and who demanded the same filiality (*xiao*) of the believer that was extended to parents and sovereign.

As long as Ricci was alive his views were not challenged. Only after he died did Niccolo Longobardi, his successor as superior of the mission, raise objections. Longobardi disagreed with Ricci over the latter's interpretation of Confucianism, and also rejected Ricci's view that the Chinese had knowledge of God. Longobardi's repeated challenges led to a series of discussions and conferences which, until the onset of Dominican and Franciscan missionaries' attacks, nonetheless reaffirmed Ricci's position.¹⁷

Longobardi's argument was less concerned with terms than with a Chinese person's knowledge of God.¹⁸ In 1633 he even suggested using the transliterated Latin term *Deus* (*dousi*). Doubts about terms for God, angels and the rational soul had first been raised in the Japan mission, which forwarded these to Longobardi for further investigation. Two diametrically opposed positions were taken by the fathers in China. One side affirmed that the Chinese "had some knowledge" of God, angels and the soul, terming them *Shangdi*, *Tianshen* and *linghun*, respectively. The other asserted that the Chinese only know material and not spiritual substances, and therefore know neither God, angels or the soul.¹⁹ Opposing views were also taken regarding the classical texts and commentaries. One faction asserted that the Classics are authoritative for Confucian philosophy, whereas the Song dynasty commentaries contain Buddhist ideas and therefore stray from the true meaning of the original texts. Chinese Roman Catholic converts supported this position. The other faction argued that the Classics are often obscure and cannot be understood without the aid of the commentaries, and that it therefore behooved the Jesuits to be acquainted with all books in order to prevent error.²⁰

In countering Ricci's equation of *Shangdi* and *Tianzhu*, Longobardi maintained that the Chinese believed *Shangdi* (translated as the "king of the upper region") is not anterior to heaven and did not therefore create the universe. *Shangdi*, being considered neither eternal nor everlasting, has no resemblance to what Christians consider *Tianzhu*.²¹ Hence the Chinese have no knowledge of God; they were and are atheists and materialists. For evidence he resorted principally to orthodox Song Confucian views. According to Longobardi, beginning with Creation, the Chinese could not conceive of an "infinite Power" [206] capable of producing something out of nothing. They must therefore believe in an eternally antecedent First Cause of origin which they term "principle" (*li*).²² Principle (also called by him chaos, primary matter) has no shape; it is pure, quiet, yet not spiritual; it has no independent existence apart from "air" (*qi*, vital energy). Through transformations, the Original Air (*taiji*), Great Ultimate, as well as the five elements (*wu xing*) and *yin* and *yang* emerged from primary matter. This process of creation was accidental and not purposeful; it was a process of matter changing form with no spiritual aspect whatsoever.²³ Longobardi concluded;

There were two sorts of Matter of which the World was compos'd.... The first is the Infinite, their *Li*. The second the Original Air, or their Tai kie [*taiji*], within which intrinsically is the Being and Substance of the First Matter and consequently is in all things...²⁴

Unable to conceive of the dualism of spirit and matter and the creation of the universe from nothing by an "Infinite Power," the Chinese are also unable to conceive of God, angels and the soul. They do not consider the soul immortal because it has no independent existence outside of the material elements of which it is formed. Longobardi saw a great danger in identifying the Christian God with the Chinese *Shangdi* because of the Chinese habit of interpreting new concepts by means of old assumptions. Like *Shangdi*, who has had earthly incarnations, *Tianzhu* too is considered incarnated in the person of Jesus Christ. Or, since *Shangdi* was produced by the Great Ultimate, so too must *Tianzhu*.²⁵

The several issues Longobardi aired—such as the question of creation; the role of the Great Ultimate, principle and vital energy in creation; whether the Chinese had the knowledge of God or could acquire it—were raised later again by the Protestants. That Chinese converts ultimately filter Christian beliefs through their own was a shrewd observation on his part, as was his insistence that missionaries must be aware of the idea of the term for God. Whereas Ricci believed that the idea of God existed in China in antiquity and merely had to be restored, Longobardi saw no way around the materialist conception of the beginning of the universe. [207]

When P. Joachim Bouvet (1656-1730) arrived in China in 1687 the controversy came full circle. Basing himself on a thorough reading of classical and Daoist works, as well as on an analysis of Chinese written characters, Bouvet was led to agree with Ricci's earlier argument that *Shangdi* corresponded to the Christian God, although he did disagree with the notion that *Tian* designated only the material sky. Like Christians, he wrote in 1701, the Chinese have knowledge of God.²⁶

The history of mission in China opened with Matteo Ricci, for whom accommodation of Confucianism to Christianity was both possible and acceptable. It closed with P. Joachim Bouvet, who above and beyond accommodation, believed that there were no obstacles to a Christian remaining a Confucian.²⁷ But these were the Christian missions' waning days in China.

Arguments of the Protestant Missionaries, 1847-1855: Tian, Shangdi, or Shen?

The Jesuit controversy on terms had lasted for almost a century, and so did that of the Protestants.²⁸ The latter began well before Schereschewsky arrived in China and continued even after he had passed away and the work of the Peking Translating Committee had been all but forgotten. The problem arose some two decades after the two initial translations of the complete Bible, the Marshman and Lassar (1822) and the Morrison and Milne (1823) versions, had appeared in print.²⁹ Perhaps because China remained closed to missionaries, how [208] to render God into Chinese was not a burning issue until after the Opium War.³⁰ After that, however, the Term Question developed rapidly, and often vehemently, in conjunction with the translation undertaking known as the Delegates' Bible.

S. Wells Williams dates the beginnings of the controversy to 1846.³¹ However, it most likely began in August 1843,³² at a meeting of Protestant missionaries held in Hong Kong. The purposes of this meeting were to reach an agreement on a revised version of the Bible and to seek approval for a new translation from both the British and American Bible societies. The crucial issue of how to translate God as well as other terms (such as soul, spirit, baptism and the Holy Spirit), was not resolved then; nor was it resolved at a later meeting in Shanghai in 1847. The missionaries were deeply troubled for, as William Boone remarked, "The question is one of the deepest moment; a mistake on this point affects almost every question in theology...."³³

Books, including those by European Orientalists, pamphlets, and articles appeared in the 1840s and 1850s, the latter for the most part in *The Chinese Repository*. The American and British Bible societies received and dispatched sheaves of correspondence. Except for a temporary lull in the 1860s, the controversy flared up again in the 1870s with a series of articles in *The Chinese Recorder*, when the Peking committee's translation effort was under way. And it surfaced with renewed vehemence when the Union Bible undertaking was in progress in the 1890s. The more recent controversy among both [209] Lutheran theologians and others in the 1920s and 1930s, stems from criticism of the Union Bible, published in 1919.³⁴

In the course of the Protestant controversy over terms, the questions remained unchanged, but the argumentation differed from those of the earlier Jesuits. The discourse underwent a change not only because the Protestant frame of reference differed from that of the Catholics, but also because modern biblical criticism had begun to emerge. Moreover, China at the decline of the Qing dynasty (1644-1912) was quite different from the China which had existed at the fall of the Ming dynasty in mid-seventeenth century. To define what was meant by the "True God," Protestants wished at the outset to differentiate between an absolute and a relative name. If the Tetragrammaton was considered an absolute name, Elohim would be a relative term. But which terms in Chinese were absolute, and which relative? Several came under consideration: Heaven (*Tian*) and *Shangdi*, which had confounded the Jesuits, and *Shen* and *di* (both divinity or god) together with *Tianzhu*, used by Chinese Catholics. Let us briefly remind ourselves of the meaning of these. *Tian*, as Heaven, is an ancient term and indicates a transcendental power. By Confucius' time it had acquired broader connotations related to the human condition in the here and now and to human destiny. *Shangdi* probably appears even earlier than Heaven in the Chinese religious and ritual vocabulary and, translatable as High Lord, indicates a god (*di*) who is above (*shang*) other gods. *Shen* has more complex meanings as God, singular and plural god and spirit (perhaps also god/spirit), and as an adjective meaning sacred and divine. Together with the question of absolute and relative terms, the Protestant missionaries revived the problem raised by the Jesuits: whether the Chinese had the idea of God. But they also raised new issues such as the nature and practice of Chinese religion and Chinese monotheism or polytheism.

Unlike the Jesuits, for whom translating and distributing the Bible had not been a major concern,³⁵ the Protestants ranked Bible reading as important as preaching and evangelizing. Early on Protestant mission presses produced Chinese Bibles along with catechisms, primers, tracts, partial Bible translations and numerous instructional materials. [210] In the first half of the nineteenth century, this published material used a variety of Chinese terms for God, without thought to uniformity. These inconsistencies were especially troubling to Walter Henry Medhurst (1796-1857), who counted no less than fourteen different terms for God, although there were probably even more.³⁶ Believing that a standardized terminology must be developed, Medhurst began his inquiry into a proper term for God by attempting to define the Chinese terms and the nature of Chinese religious thought, belief and practice. Unlike Christianity or Judaism, which, retained constant features over changes in time and place, the Chinese religious scene, Medhurst discovered, seemed infinitely variable and inconsistent.

