Biblical Names of God in Chinese:
A Catholic Point of View with
Ecumenical Perspectives

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“妙而難名者”之中文譯名

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[ABSTRACT] This article reviews some of the major Chinese
divine names that have been used in a Christian context since the
Tang dynasty. In a second step, the different characteristics and
different significations of the large variety of divine names found in
the Bible are examined with an appropriate degree of exegetical
technicality. Special attention is devoted to the translational choices
of the Sigao Bible. Detailed discussions deal with the issue of the
potential use of the terms Shén (神) and Shàngdì (上帝) within future
Roman-Catholic or Ecumenical translations. The meaningfulness of
the Catholic historical heritage, whose historical variety, richness and
scope are sometimes underestimated, is duly taken into account.
The plurality of divine names is not opposed to his divine simplicity

Thomas Aquinas, Contra Gentiles, I.31.

INTRODUCTION

A short sentence engraved on the famous Christian stele dating from 781, now located in the Beilin Museum of Xi’an, affirms that the Messiah established a new doctrine that cannot be expressed in words¹. In spite - or perhaps to some extent because - of the theological reasons lying behind such an early recognition, the question of the translation of divine names in Chinese has sparked many controversies and innumerable publications during the last centuries. Several recent well documented scholarly studies, including notably the monographs of Irene Eber², Jost Oliver Zetzsche³ and Sangkeun Kim⁴ have reviewed many major episodes of the history of the so-called Term Question in detail. Although the present article contains two short hitherto unpublished extracts of letters from the missionaries Jean Basset (1662–1707)

¹ The whole phrase 設三一淨風無言之新教 can be translated as: He established the new ineffable doctrine of the Holy Spirit of the Triune-Unity.


³ Jost Oliver Zetzsche, The Bible in China, The History of the Union Version or the Culmination of Protestant Missionary Bible Translation in China, Monumenta Serica 45, Steyler Verlag, 1999.

and Andreas Li (c. 1695–1774) that can be of interest for historians, its main purpose is not to deal with any historical issues in any detail. It contains even less information about Chinese Antiquity per se, does not address the problem of the precise etymology of the word 上帝 (Shàngdì) and does not discuss the interpretation of Chinese Classics. Many erudite and outstanding works have already been published on all these topics, and the present author lacks the competence to match them.

Nevertheless, in spite of the huge number of writings that have been devoted to the Term Question, it seems that “everything” has not yet been said or written on this issue. At least two dimensions of the problem are usually set aside in scholarly publications. The first concerns the link between the Term Question and the prospects of future ecumenical progress in China. The second concerns the detailed technical problems faced by translators of the Bible, both past and present. The name Term Question, wherein the word “Term” appears in the singular, seems to suggest that the problem at stake should be to find one best Chinese equivalent for the English name God. This may well have corresponded to the question discussed by early missionaries, but, as has already been stressed by Archie Lee5, one single divine appellation cannot suffice to satisfy the needs of biblical translators. In the prayer Our Father taught by Jesus to his disciples, the “Name” mentioned in the sentence hallowed be your Name corresponds obviously more to God’s being, to his presence and to what he stands for than to any particular linguistic expression. In case Christians

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still feel the need to privilege one particular divine term, they should perhaps try to cherish in priority the name used by Jesus himself, Abba, i.e. Father, or Father in Heaven according to Matt. 6:9. In spite of the disarming simplicity of Jesus’ language, however, biblical translators still need to cope with a large and subtle diversity of divine appellations such as El Shaddai, El, Eloah, Elohim, El Olam, El Roi, El Berith, YHWH, YHWH Sabaoth, The Holy One, The Most High, The Living God, Theos, Kurios, Kurios pantocratōr etc.

The richness and versatility of the Chinese language provide an interesting match to such biblical profusion. A large number of beautiful Chinese terms have already, or potentially can, serve as divine names for Christian expressions of faith:

天主, 上主, 聖主（景教）, 永在天主（東正教）, 永恆主, 上帝, 上子, 天帝, 皇上帝, 皇天上帝, 昊天上帝, 帝師（景教）, 神, 三一真神, 天爺, 老天爺, 天皇, 上尊, 大父母 etc.

An even wider panoply of Chinese names may prove quite useful in various poetical or theological contexts, although they are perhaps less well adapted for nurturing the personal relationship between humans and God except if they are used with a personal pronoun such as Our (我們的/吾) or My (我的/吾):

三一（景教），一神（景教）, 壹尊，天，大元（天主實義）, 萬物真源，萬有真源，自有者，永為者，永有自有者，至聖者，至高者，全能者，創造者，成事者，拯救者，創始成終的主宰，生命之寶，極是極有極聖者 etc.

Still many more Chinese expressions could be added to these. The greatest difficulty for modern translators is maybe
not so much to invent suitable Chinese terms, as to establish a viable systematic correspondence between biblical languages and modern Chinese.

The first part of the present article is devoted to a short survey of the legacy of the Church of the East in China, of Jesuit missionaries and Chinese converts in the 17th century, as well as of later Catholics in Sichuan, from an angle that can open the way towards future ecumenical progress. The background and the perspective thus gained serves as a basis for a rather systematic exegetical investigation to which the second part of this study is devoted.

I. DIVERSITY OF CATHOLIC EXPERIENCES IN CHINA

I.1 THE PRECEDENT ESTABLISHED BY MISSIONARIES OF THE JING TEACHING

The unique ecumenical characteristics of the Church of the East in China during the Tang dynasty raise several questions that are of interest not only for historians, but also for present-day believers. We shall therefore make a series of tentative comments concerning the ecumenical perspectives opened up by the Jing (Jīng) Teaching in China before turning our attention towards some of the divine names used by missionaries of the Jing teaching.
Among the set of historical puzzles left by the Reverent Teaching - which, as argued by Samuel Lieu⁶, seems to be a more accurate English rendering of the original meaning of the term 景教 (Jǐngjiào) than the idea of Radiant religion with which the author of the Xi’an stele plays explicitly - figures the short statement according to which the Messiah left 27 Classics⁷ after his glorious Ascension. This statement can be read on the Xi’an stele. The problem lies in the fact that it is impossible to find any Nestorian or Jacobite New Testament canon containing exactly 27 books (the Peshitta usually contained only 22 of them), whereas the number of books retained in the New Testament used in Constantinople during the 8th century was precisely 27, as remains the case today for Catholic, Orthodox, and most Protestant Christians.

It is not impossible that a coherent explanation may finally be given to the number of 27 Classics if one starts to pay more attention to a passage of the Xi’an stele lavishly praising the idyllic religious and social situation of the Roman Empire during the Han and Wei dynasties. This passage can be translated as follows:

« According to the Illustrated Records of the Western Lands and the historical documents of the Han and Wei, the land of Da Qin governs the Coral Sea⁸ on the south, and stretches towards the Gem Mountain on the North; on the West it

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⁷ 經留二十七部。
⁸ According to Pelliot, who provides an impressive number of references, the Coral Sea corresponds here to the Mediterranean Sea, not the Red Sea.
looks towards the Region of the Immortals and the Forest of Blossoms\(^9\), on the East it borders on the Violent Winds and the Feeble Waters. The country produces fire-washed cloth\(^{10}\), spices that restore the soul\(^{11}\), bright moon pearls and phosphorescent rings. Customs ignore theft and robbery, people are happy and content. No religion except the Radiant Teaching is practiced; no ruler deprived of virtue is established. Lands are extensive and broad, material civilization is bright.\(^{12}\)

Such a quasi mythical account shows us that when the stele was erected (in 781), missionaries of the Jing Teaching were quite willing to use the Roman Empire as a reference for their religion. For that purpose, they used the obsolete and therefore politically inoffensive designation 大秦 (Dà Qín), which differed from the usual designation of the Byzantine empire 拂林 (Fúlín) during the Tang dynasty. In no way did they hint at the existence of a religious schism between them and the patriarchate of Constantinople. Could it be possible, then, that the 27 Classics mentioned on the Xi’an stele simply correspond to the New Testament Canon used in Constantinople at the same period? One Chinese imperial edict, dated from 745, strongly strengthens this hypothesis.

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\(^9\) Cf. the legend of the Hesperides.

\(^{10}\) asbestos

\(^{11}\) theriac

\(^{12}\) Cf. the text in columns 14 and 15 of the Xi’an stele:
This text has already been translated by Bruno Forte\textsuperscript{13}, and has recently received renewed attention from Timothy Barrett\textsuperscript{14}. Let us reproduce here Forte’s translation:

« The texts and teaching of Persia originated in \textit{Da Qin}, came after being transmitted and practiced (in Persia), and have long since circulated in China. Thus it was that when first the monasteries were built [in China], they were accordingly named [\textit{Monasteries of Persia}].

Wishing to show men (sic) that it is necessary to learn their origin, for the Monasteries of Persia in the two capitals it is proper that they change into \textit{Monasteries of Da Qin}. As for those established in the superior prefectures and commanderies of the Empire, they too should conform to this\textsuperscript{15}. »

Through this 745 edict, the imperial authority of China established an official link between the \textit{Jing Teaching} and the ancient Roman Empire (\textit{Da Qin}). According to Barrett, « calling Christianity the \textit{Religion of Da Qin} shows that the Nestorians of the Tang undeniably possessed a sensitive awareness of their political environment within China, and probably internationally as well, and moved with

\textsuperscript{13} Paul Pelliot, \textit{L’Inscription Nestorienne de Si-Ngan-Fou \ Editing with Supplements by Antonino Forte}, Italian School of East Asian Studies and Collège de France, 1996, p. 353.


\textsuperscript{15} 波斯經教，出自大秦，傳習而來，久行中國。爰初建寺，因以為名。將欲示人，必修基本。其兩京波斯寺，宜改為大秦寺。天下諸府郡置者，亦宜准此。
considerable acumen to secure the best possible position for themselves within it »\(^{16}\). Samuel Lieu similarly indicates that the Nestorian monks and priests were anxious to see that their centers of worship should not be known as « Persian monasteries (Bōsī Sì 波斯寺) and petitioned to have the names of their monasteries changed into Daqín (i.e. Roman) monasteries (Dàqín Sì 大秦寺) »\(^{17}\). However, such descriptions entirely set aside the role of Chinese bureaucracy, which would have been unlikely to let foreign monks dictate the Chinese emperor’s decisions, and even less to let them ignore an imperial edict once it had been promulgated. Several indications show that the Jing Teaching had been closely monitored by the Tang dynasty since its arrival at Chang-an in 635. The concept of State and Church separation was naturally absent from the vocabulary of all imperial regimes during that period, and many Tang emperors displayed themselves a strong personal, as well as political, interest in religion. The poetic eulogy concluding the text of the Xi’an stele, successively praising the Tàizōng (太宗), Gāozōng (高宗), Xuánzōng (玄宗), Sūzōng (肅宗), Dàizōng (代宗) and Jiānzhōng (建中) emperors, suggests that the stele readership was not limited to devout Christian pilgrims. As B. Forte and Stanley Weinstein indicate\(^ {18}\), the precise number of twenty-one monks assigned to the first Jing monastery, mentioned by the Xi’an stele, corresponds to the maximum number of monks

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\(^{16}\) *Ibid*, p. 560.


authorized for monasteries of the highest grade at a time when Chinese bureaucracy tried to control Buddhist influence. An even stronger sign of the tight supervision exerted by state officials on Christian monasteries is provided by a short line of Chinese text engraved on a lateral part of the stele, which can be translated in the following way:

« The Assistant Supervisor of the erection [of the stele], the abbot and monk Yeli [i.e. Gabriel], who was awarded the purple monastic robe [or kasāya] by the Taichang Qing [an official in charge of the supervision of religious ceremonies] through [public] examination.19 »

So far, we have not yet clarified what kind of motivation would have led the Xuanzong emperor, in 745, to forbid Christian monks from acknowledging their links with Persia. In spite of the lack of direct historical evidence on this point, it is not difficult to make a few reasonable guesses. First of all, the Muslim conquest of Persia, which led to the fall of the Sassanid dynasty in 651, could not have left Tang emperors indifferent. Only six years after the 745 edict, the Battle of Talas sanctioned the victory of Muslim troops over Tang Chinese soldiers and Karluk (Turkic) mercenaries. It is not impossible that, as has happened repeatedly ever since, the political influence of Christian monks may have been largely overestimated by Chinese authorities, and that the Tang administration would have wished to isolate them from any contact with the Sassanid authorities. What is more, some

19 助檢校試太常卿紫袈寺主僧業利. The English translation supra is borrowed from Samuel Lieu, ref. supra, p. 233.
indices suggest that Tang diplomats were positively interested in consolidating their links with what remained of the Byzantine Empire at that time. The traditional Chinese stratagem called 遠交近攻, befriending a distant state while attacking a neighbor, was presumably not ignored by Byzantine diplomats either. Chinese records mention the arrival of two Byzantine embassies in China in 719 and 742\(^\text{20}\). It is difficult to avoid wondering whether the Chinese 745 edict might have been connected with the 742 Byzantine embassy.

In any case, once the 745 edict was promulgated, it would have become the duty of Tang dynasty officials to check whether the religious tenets of Christian monks were consistent with their newly professed identity. This may have constituted one of the causes leading the monks to adopt, at least formally, the New Testament canon of Constantinople. Although it must be recognized that the above discussion raises more questions than it answers, at least we may use it as a warning that it would be misleading to read too much into the rare ecumenical\(^\text{21}\) attitude displayed by monks belonging to the Jing Teaching in China\(^\text{22}\).


\(^{21}\) One could even say *de facto* Catholic, at a time when Byzantine and Latin Churches were united.

\(^{22}\) In case the text of the Xi’an stele indicating that the Messiah “制八境之度” means that he established [clerical] orders of eight different degrees, which Saeki has quoted as a possibility without pleading for it, one would have here a clear indication that the Christian monks continued to organise themselves according to the hierarchical system of the Church of the East, which indeed seems to have comprised eight orders (cf. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 3, §139). Constantinople usually recognized five “orders” only (cf. John Damascene, *Dial. Contra Manichaos 3*, and Denzinger, *Rit. Orient.*, I, 116). For rather unclear reasons, Pelliot did not take seriously the idea that 八境之度 might refer to eight hierarchical orders, although he was aware that 度 could refer in
Whatever the religious and political constraints endured by these monks, what appears eventually appealing to contemporary Christian theologians is that it is basically impossible to find any trace of doctrinally controversial content within several of their writings, particularly in the text of the Xi’an stele and the Reverent Teaching’s Hymn to Take Refuge in the Holy Trinity23 discovered in Dunhuang. This fact, added to the seniority of Jing Teaching missionaries in the history of Christianity in China, should invite contemporary Catholics to consider their legacy with deep sympathy.

As far as the translation of divine names into Chinese is concerned, several texts belonging to the Jing Teaching contain quite a number of valuable renderings. Some of them would still have the potential to inspire modern Christian poetry in Chinese. Even if we exclude from our list some rather dull, purely phonetic transliterations like 阿羅訶 (standing for Alaha24) and 彌施訶 (standing for the Messiah), and even if we limit our survey to two sources only, namely the Hymn to Take Refuge in the Holy Trinity and the Xi’an stele, we can already obtain a substantial list of highly evocative Chinese divine appellations. The English translation proposed below is only indicative. Two divine titles apply to the whole Trinity:


24 Alaha is a Syriac equivalent of the Hebrew word Eloah, which is itself a singular form of the well known plural Elohim.
Several appellations apply to the Father:

- 三才慈父 (Three-powered gracious Father)
- 師帝 (Master Ruler)
- 法皇 (Emperor of the fundamental law (dharma))
- 真主 (Genuine Master)
- 三一妙身 (Transcendent Person of the Trine-Unity)

Several others to the Son:

- 聖主 (Holy Lord)
- 普尊大聖子 (Greatest and holiest of the universally honored beings)
- 常活命王 (King of eternal life)
- 一分身 (Separated Person of the Trine-Unity)

And others to the Holy Spirit:

- 淨風 (Pure Wind)
- 法王 (Sovereign of fundamental truth)

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25 Since 淨 was used to translate the Buddhist word *vimala* which means “clean and pure”, the term 淨風 (*Jìng Fēng*) possesses interesting Buddhist harmonies (cf. Toshikazu S. Foley, *Translating Biblical Texts into Chinese: The Pioneer Venture of the Nestorian Missionaries*, Technical Papers for the Bible Translator Vol. 59, No. 3, July 2008). It is also particularly worth mentioning that Bishop Aluoben earlier used two other related terms for translating the name *Holy Spirit* in the Discourse on the Oneness of the Ruler of the Universe: 元風 (*Yuánfēng*, lit. original wind) and 玄風 (*Xuánfēng*, lit. mysterious wind). The Taoist connotations of the latter term are particularly obvious. From the point of view of Christian theology, the
I.2 CATHOLIC USE OF THE TERM 天主 (Tiānzhǔ) DURING THE 17th CENTURY

According to Matteo Ricci’s own testimony 26, the introduction of the term 天主 (Tiānzhǔ) in the Catholic Church originates from the initiative of a young Chinese convert named Cin Nicò who, during the fall of 1583, wrote the two characters 天主 (Tiānzhǔ) on a spirit tablet which he placed above an altar in the Mission established by Ruggieri and Ricci in the city of Zhaoqing. Ruggieri and Ricci adopted this term, and inserted it as soon as 1584 within the title27 of a re-edition of a catechetical book initially composed by Ruggieri. Ricci deeply appreciated this innovation, as a passage of his writings translated in English by Sangkeun Kim28 clearly shows:

« Missionaries always used the title Tianzhu, meaning Lord of Heaven. They could hardly have chosen a more appropriate expression, because there is no consonant sound corresponding to D in the Chinese language, and to them there was

expression 元風 (Yuánfēng) appears particularly easy to connect with Gen 1 and New Testament Christology. It is the author’s guess that the expression 元風 will make a comeback some day, perhaps not in biblical translations properly speaking, but at least in Christian poetry.

