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The Chinese Language Learning and
New Testament Translation Projects
Conducted by the Orthodox
Missionaries in China

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Abstract

This paper provides information on exactly where and how Russian Orthodox missionaries in China were learning Chinese, and what the practical application of this knowledge was in their missionary activities. The focus of this paper lies in the history of the New Testament translation projects completed by two missionaries: Archimandrite Gury Karpov, who was the first Orthodox missionary to translate the New Testament into Chinese (1864); and Bishop Innocent Figurovsky, who provided his own New Testament translation (1910), which remains relatively unknown among modern sinologists. This paper also provides some brief information on the lives of these outstanding missionaries, and attempts to elucidate the background of the Chinese co-worker Long Yuan, who helped Archimandrite Gury Karpov to revise his New Testament translation. The topic of religious literature that was translated by the Orthodox missionaries in China is still relatively unexplored and is almost forgotten among Western scholars. This paper addresses this lacuna and aims at drawing attention to this field.

Keywords: Gury Karpov, Innocent Figurovsky, Orthodox Church in China, Chinese Bible translations, Chinese language learning

¹ This article is largely based on the first chapter of my PhD thesis “The Chinese Translations of the Gospel of John: From the Orthodox Theological Perspective” (Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong, 2017) originally published online on A Research Hub of Excellence: CityU Scholars: [https://scholars.cityu.edu.hk/en/theses/theses\(18c7ec31-4837-49ca-a002-152900457b88\).html](https://scholars.cityu.edu.hk/en/theses/theses(18c7ec31-4837-49ca-a002-152900457b88).html) I owe many scholars I refer to in this article but I would like to specifically highlight the contribution of Alexander Nikolaevich Khokhlov (Александр Николаевич Хохлов, 1929 – 2015), who wrote pioneering works on the history of the religious literature translations by Orthodox missionaries in China.

The translation of the Gospel into the Chinese language puts the strongest foundation for future works of our ecclesiastical mission in the spread of the Orthodoxy in China.

From the letter of the Asiatic Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
January 7, 1865

Learning a language for missionary purposes seems to be natural for a missionary but at the very beginning this was not really the case for the Orthodox missionaries in China, despite the fact that according to the decree of Peter the Great (1672–1725) issued on June 18, 1700, they were supposed to do so.²

The Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in China (REMC), which arrived in Beijing in 1715, officially existed for more than 200 years (1715–1956).³ Its establishment was a very complicated issue, and the decree and original plan of Peter the Great was by far not the most deciding factor for its existence. Its history can be traced back to the year 1685, when the Russian Cossacks were captured by the Qing Army after the battle for a fortress named Albazin⁴ and were brought to Beijing together with the priest Maksim Leont'ev⁵ (Максим Леонтьев, ?-ca. 1711/12). After years of negotiations with the Qing side, permission for the first mission to enter Beijing was finally granted by the Kangxi (康熙, 1654–1722) emperor in 1712.⁶

Originally, the mission's task was to respond to the religious needs of a small group of Albazians and not to be actively involved with missionary activities among the Chinese, as had been indicated in the instructions issued by the Russian authorities. In this way, Russian authorities intended to build good relations with Qing China.⁷ The mission performed diplomatic functions, was involved in gathering information on China, and played a crucial role in building diplomatic relations, but besides that missionaries made tremendous strides in developing Russian sinology, and studying the languages of China, and Chinese history, philosophy, and culture.

² Nikolai Adoratskii Николай Адоратский (hieromonk), "Pravoslavnaia Missiia v Kitae za 200 let eia sushchestvovaniia," Православная Миссия в Китае за 200 лет ея существования [Orthodox Mission in China in 200 years of its existence] *Pravoslavnyi sobesednik Православный Собеседник* [Orthodox Collocutor] (April, 1887): 462, 463.

³ The Orthodox missionaries themselves counted the establishment of the Mission from 1685, when captured Russian Cossacks together with a priest were brought to Beijing.

⁴ Albazin is the name of a Russian fortress and village on the Amur River.

⁵ Transliterations of Russian words follow the Library of Congress system (ALA-LC), with some exceptions for historical figures or scholars known by a different spelling. In brackets I also provide the original in Cyrillic. For Chinese I follow the Pinyin system.

⁶ For the history of the Mission in China (in English) see: Eric Widmer, *The Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Peking during the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976); Claudia von Collani, Alexander Lomanov, "Russian Orthodox Church," in *Handbook of Christianity in China. Volume One: 635–1800*, ed. Nicolas Standaert (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2001), 367–375; Alexander Lomanov, "Russian Orthodox Church," in *Handbook of Christianity in China, Volume 2: 1800–Present*, ed. R.G. Tiedemann (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 193–211, 553–563, 826–835.

⁷ N.A. Samoylov Н.А. Самойлов, *Rossii i Kitai v XVII – nachale XX veka: tendentsii, formy i stadii sotsiokul'turnogo vzaimodeistviia* Россия и Китай в XVII – начале XX века: тенденции, формы и стадии социокультурного взаимодействия [Russia and China in the XVII to early XX century: Tendencies, Forms and Stages of Socio-Cultural Interaction] (Saint Petersburg: Izdatel'skii Dom Sankt-Peterburgskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 2014), 146.

Being placed in a unique and at the same time challenging situation, at a time when Christian missionaries were treated with suspicion, Orthodox missionaries were expected to be both missionaries and diplomats. Often, missionaries could not meet these expectations and even set a bad example of Christians. Living in a foreign culture for years (oftentimes more than ten years for each mission)⁸ frequently appeared to be an unbearable burden and many passed away in Beijing or upon the road.⁹ Nevertheless, by the beginning of the 19th century the mission had survived and even enjoyed the favor of Qing Emperors and officials, not being persecuted as was the Catholic Church; however, it had not succeeded much in missionary activities.

Being inactive in spreading Christianity does not mean that missionaries and other members of missions did not study Chinese, Manchu and other languages. The head of the second mission (1729–1735) Archimandrite Antonii Platkovskii (АНТОНИЙ ПЛАТКОВСКИЙ, 1682–1746), after his return to Russia, notified the chancellery of the Holy Synod that with the help of a local teacher, whom he had hired with his own money, he was learning Chinese “to spread the word of God” among the local people. According to his own words, with the help of that teacher, he also translated the Ten Commandments into Chinese and gave this to each “newly baptized”.¹⁰

In accordance with the Treaty of Kiakhta¹¹ (1728)¹² the mission was allowed to bring along with them secular students in order to learn Chinese, Mongol, and Manchu languages for diplomatic purposes. There were two schools for language learning: in one of them the teaching and administration was carried out jointly by Imperial College (國子監, Guozijian) and the mission (for the mission’s secular students); in another – the Russian Language School (RLS) at the (government) cabinet (內閣俄羅斯文館, Neige eluosi wen guan) was established by Lifayuan (理藩院)¹³ in order to prepare translators among members of “the Eight Banners”

⁸ There were 20 missions altogether.

⁹ Cf. Datsyshen, *Istoriia Rossiiskoi Dukhovnoi Missii v Kitae* История Российской Духовной Миссии в Китае [The History of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in China] (Hong Kong: Orthodox Brotherhood of Apostles Saints Peter and Paul, 2010), 107–110.

¹⁰ A.N. Khokhlov А.Н. Хохлов, “Rossiiskaia pravoslavnaia missiia v Pekine i kitaiskie perevody khristianskikh knig” Российская Православная миссия в Пекине и китайские переводы христианских книг [Russian Orthodox Mission in Beijing and Chinese translations of the Christian books] *Kitaiskoe iazykoznanie* Китайское языкознание [*Chinese linguistics*]. VIII International Conference. Moscow (1996): 161.