Because the Chinese recognized or worshiped numerous major and minor deities or spirits and because of the prevalence of different pantheons, choosing the best term for God meant finding one that would indicate these deities' differences from God. According to Medhurst, the simple English language solution of distinguishing "God" from "gods," where readers know that "gods" were under no circumstances "God," was not possible in Chinese. He believed (contrary to Bishop Boone or James Legge) that the One God and the many gods required two different terms. The principal question which Medhurst tackled was what meanings to assign to *Shangdi*, *Tian* and *Shen*, in light of what these terms corresponded to in Chinese, and which of the three was synonymous with the Hebrew Elohim of the OT and the Greek Theos of the NT. Medhurst was not a highly educated man. After his church school elementary education, he was apprenticed to a printer at age fourteen, and he arrived in China at the age of twenty or twenty one. His Doctor of Divinity was bestowed by an American university in 1843.³⁷ Yet, during his decades in China he acquired an extensive knowledge of the Chinese Classics, the Song commentaries, and works which dealt with popular folk religion. In pursuit of the proper term for God and aided by his Chinese coworker, he embarked on an extensive research project.³⁸ [211]

To define *Shangdi* Medhurst first consulted the venerable and authoritative *Kangxi*

Dictionary, from which he concluded that *shang*—having the meaning of efficaciousness and supreme—and *di* (deity)—being immaterial, incorporeal and pre-existent before heaven and earth—does indeed denote a "High God." He systematically combed not only the Confucian Classics, including the *Great Learning* (Daxue) and the *Mencius* (Mengzi), but also works dealing with popular religion, like the *Scripture of the Three Wonderful Officials* (Sanguan miaojing), or the *Comprehensive Mirror of Holy Immortals* (Shenxian tongjian). In the latter, consisting of popular fictional biographies of immortals, myths and similar materials, *Shangdi* is variously referred to as a great deity (*dadi*), August heavenly high god (*Huangtian shangdi*), or Lord of heaven high lord (*Tianzhu shangdi*).³⁹ As far as Medhurst was concerned, this reaffirmed that *Shangdi* is perceived as having had no origin and not being produced, but as the source of creation since *di* produced and endowed all things with form.

An admirably thorough investigator, Medhurst did not rest content with establishing *Shangdi* as the proper term for God. He went on to show why *Shen* was not appropriate. Toward this end, he searched an early eighteenth century phrase dictionary, the *Beiwén yunfu*, copying out and translating each mention of *Shen*. This task led him to conclude that "no ingenuity can extract the idea of God from this class of quotations."⁴⁰ Medhurst was not far off the mark. The fact is that *shen* persistently meant spirit and/or deity.

Medhurst established an interesting distinction between *Shangdi* and *Shen* by resorting to the frequently used Chinese philosophical dichotomy of essence and function. *Di* is the source, he explained, the [212] *ti* or essence; the *shen* are emanations of *di* and are therefore *yong* or function. *Shangdi*, he argued, is synonymous with Heaven, and he supported this conclusion by referring to the Jesuit account of the Jews of Kaifeng who translated the Tetragrammaton as *Tian*: "... if Jews could conscientiously employ the word Heaven to denote God, that sufficiently indicates the sense in which the Gentile Chinese understood the term."⁴¹ *Shangdi* is also found, Medhurst continued, in this sense in the *Comprehensive Mirror of Holy Immortals*, where He is referred to as ruler (*zai*), or lord ruler (*zhuzai*). As such, He is unitary and independent. *Shangdi* issues the decrees of Heaven (*Tianming*), which are politically significant and without which a ruler on earth cannot govern. Thus, *Shangdi*, the "One Being" superintends mundane affairs. Finally, *Shangdi* is:

... a being, high and lilted up, shining gloriously, surveying this lower world, regarding the interests of mankind, taking account of human actions, considering the virtue of some, forbidding the irreverent approaches of others; designing, determining, governing, overspreading, approving or disapproving, possessing a mind... complacently accepting sacrifice, commanding, forbidding, speaking directly... and appearing in dreams and visions; all of those acts bespeaking personal individuality and distinct existence.⁴²

Therefore, as an absolute term and not a proper name, *Shangdi* can be used for translating God. But what did a Chinese person think when he said *Shangdi*? "If it be said, that the word Te [*di*] does not convey the same idea to the Chinese as the word God does to us, we reply, that the word God does *not convey any idea* [italics mine] at all, except as the persons who use it have been in the habit of attaching some idea to it."⁴³ Thus Medhurst ingeniously dismissed a crucial dilemma of "the idea of God," first raised by Matteo Ricci and then taken up by the Protestant missionaries. By dismissing the idea of God, Medhurst saw no need to tackle the touchy question whether the Chinese had the knowledge of God. I shall return to this question below.

William Boone's voice was loud and dissenting. Although his research could not compare with Medhurst's, Boone forcefully argued a contrary position, using as one of his major sources a work by the Jesuit Claude de Visdelou (1656-1737) with its appended essays by

Joseph-Henri-Marie de Premare (1666-1735) and Jean-Baptiste [213] Resgie (1663-1738). For Boone, the issue was between *Shen* and *di*. He therefore rejected Medhurst's, Gützlaff's and James Legge's use of *Shangdi*, while agreeing with Morrison's, Milne's and Marshman's use of *Shen*. He began his argument with the basic premise that the Chinese are polytheists and cannot therefore know the True God. With a polytheistic people, wrote Boone, a generic name must be used. And it must be a name for the "highest class of Beings," or one which has the most attributes, rather than the name of a chief deity. "In China," said Boone, "our first great warfare must from the necessity of the case, be against polytheism... ." Translators of the Bible into Chinese should use the model of translators into Greek and Latin, who did not translate the Hebrew Elohim with a proper name like Zeus or Jupiter. Elohim, Boone contended, is not a proper name for the True God. It is a generic term which must be rendered as such; in Chinese this is *Shen*, not *Shangdi*. The *Shen* are multiple, a "class of invisible Beings" that had always been worshiped by the Chinese. Thus Heaven, worshiped at the winter solstice, is actually the spirit of Heaven [*Tian zhi shen*] and this spirit of Heaven is *Shangdi*.⁴⁴ Other missionaries supported his argument that it was important to find a generic name, for "Without such a word, the claim of Jehovah to be the only living and true God... can never be clearly set forth."⁴⁵

God, Boone continued, refers to a self-existent spiritual Being of the visible and invisible world, the Creator of heaven and earth. Nowhere is *Shangdi* referred to in this way. Not a single passage in Chinese writings refers to God as "... self-existent from eternity, or that he out of preexisting matter made the heavens and the earth and all things that exist." Unlike Medhurst, Boone resorted to orthodox Song Confucian works (often in Jesuit translation), and he repeated Longobardi's arguments, possibly even based on the same passages about creation from Zhu Xi. According to Boone, *Shangdi*, in Zhu Xi's view, did not set the process of creation in motion. Creation was an impersonal process beginning with the Great Ultimate, principle, and vital energy.⁴⁶

Boone's quarrel with Medhurst was, however, mainly over *Shangdi* as a generic, all-inclusive, term, and whether it could be used for [214] translating God. Contrary to Medhurst, Boone took *Shangdi* to be a proper name of the "Chief Diety" of the Chinese. He quarreled with other participants in the controversy as well, especially with James Legge, who in 1852 went to great lengths to refute Boone's views. But before turning to Legge's argument, I shall return briefly to "the idea of God" that had been of some importance to the Jesuits and was revived in the Protestant controversy.

Medhurst, it will be recalled, argued that the idea of God is not conveyed by the word God, since no idea inheres in the term. Rather, people hold and attach ideas to the word. Medhurst thus implied that the idea of God is an individual construct. Boone dismissed the idea of God on different grounds, stating that, since it is quite impossible to form a conception of God, it is erroneous to claim that the word God refers to an idea. Medhurst had gotten it all wrong, wrote Boone. The point was not to discover whether the Chinese have a word that conveys the idea of God; the real issue was whether they know a Being who "can be known to be the same Being we Christians call God."⁴⁷ Horrified, Boone rejected George T. Staunton's assumption that "words are symbols of ideas."⁴⁸ To him, this apparently suggested that Chinese could never know God. Staunton had argued that a word which conveys "the idea which we Christians attach to the word God" cannot be expected to exist in the Chinese language. Therefore, the idea of God has to be implanted before belief in God can exist in China. Although obviously a Chinese convert should not be given a term for which he had to unlearn the meanings he had always attached to it, Staunton supported the use of *Shangdi* on the basis of expediency: it comes closer to the meanings attached to God in the West than any other Chinese term.⁴⁹

But Staunton hedged on the issue whether the Chinese ever had the idea of God in the past, and Boone justifiably took him to task for his "symbols of ideas." According to Staunton, even prior to the idea there must be the symbol, and if the symbol of God was not there, [215] neither was the idea. Some years later, Solomon Cesar Malan⁵⁰ did not even bother with the notion of symbol. He stated unequivocally that the term "God" exists in every language. All one must do is find it. Malan did not dismiss the idea of God. The issue, he argued, is not the name but the idea of God to be conveyed in translation. He agreed with Staunton that if the term in the target language cannot adequately express the new idea "it must be amended by teaching," and that replacing or introducing new terms should be avoided. In support of *Shangdi*, Malan wrote, "...if we wish to impart to a people new ideas, we must do it through the medium of those they already have." Malan, nonetheless, conceded that using a Chinese term like *Shangdi* might induce converts to worship the *Shangdi* known to the Chinese instead of the Western God.⁵¹ Like two hundred years earlier, when Longobardi had discussed the knowledge of God, the "idea of God" was not solved. It had, in fact, assumed new epistemological dimensions regarding the correspondence between ideas and names and whether a term for God even existed in the Chinese language.