26 Fonti Ricciane, vol. 1, pp.185–186.
27 新編西竺國天主實錄 (Xīn-Biàn Xīzhúguó Tiānzhǔ-Shílù).
28 Sangkeun Kim, ref. supra, p.146.
something magnificent and a touch of the divine in this particular name. In fact, this title, first used at the beginning of our missionary work, is still in vogue today when God is mentioned in discourse and in writing. »29

Alas, since no human appellation can be totally exempt from imprecision, the Buddhist connection of the term 天主 (Tiānzhǔ) has sporadically caused some amount of confusion. According to Paul Pelliot, in Chinese Buddhism the expression 天主 (Tiānzhǔ) corresponds to the God Indra, also sometimes called 帝释天 (Dìshìtiān) in Chinese. Although modern Hindus tend to see Indra as a minor deity, and although 天主 corresponds also only to a minor and rather obscure deity among Chinese Buddhists, Indra was originally venerated as a King of the Gods or Devas, Lord of Thunder, Storms, Rainfall etc. The connection between Indra and 天主 does not seem to be more problematic than the connection between El and the Canaanite deity of the same name, and Christians should have no reason to be ashamed of it. In fact, as Pelliot has clearly pointed out, it is not in quality of Lord of Heaven, but because he is Devendra, i.e. Lord of the celestial Devas, that Indra is sometimes called 天主 (Tiānzhǔ)30. The Catholic use of the term 天主 is therefore intrinsically highly different from the Buddhist one. The Catholic appellation 天主 constitutes an innovation that deserves to be considered as both authentically Chinese, and authentically Christian.

30 Paul Pelliot, ref. supra, p. 205, note 40.
I.3 CATHOLIC USE OF THE TERM 上帝 (Shàngdì) DURING THE 17th CENTURY

The next major divine name, and historically the most debated, to have been introduced within the Catholic expression of faith in China is 上帝 (Shàngdì), literally *Patriarch on High, or Emperor on High*. Kim’s monograph provides a huge amount of information concerning the Christian and anti-Christian use of this term during the late Ming period. Let us content ourselves to record what can be considered as the three most decisive historical turning points related to the Christian use of the term Shangdi:

(1) A first historical step was made by Matteo Ricci when he asserted in his highly influential introduction to the Catholic faith entitled *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (天主實義):

吾天主，即華言上帝；與道家所塑玄帝玉皇之像不同……

*He who is called the Lord of Heaven in my humble country is He who is called Shangdi (Sovereign on High) in Chinese. He is not, however, the same as the carved image of the Taoist Jade Emperor…*

Matteo Ricci further asserted:

歷觀古書，而知上帝與天主特異以名也。

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31 Sangkeun Kim, ref. *supra*.

Having leafed through a great number of ancient books, it is quite clear to me that Shangdi (the Sovereign on High) and Tianzhu (the Lord of Heaven) are different only in name\(^{33}\).

(2) A second crucial historical decision was made in 1715 by Pope Clement XI (1649–1721) when he promulgated the bull *Ex Illa Die*. This bull confirmed several earlier partial prohibitions concerning Chinese Rites and prohibited the use of the terms as *Heaven* and *Shangdi*.

(3) Arguably the most important step was made only much later, in 1850, when the *British and Foreign Bible Society* published the so-called *Delegates’ Version* of the four Gospels. For the first time, the term 上帝 (*Shàngdì*) appeared in the Bible itself. The success of the term 上帝 has been such that it seems to have now become the most commonly employed expression referring to *God* in the Chinese media. Basically everyone in China is now aware of its Christian use. One can guess that the Catholic Church will not remain indefinitely indifferent to this phenomenon.

The strength of the early opposition to the term 上帝 on the part of a small number of Jesuits, many Catholic non-Jesuit missionaries \(^{34}\) and several 19\(^{th}\) Protestant missionaries like the Anglican William Boone\(^{35}\) (1811–1864)

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\(^{34}\) With the notable exception of J. Basset, who later turned towards the character 神 (*Shén*). He could not have adopted the term 上帝 without having convinced Mgr. Maigrot of its validity anyway, since Mgr. de Lyonne, the bishop nominally in charge of Sichuan apostolic vicariate, had ordered J. Basset to apply Mgr. Maigrot’s 1693 *Mandate* in Sichuan.

\(^{35}\) Cf. Irene Eber, ref. supra, in chap. 6, *The Term Question*, p. 213.
illustrates the fact that the adoption of this term has indeed constituted a bold move, which has often been compared by its detractors to what first century apostles would have done if they had translated Elohim or Yahweh into Zeus or Jupiter... which they did not do. Or is this comparison really valid? In fact, the parallel is rather misleading, since the foundations of Chinese language do not function in the same way as those of Greek language. Chinese characters possess such a symbolic power that the two characters 上帝 would still continue to point towards the image of a “Superior Emperor” even if Chinese ancient mythology had never existed, provided that the meaning of individual Chinese characters were known. In contrast, the combination of the four letters Z, e, u and s would become totally deprived of meaning if all knowledge of Greek mythology were lost. From the semantic point of view, the term 上帝 depends less on early Chinese literature to make sense than the term Zeus depends on Greek mythology.

I.4 CATHOLIC USE OF THE TERM 天 (Tiān) DURING THE 17th CENTURY

Our survey devoted to the term 天 (Tiān, i.e. Heaven) will be particularly brief, since although this designation has been used alongside the designation 上天 (Shàng Tiān: Heaven on High or Heavenly Sovereign) by a Jewish community in Kāifēng (開封) for several centuries (starting from at least the 12th century), and although it had been used on a quasi equal footing with the term 上帝 (Shàngdì) by early Jesuit
missionaries and Chinese converts during the 17th century, it has seldom resurfaced in a Christian context after Clement XI’s decrees, and it has hardly ever been considered as a serious option by 19th and 20th century Protestant translators, either foreign or Chinese.

One reason for this phenomenon appears, paradoxically, quite similar to one of the reasons for the success of the term 上帝 (Shàngdì) in China: Chinese characters enjoy a “life” of their own, and although both terms 上帝 (Shàngdì) and 天 (Tiān) have played nearly identical roles in Chinese Classics, the character 帝, which intrinsically points to a kind of “personal” being, possesses a much greater potential to nurture the personal relationship between humans and God than 天. Although it would be wrong to pretend that the concept of Heaven in Chinese literature has always been completely depersonalized, it remains a fact that very few tangible indications can support the idea that Confucius’ notion of 天 (Tiān) was more personal than the ancient Stoics conception of God — which arguably remained a far distance away from what Christian theology usually means by God.

Does this imply, however, that the term 天 (Tiān) should be completely excluded from the theological vocabulary of the Catholic Church? The answer to this question can only be negative, since the term 天 has in fact already made its entry into one of the most famous biblical parables for more than

36 Cf. notably the apology of the terms 帝 (Dì) and 天 (Tiān), entitled 帝天考 (Dì Tiān Kāo), composed by a Fujian convert named 嚴謨 (Yán Mó) around the year 1682, presented and analysed by N. Standaert in his dissertation entitled: 可親的天主, 清初基督徒論「帝」談「天」, 何麗霞譯, 光啓出版社, 1998.
three centuries. When the *prodigal son* (Luke 15:11-32) returns to his father, he confesses:

Πάτερ, ἧμαρτον εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ ἐνώπιόν σου

(Luke 15:21)

which can be translated very literally:

*Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before you.*

Already around the year 1705, the missionary Jean Basset\(^{37}\) composed with the help of the Chinese convert Johan Xu (徐若翰) the following quite literal translation of Luke 15:21:

父，我已得罪于天，亦有罪于尔前

The Sigao Bible published by the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum of Hong Kong contains the more modern, but less literal rendering:

父親，我得罪了天，也得罪了你

Modern exegetes usually consider the *Heaven* of Luke 15:21 as a metonymy for *God*, whose meaning can be understood if one remembers that the holiest divine name, *YHWH*, had

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\(^{37}\) J. Basset once formulated a quite balanced opinion concerning the use of 天, writing: « I would not want to condemn totally the use of the word Tiān (天) [to name God], principally because it is clear that Tian is sometimes understood metaphorically by the Chinese people; however, we should use this term only rarely and with precaution, in order to avoid that people may be led into error » (The original Latin manuscript is conserved in AME 424, p. 211).
become surrounded by so much respect (or so much fear\(^\text{38}\)) that no commoner dared to pronounce it anymore at the time of Jesus. Naturally, the divine designation of Luke 15:21 has always escaped the notice of even the most severe censors…

Let us also note that another occurrence of the same celestial metonymy can be found in Dan. 4:23/26, where the Sigao Bible uses appropriately the two characters 上天:

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Sigao:  至於所說在地中只留下樹根的餘幹，是說到你承認上天統治一切時，你的國仍再歸於你。

NRSV:  As it was commanded to leave the stump and roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be re-established for you from the time that you learn that Heaven is sovereign.
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### I.5 CATHOLIC USE OF THE TERM 神 (Shén) DURING THE 18th CENTURY

The use of the term 神 (Shén) by missionaries in Sichuan started at least as soon as 1704, when Jean Basset (1662–1707) and the Chinese convert Johan Xu (?–1734) started to translate the New Testament. As can be reconstructed from the correspondence of Basset, the introduction of the term 神 (Shén) in Catholic writings in Sichuan derives from a question he wrote to his confrère Mgr. Charles Maigrot (1652–1730) before his departure to Sichuan, asking whether it was not through the term 上帝 (Shàngdì) that Chinese people had...

\(^{38}\) The Decalogue insisted in Exod. 20:7 and Deut. 5:11: *You shall not misuse the name of Yahweh your God, for Yahweh will not leave unpunished anyone who misuses his name.*
developed a natural understanding of the unique God, in conformity with what Saint Paul writes about all non-Jewish people in Rom. 1:19: *what can be known about God is plain to them*. Maigrot refused to concede this point, and suggested instead that the ancient theological understanding of the Chinese people was contained in the word 神 (*Shén*). J. Basset was not immediately convinced by Maigrot’s argument, but he nevertheless ultimately decided to use 神 (*Shén*) in the New Testament translation that he started together with Johan Xu in 1704 in Chengdu.

The later history of the use of the term 神 (*Shén*) within the Catholic Church in Sichuan province is not well documented. Fortunately, a passage of a letter written in 1765 by the Chinese missionary Andreas Li (李安德) to the cardinal in charge of Propaganda Fide can help us to get at least an approximate general view of the first decades of this history. The 1765 letter of Andreas Li responds to an inquiry triggered by a letter of denunciation against him translated into Latin and transmitted to Rome in 1761 by the procurator of Propaganda in Macao, Emiliano Palladini39 (1733–1793). Here is the text of the answer written by Andreas Li40:

« ...None of the missionaries who work in this Mission had expected anything like this to happen. While my health was weakening day by

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39 A Latin version of the denunciation letter has been published by Fortunato Margiotti in *Il cattolicismo nello Shansi date origini al 1738*, Sinica Franciscana 1958, pp. 660 ssq.

40 I thank father Joseph Ruellen for his translation of this text from Latin into French. What I provide here is a translation of his text from French to English. Andreas Li’s letter is dated from July 16, 1765, and is referenced as A.M.E. vol. 446, fol. 698 ssq.
day, and while I was already approaching my death, I suddenly learnt, by letters sent to us from Paris in 1763, that I have been accused in front of the Holy Congregation of having been imbued with a pharisaic arrogance and of having audaciously invented, notwithstanding my own ignorance and insignificance, new Chinese words to explain the dogmas of the Catholic Church, whereas successive Vicars Apostolic and their cooperators, past and present, had never used such terms.

[...]

In order to understand what follows, I need to mention the names of four priests who were sent to this Mission [of Sichuan province] by the aforesaid prelate [Mgr. Artus de Lionne] during the year 1700. The first of them was the late Louis Appiani, from Savoy. The second was late Jean Basset, from Lyon. These two gentlemen, being older and more familiar with Chinese customs, were appointed pro-vicars. The third priest was Johan Müllener, from Bremen, and the fourth François Martin de la Baluère, from Brittany. The latter two were younger and, since they had only recently arrived in China, were concentrating on the study of the Chinese language and literature.

Around the same epoch, an apostolic missionary belonging to the Order of Saint Francis\textsuperscript{41}, who exercised his ministry in the province of Shaanxi, had composed a Latin-Chinese dictionary in which he declared that the Chinese character \textit{Shēn} (神) corresponds well with the Latin word

\textsuperscript{41} Basilio Brollo da Gemona (1648–1704) o.f.m. was appointed vicar-apostolic of Shaanxi in 1696.
Deus or numen\textsuperscript{42}.

[...] Please note, Eminence, that just as the Romans once worshiped their idols such as Jupiter, Mars, Mercury and Venus, by naming them gods, Chinese idolaters also worship under the name Shen all the things they consider to be deities and gods. In order to clarify the confusing meaning of Shen, Rev. Basset, my first father in Christ and first pro-vicar in the province of Sichuan, imitated the example of the Doctor of the Nations\textsuperscript{43}. Indeed, in the same manner as the divine Paul had used the expression the unknown God when he stood in the midst of the Areopagus in order to lead the idolatrous Athenians towards the true knowledge of God and of our Redeemer Jesus Christ, the late Rev. Basset, who wanted to attract the pagans living in Sichuan towards the Catholic faith, showed in a vigorous fashion, in the essay that he wrote against Chinese atheists and idolaters, that the deity or God, numen or Deus in Latin, Shen in Chinese, whom we must worship, does not correspond to the images of idols that one imagines in dreams, but to the God whom we must worship according to Christian doctrine. Here below are his own words which I, his unworthy disciple, have translated from Chinese to Latin:

« [...] Our religion is holy and right, considers all things through reason, and judges them in a quite different way than the world. Indeed, nothing can be compared with the God or Shen whom we worship with reverence and devotion,

\textsuperscript{42} deity.
\textsuperscript{43} Saint Paul.
whether heaven or earth, reason or substance, non-being, chaos, supremeness, all sorts of earthly deities worshipped and trusted by the world, holy men or wisemen, or any other entity. The Shén (神) I am considering is the God from whom all things depend and who depends on nothing; all beings depend on his action and assistance, whereas he, being deprived of beginning and end, does not need anything. He is the purpose and principle of all things. He is so powerful that nobody can understand his works. He is so omniscient that no one can explore his knowledge. He is so perfectly good that he wants to reward all honest people with happiness and can subject the unjust to due punishment. He is so ubiquitous that nobody can see his face. He is the one whom I call Shén (神) because he is the source and origin of all reason, the root of all beings, the author of all good virtues, the culmination of all felicity.

[...] During the Ming dynasty, missionaries of the Christian religion like Matteo Ricci and other Europeans were the first to enter the empire of China. They noticed that Chinese people, in their conversations, discussions and teachings, had constantly on their lips the word Tiān (天) and ignored the God of gods who is above heavens, creator of heaven and earth and all beings, master of life and death, judge of good and evil. These Europeans wished to attract the Chinese people through the style and the manners of Chinese language and literature. Since Chinese people acknowledge that the sky has a ruler, they called him the Lord of Heaven, Tiānzhǔ (天主), the Supreme Deity of Heaven, in other words Shén (神), God. However, the name Tianzhu, according to the literal meaning of the characters, seemed to them to be unclear, equivocal and ambiguous when applied to God. One persuaded them that they would succeed to lead the Chinese people towards the knowledge of the true God by using this name, that Chinese people would believe in this Name and that they would follow the Lord God taught by the Catholic faith. But experience has proved that the Chinese people have not
recognized under this name the true God. They rather imagine more and more false gods. It is therefore not surprising that the Chinese people, because of their ignorance of the true Lord, have entrenched themselves even further in their misconceptions. As a result, people blinded by the world, when they hear our Christians pronounce the name Tianzhu, suspect that we believe that the sky is Lord. Others, when they hear the same name Tianzhu, are stunned and amazed at the idea that a master is dwelling above in the sky. Still others say, laughingly, that the “religion of the Lord of Heaven” is now spreading, and that the “religion of the Lord of the Earth” will follow. [...] This is the reason why I have replaced the name Tianzhu, Lord of Heaven, employed by the first missionaries to signify God, by the character Shēn (神), which has seemed to me to be more appropriate. At first sight, the names Tianzhu and Shen seem to be very different, but in reality they point towards the same being. It is therefore important to take care that they are not interpreted in a different way from the way I explain them and speak about them. »

I have quoted above what Rev. Basset himself wrote. I can also report without too much difficulty about an incident that happened fifteen years ago in this province of Sichuan. At that time, a group of people had been fomenting a rebellion, and when they appeared in front of their judges, they pretended to belong to a secret religion. They also accused the Christians of the city of Siitchuen 44 to be their accomplices. However, after a few months of thorough inquiry, the judges released the innocent Christians,

44 Perhaps 旭川 (Xúchuān), today 榮縣 (Róngxiàn), located near the present city of Leshan (樂山). (Indication graciously provided by R. Entenmann).
whereas the authors of sedition and rebellion were put to death.