¹¹ A treaty between Qing China and Russia that regulated relations between the two countries. The two sides agreed about the border and trading conditions. This treaty also formalized the existence of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in China.

¹² On the issue of the text and the exact date of this treaty see: V.G. Datsyshen В. Г. Дацышен, “Kiakhtinskii traktat 21 oktiabria 1727 g.: problemy teksta i datirovki” «Кяхтинский трактат 21 октября 1727 г.»: проблемы текста и датировки [“Kiakhta treaty of 21th October 1727”: problems of text and dating] *Obshchestvo i gosudarstvo v Kitae* Общество и государство в Китае [Society and State in China], Vol. 1 (2017): 635 – 649.

¹³ “Court of Territorial Affairs” was a Chinese institution responsible for the administration of outlying regions or foreign affairs.

– the military-administrative organization of the Manchu Qing dynasty.¹⁴ As indicated by the member of the sixteenth mission (1879–1883), hieromonk Nikolai Adoratskii (1849–1896), who was also a scholar, “the Chinese government provided secular members of our mission with teachers and afterwards (потом) entrusted to them the translation and examination (рассмотрение) of all materials that came to Beijing from Russia or Europe to the Catholic missionaries...”¹⁵ Secular members and sometimes even the heads of the Orthodox mission were teaching at the RLS and were well-paid for this.¹⁶ As indicated by Pang, with reference to G. Stary, this school was founded during the reign of Kangxi, between 1707 and 1719,¹⁷ for preparing translators and interpreters for communication with Russia.¹⁸ In schools, teachers employed traditional Chinese teaching methods, namely, reading and reciting *Sanzijing* (三字經, the *Three Character Classic*), *Sishu Wujing* (四書五經, the *Four Books and Five Canons*) and other Chinese classics.¹⁹ As indicated by Datsyshen, the method of learning Chinese consisted of taking classes from Chinese teachers, the application of Latin-Chinese dictionaries created by the Roman Catholic missionaries, immersing oneself in the Chinese language, and working at Chinese institutions.²⁰ In 1830 the head of the tenth mission (1821–1830), Archimandrite Petr Kamenskii (Петр Каменский, 1765–1845), suggested a new Chinese learning technique. Its essence lay in repeating from time to time what one had already learned before. He stated that for a Chinese person, learning thirteen classics with all the histories and commentaries would take forty to fifty years, which would be impossible for a student or missionary who came to China for only seven to ten years. Therefore, he suggested ordering all thirteen classics according to their importance; some of them would be read thoroughly and studied in detail, and some of them would be just skimmed through. He also suggested systematic

¹⁴ Cf. Xiao Yuqiu, 肖玉秋, “Qingdai Eguo laihua liuxuesheng yanjiu” 清代俄国来华留学生研究 [Russian Students in China during the Qing Dynasty], in *Issues of the Far Eastern Literatures. Papers of the 7th International Conference. Vol. 2*, ed. A.A. Rodionov et al (Saint Petersburg, June 29–July 3, 2016), 139–148, 140; P.A. Lapin П.А. Лапин, “Nachal’nik Odinnadtsatoi Rossiiskoi dukhovnoi missii v Pekine o. Veniamin (Morachevich) kak prepodavatel’ shkoly russkogo iazyka pri Dvortsovoi kantseliarii (1825–1840)” Начальник Одиннадцатой Российской духовной миссии в Пекине о. Вениамин (Морачевич) как преподаватель школы русского языка при Дворцовой канцелярии (1825 – 1840) [The Head of the 11th Russian Ecclesiastical Mission father Veniamin (Morachevich) as a teacher of the Russian Language School under the Cabinet (1825 – 1840)] *Obshchestvo i gosudarstvo v Kitae* Общество и государство в Китае [Society and State in China], Vol. 2 (2018): 866 – 874, 867.

¹⁵ Nikolai Adoratskii Николай Адоратский (hieromonk), “Pravoslavnaia Missiia v Kitae za 200 let eia sushchestvovaniia,” Православная Миссия в Китае за 200 лет ее существования [Orthodox Mission in China in 200 years of its existence] *Pravoslavnyi Sobesednik* Православный Собеседник [Orthodox Collocutor] (February, 1887): 262.

¹⁶ Cf. Ibid; Lapin, “Nachal’nik Odinnadtsatoi Rossiiskoi dukhovnoi missii,” 866 – 874; Xiao, “Qingdai Eguo laihua liuxuesheng,” 139–148.

¹⁷ Lapin indicates the year 1708, see: Lapin, “Nachal’nik Odinnadtsatoi Rossiiskoi dukhovnoi missii,” 867; Some scholars indicate the year 1725. Cf. Samoylov, *Rossiia i Kitai v XVII – nachale XX veka*, 147.

¹⁸ T.A. Pang Т.А. Пан, “Nekotorye man’chzhurskie dokumenty o deiatel’nosti Pekinskoj dukhovnoi missii v XIX veke” Некоторые маньчжурские документы о деятельности Пекинской духовной миссии в XIX веке [Some Manchu documents on the Beijing Ecclesiastical Mission in XIX century] in *Pravoslavie na Dal’nem Vostoke* Православие на Дальнем Востоке [Orthodoxy in the Far East], ed. N.M. Bogolyubov Н.М. Боголюбов (Saint Petersburg: Izdatel’stvo Sankt Peterburgskogo Universiteta, 2004), 26, 27.

¹⁹ Xiao, “Qingdai Eguo laihua liuxuesheng,” 142.

²⁰ Datsyshen, *Istoriia Rossiiskoi Dukhovnoi Missii*, 99.

repetition, so that students would commit these books to memory, but this method had not been approved.²¹ A student of the seventh mission (1781–1794) Anton Vladykin (Антон Владыкин, 1757/58–1812) indicated in his comments about the learning process that the teachers who worked in the Imperial College were Chinese officials. When Vladykin was learning Chinese, these officials were teaching four or five times per month and for this work they “did not receive any specific payment”; this explains why teachers were not interested in this kind of job. At the same time, he indicated that teaching quality also depended on the existence of good relationships between the head of mission and the officials (as well as on the attitude of the student).²² As follows from Adoratskii’s description, in the 19th century the Chinese language teachers in the mission were all Orthodox Chinese, who had studied in the Beijing Orthodox School.²³

Since the 19th century, especially after 1858, when, in accordance with the Treaty of Tianjin (天津条约, *Tianjin tiaoyue*) foreign Christian missionaries were officially permitted to preach, Orthodox missionaries became more active in preaching the Orthodox faith. Archimandrite Iakinf Bichurin (1777–1853)²⁴ was one of the first to write catechetical literature for preaching the Orthodox faith. In 1810 he wrote a catechism entitled 天神會課 (*Tianshen huike*, *Conversations of the Angels*).²⁵ Karezina indicates that, at its core, this work is a concise variant of the longer catechism by an Italian Jesuit missionary, Francesco Brancati (1607–1671).²⁶ By the beginning of the 19th century, the Russian Cossacks, who were originally the primary concern of the mission, had been assimilated and had unfortunately forgotten the Russian language, justifying the need for creating such a catechism. At the same time, Karezina supposes that Bichurin intended to broaden missionary work.²⁷

²¹ Apollon Mozharovskii Аполлон Можаровский, “K istorii nashei dukhovnoj missii v Kitae” К истории нашей духовной миссии в Китае [On the history of our ecclesiastical mission in China] *Russkii Arkhiv* Русский Архив [Russian Archive], No. 7 (1886): 410–415.