In this discussion about the "idea of God" I have greatly simplified some extremely complex issues in Western philosophy raised by John Locke in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690). The discussions which these issues led to among Western philosophers form the necessary background to the missionaries' and theologians' quandary. Locke had argued that the existence of God is predicated on ideas; an enlargement of "simple ideas" form "... a complex one of existence, knowledge, power ... infinite and eternal" In short, ideas are manipulated by intelligence. David Hume (1711-1776) compounded the problem by stating that ideas are copied from prior impressions, and that if there is no impression there is also no idea.³²

The intrusion of these epistemological issues added fuel to the term controversy and ended in a head-on collision between William Boone and James Legge. A graduate of King's College in Aberdeen, Legge, with his formidable expertise in Chinese texts, took Boone to task for [216] relying more on Jesuit sources than on the Chinese Classics. Legge's forceful arguments derived not only from the Classics and their commentaries, but also included evidence from the works of Song and later scholars and the *Collected Ming Statutes* (*Daming huitian*) with its important references to religious and ritual observances. Legge's basic thesis, in distinction to Boone's, was that the Chinese had once had a monotheism—perhaps not a "pure" one—but a monotheism nonetheless. Therefore, they have the knowledge of the "true God," and this God is the same as the Christian God. Sole dependence on Song scholars had misled the Jesuits and Boone into wildly erroneous conclusions. By means of actual religious observances in the *Ming Statutes* Legge proposed to show the differences between *Shangdi* and *Shen*, and to prove that *Shangdi* is the "source" of existence. "He is the true God ... *Shang-Te* is self-existent. He existed before the heavens and the earth and men. He created these. He rules over them. His years have no end."⁵³

I shall try to sort out one important point of Legge's argument, that of God, the Creator. Legge's notion of an early Chinese monotheism was in part based on the longevity of the Chinese as a people. It was unthinkable, he wrote, for the nation to have existed for several millenia without knowing God. "... that which has been as salt preserving its parts from corruption and crumbling away, has been its ancient and modern holding to the doctrine of one only God."⁵⁴ Thus a residual Chinese monotheism remains in the historical reality of the long-lived Chinese empire. Legge still had to prove, however, that the Chinese *Shangdi* is the same as the God known in the West. To do this he showed that because *Shangdi* was thought of and worshiped as the source and the Creator of all existence, the Chinese therefore consider God as self-existent. In Legge's view, *Shen* was "spirit," or the many "spirits," and of a lower

order than *Shangdi*. God, the Creator, the Everlasting God, can be only partially discovered in Chinese philosophical texts, wrote Legge; He must be looked for elsewhere. Unlike Medhurst, who had a similar idea but turned to texts of popular religion for confirmation, Legge's search led him to observances of dynastic rituals. His sensitive apprehension that these observances were attempts to establish a connection with *Shangdi* as a living power was remarkable for the time. [217]

Legge argued that, in 1538, the Jiajing emperor of the Ming dynasty decided to alter the manner of addressing *Shangdi*. At a solemn ceremony the celestial and terrestrial spirits (*shen*) of sun, moon, clouds, hills and so on were notified that August heavenly *Shangdi* (*Huangtian Shangdi*) was henceforth to be used instead of Vast heavenly *Shangdi* (*Haotian Shangdi*). This event, according to Legge, proves conclusively that the spirits thus notified were considered subordinate to *Shangdi*, who is unitary, singular and one only, because not some but all of the spirits were notified.

Six days later, when the new address was finalized, "prayers," called songs (*yue*) were offered, which Legge described as not unlike the psalms. The opening song or prayer associated *Shangdi* with creation. In the beginning, the text stated, there were turbid mists (*hunmeng*); the five elements (*wu xing*) did not revolve; sun and moon had no light; there was no form (*rang*) or sound. The spirit of the exalted one (*shen huang*) emerged and began to divide the turbid (*zhu*) from the pure (*qing*), establishing heaven and man on earth, giving birth to all things and to life. Since this remarkable creation statement is part of the appellation change, Legge correctly assumed that the "spirit of the exalted [one]" referred to *Shangdi*.⁵⁵ From this and other passages used in this observance, Legge concluded that *Shangdi* must also be "self-existent," as he obviously existed before heaven and earth, indeed, before Creation. Therefore, Boone's argument about Chinese beliefs that primordial matter (*li* and *qi*) commenced creation are unfounded.

Legge obtained further confirmation from a document written by a Chinese Catholic, a certain Zhu Congyuan⁵⁶ from Zhejiang province. The Zhu family had been Roman Catholics for four generations and Legge acknowledged that Zhu's Christian beliefs conformed to Chinese beliefs. All the same, when Zhu referred to God, he used *Shangdi* and not *Tianzhu* (although he also used *zhu*, Lord). Zhu wrote, "There are no two Tes [*di*]." Also, "The ancients knew that it was Shang-Te [*Shangdi*] who in the beginning made all things (*wan wu*)."⁵⁷ Like Medhurst before him, Legge invoked the authority of the Kaifeng Jews to prove his case; he noted correctly that the Jews [218] rejected the worship of spirits (*shen* and *gui*) as idolatrous. But he stretched a point to make one by insisting that the Jews "have always considered *Shang-Te* to be the true God"⁵⁸ when, in fact, the Kaifeng inscriptions from the Ming and Qing dynasties refer to Heaven (*Tian*) and not to *Shangdi*.

Another major point of contention between Boone and Legge was the difference between the Tetragrammaton and Elohim or God of the OT. This involved the difference mentioned earlier between an absolute (or generic) and a relative term. Boone had argued that Elohim must be an absolute term, whereas Legge maintained that the Tetragrammaton was an absolute term. Even if both "denote the same Being," the Tetragrammaton is absolute and Elohim is relative. As Yehovah, wrote Legge, He is "as He is in Himself." As God, He is in relation to other beings.⁵⁹ Legge also rejected transliterating the Tetragrammaton, as Schereschewsky was to do a decade later, stating that the Chinese would understand it as a proper name and would therefore consider it another god. Instead, he was in favor of reproducing the meaning of the Tetragrammaton, proposing "self-existent" (*ziyouzhe*) and, when in combination with Elohim, "self-existent *Shangdi*" (*ziyou zhi shangdi*).⁶⁰

Thirteen years before the Peking Committee announced its intention to translate God as

Tianzhu, Legge had firmly rejected the term. *Tian*, he argued, relegates God to heaven when He is, in fact, the Lord of the universe. *Zhu* represents the idea of lord but not of ruler, and as *Tianzhu* is merely a synonym for *Shangdi*, it is better to use the latter. *Tianzhu* is also too closely associated with Roman Catholicism, after Pope Clement XI endorsed this term. "I stand upon my Protestant freedom," wrote Legge, "and decline to acknowledge it." *Tianzhu* "is no translation of Elohim or Theos." Legge objected to the term on two other counts: it was an innovation, and it was not used in any of the current Scripture translations.⁶¹ Among the other missionaries, aside from the three, discussed above, W.A.P. Martin wrote a series of letters addressed to the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions stating that, due to the divisiveness of this issue, missionaries might [219] best individually decide which term to use. Although Martin felt that *Shen* conformed more closely to Elohim and Theos (he changed his mind twelve years later), for grammatical reasons, *Shangdi* better expressed the "divine character" and is less susceptible to misinterpretation. Like Boone, Martin was certain that the Chinese did not ascribe creation to *Shangdi*, and he proposed accepting creation by *Shangdi* on faith.⁶² L.B. Peet, a Fuzhou missionary and himself a translator, injected a perspicacious note by proposing to eventually hand over the task of translating to the Chinese. Although Peet favored *Shen* over *Shangdi*, he believed a uniform terminology was out of the question at the present time.⁶³

In the course of this initial stage of the controversy (of which only a small portion is reproduced here), the participants were forced to examine their own beliefs while trying to understand the beliefs of the Chinese. But for men like Medhurst, Boone and especially Legge, the task of conveying the Christian message had assumed larger dimensions. The research projects which they undertook, and the Chinese sources they consulted and tried to interpret, had revealed new vistas of China's rich cultural heritage to them. Even if agreement on these terms was not reached then or later, the quest some embarked on had become a remarkable exercise in sinology.

The Peking Translating Committee and Tianzhu

By the 1860s, two basic camps had emerged: one advocated *Shen*, the other *Shangdi*. Proponents for one term or another continued to state their views in letters, pamphlets and articles. New issues were raised in the latter 1870s, but the basic positions for *Shen* or *Shangdi* remained unchanged. One of the new elements, however, added further fuel to the controversy once the Peking committee's translation effort got under way in the 1860s. This was their proposal to use *Tianzhu* for the name of God. The Peking translators did not want to become allies of either party, evidently hoping to rally the missionary community, or at least the northern missionaries, by using *Tianzhu*, the Roman Catholic term for God. As early as June 1863, Henry Blodget had written to the American Bible Society from Tianjin, [220] suggesting *Tianzhu* for God, and two years later, Schereschewsky wrote to the mission board that using *Shangdi* would obscure the meaning of an "absolute personal living God." *Tianzhu*, on the other hand, has not been used in an idolatrous sense, and the Chinese know that the term does not refer to any of their gods.⁶⁴ Early in autumn 1865, a paper urging this term was drawn up and circulated in Peking.⁶⁵ Schereschewsky and Blodget based their argument on the assumption that the Chinese were pantheists (to what extent Burdon, Edkins and Martin agreed is uncertain), and Blodget stated their case repeatedly in letters to the American Bible Society. According to him, *Shangdi* had been used "in a pantheistic sense" for a long time, making it impossible to equate this term with the Tetragrammaton.⁶⁶ He realized, of course, he wrote in 1867, that *Tianzhu* is "an appellation only, not a term, and we are driven to it by the necessities of the language," but he believed that it was nonetheless the best term under the circumstances.⁶⁷

In 1866, Joseph Edkins outlined the Peking Committee's position in a long letter, listing the

reasons for the committee's decision to use *Tianzhu*. Considering also the term for Holy Spirit (either *Shengling* or *Shengshen*), the committee had concluded that the use of the "new terms will promote harmony among the missionaries in north China" and provide a "basis of union" instead of continuing to foster divisiveness and controversy. Edkins considered the use of *Tianzhu* especially appropriate in Mandarin speaking areas, and he believed that the time and "opportunity for harmonizing the usage of Missionaries" had now arrived. Among his reasons for adopting *Tianzhu*, Edkins listed the fact that nearly one million Catholics were accustomed to it, and that Protestants who oppose the use of *Shangdi* consider *Tianzhu* an agreeable alternative. He did, however, concede that some maintain "...God as worshipped in any heathen country is not God, [and] that God cannot be known without revelation...." Opponents of *Tianzhu*, he continued, are convinced that agreement on terms is impossible; *Tianzhu* is inadequate, they argue; Catholics being especially unpopular now, possible identification with them is "very in-[221]convenient." Edkins did not minimize the strength of the southern opposition led by Griffith John, missionary in Central China, (whom Schereschewsky bitterly attacked some twenty years later for embarking on a new OT translation), but he apparently considered the partial support of the northern Tianjin and Chefoo (Yantai) missionaries sufficiently strong.⁶⁸ Having decided to use *Tianzhu*, the translators by no means ignored the ongoing controversy. Despite the excitement over their progress, their letters home often referred apprehensively to the Term Question.⁶⁹ Indeed, although the American Bible Society's 1867 "Report on Chinese Versions" cautiously permitted the use of *Tianzhu*,⁷⁰ objections to it, often caustically worded, continued to pour in from many quarters.