During the inquiry, the name Lord of Heaven, in the sense I use it now, caused a lot of confusion, and it led the investigators to despise the translator who had pretended to put into Chinese some passages of the Holy Writ. I stumbled across the same insoluble problem myself when I read a book of meditations edited, unless I am mistaken, by a European missionary. The translator would certainly not have faced so much difficulty if he had used the character Shén (神) to render the following passages of the Holy Writ:

*The God of gods said: “the gods of the pagans are demons”*45;

*I said: “you are all gods and sons of the Most High”*46,

etc.

What is more, I also once saw with my own eyes, among several inscriptions of idols, an idol designated by the title Tianzhu.

According to its etymology, the Chinese character Fēng (風) possesses a double meaning in Chinese: one physical and one moral. According to the physical sense, Feng refers to the material wind by which all visible matter is pressed, animated

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45 Ps. 95:5 (Vulgate only)
46 Ps. 81:6 (Vulgate)
and agitated. In a moral sense, the same character refers to every kind of force capable of leading humans towards what is good, or sometimes towards evil. Once we accept the meaning and the definition of this name, or word, it becomes easier, I think, to render in Chinese the words of the Gospel in which Christ says to Nicodemus:

*The wind blows where it wills; you hear its voice, but you cannot tell from where it comes and where it goes.*

And also:

*By the word of the Lord the heavens were established; and all their power by the spirit of his mouth.*

And also:

*The Spirit of the Lord was upon the waters... etc.*

The late Rev. Basset used the etymology of the Chinese character *Fēng* (風) to explain the sevenfold grace of the Holy Spirit. He named the third person of the Holy Trinity, in Latin *Spiritus Sanctus*, *Shèng Fēng* (聖風) within the following questions and answers:

« Question:

- How does one call the third person of the Blessed Trinity in the Holy Scriptures?

*Answer:*

47 Ps. 32:6 (Vulgate)
- In Latin it is called “Spiritus Sanctus”. In Chinese it seems that we should call it Shèng Fēng (聖風).

Question:

- Why should the Latin name “Spiritus Sanctus” be called “Shèng Fēng” (聖風) in Chinese?

Answer:

- Doctors have given a quadruple reason:

The first is that the third person of the Blessed Trinity is Divine Love itself. Love, or affection (風情), is also the source and origin of all action among humans.

The second is that wind or spirit, in Chinese Fēng (風), proceeds from a source, just as the third person of the Holy Trinity proceeds from the Father and the Son.

The third is that the strength and power of the “wind” or “spirit” that moves and shakes all things is immense and incommensurable: by a small and peaceful breath of wind or spirit, beings can grow and become fertilized. Humans also use the inflections carried by the breath or spirit that stems from their mouths to communicate with each other, and are able, through a sort of inner motion, to become one heart and one soul.

The fourth reason is that, according to the definition of the Chinese word Fēng (風) and the Latin word Spiritus or Wind, and according to the explanation transmitted by the holy Doctors concerning the admirable effects of the Third Person of the Most Holy Trinity, who can change the hearts of Christ’s followers, the Chinese character Fēng (風) and the Latin word Spiritus do not differ from each other. The Chinese character Fēng (風), taken in a moral sense, can refer to the instruction given by the prince of a kingdom. Once this instruction has been proclaimed, all the prince’s subjects are obliged
to abide by it wherever they live, near or far. Once enacted, laws have the capacity to bring about some change everywhere in a kingdom, just as a tree, once planted, does not need to receive the care of the person who planted it anymore. Fēng (風) in Chinese, Spiritus in Latin, can lead all the people to obey their king. [...] When the Redeemer of humankind, the Lord Jesus Christ, wanted to reform his disciples so that they may become one heart and one soul in Him, he sent them his Holy Spirit (聖風) under whose impulse these ignorant villains suddenly became wise and good. [...] »

In testimony to the legitimate definition of the character Fēng (風) explained above, it does not seem out of place to mention here what happened forty years ago. The Yongzheng 48 emperor, who died during the ninth year of his reign, sent a representative to the province of Fújìàn (福建) with the title of guānfēng (觀風), inspector of the morals of the people, and zhěngsú (整俗), reformer of the ways of living. The trend that leads humans to do this or that is expressed in Latin by the word Spiritus, while Chinese people are accustomed to say that actions are done in virtue of Fēng (風).

From what precedes, one can judge whether it is better to call the Holy Spirit Fēng (風) in Chinese, or to call it Shèngshén (聖神) as is commonly done. [...] Despite all the reasons pleading against the use of the name Tiānzhǔ (天主) that have been reported by the late Rev. Basset, his point of view has

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48 雍正 (Yōngzhèng) emperor (1678–1735).
hitherto been little accepted because of the habit engendered by a long practice perpetuated by all Vicars Apostolic and their cooperators in the Chinese Empire, which has been accepted by almost unanimous consent. Later, the name Tianzhu, designating the good and almighty God, has been approved in the apostolic constitution of Pope Clement XI, of blessed memory, which begins with the words *Exilla Die*, and in the apostolic constitution of Pope Benedict XIII which begins with *In Quo Singulati*. For this reason, Bishop Joachim de Martiliat found it necessary to retain the name Tianzhu for common use. But this has not changed the fact that the Chinese character Shén (神), whose meaning I have already explained above, has been adopted in virtue of a long common usage in this province, particularly for translations of the Scripture, until the Sacred Congregation may decide otherwise...»

What happened to the names Shén (神) and Shèng-Fēng (聖風) in Sichuan province after Andreas Li’s 1765 answer to the Propaganda is more difficult to know in detail. Since the bishop in charge of the Sichuan vicariate when Andreas Li died in 1774 was François Pottier (1726–1792), and since he usually followed the advice provided by Andreas Li, a “low-key” usage of the character Shén (神) probably continued for some time in Sichuan, although the use of the expression Shèng-Fēng (聖風) may have vanished more quickly. A letter written from the province of Sichuan in 1808 by Bishop Gabriel-Taurin Dufresse (1750–1815) indicates that: *We only have here the original of the Gospels translated by Rev. Basset, which contains many mistakes that have not yet been corrected.*
Among others, the Holy Spirit is expressed by the word Feng that means Wind\(^{49}\). Bishop Dufresse does not mention here the character Shén (神). One century after the pioneering work of J. Basset in Sichuan, it seems that the lexical specificities of the Catholic Mission in Sichuan were slowly vanishing. But just as the Christian use of the character Shén (神) was being forgotten among Catholics in Sichuan, it was revived among Protestants by the pioneering work of Robert Morrison (1782–1834), whose debt towards the biblical translation of Jean Basset and Johan Xu is well established\(^{50}\). A later significant Protestant improvement has consisted in adding a blank space in front of the character 神 as a mark of special respect.

It is also worth noting that today, whereas Korean Catholics call the Christian God by the term 천주 (Cheonju) corresponding to the Chinese term 天主 (Tiānzǔ), Japanese Catholics call him by the term 神様 (Kami-sama) corresponding to the character 神 (Kami) to which a honorific suffix has been added\(^{51}\).

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\(^{50}\) 趙曉陽，《二馬聖經譯本與白日昇聖經譯本關係考辨》，《An Examination of the Relationship between Robert Morrison and Joshua Marshman’s Translations of the Bible and Jean Basset’s Translation》, 近代史研究 (Jìndàishì Yánjiū) 2009/4, pp. 41–59.

\(^{51}\) Patrick Taveirne: *Naming the Nameless in Asia, Cross-Textual Hermeneutics and Cross-Cultural Communication*, in Christianity in Mongolia, Proceedings to the Antoon Mostaert Symposium on Christianity and Mongolia, Antoon Mostaert Center, 2006, pp. 139–149.
I.6 THEOLOGICAL REFLEXION ON THE CONCEPT OF TRADITION

How can modern Catholic theologians position themselves with regard to such a complex historical heritage? A very conservative view would consist in asserting that all the innovations condemned by bishops or Roman authorities in the past must necessarily continue to be eliminated from the practice of the Catholic Church for the sake of the purity of the Catholic doctrine. Another opposite, but not less extreme point of view, would consist in defending the idea that Catholics should now forget their tradition entirely and align their practice with that of the most “successful” Protestant Churches. As the reader can expect, neither of these theses will be defended here.

Let us first note that the first hypothetical “conservative” position mentioned above would ignore the fact that even the most rigorous papal writings concerning the Term Question, like the bull Ex Illa Die, have never anathemized the faith of Matteo Ricci’s Chinese friends. However imperfect this faith may have been (but whose faith is perfect?), it belongs to the inalienable historical heritage of the Church, and the vocabulary used by the first Chinese Catholic converts cannot be entirely separated from Christian Tradition, even if ecclesiastic authorities have later decided to forbid the usage of certain words.

Let us also note that the role of Chinese Classics in Chinese culture has dramatically evolved after the May Fourth Movement of 1919, and that the Chinese language itself has strongly evolved since then. To some extent, the
theological criteria followed by the cardinals of Propaganda Fide have also been substantially complemented since the 18th century, especially after the promulgation of the Decree on Ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council (1964), the Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions (1965), the Apostolic Exhortation of Paul VI Evangeli Nuntiandi (1975) and the encyclical of John Paul II Redemptoris Missio (1990). Key notions ignored by 17th and 18th centuries missionaries, such as inculturation and inter-religious dialogue, are now being widely promoted by the Catholic Magisterium. Yet another element that needs to be taken into account is the fact that the terms 上帝 (Shàngdì) and 神 (Shén) have now been used for more than a century and a half by various dynamic Protestant communities whose influence on Chinese culture has become significant. There is basically not the slightest doubt that the divinity adored by Protestants with the names 上帝 (Shàngdì) or 神 (Shén) is exactly the same as the one adored by Catholics with the word 天主 (Tiānzhǔ).

While there is no reason to doubt that the concerns for preserving the Catholic faith conveyed by the 1715 bull Ex Illa Die have become irrelevant for us today, the question that we wish to discuss in the present study is neither what 21st century scholars would have decided concerning Chinese Rites in 1715 if they had been educated in the mold of Post-Tridentine theology, nor what 21st century scholars could have decided concerning Chinese Rites in 1715 if they had used the theological criteria of Vatican II at that time. Much more to the point, we would wish to know how contemporary Catholics should handle different Chinese divine appellations in a Catholic Spirit today, provided that they wish to remain faithful to the Living Tradition of the Church in all its plenitude.
Since Vatican Council II and all the most recent Popes have wished to encourage ecumenical dialogue, and since Protestant Churches now commonly use the terms 上帝 (Shàngdì) or 神 (Shén), it is legitimate to ask whether these terms could be better integrated into the life of the Catholic Church. In a preceding article, the author of those lines suggested that a (too?) original but a priori consistent way of welcoming the term 上帝 (Shàngdì) in Catholic translations of the New Testament might « consist in translating Theos by Tiānzhǔ every time the term Theos corresponds to a word that, in its original historical context, was pronounced in Aramaic, which is the case for nearly all the occurrences of Theos in the Gospels, except for instance when the centurion declares that Jesus was son of God. On the other hand, one could translate Theos by Shàngdì every time the original context of the occurrence supposes the use of the Greek language, as is the case for nearly all the passages of the Pauline epistles. According to this hypothesis, Tianzhu would correspond to the divine name as it was revealed to Israel, and Shàngdì to the designation of God through which the Christian message was inculturated in a non-Israelite culture, Greek at the time of the New Testament, and later also Chinese ».\(^{52}\)

Such an idea might well prove difficult to accept by some Protestant theologians, who could argue that under the Sola Scriptura principle, one should not introduce distinctions that do not belong to the biblical text itself. Of course, the question of what belongs to the biblical text properly speaking is not as clear cut as one may wish. According to the Dominican

\(^{52}\) Cf. François Barriquand, ref. supra.
theologian Yves Congar (1904–1995), “the” Tradition of the Church is nothing else than *the transmission of the reality that is Christianity*\(^{53}\). According to such an historical perspective, translating *Theos* in the New Testament in function of the historical background of each occurrence would not be *a priori* absurd. Many Protestant exegetes might possibly even agree with this. However, since the author of these lines is himself not clearly convinced that translating *Theos* by two different names in the New Testament would really constitute a *good* translational option, this option will not be discussed any further below. Such an option remains naturally open, and the future will tell us whether it is adopted into any language one day.

In any case, even if they decide to stick to the translation of *Theos* by a single Chinese name, biblical translators still need to deal with a great number of problems associated with several divine names. The second part of this article is devoted to such issues.

**II.  BIBLICAL SURVEY**

**II.1  THE TERMS ELOHIM, YHWH, THEOS, KURIOS AND THEIR MUTUAL RELATIONSHIPS**

Since 天主 (*Tiānzhǔ*) has become the official Catholic designation of God in the aftermath of the Chinese Rites Controversy, the Sigao Bible did not innovate when it

translated the name *Elohim* in the first verse of the Bible by 天主 (*Tiānzhǔ*). What is more, since the Septuagint usually translates *Elohim* by *Theos*, it was natural for the Sigao Bible to use the term *Tianzhu* also in the New Testament, as a translation of *Theos*.

The expression *God of Heaven* is well attested in the Bible, since it occurs, with some variations, approximately 30 times\(^{54}\). Interestingly, most of these occurrences are contemporary to Persian influences on the Bible. The Sigao Bible sometimes translates *God of Heaven* by 上天的天主\(^{55}\), and more often by 天上的天主\(^{56}\). The redundant use of the character 天 in these expressions may explain why the Sigao Bible has also explored other possibilities, notably 上天大王\(^{57}\) and 上天的大主\(^{58}\), at the cost of a loss of uniformity. Although the use of 天主 to translate *Elohim* and *Theos* certainly does not facilitate the translation of the expression *God of Heaven*, the very existence of this expression in the Bible globally reinforces the feeling that 天主 (*Tiānzhǔ*) constitutes a valid translation of the term *God*.

Ironically, the expression meaning literally *Lord of Heaven* can be found only once in the Bible, in Dan. 5:23, where the Sigao Bible renders it by 上天大主 and the Union Version by 天上的神 (*Shen* edition) or 天上的上帝 (*Shangdi* edition).

\(^{54}\) Cf. Gen. 24:3.7; 2 Chron. 36:23; Ezra 1:2, 5:11.12, 6:9.10, 7:12.21.23; Neh. 1:4.5, 2:4.20; Ps. 136:26; Dan. 2:18.19.37.44; Jonah 1:9; Tob. 7:12, 8:15; Jdt. 5:8, 6:19, 11:17; Rev. 11:13, 16:11.


\(^{56}\) Cf. Neh. 1:5; Rev. 11:13, 16:11.


\(^{58}\) Cf. Ezra 5:11.12; Dan. 2:18.19.37.44; Tob. 7:12, 8:15; Jdt. 5:8, 6:19, 11:17.
None of these translations has used the expression 天主 at the only place where the original text of the Bible contains it exactly word for word!