²² V.G. Datsyshen, A.B. Chegodaev В.Г. Дацьшен А.Б. Чегодаев, *Arhimandrit Petr (Kemenskii)* Архимандрит Петр (Каменский) [Archimandrite Petr (Kamenskii)] (Moscow-Hong Kong: Orthodox Brotherhood of Apostles Saints Peter and Paul, 2013), 91.

²³ See: Nikolai Adoratskii Николай Адоратский (hieromonk), “Nastoiashchee polozhenie i sovremennaia deiatel’nost’ Pravoslavnoi Missii v Kitae.” [Current state and recent activities of the Orthodox Mission in China] *Pravoslavnyi sobesednik* Православный Собеседник [Orthodox Collocutor] (August, 1884): 376.

²⁴ The head of the ninth Mission (1807–1821), Bichurin is often called the founder of Russian sinology. He was extremely successful in his study of China and its languages, but was criticized as a missionary. After coming back to Russia, he spent four years in exile, but in 1826 was recalled to Saint Petersburg to work as a translator with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For a short description of his missionary work and life after returning to Russia (in English), see: Alexander Lomanov, “Russian Orthodox Church” in ed. R.G. Tiedemann, *Handbook of Christianity in China. Vol II: 1800–present* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010), 193, 194.

²⁵ Archimandrite Iakinf 大神父乙阿欽特, *Tianshen huike* 天神會課 [Conversations of the Angels] (Beijing: Beiguan, 1810). This work was published in *Arkhiv rossiiskoi kitaistiki Arxuv rossiiiskoi kumaustiku* [The Archive of the Russian Sinology], comp, A.I. Kobzev А.И. Кобзев, Vol. III (Moscow: IV RAN, 2016), 311–364.

²⁶ I.P. Karezina И.П. Карезина, “Obraz o. Iakinf (Bichurina): detali i utochneniia” Образ о Иакинфа (Бичурина): детали и уточнения [The Image of Fr Iakinf (Bichurin): details and clarifications] *Obshchestvo i gosudarstvo v Kitae* Общество и государство в Китае [Society and State in China] Vol. XLIV. Part. 2 (2014): 391–400.

²⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*

In 1859 the pioneering New Testament translation project was initiated by the head of the fourteenth mission (1858–1864) Archimandrite Gury Karpov (Гурий Карпов, 1814–1882). He was appointed as a head of mission in 1856. Having previously been a member of the twelfth mission (1840–1849), he had a good command of the languages of China, thus, before coming back to Beijing, he was teaching Manchu and Chinese languages to mission members for several months. The mission arrived in Beijing on September 25, 1858. In China Archimandrite Gury Karpov served not only as a missionary but also performed some diplomatic functions, being engaged in negotiations between Qing and Russian officials.²⁸

Besides translation of the New Testament, Karpov also translated the *Book of Psalms*, a prayer book, the *Service Book*, the *Longer Catechism of the Orthodox Church*, and others. In 1859 he started his translation of the New Testament. This was done after receiving an instruction from the Holy Synod stating that after the Treaty of Tianjin had been signed, missionaries were allowed to preach the Orthodox faith²⁹ among Chinese people.³⁰ Nevertheless, the translation of the New Testament was his own individual project, and was not dictated by the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The whole work of translation took six years altogether. The Holy Synod's report regarding Karpov's remarks (April 14, 1863) on his translation of the New Testament,³¹ indicates that, according to Karpov, he used the New Testament in Slavonic (meaning Church Slavonic) and Russian languages – published with the blessing of the Holy Synod by the Bible Society in 1822 at Saint Petersburg – as the basic text for his translation. He also consulted the Greek and

²⁸ *Kratkaia istoriia Russkoi pravoslavnoi missii v Kitae: sostavlennaiia po sluchaiu ispolnevshegosia v 1913 godu dvukhsotletnego iubileia ee sushchestvovaniia* Краткая история Русской православной миссии в Китае: составленная по случаю исполневшегося в 1913 году двухсотлетнего юбилея ее существования [A short history of the Russian Orthodox Mission in China: compiled in honor of its two hundred year jubilee in 1913] (Beijing: Tipografiia Uspenskogo monastyria, 1916), 132–140. The author of this historical monograph is not indicated in the original, but according to the Russian scholar B.G. Aleksandrov, certain data indirectly indicate that the author is a member of the eighteenth mission, Archimandrite Avraamii Chasovnikov (Авраамий Часовников, 1864–1918). See: *Bei-guan': Kratkaia istoriia Rossiiskoi Dukhovnoi Missii v Kitae* Бэй-гуань: Краткая история Российской Духовной Миссии в Китае [Beiguan: A short history of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in China], comp. B.G. Aleksandrov Б.Г. Александров (Moscow; Saint Petersburg: Al'ians-Arkeho, 2006), 6. For a short biography see: Avgustin Nikitin Августин Никитин, (arhimandite), "Sankt-Peterburgskaia Dukhovnaia akademiia i Rossiiskaia Dukhovnaia Missiia v Pekine: Arkhimandrit Gury Karpov (1814–1882)" Санкт-Петербургская Духовная академия и Российская Духовная Миссия в Пекине: Архимандрит Гурий Карпов (1814–1882) [Saint Petersburg Theological Academy and the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Beijing: Archimandrite Gury Karpov (1814–1882) in *Pravoslavie na Dal'nem Vostoke* Православие на Дальнем Востоке [Orthodoxy in the Far East], ed. N.M. Bogolyubov Н.М. Боголюбов (Saint Petersburg: Andreev i Synov'ia, 1993), 37–47.

²⁹ Interestingly enough the head of the thirteenth mission, Archimandrite Palladii (Kafarov), condemned in his diary the need of including into the treaty a point about the freedom of spreading the Christian faith in China, stating that "in the current situation, such a proselytism would be inappropriate..." See: A.M. Kulikov А.М. Куликов, "Kitaevedcheskaia i diplomaticheskaiia deiatel'nost' arkhimandrita Palladiia (Kafarova)" Китаеведческая и дипломатическая деятельность архимандрита Палладия (Кафарова) [Archimandrite Palladii (Kafarov's) involvement into Sinology and Diplomacy] (PhD diss., Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 2016), 239, 240, 242.

³⁰ Nikitin, "Sankt-Peterburgskaia Dukhovnaia akademiia i Rossiiskaia Dukhovnaia Missiia v Pekine" (1993), 41, 42.

³¹ The first handwritten translation was completed in 1862 and sent to the Holy Synod.

Latin New Testament edition, which was published by a German biblical scholar Constantin von Tischendorf (1815–1874) in 1848. However, this was only done when he could not clearly understand the meaning of a certain expression. Tischendorf's edition was chosen due to its similarity to the Russian edition.³² Remarkably, Adoratskii also indicates that in translating the *paremia*³³ of the Old Testament, missionaries decided to follow the Septuagint (LXX) published by Tischendorf, which is the closest to the traditional Slavonic text, and which translators have never deviated from.³⁴

Karpov was not unaware of the existing Protestant translations. Several translations are mentioned in his report, including Robert Morrison's (馬禮遜, 1782–1834) New Testament translation (1814), the Old and New Testament translations completed by the "Protestant missionary society" and "published in Hong Kong in 1855" – obviously the *Delegates Version* (委辦譯本); "after them also the Americans made the translations of both Testaments in Shanghai and published [them] in 1859", – most likely the *Delegates Version* published by the American missionaries. He knew about these translations from reports in the newspapers but due to the turbulent situation in China could not obtain them until October 1860.³⁵ Remarkably, a member of the eleventh mission (1830–1840) Archimandrite Avvakum Chestnoi (Аввакум Честной, 1801–1866),³⁶ who was a referee of Karpov's translation, indicated in his reference that this translation was "the closest to" («ближе всех подходит») the translation done by the English missionary Walter Henry Medhurst (麥都思, 1796–1857) (*The New Testament*, 1836).³⁷ He also indicated that Karpov had "detected and fixed" parts that were incorrectly translated by the English translator, while the correctly translated parts "Archimandrite Gury has included into [his] own translation without any changes."³⁸ If this is true, a whole study could be done to compare and analyze to what extent Karpov's translation resembles Medhurst's. This is particularly interesting, both in light of the statement that the translation was completed using the Russian and Church Slavonic Bible as the basis, and also, as follows from Karpov's testimony (to be shown later), because his translation was quite autonomous.