Whereas Blodget apparently thought that the opposition of southern missionaries could be overcome,⁷¹ W.A.P. Martin was more hesitant. To him it seemed that American missionaries in the south generally adhered to *Shangdi*. At the same time, he wrote in 1866, Shanghai and northern missionaries were increasingly adopting *Tianzhu*. He and others had "for years past made use of *Tien chu* to some extent in tracts and preaching."⁷²

By 1866, as some portions of the Bible neared completion, Schereschewsky stated his reasons for supporting *Tianzhu* in *The Spirit of Missions*. Writing that he had used this term in preaching and conversation all along, he pointed out that the main difficulty with *Shen* was its multiple meanings in Chinese: it can be plural for gods; it can designate goddesses; it may be an adjective, such as "divine." "In philosophical writings it often designates the pantheistical notion of deity pervading all things,⁷³ the principle of being by which all things [222] subsist." Like Boone, Legge and others, Schereschewsky stressed that God as Creator had to be clearly and unambiguously expressed. But, he maintained, to say that *Shen* created heaven and earth did not convey the idea of Creator, and to say "that Shangti created heaven and earth would be a positive untruth".

Schereschewsky ignored Legge's forceful argument and the evidence he had culled from the Ming statutes about *Shangdi*, although he was certainly familiar with the Boone, Medhurst and Legge debate of fourteen years earlier. He firmly rejected *Shangdi* as Creator, declaring the term to be "positively wrong." *Shangdi*, wrote Schereschewsky, "... is not a designation; it is the proper name of a certain being, or beings, in Chinese mythology." He came straight to the point:

The more I have examined native authorities as to the meaning of this term, the more I am convinced that to render God by Shangti, is simply to play into the hands of materialism or gross idolatry, to obscure, if not wholly to obliterate the cardinal doctrine of Revelation; namely the existence of an absolute personal living God, independent of and above nature."⁷⁴

Whereas some missionaries, despite misgivings, use *Shangdi* for the sake of expediency,

Schereschewsky argued that others, "as one of that party blasphemously asserts," say that he is the true God. He could have been referring here to none other than Legge, but his argument against *Shangdi* lacked the sophistication that Legge had mustered on behalf of *Shangdi*. According to Schereschewsky, Heaven and *Shangdi* were synonymous in Confucius' view (did he forget that the *Analects* never mention *Shangdi*?)⁷⁵, as they also were in Sima Qian's, the eminent Han dynasty historian who, in addition, identified *Shangdi* with the Five Sage Emperors. Moreover, in popular usage, wrote Schereschewsky, *Shangdi* is considered to be the Jade Emperor.

Schereschewsky also justified his choice of *Tianzhu* for practical reasons: the Chinese more or less know what the word means; it has never referred to idols; Catholics and Greek Orthodox clergy use it in their religious books. And he rejected transliterating terms like Elohim because that would lead to a meaningless combination of Chinese characters with no association for Chinese readers or listeners to "a sublime idea as that of God." Although Schereschewsky did not develop this point, he apparently subscribed to views similar to [223] those of Malan, who had argued that "the idea of God" must be conveyed by the term. Finally, he hoped that if only all those who oppose *Shangdi* would unite behind *Tianzhu* instead of forming a third party, the Term Question would be resolved.⁷⁶ Neither in this nor in a later article of 1888,⁷⁷ did Schereschewsky refer to his own, specific solutions for translating the OT's several terms. He apparently added his voice to the controversy because he was then attempting to develop his own consistent terminology to indicate the differences between the Tetragrammaton, Elohim, El and Adonai.

It is clear that Schereschewsky and Blodget had recourse to the same Jesuit works in which Boone had sought confirmation for his views. It hardly seems accidental (notwithstanding the competence of his Chinese coworkers) that the Jesuit Jean-Francoise Foucquet and Blodget some two hundred years later referred to the same event in Sima Qian's *Record of History* (*Shiji*), namely the First Emperor's sacrifice to the eight gods (*ba shen*), one of whom was named *tianzhu*.⁷⁸ Nor was it a coincidence that Schereschewsky and Burdon used the same term, High Lord (*Shangzhu*), in their partial 1863 translation of the prayerbook,⁷⁹ which Alexandre de la Charme had used in his 1753 *True Explanations of Natural Philosophy* (*Xingli zhenquan*).⁸⁰ Granted that a translator, not wishing to use the Catholic *Tianzhu*, might very well have substituted high for heaven (as was done in an 1847 translation of the Decalogue)⁸¹, it is also likely that both men adopted *Shangzhu* from de la Charme.

The Peking committee was fully aware of the major positions on the Term Question, those taken both a decade earlier and in their own day. In retrospect Edkins', Schereschewsky's or Blodget's naiveté is therefore quite startling: could they really have expected to rally a majority of the missionaries behind their term? For while they may [224] have considered their position a fairly strong one since their Mandarin translation was the first one and had a much larger potential audience than any other translation, they completely underestimated the growing fierce opposition to *Tianzhu*. The opponents were especially strong in the south, where missionaries more than once expressed their concern that the Chinese might mistake Protestants for Catholics. In 1866, Robert Nelson penned his vigorous opposition which, as was discussed in Chapter 5, culminated in his charge of Romanism against Schereschewsky some twenty years later. Nelson argued that Catholic practices, evident in Catholic churches are not incompatible with idolatry, and that *Tianzhu* would therefore pave the way for introducing polytheistic worship into the Protestant Church. Loyal supporting Boone, Nelson wrote that only *Shen* could prevent error.⁸²

Contrary to what one might assume, the Peking committee did not make a major effort to persuade missionaries elsewhere that their term was preferable. To be sure, Blodget and Edkins wrote letters, as did Schereschewsky; but neither these nor later statements (e.g.

Blodget's 1893 pamphlet) answered the attacks on *Tianzhu*. Wishing "to promote harmony," as Edkins put it, might have been the major reason why they abstained from attacking their opponents. Yet their statements on behalf of *Tianzhu* lack the sophisticated rhetoric brought to their argument by men like Legge. Finally, they might have hoped that the end product—the translated Bible itself—would carry sufficient weight to convince the missionary community of the correctness of their choice. This was not to be. In years thereafter, the British and Foreign Bible Society printed its Bibles with *Shangdi*, and the American Bible Society printed its with either *Shen* or *Tianzhu*.

Some Later Views

Shortly before the Shanghai Missionary Conference of 1877, a spate of letters debating the Term Question appeared in *The Chinese Recorder*. Most were written by (younger?) missionaries active in south China, who emphasized not only the importance of considering linguistic differences between southern and northern provinces, but also stressed Chinese religious pluralism.

Several of these missionaries raised a significant issue, not sufficiently considered earlier: how Chinese convert-teachers and their [225] listeners—both educated and illiterate—understood the terms for God. The major question was not, as one letter writer indicated, what foreigners thought; it was more important to understand how Chinese explained the terms. Elite and popular explanations differed, as Schereschewsky had pointed out earlier. *Shangdi* was readily identified by the literate with Heaven, whereas when the illiterate referred to Heaven, they did not necessarily identify it with *Shangdi*. *Shen* was coupled by both literate and illiterate Chinese with malevolent spirits (*gui*) as well as with ancestral spirits. True (*zhen*) *Shen* made no sense to either group, for there was no such thing as a false *shen*. Others writers pointed out that converts tended to prefer the terms their teachers used, and that no one was particularly upset if two different chapels used two different terms. There were also letters suggesting that local customs play a role. A writer from Fuzhou indicated that the Christians there preferred *Shangdi*, whereas another writer, from nearby Amoy (Xiamen), noted that *Shangdi* was invariably identified with the August Jade Emperor (*Yuhuang Shangdi*). Since both cities are in the same geographic area, it seems that there were significant local differences in the southeast. Some writers even suggested that it might not matter which term was used as long as it was "christianized" and conveyed the meaning of the Supreme God.⁸³ Another letter writer, who apparently considered this reasonable, stated that no Bible translations in any language had an exact equivalent to the Hebrew "ground term." Thus, he argued that all terms in translation are "analogous," including the Greek, and old terms must therefore be infused with new meaning. In this he referred to the authority of the Rev. Dr. Wm. Henry Green of Princeton, who had written that "Words are the representations of mental conceptions or mental states..." and "The style of thought and mode of conception belonging to any one people must differ from that of every other...."⁸⁴

These letters reveal new concerns. One is the necessity to understand more clearly how Chinese conceptualize the various terms. Another is related to China's vastness, to differences between geographical areas and their folk religions and local customs. Even if [226] these new concerns were not widely shared, some missionaries nonetheless brought new assumptions to their task. Imperceptibly attention was also being shifted to the Chinese themselves, no longer as completely inchoate recipients, but as intelligent beings in their infinite variety.