In order to translate the term YHWH in the OT, and Kurios in the NT when it corresponds to YHWH, the Sigao Bible has adopted the term Shàngzhǔ (上主), which leads to a kind of “fundamental equation” for the quartet \{Elohim, YHWH // Theos, Kurios\} in the Sigao:

\[ \{Elohim, YHWH // Theos, Kurios\} = \{天主, 上主//天主, 上主\} \]

Other translations have chosen different starting points, of which we shall consider only three:

(i) Union Version (Shen edition):

\[ \{Elohim, YHWH // Theos, Kurios\} = \{○神, 耶和華//○神, 主\} \]

(In the present article only, the sign ○ marks the presence of a typographical blank space serving as a mark of deep reverence in Chinese)

(ii) Union Version (Shangdi edition):

\[ \{Elohim, YHWH // Theos, Kurios\} = \{○上帝, 耶和華//○上帝, 主\} \]

(iii) Lü Zhenzhong (呂振中):

\[ \{Elohim, YHWH // Theos, Kurios\} = \{上帝, 永恆主//上帝, 主\} \]
II.1.1. HOW TO DISTINGUISH KURIOS FROM THEOS

Let us now ask what could be the path followed by a 21st century Catholic biblical scholar wishing to translate the quartet \{Elohim, YHWH // Theos, Kurios\} for a new Chinese edition of the Bible. This scholar might not necessarily choose to deal with Gen. 1:1 in the first place. Knowing that the New Testament lies at the very heart of the Christian faith, he/she might rather choose to start with the NT. What is more, since 天主 (Tiānzhǔ) has become the most official designation of God used by Chinese Catholic congregations, this scholar might also wish to use the term Tianzhu for at least a fraction of the Greek occurrences of either Theos and Kurios, which constitute the two principal divine names contained in the New Testament.

Let us therefore first turn our attention towards the divine name Theos, usually translated in English by God. How could we select the best candidates for the translation of this term into Chinese? A simple efficient philological criterion derives perhaps from the fact that several names and adjectives related to Theos do exist in Greek, such as the names theiotēs (Rom. 1:20) and theōtēs (Col. 2:9), both meaning divinity or godhead, and such as the adjective theios (Acts 17:29 and 2 Pet. 1:3.4), meaning divine or godly. Among all the Chinese candidates for God’s name, only 神 and 天主 can be easily converted into generic notions like 神性 and 天主性, both more or less equivalent to the English term divinity. As a result, it may seem rather natural to translate Theos for present day readers by either 神 or 天主.
Let us now turn our attention towards the translation of the word *Kurios* in the NT. Since *Kurios* literally means *master* or *Lord* in Greek, using a Chinese word containing the character 主 (Zhǔ) for its translation seems particularly indicated. The use of the character 主 appears all the more justified as *Kurios* often serves in the LXX to translate the Hebraic term *Adonay*, which literally means *my Lord* in an emphatic (plural) form. *Adonay* is rendered by 吾主 (Wú-Zhǔ) in the Union Version and the Sigao Bible, which seems quite adequate. These translations even succeed to systematically distinguish the emphatic (divine) plural form *Adonay* from the singular form *adoni* (meaning: *my master*) by translating the latter: 我主。

When *Kurios* serves as a Greek equivalent of the divine name *YHWH*, using the character 主 alone would be too weak. The two most familiar options containing the character 主 for 21st century Chinese Catholics are 天主 (Tiānzhǔ) and 上主 (Shàngzhǔ). In Chinese, the difference of meaning between 上主 and 天主 seems quite small: When, for instance, Thomas sees Jesus after his resurrection and exclaims: *My Lord and my God!*59, which is rendered in the Sigao Bible by:

我主！我天主！

most readers would probably not notice much difference if one wrote instead:

我主！我上主！

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59 Ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου (John 20:28).
As a consequence of the above observations, the only two most natural renderings for the pair \{Theos, Kurios\} using the word 天主 (Tiānzhǔ) for one member of the pair are respectively:

\[
\{\text{Theos, Kurios}\} = \{\text{天主, 上主}\}
\]

and:

\[
\{\text{Theos, Kurios}\} = \{\text{神, 天主}\}.
\]

The first combination corresponds to the choice of the Sigao Bible. Since the second option would entail a massive change in the NT, as well as inevitable modifications in the OT, we shall not explore it. The probability that it will be used in the future seems extremely weak.

The above reasoning does not imply, however, that the character 神 (Shén) should be totally discarded for the translation of Theos in the New Testament. In fact, the Sigao Bible already uses it in several places, notably for the translation of theiotēs (divinity) in Rom. 1:20 and theios (divine) in Acts 17:29. The character 神 also appears in an emblematic passage of Paul’s predication in Athens (Acts 17:23-24), which is worth examining in detail:

Greek: ²³διερχόμενος γὰρ καὶ ἀναθεωρῶν τὰ σεβάσματα ύμῶν εὐφόρον καὶ βωμόν ἐν ὦ ἐπεγέγρατο, Ἀγνώστω θεῷ. ὁ οὖν ἀγνοοῦντες εὐσεβείτε, τοῦτο ἐγὼ καταγγέλλω ύμῖν. Ὅ θεός ὁ ποιήσας τὸν κόσμον καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ, οὕτως ὁ σύνανοι καὶ γῆς ὑπάρχον κύριος οὐκ ἐν χειροποίητοις ναοῖς κατοικεῖ…
because, as I strolled round looking at your sacred monuments, I noticed among other things an altar inscribed: “To An Unknown God”. In fact, the unknown God you revere is the one I proclaim to you.

Since the God who made the world and everything in it is himself Lord of heaven and earth, he does not make his home in shrines made by human hands.

In Acts 17:23, the Greek word Theos is translated by 神 (Shén). One verse later, in Acts 17:24, the same Greek word is translated by 天主 (Tiānzhǔ). Unfortunately, this double translation somewhat destroys the significance of Paul’s statement. Paul’s starting point is that a common element of vocabulary, Theos, can serve to establish a link between some quite vague unfulfilled Greek religious expectations and the good news of the Resurrection. His progressive pedagogy denotes his consideration for the signs through which human spiritual aspirations are and can be conveyed in a culture that is not fully his. A posteriori, his approach also proves that unfulfilled human spiritual aspirations can, at least to some extent, be a legitimate part of the human quest for God.

The way Father Basset used the term 神 (Shén) at the very beginning of the 18th century in Sichuan bears some resemblance with Paul’s approach in Acts 17:23. We hope that the reader will forgive us to make a rather long historical
digression at this stage to emphasize this point. J. Basset has himself provided a vivid account of his missionary pedagogy:

« When non-believers ask us which God or Shen we worship, we often ask them, before answering their question, whether they really think that there is a Shen, God or gods (as their number is undetermined in Chinese). Although some Confucian scholars obstinately deny this possibility in virtue of the principles of their philosophy, there are not many of them. In contrast, no few scholars answer that although their School absolutely denies the existence of Shen, they are of another opinion, so that they fully believe that Shen exists. Others also argue that Shen is multiple.

In a second step, we ask them if they think that God or Shén (神) are several. At this question, most of them stop, not knowing what to answer. By intuition, they believe that there are several gods, but this unexpected question increases their doubts about such a plurality. They usually end up by answering, however: As many as you want, since there are so many temples dedicated to innumerable gods.

We then ask them if they have ever reflected upon the idea or concept of Shen: What is Shen?, we ask. No valid answer comes to the minds of most of them. Some, however, answer that Shen decides upon human fates, death and life, wealth and poverty, reward, virtue, vices and punishment.
We then insist: do you think that such a high authority could be possessed by things devoid of any intellect and will, like the sky, earth, rivers etc., or that it could be possessed by humans born from other fragile humans who died from disease and who, after having lived during a short span of years, all died also themselves? Please consider, we tell them, the notion of Shen or God that is innate to you and to all humans: Shen is an excellent and infinite being that exists by its own necessity and that is eternal. From Shen, all things flow as from a pure and inexhaustible source to which humans of all ranks must offer vows, prayers and sacrifices, whose favors they need to seek through their good deeds, and from whom they can hope to be rewarded for their virtue and to be punished for their sins.

When we feel that the above explanation of the word Shen, or a similar kind of explanation, pleases them, we then affirm with full confidence: 神獨一無二, God is one and there cannot be two or more gods.

After having heard this proposal, most of them are shocked, frightened and confused. And from that moment, struck as they are by the clear truth of this proposition, they find nothing to object to. Amazing, indeed, it is to discover the relationship between truth and God, and how much the reluctance of humans to deny the existence of several gods is based on preconditioned ideas.
“If it is so, some say, the sun and the moon are not gods, Guanyu\textsuperscript{60} is not a god, Zitong\textsuperscript{61} and Laojun\textsuperscript{62} \textit{etc.} are not gods.”

“This is quite true, we reply. The sun and the moon are inanimate objects; Laojun and others are men. But \textit{Shen} transcends all objects and people, so that we should avoid any confusion between them, lest we become guilty of the most flagrant error and incur the greatest possible damage.” [...] 

As soon as non-baptized people realize that the idea of divinity includes the notion of unity, they easily understand that they had been wrong to attribute divinity to idols, superior people, mountains, rivers \textit{etc.}, and that they should reserve it for a more ancient and more excellent being, who is none other than the \textit{living God who made heaven and earth and everything in it} (Acts 14:14). »\textsuperscript{63}

Although many of the philosophical assumptions that led J. Basset to use the word \textit{神} (\textit{Shén}) in the biblical translation he composed together with the Chinese convert Johan Xu would probably be considered as obsolete by most theologians today, J. Basset’s narration perhaps still has the

\textsuperscript{60} 關羽 (Guān-yǔ): military leader of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} century.

\textsuperscript{61} 梓潼 (Zǐtóng), also called 梓潼神, originally corresponding to the 4\textsuperscript{th} century scholar 張亞子 who became a semi-divinity and was particularly venerated in Zitong city, Sichuan province.

\textsuperscript{62} 老君: honorific name of Laozi used in religious Taoism.

merit of providing us with a clue about how best to translate Acts 17:23-24. If one wishes to respect the progression of Paul’s discourse in an exact way, one may consider using the term 神 (Shén) in a consistent way that was not unknown to Basset, writing for instance:

23 因為我行經各處，細看你們所敬之物，也見到一座祭壇，上面寫著「給未識之神。」現在，我就將你們所敬拜而不認識的這一位，傳告給你們。 24 創造宇宙及其中萬物之神，既是天地的主宰，就不住人手所建的殿宇...

II.1.2. HOW TO DISTINGUISH YHWH FROM ELOHIM

Since our path of reasoning has led us to retain exactly the same terms as those of the Sigao Bible for the translation of the pair {Theos, Kurios} in the New Testament, and since the influence of the Septuagint on the New Testament establishes strong links between Elohim and Theos on the one hand, and YHWH and Kurios on the other hand, one may be led to conclude that the fundamental “equation” of the Sigao Bible for the quartet:

{Elohim, YHWH // Theos, Kurios} = {天主, 上主 // 天主, 上主}

provides by necessity the best possible “Catholic” combination for all these terms. However, this conclusion is premature.

64 Here is the corresponding passage translated by J. Basset and J. Xu from the Vulgate around 1705–1706: 我觀凡事。爾等從虔崇左道太過。蓋我經看爾所敬神像。亦遇一額。寫為未識之神。爾等所謂未識而敬者。我如今宣告之與爾等。神乃作天地萬物者。其既為天地之主。弗居於人手所建之廟...
First of all, we should note that, although it is true that the relationship between the OT and the NT does impose some degree of matching between corresponding terms, the LXX itself has not succeeded in manifesting fully the significance of Hebraic divine names in Greek. This remark is particularly valid for the term YHWH, which cannot be translated in a fully satisfying manner in any language. As a result, the Sigao Bible could also have legitimately considered to translate the name YHWH phonetically, which corresponds to the option adopted by the Union Version in Chinese (although it must be said that the transliteration 耶和華, Yēhéhuá, is phonetically incorrect\(^{65}\)). The New Jerusalem Bible has similarly chosen to use a phonetic transliteraton by writing: Yahweh. This phonetic rendering presents at least one immediate potential advantage: it allows one to find an immediate phonetic equivalent for shortened versions of the term YHWH such as the two letters word “YH” in Isa. 12:2, 26:4 and Ps. 147:1. For instance, the New Jerusalem Bible writes Yah in these three verses. The Union Version does not take advantage of this possibility in Chinese, however. What is more, any phonetic rendering of YHWH would present at least one deep inconvenient in the case of a Catholic translation: the Catholic Church strongly discourages this solution in liturgical contexts\(^{66}\) out of respect for its own Tradition and also for Jewish communities.


\(^{66}\) The Instruction *Liturgiam Authenticam, On the Use of Vernacular Languages in the publication of the Books of the Roman Liturgy*, issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in March 2001, states: *in accordance with immemorial tradition, which indeed is already evident in the above-mentioned “Septuagint” version, the name of*
The term adopted by the Sigao Bible for YHWH, 上主 (Shàngzhǔ), seems aesthetically more satisfying than a mere transliteration. Unfortunately, the simple and rather inconspicuous term 上主 constitutes a rather strange match for the divine name by excellence, the holiest of all according to the OT. Therefore, one may reasonably argue that the combination:

\{Elohim, YHWH // Theos, Kurios\} = \{天主, ○上主//天主, 上主\}

where a blank space has been added in front of the term 上主 (Shàngzhǔ) for the Old Testament, could constitute a reasonable and very simple way of improving the Sigao Bible.

Another legitimate possibility, inspired by Lü Zhenzhong, would be to adopt the combination:

\{Elohim, YHWH // Theos, Kurios\} = \{天主, 永恆主//天主, 上主\}

Yet another possibility, which is unlikely to be adopted any time soon, but which may possibly resurface one day in the future, would be to translate YHWH by the term 聖主 (Shèngzhǔ), i.e. Holy Lord. The Jing Teaching (景教) used this term in its Hymn to Take Refuge in the Holy Trinity. This choice could result in the combination:

\{Elohim, YHWH // Theos, Kurios\} = \{天主, ○聖主//天主, 上主\}

almighty God expressed by the Hebrew tetragrammaton (YHWH) and rendered in Latin by the word Dominus, is to be rendered into any given vernacular by a word equivalent in meaning.

67 The whole verse containing the expression 聖主 in Dunhuang’s Hymn is:

師是我等慈父，大師是我等聖主，大師是我等法王，大師能為普救度。
Since the purpose of the present article is merely to open the
discussion about a wide range of reasonable options, we shall
leave the problem of the comparative advantages of 上主,
永恆主 and 聖主 open.

Let us now turn our attention towards the translation of
Elohim. As Karel Van der Toorn observes68, « also lower
deities (in modern usage referred to as spirits, angels, demons,
semi-gods, and the like) may be called Elohim. Thus the
teraphim (Gen. 31:30.32), anonymous heavenly beings (Ps. 8:6),
and the spirits of the dead (1 Sam. 28:13) are referred to as
gods. A metaphorical use of the term – metaphorical from our
point of view – occurs when it is applied to living human
beings, such as Moses (Exod. 4:16, 7:1) and the king (Ps. 45:7).
» Van der Toorn further notes69 that « related to the adjectival
use of Elohim for something out of the ordinary is the
occurrence of the term for the spirits of the dead. The one
indubitable instance of this use is found in 1 Sam. 28:13 where
the ghost of Samuel is described as a Elohim coming up for the
earth. […] A text seldom quoted in this connection is Exod.
21:6, which says that the slave who waives his right of
manumission and enters his master’s household for good is to
be brought to the gods. A commentator has added that the man
shall be brought to the door or to the outpost, perhaps the place
where the gods were thought to reside. These gods are
probably to be identified with the family ancestors.
Considering the fact that the expression inheritance of the gods
(nahalat Elohim, 2 Sam. 14:16) is a parallel to the inheritance of

68 Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible, Brill, 1999, article by K. Van
der Toorn, p. 353.
69 ibid, p. 364.
the fathers (nahalat abot), it may be that Elohim in 2 Sam. 14:16, too, refers to the (deified) ancestors.

If we examine how the Sigao Bible translates all the references quoted by Van der Toorn above, we find out that the teraphim of Gen. 31:30.32 have been translated by 神像, the anonymous beings of Ps. 8:6 (aggeloi in the LXX) by 天神, the ghost of Samuel in 1 Sam. 28:13 by 天主, the status of Moses vis-à-vis Aaron in Exod. 4:16 by 天主, the status of Moses vis-à-vis Pharaoh in Exod. 7:1 by 天主. All these varied renderings fit quite well within their respective contexts.

More problematic is the way the Sigao Bible deals with Ps. 45:6 and Exod. 21:6. In the first instance, the New American Bible writes:

*Your throne, O god, stands forever…*

A useful note explains that O god (with a minuscule g) applies to the king. The Sigao Bible translates the same verse as:

*上主！你的御座永遠常存…*

It is surprising that the Sigao Bible uses here the term it usually employs for the translation of YHWH, not Elohim. What is more, one cannot expect Chinese readers to understand that 上主 refers here to the king, not to God. A  

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70 One may prefer Lü Zhenzhong’s rendering for Elohim in this verse: 神魂. Using the character 魂 alone would also be a possible option.

71 The Sigao writes: 亞郎要代替你向百姓說話，作你的口舌；你對他是代替天主。

72 The Sigao writes: 上主向梅瑟說：「看，我使你在法朗前像神一樣」
slightly different translation might solve this problem, for instance:

神君！你的御座…

In the case of Exod. 21:6, the New American Bible writes:

… his master shall bring him to God and there, at the door or doorpost, he shall pierce his ear with an awl, thus keeping him as his slave forever.