³² See: A.N. Khokhlov А.Н. Хохлов, "Missionerskaia deiatel'nost' Guriia Karpova do i posle preobrazovaniia Pekinskoii dukhovnoi missii v 60-e gody XIX v." Миссионерская деятельность Гурия Карпова до и после преобразования Пекинской духовной миссии в 60-е годы XIX в. [Missionary activities of Gury Karpov before and after the reformation of the Peking Ecclesiastical Mission in the 1860s], *Obshchestvo i gosudarstvo v Kitae* Общество и государство в Китае [Society and State in China] (2015): 883.

³³ Special readings recited during the service which consists of excerpts from the Old or New Testament.

³⁴ Nikolai Adoratskii Николай Адоратский (hieromonk), "Nastoiashchee polozhenie i sovremennaia deiatel'nost'," 381.

³⁵ Cited according to: Khokhlov, "Missionerskaia deiatel'nost' Guriia Karpova," 883.

³⁶ It is interesting that according to Adoratskii, the head of the thirteenth mission (1850–1858) Archimandrite Palladii (Kafarov, 1817–1878), just like Avvakum Chestnoi, "originally was convinced that it is impossible to translate the Holy Scripture and Service books into Chinese." See: Adoratskii, "Nastoiashchee polozhenie i sovremennaia deiatel'nost'," 381.

³⁷ Cited according to: Khokhlov, "Missionerskaia deiatel'nost' Guriia Karpova," 889. For the history of Medhurst's translation see: Patric Hanan, "The Bible as Chinese Literature: Medhurst, Wang Tao, and the Delegates' Version," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 63, No. 1 (2003): 197–239.

³⁸ Cited according to: Khokhlov, "Missionerskaia deiatel'nost' Guriia Karpova," 889.

Karpov indicates two main reasons “to seek for a new, more satisfactory translation”: 1. that Protestant translators followed their own personal understanding of the text they translated; 2. that they “rejected the Christian terminology introduced by the Jesuits, which is used in China for more than 200 years and is easily understood by the [local] people, changing it to the new [terminology] which is not any better than the former one.”³⁹

The terminology used by Karpov was almost the same as that used by the Catholics,⁴⁰ and there was a certain tradition that Karpov had decided to follow. Talking about the importance of the literature of the Roman Catholic and Protestant missions to the REMC, a member of the sixteenth mission, hieromonk Aleksii Vinogradov (Алексий Виноградов, 1845–1919)⁴¹, indicated that at the very beginning of its existence the REMC had used translations completed by the Roman Catholic mission. These translations were gradually amended and were used by the Orthodox missionaries for their own purpose.⁴² This indicates that originally the REMC had used translations completed by the Roman Catholic mission (later also translations completed by the Protestant missions⁴³) and did not feel the need to make their own translations; consequently, the Orthodox missionaries did not express any hostile attitude toward the Protestant and Roman Catholic tradition of translating Christian literature, and to some extent no hostile attitude was expressed toward their Christian literature *per se*.

Talking more specifically about Karpov’s translation, Vinogradov indicates that Karpov knew *Wenyan* (文言, the literary Chinese language) and cared more about the beauty of the translation, which had been done in a classical style.⁴⁴ The same is indicated by Ivanovskii, who approved of Karpov's use of a classical Chinese language, but who also noted that

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 884.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 884.

⁴¹ Hieromonk Aleksii Vinogradov is well known as a historian, who studied the history of Christianity in China. In 1865 he graduated from the Saint Petersburg Theological Seminary and from 1867 to 1868 studied at the Saint Petersburg Theological Academy. In 1880 he became a monk, and from 1881 to 1888 served in Beijing as a member of the sixteenth mission. In 1895 he came to China for the second time, but due to a mental disease left mission in 1898. He spent the rest of his life in the Optina Monastery near the city of Kozel’sk. See: M.F. Chigrinskii М.Ф. Чигринский, “Иеромонах Алексий (Виноградов) в Оптиной пустыни” Иеромонах Алексий (Виноградов) в Оптиной пустыни [Hieromonk Aleksii (Vinogradov) in the Optina monastery] in *Pravoslavie na Dal’nem Vostoke Православие на Дальнем Востоке [Orthodoxy in the Far East]*, ed. N.M. Bogolyubov Н.М. Боголюбов (Saint Petersburg: Andreev i Synov’ia, 1993), 54–62.

⁴² Aleksii Vinogradov Алексий Виноградов (hieromonk), *Kitaiskaia Biblioteka i uchenye trudy Chlenov Imperatorskoï Rossiiskoi Dukhovnoi i Diplomaticheskoi Missii v g. Pekine ili Bei-Tszine (v Kitae) Китайская Библиотека и ученые труды Членов Императорской Российской Духовной и Дипломатической Миссии в Г. Пекине или Бэй-Цзине, (в Китае) [Chinese Library and Academic Works of the members of the Emperial Russian Ecclesiastical and Diplomatic Mission in the City of Peking or Beijing (in China)]* (Saint Petersburg: Tipografiia brat. Panteleevykh, 1889), 33. He also states that at the very beginning the Protestant missionaries had acted in the same way. (*Ibid.*)

⁴³ Vinogradov, *Kitaiskaia Biblioteka*, 33–36.

⁴⁴ Vinogradov, *Kitaiskaia Biblioteka*, 32.

“sometimes the translator has deviated too much from the [original] text”.⁴⁵ There were different opinions about the quality of this translation.⁴⁶ For instance, as authoritative a missionary as Bishop Nicholas of Japan,⁴⁷ who consulted Bibles written in different languages in order to complete his Japanese Bible translation (including different Chinese Bible translations), stated in his diary (November 26, 1896): “Our Peking [translation] is also amusing (потешен)”.⁴⁸ According to Adoratskii, Karpov had rendered the text of the Gospels “not close to the original” and the language he used was too complicated. That is why his translation was criticized by his referee Archimandrite Avvakum.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, overall, Chestnoi gave a positive comment on his rendering. In his review (June 25, 1865) Chestnoi even stated that the rendering of the New Testament from Russian into Chinese “must be justly acknowledged as the best of all contemporary translations.”⁵⁰ On the basis of remarks made by Chestnoi, the translation was revised and published in 1865. (This was the second edition; the first publication was in 1864.)⁵¹ In a letter (dated January 14, 1866) to the ober-secretary⁵² of the Holy Synod, I.G. Tersinskii, Karpov doubted whether Chinese Christians would like the amendments that had been made in accordance with Chestnoi’s remarks. He also stated: “[the] Chinese were witnesses of the fact that for a revision of my translation I have invited a whole committee of scholars and was doing this revision for two years. No one would believe that Father Avvakum would have a better knowledge of Chinese than a Chinese person with an academic background.”⁵³

In another letter, Karpov wrote:

I have never called upon anyone for help except God my Lord. Only a master of literature (магистр словесности), the Chinese Long has helped me as a scribe.