The Term Question was also taken up by missionaries writing in Chinese⁸⁵ and by Chinese Christians. Some of the latter based their attempts at clarifying the Chinese terms on the Bible itself, while others drew on Chinese philosophical and historical works for explanations. As

did most missionaries, the Chinese too tried to show how either *Shangdi* or *Shen* (sometimes both together) were appropriate terms. However, the manner in which they presented their arguments and the vocabulary they resorted to was substantially different from that of the Western missionaries. To what extent these essays might be considered among the first tentative steps in an evolving Chinese theology is an important question which cannot be considered here.

Some writers stressed the Lord as Creator (*chuangzao zhu*) who, according to the Hebrew OT, is the Tetragrammaton (*Yehehua*). He is God (*Shen*) as known in the West and in China and whom the people of the world worship. The Greek NT might use a different name, but it is nevertheless the same Lord the Creator.⁸⁶ *Yehehua*, stated another writer, is God (*Shen*) who created heaven and earth and the ten thousand things. From heaven *Yehehua* continues to look after his creation because He is the Lord Ruler (*zhuzai*), and by His grace He created man and endowed him with a soul (*ling*).⁸⁷

Huang Pinsan (1823-1890), a Southern Baptist and prolific writer on biblical subjects,⁸⁸ wrote that the West has the concept of one Lord (*zhu*) and only one word to designate Him. But in Chinese one can say either *Shen* or *Shangdi*.⁸⁹ Other writers did not put it that simply. Kao Zhenzi differentiated between name (*ming*) and appellation (*hao*). A person has a name, Kao argued, and he has appellations. [227] Similarly, God is the name and He has different appellations. But the difference between name and appellation is not the same as the difference between an absolute and a relative term, discussed by the missionaries. Kao, when writing *Yehehua Shen* (God Yehovah), meant it to be taken as one term, and he explained it as the self-existent name revealed to man. Stressing the importance of understanding *Shen* in the broadest possible way—omniscient, omnipotent, naturally self-existent (*ziran er'an*), beginningless, endless—Kao added still another term (or appellation, according to his argument): that of True Ruler (*Zhenzai*).⁹⁰ Although Kao's sagacious explanations were apparently not pursued, the idea of multiple terms was not seen as problematic by men like Kao and later Chinese writers who were to develop far more sophisticated approaches to the term problem. Chinese writers increasingly pleaded for recognizing that Christianity in China must accord with the Chinese people's established ways of thinking, as part of a Chinese scholarly discourse. If the Chinese language could not yield the one word that adequately expressed the concept of God, different terms would have to be used to express the multiplicity of God's work.⁹¹ John Burdon and C. Hartwell had said as much previously when they suggested that all five terms—*Shangdi*, *Shen*, *Zhu*, *Shangzhu* and *Tianzhu*—be used until such time that the Chinese Church would make its decision on the subject.⁹²

Meanwhile, in a kind of gearing-up exercise for the 1877 Missionary Conference, John Chalmers once again turned to written Chinese sources to determine how various terms, including *Shen* and *Shangdi*, were used in these. Reminiscent of Medhurst's efforts almost thirty years earlier, Chalmers searched the Classics, Daoist philosophers, even the *Lushi chunqiu* and *Guanzi*,⁹³ in addition to major Tang dynasty poets. He was not interested, Chalmers told his readers, in absolute or relative terms. What mattered was to find a term in Chinese that corresponds as closely as possible to God. He dismissed [228] *Tianzhu* as a mere "definition" of *di* and *Shangdi*, and he dismissed *shen* because it simply referred to god or gods. *Shangdi*, wrote Chalmers, has been used for Heaven personified and is used by both Confucians and Daoists. Even if it is not the Tetragrammaton, Theos or the God of the English Christians, it does refer to the Highest and is therefore most suitable.⁹⁴

But both Chalmers and S. Wells Williams, whose article appeared a year later, stated their choices in far more tentative terms than Boone and Legge had done twenty-odd years earlier. Williams pointed out that one could not expect to find the idea of God in China or in the Chinese language. The many terms that had been either advanced or used were descriptive or

proper names (as are the Tetragrammaton or Aloha), and not generic terms (as are Elohim or Theos). Williams rejected the use of *Shangdi* for a variety of reasons, but specifically because he believed that people confused it with August Heavenly (*Huangtian*) *Shangdi* and August Jade (emperor) *Shangdi*. In spite of its broader connotations, and aware of its meaning of "spirit," Williams held out more hope for *Shen*. He acknowledged the term's pantheistic implications as well as the problem of its singular and plural usages; but he believed that with increased knowledge of the Bible it would also be understood in a more limited sense.⁹⁵

Williams also correctly stressed that the worship of *Shangdi* alone was an imperial prerogative, as well as a state religious ritual in which the common people had no part. Contrary to Legge's conclusion,⁹⁶ Williams wrote that this state ritual, with its ceremonial at Peking's altars of Heaven and Earth, was based on Chinese cosmogonic notions which differed completely from the Western belief in Creation.

Williams important summary recapitulating the arguments of Boone, Medhurst, Legge and others, supplied still another element of which he, as a long term resident of Peking, was well aware. This was the imperial rites performed by the emperor and his family which had to be considered and differentiated from more popular ritual activities. Similarly, the beliefs and assumptions in the classical literature on which these rites were based had to be understood. All the same, Williams might have also shown that actual observances did not necessarily correlate with either descriptions or prescriptions in China's classical and philosophical literature. But, like the letter writers in *The Chinese Recorder* who increasingly saw a diverse rather than a monolithic China, Williams too supplied yet another fragment to aid Western understanding of the Chinese mosaic.

By the time Williams article appeared in 1878, the American Bible Society had printed the entire Mandarin Bible, using different terms in different portions. Also, by 1878 Schereschewsky had been consecrated Bishop of China, and he and his wife were lobbying for funds in the United States with which to build St. John's College. The 1877 General Conference of the Protestant Missionaries of China in Shanghai, from which he was therefore absent discussed the Term Question, but agreed to omit referring to it in the published record.⁹⁷ Indeed, so explosive had the term problem become that a paper submitted by James Legge and debated at the conference, "Confucianism in Relation to Christianity," was excluded from the proceedings. In this paper Legge not only reiterated his conviction that *Shangdi* was the correct term, he also forcefully urged using Confucianism as the road to Christianity.⁹⁸ However, despite the exclusion of such controversial ideas from the record, the official silence could not disguise the continuing differences among the missionaries.

Resolution of the Term Question acquired added urgency when the missionaries next met in 1890 to decide, among other reasons, whether to undertake a Union version of the Bible. Due to the ever deepening divisions among proponents of one term or another, and the increasingly acrimonious language of the debate, the conference resolved to avoid discussing the issue in official meetings.⁹⁹ Nonetheless a short article by Schereschewsky, who was still in the United States in 1890, was read into the record, perhaps because it alluded only in passing to the Term Question. Schereschewsky wrote that compromise was possible and should be considered instead of clinging to individual preferences. He therefore suggested that the conference appoint a committee to deal with it.¹⁰⁰ Somewhat later, Blodget too sounded a conciliatory note when he stated apprehensively that the current crop of missionaries, having inherited the problem from their predecessors, might hand it on to yet another generation.¹⁰¹ The choice, he curiously seemed to believe, was now only between *Shangdi* and *Tiamzhu*,¹⁰² and he again urged adopting the latter. Yet, unlike Schereschewsky who had pleaded for compromise, Blodget asked the *Shangdi* supporters to concede the point. He seemed unaware that this was even less likely to be accepted by them than compromise.

Moreover, instead of bringing proof for *Tianzhu's* greater suitability, Blodget decided to refute the objections against it one by one. Among nine such objections, he discussed at length the Protestants' fear of being mistaken for Roman Catholics if they used the same term for God. According to Blodget:

The true Christian, be he Protestant or Roman Catholic, belongs to the Church of God, also to the Church of the Lord Jesus: and he places himself at a disadvantage before the heathen when he denies that he belongs to the one or to the other. They both accept and teach the great facts of the Christian religion as stated in the Apostles' Creed, and they both reject and oppose... idolatry....¹⁰³

The Protestant missionaries, like the Jesuits before them encountered a highly literate civilization. For both learning Chinese was learning how to speak local languages as well as how to read in what seemed to be yet another language. The Jesuits were more dependent than the later Protestants on Chinese classical works together with their commentaries for their reading matter, since the Protestants had already access to some Christian materials in Chinese. Reading Chinese books led many Protestant missionaries into excursions in sinology under the guidance of their Chinese coworkers, all men with traditional classical education. The libraries which Legge¹⁰⁴ and Medhurst accumulated attest to the broad learning of their coworkers who were no doubt instrumental in assembling them. The missionaries thus gained access to some major works of Chinese poetry, even [231] fiction, philosophy and history,¹⁰³ leading many among them to understand and respect considerable portions of China's rich literary tradition. But having become literate in Chinese made the task of finding the proper and right term for God infinitely more complex. Which of the Chinese works could be considered conclusively authoritative to their quest? The Classics? Orthodox Song commentaries? Dictionaries? Poetry from the *Book of Songs* or by Tang poets?

The Protestants' perplexity was as great as that of the Jesuits before them. But, whereas papal decree had ended the Jesuit dilemma, no such authoritative ruling was forthcoming for the Protestants. Their publishers, the Bible societies, might have done so, but they were doing a brisk business in China; Bibles were selling well regardless of the term used. Even if they might have liked to see an end to the protracted controversy, there were no practical reasons to force a decision which, in any event, not all missionaries would be willing to accept. In 1896, and again in 1903, John R. Hykes, the American Bible Society agent, reported on the sales of Mandarin Bibles. In 1902, two-thousand copies of the *Shen* edition had sold out before it was even printed, and one thousand five hundred copies of the *Tianzhu* edition were on order.¹⁰⁶ For want of a better solution the British and Foreign Bible Society printed Schereschewsky's OT and the Peking committee's NT with *Shangdi*.