The Sigao Bible writes:

他的主人應領他到天主前，然後領他到門口或門框前，用錐子穿透他的耳朵，如此他可長久服事主人。

If the understanding of Van der Toorn is correct, *Elohim* corresponds here to family-god(s) or family ancestors, which could be expressed in Chinese for instance by 祖靈.

All the occurrences of *Elohim* examined above are quite revealing, in that they demonstrate that *Elohim* can hardly be translated by a unique term in all instances. However, the references selected above are admittedly quite marginal in number. *Elohim* occurs some 2750 times in the Hebrew Bible, mostly to refer to gods, *God* in general, or *God* in an absolute sense, in which case it can function as a proper name, as is particularly manifest in the Psalms.

A specific translational difficulty arises when *Elohim* refers to foreign Gods or to spiritual beings that are inferior to YHWH. In certain cases, especially in the book of Jeremiah,
the Sigao Bible translates *Elohim* by the interesting \(^{73}\) composite term 神祇 (Shén-Qí)\(^{74}\). In a comparable number of cases, the Sigao Bible uses the term 眾神 (Zhòng-Shén), which means literally *all Gods/all spirits*. This expression appears in the Sigao Bible not only when the biblical text explicitly refers to “all” (in Hebrew: *kol*) gods, as is the case in Ex 12:12, 18:11, 1 Chr. 16:24, Pss. 96:4.5, Ps 97:9\(^{75}\), but also when it only refers non-specifically to *Elohim* (1 Kgs. 19:2, 20:10; Ps. 138:1), *El* (Exod. 15:11) or successively both to *Elohim* and *El* (Ps. 82:1). In all these occurrences, *the gods* (眾神) correspond to heavenly beings that are completely subordinated or dominated by the God of Israel. This biblical understanding surfaces in the expression *God of gods*, which the Sigao Bible translates diversely by:

大能者天主 (Jos. 22:22)
眾神中的真神 (Ps. 136:2)

and

眾神之神 (Dan. 3:90 Greek, 11:36)

The expression of God’s dominance culminates in the majestic expression *God of gods and Lord of lords*, which the Sigao Bible translates convincingly in Deut. 10:17 by:

萬神之神，萬主之主

\(^{73}\) In Chinese culture, 神祇 (Shén-Qí) refers to what can be called *Gods of the Heaven and the Earth*.


\(^{75}\) also in Dan. 11:36 with *kol-El* instead of *kol-Elohim*. 

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A rather similar expression, *God of gods and Lord of kings*, also occurs in Dan. 2:47 (in Aramaic), for which the Sigao Bible proposes:

萬神的天主，萬王的主宰

In this latter case, one may have preferred the more literal rendering:

萬神之神、萬王之主宰

A Greek variant of the same emphatic expression also appears in 2 Macc. 3:24: *The Sovereign of spirits and of every authority* (ὁ τῶν πνευμάτων καὶ πάσης ἐξουσίας δυνάστης). The translation proposed by the Sigao Bible in this case is:

眾神和全能的主

Although grammatically acceptable, this reading does not help to clarify the original meaning of *exousia* (*authority*) in 2 Macc. 3:24. The context of this verse invites us to understand that *every authority* corresponds to the heavenly beings of the same name. Therefore, one could also have considered the following translation:

萬神與眾威者之主

The problem of the translation of *Elohim* when it functions as a proper name for God is naturally particularly interesting from a theological point of view. Since *Elohim* often simply means *God in general/the divinity*, which can be translated by 神 (without any blank space in front of 神), the distinct translation of *Elohim* by ○神 when it functions as a
proper name would appear rather consistent. The choice of 上帝 (Shàngdì) may also be justified, since the plural form Elohim is best understood as a plural of excellence or majesty\textsuperscript{76}, and Shangdi can be viewed in Chinese tradition as God par excellence. Naturally, the choice of 天主 (Tiānzhū) for the rendering of Elohim also remains a reasonable possibility.

If the preparation of an ecumenical edition of the Bible in Chinese is considered anew in the future, the author of these lines thinks – but this concerns himself only - that the Catholic Church could accept without too much difficulty the rendering of Elohim by either 神 (Shén) or 上帝 (Shàngdì), while keeping 天主 (Tiānzhū) for Theos in the New Testament.

On the other hand, in case a revision of already existing Catholic translations is considered in the future, or if an entirely new Catholic translation of the Old Testament is published one day, it is difficult to see what intrinsically compelling reasons could justify a massive change from 天主 to either 神 or 上帝 for the translation of Elohim. In particular, one should be aware of the three following considerations:

(i) It is not easy to imagine that Catholic translations may willingly abandon the use of 天主 for the translation of Theos in the NT. Since a certain degree of correspondence exists between Theos and Elohim, the translation of both words by a unique Chinese term presents a strong natural benefit.

(ii) The Sigao Bible already uses the word 神 (Shén) for the rendering of Elohim in certain particular cases. We have already quoted the examples of 1 Sam. 28:13 and Exod. 7:1. Another example of the use of 神 can be found in Exod. 12:12, where the gods of Egypt are translated 埃及的眾神. Using another Chinese term than 神 when Elohim functions as a proper name for the God of Israel, as does the Sigao Bible with 天主, also presents some natural benefit.

(iii) Although, as already noted, translating Elohim by 上帝 (Shàngdì) may present some advantages, doing so would prevent us from expressing in Chinese an interesting subtlety that seems to have remained ignored by most translators so far: Chinese translations make little difference between the terms El and Elohim, although their respective meanings do present certain identifiable differences in a small number of cases. Admittedly, El can sometimes function in exactly the same way as Elohim, as is the case for instance in Ps. 7:11 where Elohim and El are used in parallel way. But Wolfgang Herrmann also notes that « the OT contains texts where the Canaanite background is still recognizable. In these few instances, El refers [originally] to a deity other than YHWH.»77 The two most significant instances of this phenomenon can be found in Gen. 33:20 and Gen. 46:3. Curiously, the New American Bible simply transliterates the name El in the first instance, writing in Gen. 33:20 El, the God of Israel for what corresponds literally to El, the Elohim of Israel, whereas it translates El by God in Gen. 46:3, writing I am God, the God of

77 Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible, article by W. Herrmann, p. 277.
your father for what corresponds literally to I am El, the Elohim of your father. In Gen. 33:20, the Sigao Bible writes:

大能者以色列的天主，

whereas in Gen. 46:3, it writes:

我是天主，你父親的天主。

One may emit the opinion that these two instances provide a quasi ideal connection between some of the most ancient faiths of the Middle East, and the ancient Chinese faith in 上帝 (Shàngdì). 上帝 cannot easily be used to translate YHWH – and no Protestant translation has used it in that way – among other reasons because it would seem somewhat anachronistic to use a Chinese name used during the Shang dynasty for the translation of a name revealed to Moses much later. What is more, using 上帝 to translate Elohim would suffer from the fact that Elohim is not always clearly personalized in the Bible, as it often means simply God. In contrast, Gen. 33:20 and Gen. 46:3 contain a clearly personalized invocation of El, wherein El can be understood to exert a clear supremacy over all other gods, just as Shangdi stands over other gods or spirits in the Chinese pantheon. Another passage where El appears linked to early Canaanite traditions can be found in Isa. 14:13, where the king of Babylon is reported to have thought proudly:

I will raise my throne above the stars of El.

This sentence is translated in the Sigao Bible by:

我要直沖霄漢，高置我的御座在天主的星宿以上。
Also here, using 上帝 may constitute a serious option by writing:

我要直冲霄漢，高置我的御座在上帝的星宿以上。

A last passage wherein Herrmann identifies an allusion to El Canaanite mythology is Ezek. 28:2. This verse accuses the king of Tyre of having considered himself as a God (El) and of having dreamed to possess a divine residence in the middle of the sea, which is reminiscent of the abode attributed to El by Canaanite mythology.

In other biblical occurrences, El can be simply considered as a generic name for God, quasi interchangeable with Elohim, except for the fact that the singular form El does not carry the same amount of reverence as the plural Elohim. For this reason, although the Sigao Bible usually renders El by 天主 (Tiānzhǔ), the more neutral word 神 (Shén) may be preferable in certain cases. As an example of this, let us consider Ps. 5:5, where the New American Bible writes:

You are not a God [El] who delights in evil.

The Sigao Bible writes here:

你絕不是喜愛罪惡的天主。

One might have considered the variant:

你絕不是一位喜愛罪惡的神。

The word El also serves as a component of several composite expressions such as El Elyon, El Olam, El Roy, El
Berit etc. The problem of their translation in Chinese is addressed *infra* in § II.5.1.

Lastly, let us also note that the word El can be metaphorically applied to human beings in the same way as Elohim. Such happens to be the case in Isa. 9:5, where the Sigao Bible writes:

因為有一個嬰孩為我們誕生了，有一個兒子賜給了我們；他肩上擔負著王權，他的名子要稱為神奇的謀士、強有力的天主、永遠之父、和平之王。

The use of 天主 (*Tiānzhǔ*) in this verse may be felt too “strong”, and one might have considered the use of 神 (*Shén*), writing:

因為有一個嬰孩為我們誕生了，有一個兒子賜給了我們；他肩上擔負著王權，他的名子要稱為奇妙的謀士、有力之神、永遠之父、和平之王。

Our discussion concerning the four terms Elohim, Theos, YHWH and Kurios is still far from complete, since the use of *kurios* in the NT possesses certain theological implications that deserve to be examined in some detail. The meaning of the expression YHWH Sabaoth, which occurs 284 times in the Hebrew Bible as a divine name, also deserves particular attention. A few more opportunities for using the characters 神 (*Shén*) and 帝 (*Dì*) will surface in our discussion.
II.2 MULTI-FUNCTIONALITY OF THE TERM KURIOS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

One of the most elementary problems faced by translators concerning *Kurios* is the following: how should one translate *Kurios* in the New Testament when this term belongs to a quotation borrowed from the LXX concerning *YHWH*? Should one translate it in the same way as one translates *YHWH* in the Old Testament? The Chinese Union Version does not do so. The Sigao Bible automatically resolves this difficulty by using the same term 上主 (*Shàngzhǔ*) in the Old and New Testament. However, even the Sigao Bible cannot escape another problem linked to the translation of *Kurios*, which is rendered particularly manifest at least six times in Pauline epistles and once in the first epistle of Peter.

Pauline and Lucan Christology are characterized, already in Paul’s earliest epistles, by a systematic tendency to apply LXX passages concerning *Kurios* (= *YHWH*) to Jesus-Christ. Even in passages where OT quotations are scarce, Paul recurrently uses expressions such as the *day of the Lord*, the *Spirit of the Lord*, among others, with a Christological twist. The Philippians Hymn provides a particularly remarkable example of such early Christology. Its typically Greek features support the hypothesis that Antioch served as a melting pot for its maturation. In any case, whatever the details of its historical elaboration, such Christological hermeneutics raise major difficulties for translators. We may well ask ourselves how many biblical translations, not only in Chinese, succeed to convey the kerygmatic proclamation that *Jesus is Lord* as boldly as Paul confessed it. According to the New Testament, this confession (cf. for instance 1 Cor. 12:3) seems to imply
that all the qualities and prerogatives attributed to YHWH in the OT belong to, or are shared by, Jesus-Christ. But does this creedal statement really surface in modern translations?

Let us examine the seven NT sentences wherein the theological dimension of the confession in Christ Kurios seems most directly apparent, followed by the translation made by the Sigao Bible:

Rom. 10:9 ὅτι ἐὰν ὀμολογήσῃς ἐν τῷ στόματί σου Κύριον Ἰησούν, καὶ πιστεύσῃς ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου ὅτι ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ἤγειρεν ἐκ νεκρῶν, σωθήσῃ:

如果你口裏承認耶穌為主，心裏相信天主使祂從死者中復活起來了，你便可獲得救恩，

Rom. 10:12.13 οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν διαστολὴ Ἰουδαίου τε καὶ Ελλήνως, ὁ γὰρ αὐτὸς Κύριος πάντων, πλουτῶν εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἑπικαλουμένους αὐτὸν: 12Πᾶς γὰρ ὃς ἀν ἑπικαλέσηται τὸ ὄνομα Κυρίου σωθήσεται.

其實，並沒有猶太人與希臘人的區別，因為眾人都有同一的主，他對一切呼號他的人都富有慈惠的。的確，『凡呼號上主名號的人，必然獲救。』

1 Cor. 8:6 ἀλλὰ ἡμῖν εἰς θεὸς ὁ πατήρ, ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτὸν, καὶ εἰς Κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς, δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς δι' αὐτοῦ.

可是為我們只有一個天主，就是聖父，萬物都出於他，而我們也歸於他；也只有一個主，
就是耶穌基督，萬物藉他而有，我們也藉他而有。

1 Cor. 12:3  διὸ γνωρίζω οὐδὲν ἐν πνεύματι θεοῦ λαλῶν λέγει, Ἀνάθεμα Ἰησοῦς, καὶ οὐδὲν δύναται εἰπεῖν, Κύριος Ἰησοῦς, εἰ μὴ ἐν πνεύματι ἀγίῳ.

為此，我告訴你們，沒有一個受天主聖神感動的會說：「耶穌是可詛咒的；」除非受聖神感動，也沒有一個能說：「耶穌是主」的。

2 Cor. 4:5  οὐ γὰρ ἑαυτοὺς κηρύσσομεν ἀλλὰ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν Κύριον, ἑαυτοὺς δὲ δούλους ὑμῶν διὰ Ἰησοῦν.

因為我們不是宣傳我們自己，而是宣傳耶穌基督為主，我們只是因耶穌的緣故作了你們的奴僕。

Phil. 2:11  καὶ πᾶσα γλῶσσα ἐξομολογήσῃ τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦς εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ πατρός.

一切唇舌無不明認耶穌基督是主，以光榮天主聖父。

1 Pet. 3:15  Κύριον δὲ τὸν Χριστὸν ἀγιάσατε ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις υμῶν, ἐτοιμοὶ αἰ̱ πρὸς ἀπολογίαν παντὶ τῷ αἰτοῦντι υμᾶς λόγον περὶ τῆς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐλπίδος,

你們但要在心內尊崇基督為主；若有人詢問你們心中所懷希望的理由，你們要時常準備答覆，
In all the above instances, one may wonder whether using 上主 (Shàngzhǔ) to translate Kurios could not have led to a more faithful translation than using the simple character 主 (Zhū). We shall content ourselves to leave this question open for further debate.

The translation of kurios seems to demand a lot of attention and technical skills, since there also exist a few cases where readers of the Sigao Bible may ask exactly the reverse question, i.e.: does the expression 上主 (Shàngzhǔ) seem appropriate for the translation of Kurios, or shouldn’t one have preferred the single character 主 (Zhū) instead? After inspection, it seems that the choice of the Sigao Bible does not fit well with Lucan Christology in five passages of Acts: Acts 2:47, 9:31, 10:33, 12:17, 23.

Apart from the occurrences mentioned above, let us also, for the sake of completion, mention that there exist three occurrences in the Sigao Bible where the NT quotes the LXX in passages where Kurios serves as an equivalent to YHWH, and where the Sigao Bible, inexplicably, does not use the term 上主 (Shàngzhǔ)\(^78\). There also exist three occurrences where the NT uses Kurios in a way that does not directly quote the LXX, but where it is strongly reminiscent of the LXX and where Kurios obviously refers to YHWH\(^79\), whereas the Sigao Bible does not use 上主.

Even more inexplicably, there also exist a few cases where the Sigao Bible inadvertently uses the term 天主

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\(^{78}\) Cf. Acts 15:18 (quoting Amos 9:12), 1 Cor. 1:31 (quoting Jer. 9:24) and 2 Tim. 2:19 (quoting Num. 16:5).

\(^{79}\) Cf. 2 Tim. 2:19 (second use of Kurios in the verse); Jude 1:5.9.
(Tiānzhǔ) instead of 上主 (Shàngzhǔ) to translate Kurios\textsuperscript{80}. There is also one use of 天主 (Tiānzhǔ) for Kurios in the Sigao Bible where one would have expected 主 (Zhǔ)\textsuperscript{81}; one occurrence where the word Kurios has been forgotten by Sigao Bible translators\textsuperscript{82}, and one occurrence where the word Kurios is strangely translated by 基督\textsuperscript{83}.

Since we have already devoted some attention (cf. II.1.2.) to the majesty of the Old Testament expressions God of gods and Lord of lords (Deut. 10:17) and God of gods and Lord of kings (Dan. 2:47), it is fitting to conclude this paragraph by mentioning the equal solemnity of the expression King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 19:16), which also appears in Rev. 17:14 in a reversed order (Lord of lords and King of kings). In the case of Rev. 17:14, 19:16, this expression refers to Christ. The Sigao Bible renders it convincingly by, respectively:

萬王之王，萬主之主 \hspace{1cm} (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 19:16)

and

萬主之主，萬王之王 \hspace{1cm} (Rev. 17:14).