⁴⁵ Aleksei Ivanovskii Алексей Ивановский, “Bogoslužebnye knigi pravoslavnoi Tserkvi na kitaiskom iazyke” Богослужебные книги православной Церкви на китайском языке [Service books of the Orthodox Church in the Chinese language], *Khristianskoe chtenie* Христианское Чтение [Christian Reading], No. 3-4, (1885): 490-502, accessed October, 6, 2020, http://www.orthodox.cn/localchurch/1885KristianskoeChteniePg490-502_ru.htm

⁴⁶ Datsyshen, *Istoriia Rossiiskoi Dukhovnoi Missii*, 192.

⁴⁷ Nikolai Kasatkin (Николай Касаткин, 1836-1912), the archbishop of the Japan Orthodox Church, missionary and translator of the New Testament. He was born in the Smolensk prefecture in the Russian Empire. In 1836 he graduated from the Smolensk Theological Seminary and the same year entered the Saint Petersburg Theological Academy. In 1860 he became a monk and a priest. In 1861 he came to Japan as a missionary. In 1870 he established the Orthodox mission in Japan. In 1880 he was ordained as a bishop and was elevated to the dignity of Archbishop of All Japan by the Synod in 1907. Already during the 1860s he had started some translation work and had been involved in translation work till his death in 1912. For his biography see: Sviatitel’ Nikolai Iaponskii Святитель Николай Японский, *Kratkoe zhizneopisanie, dnevniki 1870-1911* Краткое жизнеописание, дневники 1870 - 1911 [St Nicholas of Japan. A short biography, diaries 1870-1911] (Saint Petersburg: Bibliopolis, 2007), 7 - 47.

⁴⁸ Iaponskii, *Kratkoe zhizneopisanie, dnevniki 1870-1911*, 371.

⁴⁹ Adoratskii, “Nastoiashchee polozhenie i sovremennaia deiatel’nost’,” 381.

⁵⁰ Cited according to: Khokhlov, “Missionerskaia deiatel’nost’ Guriia Karpova,” 889.

⁵¹ Cf. Khokhlov, “Missionerskaia deiatel’nost’ Guriia Karpova,” 891.

⁵² Chief Secretary in the office of the Holy Synod.

⁵³ Gury Karpov Гурий Карпов (archimandrite), “Pis’mo arkhimandrita Guriia k I.G. Tersinskomu o perevode Novago Zaveta na kitaiskii iazyk” Письмо архимандрита Гурия к И.Г. Терсинскому о переводе Нового Завета на китайский язык [A letter of Archimandrite Gury to I.G. Tersinskii about the translation of the New Testament into the Chinese language] *Russkii arkhiv* Русский Архив [Russian Archive], SPb. No. 1 (1894): 97.

Usually, I was walking around the room with the New Testament in my hands and dictated, while Long was sitting at the table and wrote down my translation. When the translation was done (which took 4 years) [I] have invited for the meeting: a teacher Ivan from the school for boys and a teacher Maria from the school for girls, Maria's son Nikita and an albazinian Moses. All six of us were spending two hours a day (every day) for revision of the translation. Two-three verses being read, and [then, all] guests recount how they have understood what had been read. If I heard not that same idea that is in the original [text], then we would seek for a reason for that difference [...]. We have spent two years in doing such a revision, and [I] believe with a help of God we have done the best we could.⁵⁴

Vinogradov, in his work about the Chinese Library of the mission, referred to the scribe as “a Chinese [man] Long.”⁵⁵ In the above-mentioned Holy Synod report on Karpov's translation, it was stated that the Chinese man, whose surname was Long, was “a well-educated Chinese”, who was “not at all familiar with Christianity”.⁵⁶ In the description of the life and martyrdom of the Chinese martyrs, this man was mentioned as a teacher of the Archimandrite Palladii (Kafarov), and the author – as did Karpov in his preface to the New Testament translation – referred to him as *juren* (舉人) Long Yuan (隆源),⁵⁷ which meant that he was a successful candidate in the imperial provincial examination. Karpov indicated that Long was “from the district of Xuntian”, and, as explained by Baker, the term Xuntian 順天 here “indicates the xiang, located in the region of Beijing, where Long Yuan obtained his *juren* degree.”⁵⁸ Remarkably, in the description of martyrdom it is indicated that when Kafarov was the head of the mission for the second time (the fifteenth mission, 1865–1878), he “entrusted his teacher” Long Yuan “[to] bring (воспитывать) Mitrophan⁵⁹ up [who subsequently became a priest and martyr – A.D.] with special care to prepare him later for receiving ordination as a

⁵⁴ Gury Karpov Гурий Карпов (archimandrite), “Iz pis'ma preosviashchennogo Guriia k I.I. Palimpsestovu. O perevode Novago Zaveta na Kitaiskii iazyk” Из письма преосвященного Гурия к И.И. Палимпсестову. О переводе Нового Завета на Китайский язык [From a letter of a Bishop Gury to I.I. Palimpsestov. On the translation of the New Testament into the Chinese Language] Russkii arkhiv Русский Архив [Russian Archive], SPb. No. 11 (1893): 394.

⁵⁵ Vinogradov, *Kitaiskaia Biblioteka*, 24.

⁵⁶ Cited according to: Khokhlov, “Missionerskaia deiatel'nost' Guriia Karpova,” 884.

⁵⁷ Gury Karpov (archimandrite), *Zixu* 自序 [preface] in *Xinyizhao Shengjing* 新遺詔聖經 [The New Testament], trans. Gury Karpov (Beijing: Beitangtushuguan, 1864), ii; “Skazanie o muchenikakh Kitaiskoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, postradavshikh v 1900-m godu, i ‘pokhvala’ im” Сказание о мучениках Китайской Православной Церкви, пострадавших в 1900-м году, и «похвала» им [The Story of the Martyrs of the Chinese Orthodox Church, who suffered in 1900, and “eulogy” to them] *Kitaiskii Blagovestnik* Китайский Благовестник [the Chinese Herald], No. 6 (August 1932): 6.

⁵⁸ Timothy Baker, “Appendix One – Translations the Three Prefaces” in “Confucian Attitudes at the Intersection of Sino-Russian Relations and Orthodox Missionary Activity in the Late Qing: Prefaces to the 1864 Russian Orthodox Translation of the New Testament,” *Tzu-Chi University Journal of the Humanities and Social Science*, No. 18 (2015): 161.

⁵⁹ Mitrophan (1855–1900, 常楊吉, Chang Yangji, often mentioned in publications as Chang Ji), the first Orthodox Chinese priest, who suffered martyrdom in 1900 during the Boxer Rebellion (or Yihetuan movement: Yihetuan yundong, 義和團運動, 1899–1901). Was canonized and is venerated as a holy martyr together with other Chinese Orthodox Martyrs. See: L.A. Afonina, “Chinese Orthodox Martyrs of 1900: Survey of Historical Sources and Church Veneration,” In *International Journal of Sino-Western Studies*. Vol. 14, (2018): 49, 45–71.

priest.”⁶⁰ It is not clear what kind of training he was supposed to perform,⁶¹ but the fact that he was entrusted to prepare someone for receiving ordination, indicates that he was held in high esteem by mission members. Notably, it was also said that Mitrophan Ji was “urged by the teacher” («убеждаемый учителем») to receive ordination, and so he submitted.⁶² If Long Yuan really was Kafarov’s teacher, then he, theoretically, could have been in the mission since the 1840s, when Kafarov had just started learning Chinese. Nonetheless, there is an interesting testimony of Long Yuan in his preface to the New Testament translation:

In the summer of the renshu⁶³ year (1862) he [Karpov – A.D.] employed me to translate religious books, and I began to have the honor of his acquaintance of him, [he then] took out the New Testament, to be revised and corrected, thus [we] studied from dawn to dusk, laboring tirelessly, not caring for ornate expressions, hoping only to make the meaning detailed and concise, and the order of the language to be correct with no difference from the original text. Accordingly for each affair [seeking] the correct word, weighing each of the particles and function words, so they must be in agreement with the spirit; to the chapters, sections, sentences and words, giving utmost attention and deliberation, going over it more than ten times, truly each and every word placed on the scale and weighed.⁶⁴

Hence, from his own testimony, he only became acquainted with Gury Karpov in 1862.⁶⁵ The head of the sixteenth mission, Archimandrite Flavian Gorodetskii (Флавиан Городецкий, 1841–1915), indicated that Long was teaching him Chinese, and was a pagan, but as a teacher had a profound knowledge and experience, and “for many years served by the mission.”⁶⁶ If he was never baptized, it is even more striking that this man had even compiled some catechetical literature for Orthodox Christians.⁶⁷ It can be said with certainty that Long Yuan was in close contact with mission members from at least 1862 and passed away in the early 1880s – before 1882 – because, according to Gorodetskii, Long was helping to revise the translation of service books, and after his death this was done by several other catechists, including Mitrophan Ji, who later (in 1882) became a priest.⁶⁸

⁶⁰ “Skazanie o muchenikakh,” 6, 7.

⁶¹ As follows also from the report of the Ober-Procurator of the Holy Synod from 1868, the teacher Long was teaching Chinese to the children of parish members (“kids of our Christians”) at the mission’s school. See: Kulikov, “Kitavedcheskaia i diplomaticheskaia deiatel’nost’”, 132, 133.

⁶² “Skazanie o muchenikakh,” 7.

⁶³ Normally referred to as renxu 壬戌. 59th year of the Sexagenary Cycle.

⁶⁴ The translation by Timothy Baker cited according to: Baker, “Appendix One” in “Confucian Attitudes,” 162.

⁶⁵ This contradicts Karpov’s statement from the aforementioned letter that Long has helped him as a scribe and the very translation took 4 years, after which another 2 years were spent for a revision. Taking into consideration that the first draft was sent to the Holy Synod in 1862 this raises a question about the exact time when Karpov started his translation, and when made his final amendments/revision.

⁶⁶ “iz pis’ma Vysokopreosviashchenneishago Flaviana, Mitropolita Kievskago i Galitskago.” Из письма Высокопреосвященнейшаго Флавиана, Митрополита Киевскаго и Галицкаго [From the letter of his Eminence, the most Reverend Flavian, Metropolitan of Kiev and Galitsa], Kitaiskii Blagovestnik Китайский Благовестник [the Chinese Herald] No.2 (1912): 2.

⁶⁷ Vinogradov, Kitaiskaia Biblioteka, 29.

⁶⁸ “iz pis’ma Vysokopreosviashchenneishago Flaviana,” 4.

The New Testament translation was initiated by Karpov, and it was published, but permission to use this translation for missionary purposes was only received from the Holy Synod in 1866 by which time Karpov had already gone back to Russia.⁶⁹ Vinogradov states that European sinologists (without mentioning specific names) defined Karpov's translation as a classical work because it was written in "a classical style of Chinese scholars". For this reason, only educated Chinese could read and understand it. He also mentions that the Orthodox Chinese used Karpov's translation and *Xinyue Quanshu* 新約全書 (1872) completed by "the English missionaries"⁷⁰ for the study of the Bible text.⁷¹

Moreover, even later mission members have criticized Karpov's New Testament rendering. The head of the sixteenth mission, Archimandrite Flavian Gorodetskii, found many "unclear and obscure parts" and decided to republish his *Four Gospel* translation together with his own comments. The comments were based partly on his own interpretation, but mostly on the comments of the St Fathers. This annotated edition of *Four Gospels* was published in 1884.⁷² According to Gorodetskii's testimony, Fr Palladii had entrusted him with creating short commentaries on the Gospel. The first part of this work was checked and corrected by Archimandrite Palladii, who also "made substantial changes in the very text of the Gospel translated by Archbishop Gury".⁷³

Russian sinologist, missionary and translator, a member of the fourteenth and fifteenth missions, hieromonk Isaiia Polikin (Исайя Поликин, 1833–1871), stated that after reading many Chinese classical works and Chinese translations, or original works completed by the Protestant missionaries, he had come to the conclusion that most of the Chinese Orthodox theological terminology came from the Chinese Roman Catholic works and needed to be changed in order to suit the traditions of the Orthodox Church.⁷⁴ This very concern of the Orthodox missionaries can explain why another New Testament translation project (which will be discussed later in this paper) was initiated in the early 20th century.

Some remarks made by Polikin in the foreword to his *Russian-Chinese Dictionary of Theological and Church Terms*⁷⁵ reveal how undeveloped translation methods were in the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission during the time when Karpov was doing his translation. Polikin mentions that at the beginning of the year 1860, he was asked to celebrate service in Chinese and started searching in their Chinese theological library for a dictionary in order to

⁶⁹ Datsyshen, *Istoriia Rossiiskoi Dukhovnoi Missii*, 192.

⁷⁰ According to the year of publication, this is a well-known Peking Version – *Guanhua Xinyue Quanshu* 官話新約全書 [Peking Version Bible] (Shanghai: American Bible Society, 1872).

⁷¹ Vinogradov, *Kitaiskaia Biblioteka*, 25.

⁷² Vinogradov, *Kitaiskaia Biblioteka*, 25, 26.

⁷³ "iz pis'ma Vysokopreosviashchennishago Flaviana," 2.

⁷⁴ A.N. Khokhlov А.Н. Хохлов, "Isaia Polikin: missionary, perevodchik, filolog" Исайя Поликин: миссионер, переводчик, филолог [Isaia Polikin: a missionary, translator, philologist] *Vostochnii arkhiv* Восточный Архив [Eastern Archive], No.1 (33), (2016): 37.

⁷⁵ This dictionary has never been published, but it is known that the dictionary (just like the Chinese New Testament translation in 1867) was sent to/and received by Nicolas of Japan in 1872. See: Nikolai Adoratskii Николай Адоратский (hieromonk), "Pravoslavnaia Missiia v Kitae za 200 let eia sushchestvovaniia," Православная Миссия в Китае за 200 лет ея существования [Orthodox Mission in China in 200 years of its existence] *Pravoslavnyi sobesednik* Православный Собеседник [Orthodox Collocutor] (February, 1887): 263 fn. 2.

understand how certain terms should be translated; he found nothing except “a notebook” of Fr Avvakum, containing around one hundred terms.⁷⁶ Due to a lack of such materials, Polikin started reading some prayers (unpublished) and books published either by Karpov or by others before him. While reading these materials he started to write down terms and phrases which he found useful. Hence, in three years he had completed a small dictionary. He had not changed these terms, because they had been used in previous translations; nevertheless, in 1864, while translating the *Book of Needs*, he came to the conclusion that some terms were imprecise and not sufficient. Polikin discussed this many times with Karpov and Karpov revised the dictionary. In September 1865, this dictionary (containing 1800 words) was submitted to the Holy Synod. In 1866, after coming back to Beijing, Polikin continued to work on the translations and dictionary, and hence, by the end of 1868, the dictionary contained up to 3300 words and phrases.⁷⁷