Neither the Jesuits nor the Protestants regarded the Term Question separately from other questions of belief. Fundamental among these was whether the Chinese had once had the idea or knowledge of God, as Ricci and Legge maintained, or whether no such knowledge existed, as Longobardi and Boone asserted. This was a crucial question, with consequences for the missionary enterprise in China. For, if God had been known at one time, then monotheism was not altogether foreign and the missionaries' task was to reintroduce the Chinese to the idea of God. If, however, God had never been known and the Chinese had always been polytheists, the missionaries' work was entirely different. In this context, the Classics also had a different function for either monotheist or polytheist proponents. If God was known, one would find mention of Him in the ancient writings. How a missionary solved the Term Question, to which term he committed himself, was not only a problem of translating; it was also related to these larger issues. [232]

Belief in Creation by a self-existent God was another important ingredient of monotheist

belief. If, indeed, God had been known at some time, then He must be also known as Creator of the universe. Monotheism and God, the Creator, self-existent before creation, were inseparable. Monotheism was irreconcilable with an impersonal process of creation like the one stipulated by Song Confucians. However, neither the Classics nor Chinese philosophy could be made to yield convincing evidence for God, the Creator. Legge's discovery of the remarkable series of songs in the *Collected Ming Statutes*, which assigned creation to *Shangdi*, was therefore important, but failed to convince the missionary community. Yet, no *Shen* proponent had ever found similarly extensive creation materials in the literature.

In choosing *Tianzhu*, the Peking translators too brought larger assumptions to the Term Question by juxtaposing monotheism to a Chinese pantheism. But I must state this more cautiously, for the most active advocates of pantheism were Blodget and Schereschewsky. Pantheism, generally defined as "God is everything and everything is God," was in Blodget's words "pantheistic nature-worship." He must have had in mind here the gods and goddesses, deities or spirits, thought to preside over the natural landscape. Although this is not pantheism and does not fit the definition of nature worship, Blodget's assumption of a pantheistic nature worship led him to conclude that it was not reconcilable with revelation, or the preparatory revelation in Judaism. Ultimately, Blodget and Schereschewsky were convinced of the simple practicality of using *Tianzhu*, Lord of Heaven: it combined the abstract with the personal; it invoked the Heaven known to all Chinese; it eliminated all associations with a pantheon and worship of a lesser deity.

Another consideration is significant. One assumption in the controversy, held by some, had been that a Chinese term equivalent to the Western could be found. This was the basic idea in the quest for a generic term, as argued by Boone and others. However, in later years, missionaries seemed to have abandoned the search for equivalency. Together with the hardening of positions it was also desirable to find a way out of the quandary. The Peking committee's *Tianzhu* was not considered equivalent to God and, as Blodget hastened to write in 1867, was "an appellation only." It might have seemed a neat solution. However, the Peking group's position vis-à-vis the Term Question was the weakest of all. Unlike other participants in the controversy, they made insufficient, if any, use of theological authority to bolster their argument. In the end, their apparent reticence to stir up further controversy did not contribute to making their position a viable option. [233]

The few Chinese who began to address the problem brought their own assumptions to the controversy.¹⁰⁷ Their philosophical baggage was different from that of the missionaries. Although what they had to say was apparently peripheral to the missionaries' arguments, since with few exceptions they did not respond to them, the Chinese views are nonetheless revealing. The notion of an ineffable Name and qualifying names, clearly distinguishable by *ming* and *hao*, name and appellation, made sense in Chinese. God, un-named, as it were, was *Shen* and was preceded by the name of that *shen*. The Jade Emperor was a *shen*, and no Chinese could possibly mistake him for Yehovah *Shen*. A Chinese Christian would know God was not God among other gods, even if non-believers might think Him one of many other *shen* until told otherwise. In this argument, however, the distinction between the sacred Name (according to the OT) and other names was obliterated, so that the Tetragrammaton as Name was not seen as different from other names. Yet, from this point of view, *Shen* was better than *Shangdi*, and may be the reason why Schereschewsky eventually dropped his objections to the term whereas he remained adamantly opposed to *Shangdi* for much longer.

Without the imposition of a solution, the term controversy continued. As time went on, positions hardened when men in the mission field increasingly exerted themselves to prove the correctness of their views. To this might be added the growing competition among Protestant denominations and Bible translators, vying with one another for attention from the

Bible societies. Schereschewsky's several caustic comments about would-be translators who lacked the requisite competence make it abundantly clear that, by 1890, the days of amiable cooperation among missionaries were long past. In the final analysis, foreign missionaries were incapable of solving the Term Question. A solution could only be reached by taking account of Chinese culture and her religious traditions. Speaking of the Bible in African languages, but applicable to the Chinese situation, Lamin Sanneh writes that "Translatability presupposed cultural pluralism by assuming that linguistic variety was needed for the word of God."¹⁰⁸ In China not only the word of God, but also the word for God as far as Bible translation was concerned, demanded linguistic variety.

Notes

- 1 Although the problem of translating the "Holy Spirit" (*Shengling* or *Shengshen*) was often part of the missionaries' debates, I omit these arguments here since translating that term pertained to the New Testament.
- 2 CWM Library, Pam Vol. 70, "Catalogue of the London Mission Library," pp. 38-39.
- 3 John Wherry, "Historical Summary of the Different Versions of the Scriptures," *Records of the General Conference of the Protestant Missionaries, 1890*, Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1890, p. 47.
- 4 *General Description of Shanghai and Its Environs, Extracted from Native Authorities*, Shanghai: Mission Press, 1850, p. 159. A ceremonial arch (*pailou*) was erected in his memory at his native place.
- 5 M. L'Abbe Huc, *Christianity in China, Tartary, and Thibet*, London: Longman, Browne, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1857, 3 vols.
- 6 Paul A. Rule, *K'ung-tzu or Confucius? The Jesuit Interpretation of Confucianism*, Sidney: Allen and Unwin, 1986, p. 8. *Tianzhu* came into use rather by accident. A Chinese convert in charge of the altar during Ricci's and other missionaries' absence had no sacred image and therefore, in accordance with Chinese custom, he wrote the two characters on a tablet.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 74. Longobardi's disquisition, "A Short Answer Concerning the Controversies about Xang, Tien, Xin, and Ling Hoen (that is the King of the Upper Region, Spirits, and Rational Soul Assign'd by the Chinese) and Other Chinese Terms; to Clear which of Them May Be Us'd by the Christians of these Parts. Directed to the Fathers of the Residences in China, that They May Peruse it, and Then Send Their Opinions Concerning it to the Visitor at Macao," in Dominic Fernandez Navarette, *An Account of the Empire of China, Historical, Political, Moral and Religious, Written in Spanish, in A Collection of Voyages and Travels, Some Now First Printed from Original Manuscripts*, London: Printed for Awusham and John Churchill, 1704, 4 vols. Navarette's account is contained in Vol. I, pp. 1-424. Longobardi's account is Book V, pp. 183-224. For the background of Longobardi's account and its inclusion in Navarette, see Claudia von Collani, "The Treatise on Chinese Religions (1623) of N. Longobardi, S.J.," *Sino-Western Cultural Relations Journal*, 17 (1995), pp. 29-37.
- 8 The Classics (*jing*) are a set of texts considered canonical due to their antiquity and their association with the name of Confucius. Six Classics are already mentioned in the fourth century B.C., but their standardization dates only from 136 B.C. The number of texts considered canonical has varied over the centuries. Today's thirteen Classics were established in the Song dynasty.
- 9 Rule, *K'ung-tzu or Confucius?*, pp. 34, 77.
- 10 John W. Witek, S.J., *Controversial Ideas in China and in Europe: A Biography of Jean-Francoise Fouquet, S.J. (1665-1741)*, Rome: Institutum Historicum, S.I., 1982, p. 272.
- 11 Rule, *K'ung-tzu or Confucius?*, pp. 33-43. Regarding Ricci's critique of Buddhism, see also the perceptive comments by Timothy Man Kong Wong, "Matteo Ricci's Mission to Chinese Buddhism," *Ching Feng*, Vol. 33, no. 4 (December 1990), pp. 205-231. I am grateful to Lauren Pfister for alerting me to this article.