\textsuperscript{80} Cf. Mark 12:29; Acts 13:10.44; 2 Cor. 10:18.
\textsuperscript{81} Cf. 2 Pet. 3:8.
\textsuperscript{83} Cf. Rom. 14:14.
II.3  **YHWH SABAOTH AND KURIOS PANTOCRATOR**

II.3.1.  **YHWH SABAOTH**

Let us now turn our attention towards the set expression *YHWH Sabaoth*, which occurs no less than 284 times in the Hebrew Bible (not counting the *qere* in 2 Kgs. 19:31). It also surfaces 12 times in the NT (cf. § II.3.2).

From the philological point of view, the exact interpretation of the expression *YHWH Sabaoth* appears somewhat challenging. Let us start by considering four observations discussed in much greater detail by Tryggve Mettinger:

(i)  First of all, according to Mettinger\(^{84}\), « there is almost general agreement [among scholars] that the word ᵜḇāʾōt derives from the Semitic root ᵜḇ’, found in e.g. Akkadian ᵚḇum (Mari ᵚḇum), “people”, plural “soldiers”, “workers” and Hebrew ᵜḇā’, “army; host”».

(ii)  Although Eissfeldt’s proposal to read ᵜḇāʾōt as an intensive abstract plural on the order of such plurals as ᵜʾōt, *full knowledge*, ᵜḇûrōt, *extraordinary strength*, and ᵜемые, *Guardian, Protector*\(^{85}\) (2 Sam. 23:1) - which would lead one to translate *YHWH Sabaoth* roughly by *YHWH the mighty* - has been received with great enthusiasm in recent literature, many exegetes (including Mettinger) remain of the opinion

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\(^{84}\) *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, article by T. N. D. Mettinger, p. 924.

that « the traditional understanding, viz. as a construct relation, YHWH of ʿēḇāʿōt, seems the most probable solution and is made less problematical by the epigraphic attestation of analogues such as YHWH of Teman and YHWH of Samaria in Kuntillet Ajrud. »\(^{86}\)

(iii) The biblical appellation YHWH Sabaoth had been historically developed in the sanctuary of Shiloh. The royal imagery with which it was associated (notably the throne of cherubim) possesses features borrowed from the Canaanite divine monarch El. The expression YHWH Sabaoth was later used in the context of the liturgy of the temple in Jerusalem.

(iv) Instances of warlike connotations « are to be found in texts which use the designation [YHWH Sabaoth] as part of a play on words with military overtones (1 Sam. 17:45; Isa. 13:4, 31:4). Indeed, the martial character of YHWH Sabaoth is amply\(^{87}\) attested. » One may add that military might would have been a necessary attribute of any God endowed with the power to determine the fate of nations recurrently at war against each other. In other words, the fact that YHWH Sabaoth had to rule on military matters does not prove per se that his name bore strong military connotations. What is more, it would be wrong to imagine that YHWH Sabaoth confined himself to military issues. The fact that YHWH Sabaoth was willing to intervene in purely civil family issues can

\(^{86}\) Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible, article by T. N. D. Mettinger, p. 920.


\(^{88}\) Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible, article by T. N. D. Mettinger, p. 921.
be known already from Hannah’s prayer for a son in 1 Sam. 1:11.

To what extent must the divine Council of God, 23 times designated by sôd, and also sometimes called šāḇā’89, be identified with the šēḇā’ôt is a controversial issue. Mettinger argues in favor of a close identification, noting that the expression YHWH Sabaoth twice occurs in passages wherein the divine Council plays a role (Ps. 89:6-19; Isa. 6:3.5.8). He affirms that « If the Sabaoth name refers to God as the heavenly King, and the term šāḇā’ in the singular is a common term for the heavenly host surrounding the throne, then it would be reasonable to conclude that the Sabaoth name is to be interpreted on the basis of this use of the word šāḇā’ rather than on the basis of its application to Israel’s mortal armies, or to the universe in general, or anything else. The Sabaoth name speaks of God as YHWH of the heavenly hosts. »90

The fact that the heavenly Hosts’ main task was not exclusively militaristic can be deduced from many passages. Two passages are particularly evocative: Neh. 9:6 and 1 Kgs. 22:19-22, the translations of which are worth examining.

In Nehemiah 9:6, Ezra tells God:

Sigao: 唯獨你是上主，是你創造了天，天上的天，和天
上的一切軍旅，地和地上的一切，海和海中的一
切，是你使一切生存；天上的軍旅常在你前跪拜。

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90 Tryggve Mettinger, ref. supra, p. 134.
NAB: It is you, O LORD, you are the only one; you made the heavens, the highest heavens and all their host, the earth and all that is upon it, the seas and all that is in them. To all of them you give life, and the heavenly hosts bow down before you.

In this verse, the Sigao Bible has translated the Host/Heavenly Hosts respectively by 軍旅 and 天上的軍旅, although it is clear that their main function is a religious one (to worship God), not to wage war.

The usefulness of the Sabaoth appears even more clearly in 1 Kgs. 22:19-22:

Sigao: 米加亞答說：「為此，你且靜聽上主的話：我見上主坐在寶座上，天上的萬軍侍立在他左右。上主問說：有誰能去唆使阿哈布，叫他上去進攻辣摩特基肋阿得，而死在那裏呢？那時有的說這樣，有的說那樣。以後，有一個神出來，立在上主面前說：我能唆使他。上主問他說：用什麼方法？那神回答說：我去，在他所有的先知口中做虛言的神。

NAB: Micaiah continued: “Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD seated on his throne, with the whole host of heaven standing by to his right and to his left. The LORD asked, ‘Who will deceive Ahab, so that he will go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?’ And one said this, another that, until one of the spirits came forth and presented himself to the LORD, saying, ‘I will deceive him.’ The LORD asked, ‘How?’ He answered, ‘I will go forth and become a lying spirit in the mouths of all his prophets.’ The LORD replied, ‘You shall succeed in deceiving him. Go forth and do this.’
In this latter passage, the Sigao Bible has translated the *host of heaven* by 天上的萬軍 instead of 天上的軍旅 in Neh. 9:6. In 1 Kgs. 22:19-22, the divine Hosts behave like a kind of divine Court. It appears that a single Host is powerful enough to inspire or to mislead several prophets. One of them would presumably also suffice to infuse a spirit of courage or fear into a whole army without needing to take part in the fighting himself. Let us note in passing that one may consider the possibility to replace the three occurrences of 神 in the Sigao Bible’s translation of 1 Kgs. 22:21-22 by the word 天神 (already used by Matteo Ricci), in particular for ecumenical reasons.

Let us now turn towards the problem of the translation of *YHWH Sabaoth* in Chinese. Existing translations include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>萬軍的上主</td>
<td>Sigao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(also 萬軍之軍的上主 in Ps. 24:10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>萬軍之耶和華</td>
<td>Union Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>萬軍之永恆主</td>
<td>Lü Zhenzhong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>萬有主宰</td>
<td>Wu Jingxiong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LORD of hosts</td>
<td>New American Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yahweh Sabaoth</td>
<td>New Jerusalem Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lord of hosts</td>
<td>NRSV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le SEIGNEUR, le tout-puissant</td>
<td>TOB (ecumenical, French, 1975)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le Seigneur de l’univers</td>
<td>TOB (ecumenical, French, 2010)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The uniqueness of the expression 萬軍的上主 used by the Sigao Bible in Ps. 24:10 does not seem to correspond to any particular feature present in the Hebraic text.

It is somewhat striking to note that the locution 萬軍 is shared by three major Chinese translations, whereas all the
major English and French translations avoid militaristic connotations in the translation of *YHWH Sabaoth*.

In the light of the modifications adopted for the 2010 new edition of the *Traduction Œcuménique de la Bible* (TOB), one may consider that good translations of the expression *YHWH Sabaoth* must stress the superhuman authority of *YHWH*, but that they do not need to provide any clear indication concerning the identity of the *Sabaoth* at all costs; this identity presumably never interested the authors of the O.T. too much anyway. Another fundamental characteristic of the Hebraic expression *YHWH Sabaoth* is its length and majesty, which concurs to emphasize the significance of the vision reported in Isa 6:3. A corresponding degree of stately majesty should be found for its Chinese equivalents.

At this stage, we may remember that the first generations of Jesuit missionaries in China sometimes used enjoyed to use a highly idiomatic and noble expression, 大父母 (Dà-Fù-Mǔ) (meaning literally the *Great-Father-Mother*, or the *Pre-eminent-Parent*), which was particularly appreciated by Giulio Aleni (艾儒略, 1582–1649) and the “pillar of the Church” Yang Tingyun (楊廷筠, 1557–1627) among others. Its value was also acknowledged in Sichuan province around 1704\(^91\). The later disuse of this expression is one of the

regrettable consequences of the Rites Controversy. Modern Chinese readers might perhaps tend to consider the expression 大父母 as little more than an exotic reminiscence of the past. However, this expression can be embedded into universally oriented designations which modern readers may quickly learn to appreciate, such as:

吾人之大父母,
萬民的大父母,
萬國萬類之大父母

The all‐encompassing parenthood suggested by such expressions fits particularly well with Christian theology. They may perhaps serve as a source of inspiration for the translation of the expression YHWH of Hosts, which could be rendered for instance like this:

天地萬臣之大父母

or:

天地眾臣之大父母

In a significant number of cases, especially in Jeremiah, the Bible uses the even longer designation YHWH of Hosts, God of Israel, which could be translated accordingly:

天地萬臣之大父母，以色列的天主

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92 Gianni Criveller (柯毅霖), "利瑪竇的傳教方法", 鼎 2010 年, 30 卷, 158 期 (陳愛潔譯)。

In some rarer cases, the Bible does not use the standard expression *YHWH of Hosts* but rather *God of Hosts*, principally as a component of the standard phrase *Lord, God of Hosts*\(^94\). The Bible also contains the even more majestic, but rarer designation *Lord, God of Hosts, God of Israel*\(^95\) as well as *Lord God, the God of Hosts*\(^96\) and the *Lord, the God of Hosts, the Lord*\(^97\).

The Sigao Bible usually translates *Lord, God of Hosts* logically by:

上主萬軍的天主

although it also contains several other renderings of exactly the same expression, such as:

- 上主, 萬軍的上主 (Ps. 69:6)
- 萬軍的天主 (Ps. 80:4; Amos 5:15)
- 萬軍的上主 (Ps. 84:8)
- 我主萬軍上主 (Jer. 2:19, 46:10, 49:5, 50:31)
- 「雅威，」萬軍的天主 (Amos 4:13)
- 吾主上主 (Amos 9:5)

The Sigao Bible also contains two different translations for the expression *Lord, God of Hosts, God of Israel*:


\(^95\) Jer. 35:17, 38:17, 44:7.

\(^96\) Amos 3:13.

\(^97\) Amos 5:16.
上主萬軍的天主，以色列的天主 (Jer 35:17, 44:7)
萬軍的天主，以色列的天主主 (Jer 38:17)

The two *hapax legomena*: *Lord God, the God of Hosts* and *the Lord, the God of Hosts, the Lord* are translated by the Sigao Bible respectively by:

吾主萬軍的天主 (Amos 3:13)
萬軍的天主，吾主上主 (Amos 5:16)

If we choose to reserve the use of the term 大父母 for occurrences containing the expression *YHWH of Hosts*, the lexical unit *God of Hosts* could be best translated by an expression like 萬臣的天主. The ample divine designations into which this lexical unit is always embedded might be translated respectively, for instance, by:

*Lord, God of Hosts* 上主，萬臣的天主
*Lord, God of Hosts, God of Israel* 上主，萬臣的天主，以色列的天主

*Lord God, the God of Hosts* 吾主上主，萬臣的天主
*the Lord, the God of Hosts, the Lord* 上主，萬臣的天主，上主

II.3.2. **KURIOS PANTOCRATOR**

Before leaving the expression *YHWH Sabaoth*, it is worthwhile to consider its influence on the New Testament. The expression *Kurios Sabaōth* or *Pantocratōr* (the most common LXX rendering for *YHWH Sabaoth*) appears twice in a semi-transliterated form (*Kurios Sabaōth*) in Rom. 9:29 and Jas. 5:4, once in fully translated form (*Kurios Pantocrator*) in 2 Cor. 6:18, and nine times, also in fully translated form, in the book of Revelation. Reinhard Feldmeier further indicates that
The shortened expression *ho theos ho pantocratōr* occurs twice in connection with God’s or his Messiah’s battle against the godless people and their kings (Rev. 16:14, 19:15). The more detailed expression *Kurios ho Theos ho Pantokratōr* is used seven times (Rev. 1:8, 4:8, 11:17, 15:3, 16:7, 19:6, 21:22). We shall concentrate our attention here on the book of Revelation, whose more frequent use of the expression *Kurios Pantokratōr*, literally meaning *Lord Almighty, All-Sovereign or Controlling all things*, appears linked with the main theological intention of the entire book. As Feldmeier puts it, the divine attribute *pantokratōr* «stresses, in opposition to the Roman Empire’s claim for world power, God’s royal power, which embraces the whole cosmos. [...] *Pantokratōr* as a divine designation intends to express something similar to the more dynamic concept of the *kingdom of God*, namely that God is the Lord of his Creation and that in it he has realized or shall realize his will».

Let us now compare a few existing translations for Rev 4:8 (*Kurios ho Theos ho Pantokratōr*):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>取神或主上帝 + 全能者</td>
<td>主上帝・全能者</td>
<td>Union Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>天地萬有之主宰... + 全能天主</td>
<td>Lord God Almighty</td>
<td>New American Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the Lord God... + the Almighty</td>
<td>New Jerusalem Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lord God the Almighty</td>
<td>NRSV</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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98 Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible, article by R. Feldmeier, p. 22.

99 ibid, p. 23.
All the translations listed above appear quite acceptable. Still other possibilities may also appear in the future. From an ecumenically oriented point of view anchored in Catholic tradition, animated with the desire to open more space for the character 帝 (Dì) in Catholic translations, Feldmeier’s observation that the expression Kurios Pantocratōr exalts the divine royal prerogatives against the Roman Empire’s claim for worldwide domination appears particularly meaningful: this information provides an objective reason for introducing the character 帝 (Dì) in the book of Revelation, since the divine/imperial ambivalence of this character seems particularly well suited to convey the message of the biblical author. Concretely, one could consider translating the shorter expression

\[Kurios Pantocratōr\]

by:

全能之帝

and the longer, more majestic expression

\[Kurios ho Theos ho Pantokratōr\]

by:

全能的上帝天主

The fact that Feldmeier’s analysis does not apply to the Old Testament cannot be viewed as a compelling handicap for the introduction of 帝 in the translation of Kurios Pantocratōr in the NT, since among the seven translations examined above (Union Version, Lù Zhenzhong, Sigao, Wu Jingxiong, New
American Bible, New Jerusalem Bible, NRSV), Wu Jingxiong’s translation is the only one that has succeeded in preserving a visible link between the OT expression YHWH Sabaoth and the NT expression Kurios Pantocrātor.

II.4 SHADDAI

The name Shaddai occurs 48 times in the OT: 41 times on its own, and seven times in the longer form El Shaddai. It potentially corresponds to the most ancient divine name of the Bible100. Although Ernst Knauf humbly confesses that «a convincing etymology has until now not been offered»101, Knauf himself is able to provide more than a few convincing hints of where such etymology may be found. He indicates in particular that «both Akkadian šadû, the mountain wilderness (as seen from the cultivated alluvial land along the rivers Tigris and Euphrates and Biblical Hebrew šādeh, the (uncultivated) field, i.e. the area of hunting (cf. e.g. Gen. 25:27, 27:3, and the opposition bēhēmā – ḥayit haṭādeh, e.g. Gen. 2:20, 3:14) go back to the root ŠDY. Any El Shadday is, therefore, a god of the wilderness and can be connected with the iconographical motif of the Lord of the animals.» Knauf further points out at a late biblical attempt to re-etymologize Shaddai: «in kēšōd miššadday yābô’ (referring to the day of Yahweh) Isa. 13:6 = Joel 1:15 (6th–4th centuries BCE), Shadday is re-etymologized by the root ŠDĐ. This understanding of the name may also have influenced the use of Shadday (as the violent/powerful God) in

100 Tryggve Mettinger, ref. supra, p. 69.
101 Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible, article by E. A. Knauf, p. 749.
Ruth 1:20-21 and Ps. 91:1. According to Knauf, it is also possible that a second re-etymologizing attempt may have been made in Gen. 49:25: «the reference to the blessings of the breasts and womb (Gen. 49:25) presupposes the elimination of the Goddess from Israelite/Judean religion, and dates the present form of Jacob’s blessing in the aftermath of Hosea and his followers. [...] The breasts (Heb šadayim, root TDY; but note that Shadday does not mean breast(s), pace P. Dhorme, RB 31 [1922] 230–231) may have crept into the verse as an allusion to El Shadday; in this case, they testify to the re-etymologization of the god’s name already in what may form its first biblical attestation.»