Since the 1860s, missionaries have specifically focused on translating service books; however, besides that many efforts were made to translate different kinds of catechetical and religious literature, including catechisms, Church history, Bible stories, the works of St Fathers, explanation of the Orthodox service, prayers, and others.⁷⁸ In 1882, when Archimandrite Falvian Gorodetskii was the head of the mission, a catechist called Mitrophan Ji was ordained as a priest in Japan, and after coming back to Beijing, Church service was delivered completely in Chinese.⁷⁹ Unfortunately, he suffered a series of nervous breakdowns, leading him to stop service by the mid-1890s.⁸⁰

The head of the eighteenth mission (1896–1931), Archimandrite Innocent Figurovsky (Иннокентий Фигуровский, 1863–1931), was quite critical in assessing the state of the mission in his first report from 1897–1898. There were only 458 local Orthodox Christians. Since March 1, 1897, Church service had been celebrated daily “almost entirely in Chinese”, but before that it was celebrated in Church Slavonic, due to which “hardly 15–20 people came to service on big feasts”. According to Figurovsky, the homilies in Chinese preached by catechists during the services did not interest the listeners because they were written “in a language which is not really understandable to commoners”. He also criticized the moral state of parish members and the lack of involvement of missionaries in missionary activities.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Khokhlov, “Isaia Polikin,” 37. A Russian sinologist T. Pang indicates that some notebooks with Manchu-Chinese exercises in translating sacral texts from Russian into Manchu can be found in the Manchu fund. Pang, “Nekotorye man’chzhurskie dokumenty”, 29. But the absence of any materials in the library of the mission can be explained by the fact that members of mission usually took the study materials with them back to Russia. See: Datsyshen, Chegodaev, *Arhimandrit Petr (Kemenskii)*, 90, 91.

⁷⁷ Khokhlov, “Isaia Polikin,” 37.

⁷⁸ Cf. Adoratskii, “Nastoiashchee polozhenie i sovremennaia deiatel’nost’,” 377 – 384; Vinogradov, *Kitaiskaia Biblioteka*, 23 – 33.

⁷⁹ “iz pis’ma Vysokopreosviashchenneishago Flaviana,” 4.

⁸⁰ *Kratkaia istoriia Russkoi pravoslavnoi missii*, 182.

⁸¹ Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA), f. 796, o. 180, d. 3567 a. I express my gratitude to Liliya Kholkina for accessing these materials on my request. The report was also printed in “Iz otcheta nachal’nika Pekinskoï dukhovnoï missii arkhimandrita Innokentia o sostoianii missii za 1897 – 1898 gody.” Из отчета начальника Пекинской духовной миссии архимандрита Иннокентия о состоянии миссии за 1897 – 1898 годы [From the report of the head of the Beijing Ecclesiastical Mission Archimandrite Innocent on the state of the mission in 1897–1898], *Tserkovnye vedomosti* Церковные ведомости [Church Records], No. 51–52 (December 18, 1899): 397–402.

Innocent Figurovsky, whose secular name was Ivan (Иван), was born on February 22, 1863 in a Panovo village (Siberia) to the family of a priest. Despite having been an extremely important figure in the history of the REMC – the one who was able to save it and even lead it to its heyday after the Boxer rebellion – he remains quite unknown, and before Datsyshen's monograph about him (which will be used as the basis for this part of the article) there was not a single monograph about this outstanding missionary.⁸²

In 1878 Figurovsky entered the Tomsk Theological Seminary, where he spent four years, and six years later, in 1884, he was ordained as a priest. After the death of his son and wife in 1885, as a young priest he decided to leave the village of Verkhne-Kuzhebarskoe (Верхне-Кужебарское)⁸³, where he was serving at the time. From 1886 to 1892 he studied at Saint Petersburg Theological Seminary and Academy. During this period of study, in 1890, he became a monk. In 1894, by then a young hieromonk, Figurovsky became an archimandrite and was appointed to be a rector of Saint Petersburg Theological Seminary.⁸⁴ In 1896, in accordance with the order of the Emperor of Russia, Archimandrite Innocent was appointed to be the head of the eighteenth REMC.⁸⁵

After the Boxer rebellion, Figurovsky was called back to Saint Petersburg. Russian authorities had thought of moving the mission to Siberia, and there were even rumors that the mission might be abandoned.⁸⁶ Nonetheless, as claimed by the author of the *Short History of the REMC*, “thanks to [the] attentive and thoughtful attitude of the Metropolitan Antonii [Vadkovskii (Антоний Вадковский, 1846–1912)] of Saint Petersburg the Chinese mission was saved”.⁸⁷ Figurovsky was ordained a bishop, and together with thirty-four new members of the mission dispatched back to Beijing in 1902.⁸⁸

The head of mission, Figurovsky believed that the language used for preaching must be simple and clear to everyone, rather than literary and obtuse.⁸⁹ This can also be regarded as his translation principle. He stated that a permanent translation committee must be created for the translation of literature and that the head of mission must learn both Chinese and English, which he himself had done on a regular basis from the very beginning of his time in China.⁹⁰

Figurovsky was not only an outstanding missionary but was also a great scholar. In 1909 he prepared *A Complete Chinese-Russian Dictionary* (in two volumes) which was the largest and

⁸² V.G. Datsyshen В.Г. Дацьшэн, *Mitropolit Innokentii Pekinskii* Митрополит Иннокентий Пекинский [Metropolitan Innocent of Beijing] (Hong Kong: Orthodox Brotherhood of Apostles Saints Peter and Paul, 2011), 15, 19.

⁸³ Located in Krasnoiar'sk Krai.

⁸⁴ For details see: Datsyshen, *Mitropolit Innokentii Pekinskii*, 47, 56, 60, 62, 41–66.

⁸⁵ Datsyshen, *Mitropolit Innokentii Pekinskii*, 83. For details of his life before the mission see *Ibid.*, 19–84.

⁸⁶ Cf. Datsyshen, *Mitropolit Innokentii Pekinskii*, 156, 160.

⁸⁷ *Kratkaia istoriia Russkoi pravoslavnoi missii*, 194.

⁸⁸ Cf. Datsyshen, *Mitropolit Innokentii Pekinskii*, 170, 155–171.

⁸⁹ *Kratkaia istoriia Russkoi pravoslavnoi missii*, 188.

⁹⁰ *Kratkaia istoriia Russkoi pravoslavnoi missii*, 188, 189.

most complete Chinese-Russian dictionary published before the Chinese revolution (1911).⁹¹ According to the information provided in a reference book about the Russian Orthodox hierarchs from 1893 to 1965, Bishop (since 1928 Metropolitan) Innocent knew 62,000 Chinese characters, and even Chinese scholars asked for his help in explaining the meaning of rare characters.⁹² One may doubt the objectivity of this information; nonetheless, Figurovsky is definitely known as having been a specialist in the Chinese language.

In 1931 a Russian sinologist S.V. Nedachin (С.В. Недачин), who knew Figurovsky in person, indicated that in nineteen years of his work during the eighteenth mission,⁹³ the Chinese Orthodox Church had received from him all the (required) “Church literature” (meaning catechetical and liturgical literature), namely: the New Testament, commentaries on the four gospels, a concise Old Testament, commentaries on the *Books of Genesis* and *Exodus*, the *Service Book*, the *Book of Needs*, *Octoechos*, the *Book of Psalms*, Homilies (on the whole year), a prayer book, a Catechism, Canons, and a Russian Church history.⁹⁴

According to the report of 1908, the Gospel of John was finished by the translation committee and published that year. The new translations of the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles up to 2 Corinthians were published as well. The translation committee worked on several translation projects;⁹⁵ however, in the published version of the New Testament (1910) only Bishop Innocent was indicated as a translator.⁹⁶ It was stated that “the Gospel of Matthew has been translated into literary Chinese anew (or again) in accordance with the Greek text”.⁹⁷ In the lithography of the first publication of the New Testament, it was stated that the Greek original had been used as a source text,⁹⁸ but it was not indicated which codex had been used for this translation.