- 12 This is convincingly argued by Monika Übelhör, "Geistesströmungen der späten Mingzeit, die das Wirken der Jesuiten in China begünstigen," *Saeculum*, Vol. 23, no. 2 (1972), pp. 172-185. The rich volume by Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed., *Self and Society in Ming Thought*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1970, gives an excellent overview of the variety of Ming thought.
- 13 For the various edition of this work, see Xu Zongzi, *Ming Qing jian Yesuishi yizhu tiyao* (An outline of Jesuit publications in the Ming and Qing), Taipei: Zhonghua, 1958, p. 350. For the problems connected with the composition of Ricci's work, see Wong, "Matteo Ricci's Mission."
- 14 Matteo Ricci, S.J., translated with introduction and notes, by Douglas Lancashire and Peter Hu Kuo-chen, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (T'ien-chu shi-i), Taipei: Ricci Institute, 1985, pp. 120, 122-124. *Varietes Sinologiques-Nouvelle Serie*, no. 72. (my translation).
- 15 Ibid., pp. 124-126.
- 16 Ibid., pp. 128, 130.
- 17 Rule, *K'ung-tzu or Confucius?*, pp. 74, 87-88.
- 18 Ibid., p. 86. Longobardi's treatise, "A Short Answer...", writes Rule, was a private document, and was not intended for publication; it was something like a "position paper" and should not be regarded as Longobardi's definitive views. See also Claudia von Collani, "Der Deutsche Philosoph Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz zum Chinesischen Ritenstreit," *Sino-Western Cultural Relations Journal*, 16 (1994), p. 47, who writes that Longobardi's treatise was meant for internal discussions within the Jesuit order. My use of the treatise here is not so much to prove what Longobardi believed as to show how the argument was constructed.
- 19 Longobardi, "A Short Answer ...," pp. 184-185.
- 20 Ibid., p. 189.
- 21 Ibid., pp. 189, 205.
- 22 Ibid., p. 196.
- 23 Ibid., pp. 197-198.
- 24 Ibid., p. 201.
- 25 Ibid., pp. 203, 221, 218.
- 26 Bouvet in a letter to Leibniz, in Collani, "Der Deutsche Philosoph," p. 42.
- 27 Claudia von Collani, *P. Joachim Bouvet S.J., Sein Leben und sein Werk*, Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 1985, pp. 136, 139, 211. Bouvet belonged to the so-called Figurists whose Christian exegesis consisted in searching the Old Testament for figurative meanings. These, it was assumed, would point to future Christian developments.
- 28 This was still a live issue in the Lutheran Church well into the 1930s. Several archives of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod contain collections of correspondence, minutes of meetings, etc. on the Term Question. See also two pamphlets by George O. Lillegard, *The Chinese Term Question*, Boston, 1929, and *The Chinese Term Question, An Analysis of the Problem and Historical Sketch of the Controversy*, n.d. Courtesy of the Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, Mankato, Minnesota.
- 29 Marshman's NT translation had appeared earlier, in 1811, in Serampore, India, followed by Morrison's NT in 1813, published in Canton. According to an entry in his journal for 10 January 1808, Morrison already pondered how to translate God while he was still learning Chinese. Should he use *Tianzhu*, or "...words which are commonly understood by the heathen to denote spiritual and superior beings...."? Eliza Morrison, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of Robert Morrison ...*, London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1839, Vol. I, pp. 200-201.
- 30 The Morrison and Milne translation had used *Shen* to which the French Sinologist Joseph Abel Remusat objected as early as 1825. Remusat rejected the need for any term other than *Tianzhu*. Quoted in CWM Library 05/12, Pams 65, "The National Religion of China, As Illustrative of the Proper Word for Translating 'God' into the Chinese Language. Being an

Extract from the Bishop of Victoria's Charge to the Anglican Clergy, Delivered at Shanghai, China, on October 20th, 1853." Shanghai: Herald, 1853.

- 31 S. Wells Williams, "The Controversy Among the Protestant Missionaries on the Proper Translation of the Words God and Spirit into the Chinese," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 35 (October 1878), p. 739. I thank Professor Lauren Pfister for making a copy of this article available to me.
- 32 See the excellent summary of the controversy during the first twenty years by Douglas G. Spelman, "Christianity in Chinese: The Protestant Term Question," *Papers on China*, Last Asian Research Center, Harvard University, May 1969, Vol. 22A, pp. 25-52.
- 33 William J. Boone, *An Essay on the Proper Rendering of the Words Elohim and Theos into the Chinese Language*, Canton: The Chinese Repository, 1848, p. v. (bound together with W.H. Medhurst, sen., *A Dissertation on the Theology of the Chinese with a View to the Elucidation of the Most Appropriate Term for Expressing the Deity in the Chinese Language*, Shanghai: The Mission Press, 1847).
- 34 Lillegard, *The Chinese Term Question*, pp. 34-36.
- 35 The earliest complete translation into Chinese of both the OT and NT, the *Guxin shengjing* (Old and new holy scripture) seems to be by Louis de Poirot (1735-1814), who came to China in 1770. See Xu Zongxi, *An Outline of Jesuit Publications*, p. 417. S. Wells Williams, "The Controversy Among the Protestant Missionaries," p. 775, complained that Catholic converts did not know the Bible because it was neither distributed nor taught in China.
- 36 W.H. Medhurst, sen., *An Inquiry into the Proper Mode of Rendering the Word God in Translating the Sacred Scriptures into the Chinese Language*, Shanghai: The Mission Press, 1848, pp. 158-159 (bound together with Medhurst, *A Dissertation on the Theology*).
- 37 Alexander Wylie, *Memorials of Protestant Missionaries to the Chinese, Giving a List of Their Publications, and Obituary Notices of the Deceased*, Taipei: Cheng-wen Publishing Co., reprint, 1967, pp. 40-41.
- 38 According to Spelman, "Christianity in Chinese", p. 46 n., Wang Tao, who was then Medhurst's tutor, may have introduced him to these books. See also Jane K. Leonard, "W.H. Medhurst: Rewriting the Missionary Message," in Suzanne W. Barnett and John K. Fairbank, eds., *Christianity in China, Early Protestant Missionary Writings*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985, pp. 47-59, who describes Medhurst as "...a respected scholar, linguist, and China expert...."
- 39 W.H. Medhurst, *A Dissertation on the Theology of the Chinese*, pp. 260, 205-227, 240-248. *The Scripture of the Three Wonderful Officials* may be a version of the *Yuanshi Tianzun shuo san guan bao hao jing* (Primordials honored of Heaven doctrine of the three officials' precious signs scripture). The three officials rank just below the Jade Emperor and are those of Heaven, Earth and Water. The *Comprehensive Minor* is the *Lidai Shenxian Tongjian* (Comprehensive mirror of successive divine immortals), by Xu Dao (fl. 17th century). Reprinted in *Zhongguo minjian xinyang ziliao huibian*, edited by Wang Qjugui and Li Fengmao. Taipei: Taiwan Xuesheng Shuju, 1989, 8 vols. For the description and history of this work, which reflects the "Three Teachings" religious views, see Vol. 1, pp. 13-15. These and other books were in Medhurst's library. See, CWM Library, Pam Vol. 70, "Catalogue of the London Mission Library," pp. 87, 91.
- 40 CWM Library, N 6/8, Pam 4. W.H. Medhurst, "On the True Meaning of the Word Shin, as Exhibited in the Quotations Adduced under that Word, in the Chinese Imperial Thesaurus, Called the Pei-Wan-Yun-Foo," 1849. This work, consisting of 10,257 characters arranged under 106 rhymes, was ordered by the Kangxi emperor in 1704. It was compiled by Zhang Yushu and others and was published in 1711.
- 41 Medhurst, *An Inquiry*, pp. 5, 19, 18, 21.
- 42 *Ibid.*, pp. 29, 35, 36, 38, 43.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 86.

- 44 William J. Boone, *An Essay on the Proper Rendering of the Words Elohim and Theos*, pp. v, 2, 4, 8, 25.
- 45 L.N.N., "Remarks on the Words Shin and Ti," *The Chinese Repository*, 19, no. 2 (February 1850), pp. 90-94. Letter to the editor.
- 46 William J. Boone, *Defense of an Essay on the Proper Rendering of the Words Elohim and Theos into the Chinese Language*, Canton: The Chinese Repository, 1850, pp. 8, 20, 25, 26-27, 30, 31-36, 68, 70, (bound together with Medhurst, *A Dissertation*).
- 47 Medhurst, *An Inquiry*, p. 86, and Boone, *Defense of an Essay*, pp. 6, 8.
- 48 I am grateful to Lauren Pfister for reminding me that the discussion about ideas and words and the epistemological problems related to these hark back to issues raised by John Locke (1632-1704).
- 49 Sir George Thomas Staunton, *An Inquiry into the Proper Mode of Rendering the Word "God" in Translating the Sacred Scriptures into the Chinese Language with an Examination of the Various Opinions which have Prevalled on this Important Subject, Especially in Reference to their Influence on the Diffusion of Christianity in China*, London: Lionel Booth, 1849, pp. 42, 27, 43. Courtesy of the Burke Library of Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York.
- 50 Malan had learned Chinese in 1839 from Legge's future coworker. Ho Tsun-sheen, who studied Christian theology and English with Malan, teaching him Chinese in return. See Lauren Pfister, "Reconfirming the Way: Perspectives from the Writings of Rev. Ho Tsun-sheen," *Ching Feng*, 36, no. 4 (December 1993), p. 250 n. Malan was well-versed in various language texts, including Hebrew, Sanskrit and Manchu texts.
- 51 S.C. Malan, *Who is God in China, Shin or Shang-Te? Remarks on the Etymology of Theos and Elohim and on the Rendering of Those Terms into Chinese*, London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1855, pp. 33, 38, 286-287.
- 52 Edwin A. Burt, ed., *The English Philosophers from Bacon to Mill*, New York: The Modern Library, 1939, pp. 306, 632.
- 53 James Legge, *The Notions of the Chinese Concerning God and Spirits: with An Examination of the Defense of an Essay, on the Proper Rendering of the Words Elohim and Theos, into the Chinese Language*, Hongkong: "Hongkong Register" Office, 1852, pp. 11, 33, 23, 36, 32.
- 54 *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.
- 55 *Ibid.*, pp. 25-28. The passages which Legge cites are in Li Dongyang, *Taming huitian* (Collected Ming Statutes), Taipei: Dongnan shubao she, 1964, Vol. 3, pp. 1291-1292, 1294-1296; seventeenth year of Jiaqing, juan 82, 21b-23b, 28b-31a. Reprint of the 1587 edition.
- 56 He seems to have been a highly placed literatus, a *huiyuan*, ranking first on the *jinshi* examination list.
- 57 Legge, *The Notions of the Chinese*, pp. 70-71.
- 58 *Ibid.*, pp. 132-133.
- 59 CWM Library, N Pams 43, William J. Boone, "Defense of an Essay," p. 43, and Legge, *The Notions of the Chinese*, pp. 89, 77-78. On this issue in particular I thank Professor Pfister for his help in clarifying the argument.
- 60 Legge, *The Notions of the Chinese*, pp. 117, 130-131, 139, and Legge, *An Argument for ... (Shang Te) as the Proper Rendering of the Words Elohim and Theos in the Chinese Language*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Register Office, 1850, n. p. 29.
- 61 Legge, *The Notions of the Chinese*, pp. 129-131.
- 62 PCUSABFM, BFM Correspondence, microfilm. Martin to the Secretaries of the Board, 12 October 1854; letter to Lowrie, 31 March 1855, no. 56; 1 June 1855, no. 58.
- 63 CWM Library, N. Pamphlet, Vol. 43, L.B. Peet, "Remarks on the Best Term for God in Chinese, also on the Proper Basis of Compromise on this Subject," Canton, 1852.
- 64 DFMS, RG 64-28, Schereschewsky to S.D. Denison, 21 July 1865.