Knauf also notes that «a third aberrant etymology may have led to the Masoretic form with lengthened /d/: *šad-day, which is sufficient (cf. hikanos as the “translation” of Shadday in some instances in the LXX) »

As appears from Knauf’s observations, an original striking feature of the name Shaddai is that it corresponds to what had become « only a faint memory, and a tradition only half understood, for the biblical authors » themselves! This problem naturally complicates the task of biblical translators. Let us compare a few existing translations for the occurrence of the single word Shaddai in Gen. 49:25 and the set-expression El-Shaddai in Gen. 17:1:

1. ibid, p. 750.
2. ibid, p. 750.
3. ibid, p. 751.
4. ibid, p. 752.
Gen. 49:25 (Shaddai)  Gen. 17:1 (El-Shaddai)  

| 全能者 | 全能的○神 or 全能的○上帝 | Union Version |
| 全能的上帝 | 全能的上帝 | Lü Zhenzhong |
| 全能者天主 | 全能的天主 | Sigao |
| 上帝全能 | 上帝全能 | Feng Xiang |
| God Almighty | God the Almighty | New American Bible |
| Shaddai | El Shaddai | New Jerusalem Bible |
| the Almighty | God Almighty | NRSV |
| Dieu puissant | Dieu Puissant | TOB (ecumenical, 1975) |
| Shaddai | El Shaddai | TOB (ecumenical, 2010) |

All the translations listed above except the New Jerusalem Bible and the 2010 edition of the TOB (Traduction Œcuménique de la Bible) have followed the precedent established by the LXX, which often (but not always) translates Shaddai by pantocratōr (almighty), especially in Job. This option has the merit to remain faithful to an antique tradition also followed by the Vulgate (which uses omnipotens). Nevertheless, translators of the New Jerusalem Bible maintain that translating Shaddai by Almighty God is inaccurate. The philological analysis provided above by Knauf strongly supports their point of view: the so-called “antique tradition” that identifies Shaddai with pantocratōr is basically… wrong, and Shaddai does not mean Almighty!

A supplementary problem created by the equivalence Shaddai = Almighty comes from the fact that it establishes de facto a link between the OT Shaddai and the NT pantocratōr, whereas both terms have originally nothing to do with each
other. A rather similar problem also arises specifically for the book of Job: the large use of Shaddai made by the author of this book (31 occurrences in a total of 48 for the whole OT) is explainable by the fact that Shaddai fittingly corresponds to a divine name that could be used both by a non-Israelite (Job) and by Israelite people. Nothing suggests that the high number of occurrences of Shaddai in Job has anything to do with the idea that God is almighty. As a matter of fact, God does emphasize the immense scope of his power in the final chapters Job 38-41, but the name Shaddai has been systematically replaced by YHWH in this final passage, except only once in Job 40:2. The phonetic rendering of Shaddai adopted by the New Jerusalem Bible and the TOB 2010 therefore appears to be a quite good option: it is the only current one that is not patently “wrong”!

In future, biblical translators may perhaps consider yet another solution, which is directly based on the philological survey provided by Knauf. If El-Shaddai originally corresponds to a God of wild places, God of the desert, or God of uninhabited places, why not translate it precisely that way? The image of vast uninhabited spaces fits well with the wandering experiences of the patriarchs with whom El Shaddai appears closely associated. Naturally, from the aesthetic point of view, an expression such as God of the desert might seem rather weird. But the image carried by this phrase can easily be expressed with more poetical flavor, for instance by: God of the immensities. In Chinese, this could give rise to translations such as:
A specific translational difficulty occurs in the above-mentioned passages Isa. 13:6; Joel 1:15 and Gen. 49:25: the Hebraic plays on words contained in these verses are impossible to translate except if one chooses to abandon the general translation one has adopted for *El Shaddai* in these very particular cases. At least one French translation (Osty) has opted for this option in Isa. 13:6. The Sigao Bible, the NRSV and Osty have respectively written for this verse:

**Sigao:** 號啕罷！因為上主的日子近了，它來有如全能者實行毀滅...

**NRSV:** Wail, for the day of the Lord is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty!

**Osty:** Hurlez! car il est proche, le jour de Yahvé, comme une dévastation venant du Dévasteur, il arrive.

In Chinese, following Osty’s option could give more or less:

號啕吧！因為上主的日子逼近了，它來有如毀滅者實行毀滅...

II.5 OTHER SET-PHRASES AND DIVINE APPELLATIONS

The present article remains quite far from having exhausted all the richness of the Bible’s divine appellations. Apart from the most common names already examined above,
several set-phrases also serve as rather direct, metaphoric or metonymic designations of God. The next section follows the number of their occurrences in the Bible in decreasing order. To a lesser degree, many grammatically flexible expressions also function as divine designations in the Bible. Section II.5.2 discusses a limited number of them.

II.5.1. SET-PHRASES

II.5.1.a. THE GOD OF THE FATHERS

The expression God of the Fathers has been the subject of a landmark study by Albrecht Alt (1883–1956) in 1929[106]. Biblical authors use it in a grammatically flexible way. It possesses at least two variants, (The) God of your/their Fathers[107] and The LORD God of your/his/their Fathers[108]. To some extent, the frequent expressions God of Israel[109], The LORD God of Israel[110] and God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob[111] are all intrinsically connected with the notion of God of the Fathers. None of these expressions seems to raise any major translational difficulty.

109 This expression occurs at least 93 times in the entire Bible.
110 This expression occurs at least 108 times in the entire Bible.
II.5.1.b. **THE HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL**

The set-phrase *Holy One of Israel* occurs 31 times\(^{112}\) in the Hebrew Bible, among which 25 are concentrated in the book of Isaiah. The shorter expression *Holy One* occurs 5 times\(^{113}\) in the Bible, and the *Holy one of Jacob* only once in Isa. 29:23. As Mettinger puts it, *The Holy One* «designates God as unapproachable in majesty»\(^{114}\). The Sigao Bible consistently translates these three expressions respectively by 以色列的聖者, 聖者 and 雅各伯的聖者, just as the Union Version also does. It would be difficult to find any better alternative.

The only difficulty presented by the text of the Sigao Bible concerns Isa. 47:4, which explicitly contains the Hebraic expression *Holy One of Israel*.

The Union Version writes:

> 我們救贖主的名是萬軍之耶和華, 以色列的聖者。

whereas the Sigao Bible writes:

> 我們的救主——他的名字是萬軍的上主——說。

It seems that the translation team of the Sigao Bible has simply forgotten to include the mention of *the Holy One of Israel* in this verse.

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\(^{113}\) Cf. Isa. 40:25, 57:15; Hos. 11:9; Hab. 3:3; Job 6:10.

\(^{114}\) Tryggve Mettinger, ref. *supra*, p. 152.
II.5.1.c.  **EL ELYON / HO HYPSISTOS**

*Elyon,* which means *higher/most-high,* appears in the Bible either on its own (e.g. Isa. 14:14), in which case the Sigao Bible translates it by 至高者, or in combination with other divine names *Yahweh, Elohim, El,* in which case the Sigao Bible translates it either by 至高(的)上主 or 至高(的)天主. The Aramaic equivalent of *Elyon* also appears in Dan. 7:18.22.25.27. *Elyon* applies 31 times to God in the Hebrew Bible, not including Hos. 11:7 and 1 Sam. 2:10 where it may be present in abbreviated form.

The Sigao Bible translates the divine name *Elyon* and its Greek equivalent *Hypsistos*\(^{115}\) in a very consistent way, and it would be difficult to find any more satisfying alternative.

The only difficulty linked to this divine name concerns Hos. 11:7, where the meaning of the Hebrew text is disputed, as can be seen from the high diversity of “translations” it has received.

The New American Bible proposes for Hos. 11:7:

*His people are in suspense about returning to him; and God, though in unison they cry out to him, shall not raise them up.*

The Union Version, the *Chinese New Version* (新譯本) and the Sigao Bible write respectively:

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\(^{115}\) *Hypsistos* serves to refer to God nine times in the New Testament: 5 times as an absolute noun (Luke 1:32.35.76, 6:35; Acts 7:48), and 4 times as an adjective (Mark 5:7; Luke 8:28; Acts 16:17; Heb. 7:1).
我的民偏要背道離開我，眾先知雖然招呼他們歸向至上的主，卻無人尊崇主。

我的子民決要背道離開我，他們因著所負的軛而呼求，卻沒有給他們卸下。

我的百姓因著自己的叛逆使我厭煩了；為此上主給他們指定了應負的重軛，因為他已不再憐惜他們。

Obviously, one would need to get a clear idea of the Hebraic meaning of this verse before trying to improve its translation. This highly technical problem lies outside the scope of the present article.

II.5.1.d. THE LIVING GOD

Israel’s faith in the living God (wherein God can be written either by ʿēl, ʿēlōhîm or in Aramaic by ʿēlāhā) «demarcated Israelite thought from the conception of a dying and rising god whose cyclical biography reflected the vegetational seasons, and which was ubiquitous in Israel’s surroundings.»116 As can be seen in particular from the creed courageously professed by David in 1 Sam. 17:26.36 just before his fight with Goliath, the faith in the living God was more than just a matter of words in Israel.

The set-expression living God appears 13 times117 in the Hebrew Bible and 10 times118 in the NT. Its influence is also

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116 Tryggve Mettinger, ref. supra, p. 90.
117 Deut. 5:26; Josh. 3:10; 1 Sam. 17:26.36; 2 Kgs. 19:4.16; Isa. 37:4.17; Jer. 10:10, 23:36; Hos. 1:10 [2:1]; Pss. 42:2 [3], 84:2 [3].
118 Matt. 16:16, 26:63; Acts 14:15; Rom. 9:26; 2 Cor. 3:3; 1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 3:12, 10:31, 12:22; Rev. 7:2.
recognizable in several other expressions, which the Sigao Bible translates respectively as:

- **YHWH lives!**
  (2 Sam. 22:47; Ps. 18:46)
  上主萬歲！

- **my redeemer lives**
  (Job 19:25)
  為我伸冤者還活著

- **the living God, enduring for ever**
  (Dan. 6:26, Aram v. 27)
  生活永在的天主

- **he who lives for ever**
  (Dan. 12:7)
  永生者

- **living bread**
  (John 6:51)
  生活的食糧

- **living Father**
  (John 6:57)
  生活的父

- **a living and true God**
  (1 Thess. 1:9)
  永生的真天主

- **the one who lives for ever and ever**
  (Rev. 4:10, 10:6)
  萬世萬代的永生者

Mettinger indicates that the OT also contains « some oath formulas in which God’s life is an element, that is, oaths of the type as the Lord lives. Such oaths occur 67 times in the OT; ’êl and ’êlôm occur only twice (in Job 27:2 and 2 Sam. 2:27, respectively), while we meet the formula he who lives for ever once (Dan. 12:7). YHWH dominates with 41 occurrences in such oaths (e.g. Judges 8:18; 1 Sam. 14:39.45, 19:6). There are also 23 occasions in which God swears by himself, that is, as I live. »\(^{119}\)

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\(^{119}\) Tryggve Mettinger, ref. *supra*, p. 91.
It is interesting to survey the 23 occasions\textsuperscript{120} on which God swears by his own “life”, 16 of which are concentrated in Ezekiel. A 24\textsuperscript{th} NT occurrence (Rom. 14:11) can be added to them. Although the Sigao Bible consistently translates God’s oath formula as 

\textit{I live} by:

\begin{quote}
我指著我的生命起誓說
\end{quote}

in Ezekiel (16 times) and in Zephaniah (1 time), other varied expressions appear in other places such as

\begin{quote}
\begin{align*}
\text{Num. 14:21.28:} & \quad \text{我以我的生命起誓},
\text{Deut. 32:40:} & \quad \text{我向天舉手宣誓: 我生活, 至於永遠!}
\text{Isa. 49:18:} & \quad \text{我永遠生活,}
\text{Jer. 22:24, 46:18:} & \quad \text{我永在}
\text{and Rom. 14:11:} & \quad \text{我指著我自己起誓}.
\end{align*}
\end{quote}

The lack of uniformity of the Sigao Bible is not satisfying. We shall leave the question of which best unified solution could be found open.

Let us now examine the translation of the designation \textit{living God}. The Sigao Bible always translates this expression in the OT by:

\begin{quote}
永生的天主
\end{quote}

except in Jer. 10:10 and Ps. 42:2[3], 84:2[3] where the same expression is rendered by:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}
生活的天主

In the NT, the expression

生活的天主

appears more frequently\(^{121}\), although the expression

永生的天主

remains slightly dominant\(^{122}\). In theory, one may wish to use a single Chinese set-phrase for the translation of all these occurrences. But in practice, it seems that no single double-character Chinese term can reflect the full meaning of the Hebraic expression *Living-God* in a fully satisfying way. Only a longer expression like 永遠活着的天主 might have a more universally appropriate meaning, but its length renders it unusable in practice.

All things being considered, it seems that the Sigao Bible reaches a good compromise by adopting either 永生的天主 or 生活的天主 according to the context. The Sigao Bible’s choices fit well in each particular case. Only in the case of Matt. 26:63 does the Sigao Bible’s choice seem rather disputable. In this verse, Caiaphas declares to Jesus:

\[ I \text{ order you to tell us under oath before the living God whether you are the Messiah, the Son of God…} \]

The Sigao Bible writes here:

\(^{121}\) Cf. Matt. 26:63; Acts 14:15; 2 Cor. 3:3; Heb. 3:12.

\(^{122}\) Cf. Matt. 16:16; Rom. 9:26; 1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 10:31, 12:22; Rev. 7:2.
Due to the high degree of solemnity of Caiaphas’ statement, one may have preferred to write:

我因永生的天主...

II.5.1.e. **EL OLAM**

The divine name *El Olam* appears only once in the Bible, in Gen. 21:33. According to Albert de Pury\(^{123}\), the meaning of this name corresponds to something like:

*El/God, the Eternal/Everlasting/Ancient one*

The Sigao Bible translates it by:

永恒天主

which seems quite good.

II.5.1.f. **EL BERITH**

The expression *El Berith* occurs only once in the Bible, in Judg. 9:46. It is quite similar to the expression *Baal Berith* that occurs twice in Judg. 8:33 and Judg. 9:4. Both expressions refer to deities worshipped in the neighborhood of the city of Sheshem. According to modern scholars\(^ {124}\), there is no strong reason to doubt that two sanctuaries devoted to each deity

\(^{123}\) *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, article by A. de Pury, p. 289.

\(^{124}\) *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, article by M. Mulder, p. 142.
may have simultaneously existed in the neighborhood of Sheshem.

*Baal Berith* is consistently transliterated by the Sigao Bible by

巴耳貝黎特

in both Judg. 8:33 and Judg. 9:4. The Union Version uses the different transliteration:

巴力比利土

Curiously, both the Sigao Bible and the Union Version render *El Berith* in Judg. 9:46 by exactly the same transliteration as for *Baal Berith*.

The *Chinese New Version* (新譯本) has rightly corrected the Union Version by writing in Judg. 9:46:

伊勒-比利土

It does not seem that the Sigao Bible contains any direct transliteration for *El*, although several indirect transliterations of *El* can be found in theophoric names such as *Samuel* (撒慕爾), *Eliah* (厄里亞), *Elisabeth* (依撒伯爾) etc. For ecumenical reasons, future translations wishing to transliterate the name *El* may consider using the transliteration of the Chinese New Version: 伊勒 (Yīlè). Yet another option could consist in transliterating *El* by:
壹力(Yīlì)\textsuperscript{125}

The character 力 evokes the idea of strength, which is associated with the most probable etymology of the word El, whereas 壹 can suggest unity or uniqueness.

II.5.1.g.  \textit{EL BETHEL / BETHEL}

The expression \textit{El-Bethel} appears twice in Gen. 31:13, 35:7. Bethel itself contains the word El and means house/temple of God/El. According to Wolfgang Röllig, « the name Bethel originally did not point to the town of Bethel, but may have referred to open cult-places, as the aetiology of Bethel in the OT suggests (Gen. 28:10-19). »\textsuperscript{126} Bethel later became the name of a city formerly called Lûz (cf. Judg. 1:23).

In Gen. 31:13 and Gen. 35:7, the expression \textit{El-Bethel} simply means God of [the city] Bethel. The Sigao Bible translates it by 貝特耳的天主 in Gen. 31:13, but only by 貝特耳 in Gen. 35:7, where \textit{El-Bethel} becomes in this verse the name of a place:

\textit{There Jacob built an altar and called the place El-bethel… (Gen. 35:7)}\textsuperscript{127}

Translating \textit{El-Bethel} by Bethel only in Gen. 35:7 is difficult to justify.

\textsuperscript{125} Cf. the article written by Liu Li (劉麗) for the present Journal.

\textsuperscript{126} \textit{Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible}, article by W. Röllig, p. 174.