It is hard to tell whether, and if so, to what extent, the translation committee was involved in the New Testament translation project. The history of Chinese Bible translation is hardly mentioned on the pages of *Kitaiskii Blagovestnik* (KB, the *Chinese Herald*), which was the main periodical of the REMC. Neither yearly reports nor articles on the mission, which include lists of its members, state clearly who was a member of the translation committee. An article on missionary activities in the years 1902–1913 states that “elder members of the mission are the closest assistants” to Figurovsky and they performed different tasks, including translation

⁹¹ Datsyshen, *Mitropolit Innokentii Pekinskii*, 252–254.

⁹² Cited according to: Datsyshen, *Mitropolit Innokentii Pekinskii*, 257.

⁹³ I assume he meant the first nineteen years.

⁹⁴ Cited according to: Datsyshen, *Mitropolit Innokentii Pekinskii*, 260.

⁹⁵ “Otchet o sostoianii Pekinskoj Dukhovnoj Missii v Kitae za 1908 god” Отчет о состоянии Пекинской Духовной Миссии в Китае за 1908 год [The report on the state of the Beijing Ecclesiastical Mission in China in 1908], *Kitaiskii Blagovestnik* Китайский Благовестник [the Chinese Herald] No. 1 (1909): 2.

⁹⁶ *Xila yuanwen Xinyue Shengjing* 希臘原文《新約聖經》 [The New Testament translation of the Greek original], zhujiao Yingnuokentiyi jingyi 主教英諾肯提乙敬譯trans. Bishop Innocent (Beijing: Beijing Dongzhengjiao zonghuiyin, 1910), cover.

⁹⁷ “Otchet o sostoianii Pekinskoj Dukhovnoj Missii v Kitae za 1906 god” Отчет о состоянии Пекинской Духовной Миссии в Китае за 1906 год [The report on the state of the Beijing Ecclesiastical Mission in China in 1906], *Kitaiskii Blagovestnik* Китайский Благовестник [the Chinese Herald], No. 7-8 (1907): 9.

⁹⁸ *Xila yuanwen Xinyue Shengjing*.

and book publishing.⁹⁹ At present, the history of this translation work requires further study, since many questions remain unanswered. It is known that in 1910 the translation committee initiated the translation of Bible commentaries,¹⁰⁰ and some annotated editions of the gospels and Genesis were published in 1911.¹⁰¹ Remarkably, the report of 1913 states that the missionaries had discovered “a method of translation into a language, [which is] understandable by people, and, at the same time, not shocking to intelligent people; [the following] is already translated into this language: part of the liturgy, some chapters of the Gospel and Epistles of the Apostles”.¹⁰² The translation committee has clearly worked quite quickly because as early as December 14, 1913 the Gospel and Epistles were read in the new translation in a “commonly understood language”.¹⁰³ It is not clear how this method was discovered, but it is evident that missionaries were moving in their new translations toward modern vernacular Mandarin Chinese.¹⁰⁴

Talking more specifically about the 1910 New Testament translation, there is a similarity in structure and vocabulary, especially in the choice of proper names,¹⁰⁵ between this and Karpov’s translation. This also follows from the testimony in *KB* (No. 1-2, 1914), which says that “the works of the previous members of the mission have served as the basis for new work”.¹⁰⁶

Finally, the reason why information about the translation process is so reluctantly shared on pages of the mission’s main periodical might be the humbleness of its leader, Figurowsky. In an interview with the Russian newspaper *Kolokol* (Колокол – Church Bell) in 1913 (! by which time he had already published his own translation), Figurowsky says: “In our missionary work the Gospel, on the translation of which into Chinese Metropolitan Flavian of

⁹⁹ “Pekinskaia Dukhovnaia Missiia v 1902–1913 g.” Пекинская Духовная Миссия в 1902–1913 г. [Beijing Ecclesiastical Mission in 1902–1913], *Kitaiskii Blagovestnik* Китайский Благовестник [the Chinese Herald], No. 1-2 (1914): 14.

¹⁰⁰ “Otchet o sostoianii Pekinskoï Dukhovnoi missii v Kitae za 1910 god” Отчет о состоянии Пекинской Духовной Миссии в Китае за 1910 год [The report on the state of the Beijing Ecclesiastical Mission in China in 1910], *Kitaiskii Blagovestnik* Китайский Благовестник [the Chinese Herald], No. 1 (1911): 5.

¹⁰¹ The Gospel of Matthew and the Book of Genesis are accessible on the website of the Orthodox Fellowship of All Saints of China: <http://www.orthodox.cn/bible/index.html> Accessed October 14, 2020.

¹⁰² “Otchet o sostoianii Pekinskoï Dukhovnoi missii v Kitae za 1913 god” Отчет о состоянии Пекинской Духовной Миссии в Китае за 1913 год [The report on the state of the Beijing Ecclesiastical Mission in China in 1913], *Kitaiskii Blagovestnik* Китайский Благовестник [the Chinese Herald], No. 1-2 (1914): 10.

¹⁰³ “Iz zhizni missii” Из жизни миссии [From the life of the mission] *Kitaiskii Blagovestnik* Китайский Благовестник [the Chinese Herald], No. 5-6 (1914): 14.

¹⁰⁴ Compare to problems of defining the language in the Mandarin committee of the Protestant Union Version. Jost Zetsche, “The Work of Lifetimes: Why the Union Version Took Nearly Three Decades to Complete,” in *Bible in Modern China: The Literary and Intellectual Impact*, ed. Irene Eber et al (Sankt Augustin-Nettelal: Steyler Verlag, 1999), 92–99.

¹⁰⁵ Even though some are changed.

¹⁰⁶ “Pekinskaia Dukhovnaia Missiia v 1902–1913 g,” 15.

Kiev has worked a lot, is of great use [to the mission]. The Gospel is written in popular Chinese language with commentaries.”¹⁰⁷

In recent years Figurovsky’s New Testament translation has raised interest among modern Orthodox Chinese and Russian scholars. Since 2018 the Russian State University for the Humanities has run a series of seminars entitled: “Problems of translation of the New Testament into the Chinese language”. Participants in this seminar have tested how well Figurovsky’s translation is understood by modern Chinese speakers, and have concluded that the text is understood quite well, in spite of having been produced before the standards of the modern literary Chinese language were set.¹⁰⁸

Despite the mission having played a tremendous role in the history of Sino-Russian relations, and the traces it left in China, it has been almost forgotten. There are few scholars in Russia and China who study its history, and it remains largely unknown to Western scholars. In particular, the history of religious literature translations is hardly studied by anyone. Acknowledging the limitations of the study, this paper seeks to address that lacuna, and to draw attention to the study of this field.

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¹⁰⁷ Reprinted in KB. О.В. А-в, О.В. А-в, “Russkaia missiia v Kitae” Русская миссия в Китае [The Russian mission in China] *Kitaiskii Blagovestnik* Китайский Благовестник [the Chinese Herald], No. 9 (1913): 17.

¹⁰⁸ See: Seminar “Problemy perevoda Novogo zaveta na kitaiskii iazyk” Семинар «Проблемы перевода Нового Завета на китайский язык» [Seminar: Problems of translation of the New Testament into the Chinese language]: Otchet o vstreche 15 marta 2019 goda Отчет о встрече 15 марта 2019 года [The report on the session on March 15, 2019]. Accessed October 15, 2020 <https://www.rsuh.ru/education/il/science/scientific-seminar/translation-nz.php>

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