- 65 H. Blodget, *The Use of T'ien Chu for God in Chinese*, Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1893, p. 7. Courtesy of the Burke Library of Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York. Except for Burdon and Schereschewsky, who were not in Peking at the time, a number of missionaries who were not committee members also signed this paper.
- 66 Letter cited in Margaret T. Hills, "Text and Translation, Languages of China—1861-1900," ABS Historical Essay, #16, IV-G-3, unpublished ms., p. 17.
- 67 ABCFM, Vol. 302:1, Blodget to N.L. Clark, 12 October 1867, ms. 186.
- 68 CWM Library, Edkins to Dr. Tiedeman, 14 May 1866. See also Edkins' letter to Mullens, 25 May 1866.
- 69 ABCFM, Vol. 302:1, e.g. Blodget to N.L. Clark, 23 November 1868, ms. no. 209; 6 January 1871, ms. no. 253.
- 70 For the text of the "Report," see Hills, "ABS Historical Essay," pp. 19-20. The strangely worded sentence reads that the sub-committee is "...not willing to recommend that the patronage of our Society be withheld from those who use *Tien-chu* ..."
- 71 The issues, problems, opinions, and huge correspondence have been ably summarized in Hills, "ABS Historical Essay," #16, IV-G-3, pp. 15-17; ABCFM, Vol. 302:1, Blodget to Anderson, 30 September 1863, ms. 169.
- 72 PCUSABFM, Martin to Lowrie, 27 June 1866, no. 324.
- 73 In a personal communication Lauren Pfister points out that the idea of a Chinese pantheism was first posited by Boone. Similar to Longobardi of two centuries earlier, Boone considered Zhu Xi's Great Ultimate, principle and vital energy indicative of materialism. Since Boone's works were read and reread as the debate dragged on, the Peking translators were undoubtedly indebted to him for the notion of pantheism. We must also remember Schereschewsky's long ocean voyage in Boone's company and his two years at the Shanghai mission.
- 74 Letter in *SM*, Vol. 31, (May 1866), pp. 268-270 and (June 1866), pp. 326-328.
- 75 *Houidi*, "August god" occurs in *Lun Yu*, 20:1. Can it be considered a synonym for *Shangdi*?
- 76 Letter in *SM*, Vol. 31, (May 1866), pp. 268-270 and (June 1866), pp. 326-328.
- 77 Schereschewsky, "Terminology in the China Mission", *The Churchman*, Vol. 57, no. 6 (14 January 1888), pp. 34-35, 61-62.
- 78 Sima Qian, *Shiji* 28, in *Ershi wu shi* (Twenty five histories), Kaiming edition, 1934, Vol. 1, p. 115. Henry Blodget, "The Use of T'ien Chu for God in Chinese", Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1893, p. 10, Pamphlet. Courtesy of the Burke Library of Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York; John W. Witek, *Controversial Ideas in China and in Europe*, p. 273.
- 79 DFMS, RG-64-29, Schereschewsky, "The Bible, Prayerbook, and Terms in Our China Missions", Geneva, New York: W.F. Humphreys, p. 11. Pamphlet.
- 80 Writing after the 1724 prohibition against *Tian* and *Shangdi*, de la Charne was forced to resort to terms that were not proscribed; hence his use of *Shangzhu*. Rule, *K'ng-tzu or Confucius?*, p. 191.
- 81 *Notes on the Decalogue* (Zhenshen shitiao jiaizhu), Ningbo, 1847. No. 156 on Wylie's list. Courtesy of the Bodleian Library.
- 82 Robert Nelson, "Chinese Version of the Holy Scripture," *SM*, Vol. 31 (August 1866), pp. 452-454.
- 83 John Ross, "The Term for God," *CR*, Vol. 7, no. 3 (June 1876), pp. 216-217; Carstairs Douglas, "'Spirit' and 'God': How Should they be Translated," *CR*, Vol. 7, no. 1 (February 1876), pp. 68-74; J.G. Kerr, "A Layman on the 'Term' Question," *CR*, Vol. 7, no. 1 (February 1876), pp. 66-68; "On the Term for God," *CR*, Vol. 7, no. 4 (August 1876), pp. 294-297; Hampden C. DuBose, "On the Term for 'God'," *CR*, Vol. 7, no. 2 (April 1876), pp. 133-135.
- 84 John S. Roberts, "Some General Principles for Guidance in Translating the S.S. Terms for

- 'God'," *CR*, Vol. 7, no. 2 (April 1876), pp. 136-141.
- 85 Among these special mention should be made of John Chalmers, "Zhengming yaolun" (Important discussion of the rectification of names), Hong Kong, Xiaoshu hui, 1876. Pamphlet. I thank Lauren Pfister for the reference. The term *zhengming* is borrowed from classical Confucianism.
- 86 Kao Zhenzi, "Cheng Shen jieyi" (Meaning of the term *Shen*), *WGGB*, Vol. 10, no. 463 (November 1877), p. 169a (4287).
- 87 Wu Chungqiao, "Shenlun" (About *Shen*), *JHXB*, Vol. 2 (13 November 1869), p. 581.
- 88 For Huang's biography, see James Shijie Zha, *Zhongguo Jidujiao renwu xiao chuan* (Concise biographies of important Chinese Christians), Taipei: China Evangelical Seminary Press, 1982, pp. 16-20.
- 89 Huang Pinsan, "Shouyao zhengming lun" (About the proper term), *WGGB*, Vol. 10, no. 452 (18 August 1877), p. 18.
- 90 Kao, "Meaning of the term *Shen*," pp. 171b-172a, 174b (4292-4293, 4298).
- 91 Wang Shixin, *Zhongguo lishide Shangdi quan* (Concepts of *Shangdi* in Chinese history), Shanghai: Zhonghua jidujiao wenshe, 1926, preface, p. 6, and introduction, pp. 2, 4.
- 92 Hartwell's comment on Burdon's letter, *CR*, Vol. 6, no. 3 (May-June 1875), pp. 228-229.
- 93 The *Lushi chunqiu* (Spring and autumn of Mr. Lu) was commissioned by the Qin dynasty merchant Lu Buwei (d. 235 B.C.). Compiled by many hands, it can be considered representative of late Zhou dynasty thought. The *Guanzi* is not a text by the famous prime minister of the same name (d. 645 B.C.), who was in the service of Duke Huan of the state of Qi. The text probably originated among academicians active in the *Qi* capital and was subject to later editorial work by Liu Xiang (c.79-c.6 B.C.).
- 94 CWM Library, Pam Vol. 65, John Chalmers, "The Question of Terms Simplified, or the Meaning of Shan, Ling and Ti in Chinese Made Plain by Induction," Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, 1876, pp. 2-3, 48, 56, 59.
- 95 S. Wells Williams, "The Controversy Among the Protestant Missionaries", pp. 736, 739, 762-764, 766-767, 771-772, 778.
- 96 To demonstrate his belief in action, in 1873 Legge removed his shoes and ascended the Altar of Heaven which housed the tablet to *Shangdi* where he sang the doxology. Hills, "ABS Historical Essay," p. 25. Legge's important contribution to both Chinese Christianity and European sinology is discussed by Lauren Pfister in the forthcoming work, *Dutybound: James Legge and the Scottish Encounter with China*.
- 97 Hills, "ABS Historical Essay", pp. 36-37.
- 98 James Legge, "Confucianism in Relation to Christianity. A Paper Read Before the Missionary Conference in Shanghai, on May 11, 1877," Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, 1877. Pamphlet. Legge, it seems, did not personally read the paper. For an excellent discussion of how Legge supported his equation of *Shangdi* and God, see Lauren Pfister, "Some New Dimensions in the Study of the Works of James Legge (1815-1897): Part I", *Sino-Western Cultural Relations Journal*, 12 (1990), pp. 45-49.
- 99 Hills, "ABS Historical Essay", pp. 25-30.
- 100 Schereschewsky, "Translation of the Scriptures into Chinese", *Records of the General Conference*, pp. 41-44.
- 101 Blodget, *The Use of T'ien Chu*, p. 2.
- 102 Letter from Blodget, dated 14 June 1890, quoted in Hills, "ABS Historical Essay," pp. 159-162.
- 103 Blodget, *The Use of T'ien Chu*, pp. 16-17.
- 104 For a summary of Legge's library, see Lauren Pfister, "Some New Dimensions in the Study of the Works of James Legge (1815-1897): Part II," *Sino-Western Cultural Relations Journal*, 13 (1991), pp. 33-48.
- 105 The "Catalogue of the London Mission Library" lists 914 Chinese titles and includes the libraries of Medhurst and Lockhart.

106 DFMS, RG64-29, Hykes to Hunt, 9 June 1896; Hykes to Fox, 26 November 1902.

107 Nicolas Standaert, *Yang Tingyun, Confucian and Christian in Late Ming China, His Life and Thought*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988, p. 221, points this out also in the case of the earlier Jesuits.

108 Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990, p. 205.

Source: Irene Eber, *The Jewish Bishop and the Chinese Bible: S.I.J. Schereschewsky (1831-1906)*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999, pp. 199-233.