\textsuperscript{127} The Sigao writes for the whole verse Gen 35:7: \textit{他在那裏築了一座祭壇。稱呼那地方為貝特耳，因為他逃避他哥哥時，天主曾在那裏顯現給他。}
Another more interesting situation appears in Jer. 48:13, where Bethel alone, not El-Bethel, serves as a name for the God of the Israelites, without referring to the city of Bethel. The New American Bible translates:

*Chemosh shall disappoint Moab, as Israel was disappointed by Bethel in which they trusted.*

The Sigao Bible writes for the same verse Jer. 48:13:

那時，摩阿布必因革摩士而受辱，就如以色列家因他們信賴的貝特耳而受辱一樣。

Since 貝特耳 constitutes no more than a phonetic transliteration, its evocative power in Chinese is quite poor. One could do better if one possessed a standard transliteration of the root El, which one could use systematically in many theophoric names (cf. II.5.1.f. *supra*).

II.5.1.h.  

_El ROI_

The divine name *El Roi* can be found only once in the OT, in Gen. 16:13. Literally, *El Roi* can be understood to mean *El who sees me* (also: chooses/saves me). At first sight, this name may seem rather comparable to *El Olam*, but the context of Gen. 16:13 shows that this is not the case.

_El Olam_ is pronounced by Sarah’s servant Hagar, and since «the apparent aim [of Gen. 16:13] is to ensure that the non-Israelite Ishmaelites have no part in the worship of Yahweh»[^128], the aim of the redactor «could have been to

“correct” both the identification of El and Yahweh and the privileged relation between Hagar and Yahweh, and to this end he may have thought of a pseudo archaic divine name in the style of El Olam and El Shadday.»129. According to A. de Pury, El Olam is therefore « best interpreted as a pseudo-archaic divine name inserted by a later redactor of Gen 16. »130

This explanation is crucial for translators. If the intention of the biblical redactor has been to distinguish between the divine favors granted to Israelites and Ishmaelites respectively, it might be more appropriate to translate the El of El Roi by the character 神 (Shén) than by 天主.

The Sigao Bible writes for Gen. 16:13:

哈加爾遂給那對她說話的上主起名叫「你是看顧人的天主，」因為她說：「我不是也看見了那看顧人的天主嗎？」

Using the character 神 might give:

哈加爾遂給那對她說話的上主起名叫「你是看顧我的神，」因為她說：「我不是也看見了看顧我的那一位嗎？」

II.5.1.i. THE JEALOUS GOD

At first sight, the expression Jealous God looks more like a “description” than a proper name for God. The adjective

129 ibid, p. 292.
130 ibid, p. 291.
jealous simply serves to emphasize a particular characteristic of the God of Israel in four appropriate contexts, Exod. 20:5 and Deut. 4:24, 5:9, 6:15. In these four cases, jealous God is consistently translated in the Sigao Bible by 忌邪的天, which seems quite appropriate.

A fifth occurrence of the expression Jealous God in Exod. 34:14 bears some rather different characteristics. In that particular case, the biblical author explicitly treats Jealous-God as a proper name for God. This verse is translated by the New Jerusalem Bible as:

for you will worship no other god, since Yahweh’s name is the Jealous One; he is a jealous God.

The Sigao Bible writes:

不准你朝拜別的神,因為上主名為忌邪者,他是忌邪的天主。

This seems to be a quite good solution, although one may possibly prefer to use more explicit punctuation by using brackets such as 「」 (or “” in horizontal editions), writing:

不准你朝拜別的神,因為上主名為「忌邪者」,他是忌邪的天主。

II.5.2. OTHER DIVINE APPELLATIONS

II.5.2.a. INTIMATE APPELLATIONS

It is not always possible to establish a clear frontier between expressions that function as divine “names” and
those that serve as descriptions, or metaphors, for God. What is more, as Thomas Aquinas has argued (I Q.13 art.10), it would be wrong to consider metaphors as a category of secondary importance, since their meaning should sometimes be taken neither univocally nor equivocally, but analogically, as applies in particular for the marvelously simple expression Father. Another factor of complexity comes from the fact that some expressions can function ambivalently as “names” in private contexts, and more as descriptive references in public contexts. Here are a few examples of rather intimate appellations, followed by their translation by the Sigao Bible:

- your Creator (Eccl. 12:1) 你 的 造 主
- the God of my life (Ps. 42:8) 賜 我 生 命 的 天 主
- my King and my God (Ps. 5:2/3) 我 的 君 王，我 的 天 主
- the God of our salvation (Ps. 68:20) 救 我 們 的 天 主
- my Redeemer (Job 19:25 / Ps. 19:25) 為 我 伸 寵 者 / 我 的 救 主
- our Father in Heaven (Matt 6:9) 我 們 在 天 的 父
- my Saviour (Luke 1:47) 我 的 救 主
- our Hope (1 Tim. 1:1) 作 我 們 希 望 的 …

A familiar public metaphor, the Rock, also serves as a “private” appellation, for instance in Ps. 42:9. The New Jerusalem Bible translates for the whole passage Ps. 42:8-9:

8 In the daytime God sends his faithful love, and even at night; the song it inspires in me is a prayer to my living God.
9 I shall say to God, my rock, ’Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go around in mourning, harassed by the enemy?’

The Sigao Bible writes here:
8 But may my Lord in the day give me his loving kindness; I will praise night the Lord my God.

9 I said to the Lord: What is my rock, my God, why have you forgotten me? Why are you far from the terrors of the enemy to make me sigh in bitterness of soul?

Since the psalmist refers to God in verse 42:8 as my living God without addressing himself directly to God, it is perhaps more logical to assume that my Rock in verse 42:9 also functions in the same way, in which case one may prefer to follow the solution adopted for the celebration of Catholic liturgy in Taiwan:

9 I said to the Lord my rock: 'Why have you forgotten me? Why have you let me be as one who is dashed to pieces by my enemies?'

II.5.2.b. DESCRIPTIVE APPELLATIONS

An uncommon detail of transcription appears in Ps. 29:3, where Masoretes have connected the two nouns El and Hakkavod with a maqqef, presumably because they understood El-Hakkavod (meaning God-of-Glory) as forming a single entity, or at least because they wished their readers to regard it as such. The New Jerusalem Bible provides a particularly literal rendering of Ps. 29:3, which can serve as a convenient reference:

Yahweh’s voice over the waters, the God of glory thunders; Yahweh over countless waters

The Sigao Bible proposes:
It is somewhat disappointing to see that the appellation God of Glory is absent from the Sigao Bible in this verse. In order to re-establish an explicit equivalent to the expression God of Glory in Chinese, one may consider a simple modification:

上主的聲音響徹水面，榮耀的天主以雷顯威，上主臨到澎湃的水面。

One may also consider another alternative\textsuperscript{132}, which has the merit of conferring a common identical rhythm to all the three meters of Ps. 29:3, as is the case in the Hebrew text:

上主的聲音響徹水面，榮耀的天主響雷隆隆，上主在海上顯示莊嚴。

Let us note that a parallel expression to El-Hakkavod occurs in Acts 7:2 with Ho Theos \textit{tēs doxēs}. The Sigao Bible translates it adequately by 荣耀的天主.

An expression rather similar to God-of-Glory is King of Glory (Melek Hakkavod), which occurs five times in Ps. 24:7.8.9.10. The Sigao Bible translates it quite adequately by 光荣的君主.

Yet another comparable designation is Splendour of Israel (Netsach Israel), which occurs only once in the Bible, in 1 Sam. 15:29. The Sigao Bible translates it by 以色列的光榮, which,

\textsuperscript{132} I am strongly indebted to Liu Li for helping me to write this Chinese sentence, as well as a few others.
although accurate, does not allow the reader to distinguish \textit{netsach} from the very frequent name \textit{kavod}, also rendered by 光榮 in the Sigao Bible. Maybe some distinction between \textit{kavod} and \textit{netsach} could be made in Chinese by writing for \textit{Netsach Israel} in 1 Sam. 15:29:

以色列的光輝

Many more divine descriptions share, to some lesser degree, the characteristics of clearly identifiable divine names. Let us list here a few examples, followed by their translations by the Sigao Bible:

\begin{tabular}{ll}
\textit{God of knowledge} (1 Sam. 2:3) & 全知的天主 \\
\textit{holy God} (Isa. 5:16) & 至聖的天主 \\
\textit{righteous God} (Isa. 45:21) & 仁義的神 \\
\textit{God of the spirits of all flesh} (Num. 16:22) & 賜給一切血肉生氣的天主 \\
\textit{faithful God} (Deut. 7:9) & 忠信的天主 \\
\textit{God of truth/faithfulness} (Ps. 31:6) & 忠實的天主 \\
\textit{gracious God} (Jon. 4:2) & 寬仁的天主 \\
\textit{Lord King} (Sir. 51:1) & 上主，君王 \\
\end{tabular}

II.5.2.c. RARE NEW TESTAMENT APPELLATIONS

Before concluding our study, let us still consider several original NT divine appellations.

Several metonymies deserve our consideration:

(i) \textit{The Blessed One} (\textit{Ho Eulogētos})

This expression occurs once in Mark 14:6. The notion that God is or should be blessed is found several times in the
NT\textsuperscript{133}. In Mark 14:6, \textit{The Blessed One} does not really function as a name, but rather a deferent metonymy for God. The aim of the great priest is not to bless God, but simply to avoid pronouncing the name of YHWH. The Sigao Bible translates the expression \textit{Son of the Blessed One} in this passage by:

那應受讚頌者的兒子

which seems quite appropriate.

(ii) \textit{The Power (Hē Dunamis)}

This metonymy is used by Jesus himself in response to the high priest’s questioning in Matt. 26:64 and Mark 14:62. The parallel verse Luke 22:69 is rather redundant, since it speaks of the Power of God (\textit{Hē Dunamis tou Theou}). The Sigao Bible translates in Matt. 26:64 and Mark 14:62 \textit{The Power} by

大能者

and \textit{the Power of God} in Luke 22:69 by

大能者天主

This latter translation is not really correct, since one should rather have, strictly speaking, 天主的大能.

(iii) **Heaven**

This metonymy, which occurs in Luke 15:21, has already been discussed in § I.4.

(iv) **The Mighty One (Ho Dunatos, literally: The Capable One)**

This expression is used by Mary in her prayer starting in Latin by *Magnificat* (Luke 1:49). *Ho Dunatos* has been translated in the Sigao Bible by 全能者, which is quite acceptable, although the Sigao Bible already uses the term 全能 in its renderings of *Shaddai* and *Pantokratōr*. The Union Version writes in Luke 1:49 那有權能的, which seems to be a rather good choice.

(v) **The Majesty (hē Megalōsunē), or more literally the Greatness**

This expression occurs twice in the Epistle to the Hebrews134. The occurrence of Heb. 8:1 is particularly interesting, since the content of Heb. 8:1-2 lies at the very heart of the entire epistle, as the author indicates himself. The Greek text is:

1Κεφάλαιον δὲ ἐπὶ τοῖς λεγομένοις, τοιούτων ἔχομεν ἄρχιερεά, ὃς ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ θρόνου τῆς μεγαλωσύνης ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς,
2τῶν ἀγώνων λειτουργός καὶ τῆς σκηνῆς τῆς ἀληθινῆς, ἢν ἔπηξεν ὁ κύριος, οὐκ ἀνθρώπος.

The Sigao Bible proposes for these two verses:

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134 Cf. Heb. 1:3 and Heb. 8:1.
In both Heb. 1:3 and Heb. 8:1, the Sigao Bible translates *The Majesty* by 「尊威」, which constitutes a quite accurate rendering.

Just for the pleasure of letting more Jesuit and Buddhist harmonies resound in this verse, one may also consider an expression used by Matteo Ricci in his famous treatise *Tiānzhǔ Shiyì*: 上尊 (Shàngzūn, *i.e.* Majesty on High). This remark gives us the opportunity to try to render a few minor details of the Greek text of Heb. 8:1-2 more explicitly. One may possibly have written here:

我們所論述的要點即是：我們有的就是這樣的一位大司祭，他已在天上「尊威」的寶座右邊。他在聖所，即真正的會幕裏作臣僕。這一會幕是上主而非人手所搭建的。

Still more rare expressions deserve our consideration in the NT:

(vi) *Father of Lights*

This rare divine NT appellation occurs only once in James 1:17. According to most modern exegetes, this expression refers to the luminaries in heaven, not to light(s) taken in a spiritual, moral or philosophical sense. Therefore, instead of translating, as the Sigao Bible does, *Father of Lights* by

光明之父
one may have preferred to retain the choice of the Union Version,

眾光之父

or to turn towards other options such as

皓天萬光之父，皓天之父 etc.

(vii) *Father of Spirits*

The Epistle to the Hebrews also contains this rare divine appellation only once (Heb. 12:9). The Sigao Bible translates it nicely by:

靈性的父親

(viii) *Master of the Harvest (ho Kurios tou Therismou)*

This divine appellation is used by Jesus himself in the parallel passages Matt. 9:38 and Luke 10:2. The Sigao Bible translates this expression in both cases by:

莊稼的主人

The use of the character 人 is hardly satisfying in these verses. Wu Jingxiong’s solution,

莊稼之主

may be preferred.

We shall leave outside of the scope of our study all the biblical designations of the Holy Spirit, including the famous *Paraclete* (John 14:16.26, 15:26, 16:7; 1 John 2:1), hoping that the
reader will forgive us these omissions even if the Holy Spirit is not less worthy of attention than the heavenly Father. We shall also leave outside of the scope of our study many Christological designations such as the Logos (John 1:1), the Way, Truth and Life (John 14:6), the Bread of Life (John 6:48), the Light of the World (John 8:12), the Gate (John 10:9), the Good Shepherd (John 10:11), the Resurrection (John 10:25), the True Vine (John 15:1). Jesus’ famous self designation Egō eimi\(^{135}\) will also be left out of our discussion. A full article, even possibly a book, could be devoted to this subject alone.

The divine name with which we shall close our study is Emmanuel, literally *El is with us\(^{136}\)*, transliterated by the Sigao Bible as 厄瑪奴耳 and by the Union Version as 以馬內利. The character 厄, evoking *distress*, is practically never included in genuinely Chinese personal names, and it has little chance to be ever adopted in ecumenical renderings. Let us hope that, at least for the name *God with us*, which is so much connected with the core of the Good News, all Christian communities in China will be able to adopt a common rendering one day\(^{137}\).

CONCLUSION

One of the most sensitive topics discussed by the present article concerns the theological interpretation of the history of


\(^{137}\) Cf. the beautiful solution proposed by Liu Li (劉麗) in the present Journal, which has the merit of taking into account the etymology of *El*. 
the use of the term 上帝 (Shàngdì) by Christian communities in China, as well as the potential future of this term in Catholic or ecumenical translations of the Bible. We have suggested that the term Shangdi constitutes a serious candidate for at least a few occurrences of the divine name El in the Old Testament (perhaps not much more than four: Gen. 33:20, Gen. 46:3, Isa. 14:13 and Ezek. 28:2, since the character 神 (Shén) may possibly constitute a better candidate for other occurrences of El), as well as for the majestic expression Kyrios ho Theos ho Pantokratōr, which occurs seven times in the book of Revelation. Even more space could be provided to the term 上帝 (Shàngdì) if one translated a significant fraction of the Old Testament occurrences of Elohim by 上帝 (Shàngdì), or if one opted for a splitting of the translation of the word Theos in the New Testament according to different original linguistic contexts (Aramaic or Greek). These two latter options, especially the first one, might presumably pave the way for more ecumenical progress, although neither of them is exegetically easy to justify from a point of view anchored in traditional Catholic linguistic usage.

The Catholic Church has the special duty and vocation to become ever more what it already is intrinsically by nature, that is to say, charitable towards all and spiritually concerned by “the whole” in an extended sense, since it is aware that God desires everyone (1 Tim. 2:4) to be saved. Assuredly, the Catholic dimension of the Mission entrusted by Christ to his apostles is essentially a matter of Spirit, not of words. Yet words are not completely useless. It is the hope of the present author that Roman-Catholic authorities will find ways - not too fast, but progressively, with order, wisdom and discernment - to promote a usage of divine names in Chinese
that may eventually serve as a sign, and even perhaps (why not?) as a new source of unity among all Christians. If this can happen in the future, the painful controversies of the past may be completely transformed, and all Christians may find new ways to build up together an even greater Communion, experiencing anew how much the Spirit surpasses the limitations of our human languages.

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[摘要] 本文回顧基督宗教歷史上對超越宇宙的“創造者” 所用過的不同稱呼。聖經本身使用一系列不同的名子來稱呼“神”；本文也分析了這些名字的意義與特色，並且嘗試以天主教梵二之後對合一運動的積極態度來恰當地選用一系列稱呼方式，以便為“合一運動”、還未出版的基督宗教共同譯本與新的天主教版本，分別提供進展的平台。