

An Explanation of the Different Chinese Bibles

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A Note on the Chinese Language

Chinese is a tonal language with many dialects: Mandarin, Cantonese and Shanghainese are some examples. Mainland China's official spoken dialect is Mandarin Chinese – “Putonghua” or “Guoyu”. Most Chinese internationals will know Mandarin and also their local dialect. However, all dialects share the same written script. Mainland China has adopted the use of simplified script. Most other Chinese – in Taiwan, Hong Kong, etc. – use traditional script. Simplified script is an abbreviated system of writing that reads word for word identically with the traditional script (it's just written more simply). Many Chinese readers have learned to read both systems, but it would be good to obtain literature in **simplified** script for internationals from Mainland China and literature in **traditional** script for those from other countries.

There are currently several translations of the Chinese Bible. All versions are available in both traditional and simplified script. Here is a description of the most widely available versions:

1.) **Chinese Union (CU) Version** “He He Ben”

- Published in 1919 and is the most widely used among Chinese Christians in China, the U.S. and elsewhere.
- Translated from the original Greek and Hebrew by missionaries to China.
- Original version contains dated Chinese language thus harder to read but it has been subsequently revised to reflect more contemporary language. Readability has improved in the revised versions including the Chinese Union New Punctuation (CUNP) version, published in 1988, and the Revised Chinese Union Version (RCUV), NT published in 2006 and OT due to come out in 2010.
- In bilingual Bibles, it's often paired with the NIV.
- Even if students don't start off using this Bible, it would be good for them to familiarize themselves with it if they plan on being involved in a Chinese-language church.

2.) **New Chinese Version (NCV)** aka Chinese New Version (CNV) “Xin Yi Ben”

- Published in 1992 by the Worldwide Bible Society.
- Translated from original languages by a committee of Chinese scholars and pastors incorporating textual and linguistic development in the 20th century.
- Uses more contemporary language but still follows the form-driven translation approach.

- Usually paired in bilingual Bibles with the English Standard Bible or the NIV.
- Easier to read than the Chinese Union version.

3.) **Today's Chinese Version (TCV)** “Xian Dai Xin Yi Ben”

- Published in 1979 and revised in 1997
- Paired with the Good News Bible or Today's English Version in bilingual versions.
- Follows the “dynamic equivalent” approach which is meaning-driven, similar to that in the Today's English Version.
- Easy to use for seekers.

4.) **Chinese Living Bible** “Tang Dai Ben”

- Published by the International Bible Society.
- A paraphrased version, similar to the approach used in the English Living Bible.

5.) **Lu Zheng Zhong Version**

- Translated by Mr. Lu and published in 1970.
- A solid translation from the original languages that never became widely popular or used. Possibly because it was the work of one person instead of a translation committee.

6.) **Recovery Version** “Hui Fu Ben”

- This is the translation by the "Local Church" in Taiwan, a group that some may consider a cult.
- Translation is of good quality, but the commentary notes that accompany this version are questionable.

More Notes on Chinese Bible Translation

Pinyin

This is the transliteration system used in China to spell the Mandarin dialect phonetically using the Roman alphabet. Some Chinese Bibles may also have Pinying. Pinying is generally only used while learning Chinese so the reader can read the word using the phonic system.

“Shen” and “Shangti” editions of the Bible

This refers to two different ways that the word “God” may be translated in Chinese. “Shangti” is an ancient name for God that originated in the Chinese language and culture. “Shen” is a generic term for god. The “Shen” edition is more commonly used but neither of the translations should cause any interpretation issues unless the reader is from an animistic background and has certain connotations regarding the generic term for god.