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REMARKS

ON THE

BEST TERM FOR GOD IN CHINESE;

ALSO ON

THE PROPER BASIS
OF COMPROMISE ON THIS SUBJECT.

ADDRESSED TO THE
FRIENDS OF PROTESTANT MISSIONS TO THE CHINESE,

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REMARKS,

Addressed to the Friends of Protestant Missions to the Chinese, on the two following Questions, viz.,

“I. What is the best term to be used for God, in translating the Sacred Scriptures into the Chinese language ?

“II. What is the proper basis to be adopted, to reconcile the present conflicting opinions on this subject ?”

RESPECTED FRIENDS :

IN bringing to your notice the first of the above topics, I am well aware that it has already been extensively and ably written upon ; and therefore I do not expect to throw additional light on those particular points, which have been so fully discussed. But as there are often several roads leading to the same place, so there may be several modes of reasoning which lead to the same conclusion. As in the one case, one road may be more pleasant to one traveler than it is to another, so in the other case, one mode of reasoning on any particular subject may be more conclusive to some minds than it is to others. Moreover, as in the former

illustration, much depends upon the road and upon the direction in which we go, in order to reach the same place; so in the latter illustration, much depends upon the definitions we may adopt, and the kinds of proof that we may employ in our reasoning, in order to arrive at the same conclusion.

This is applicable to the topic under consideration. Writers on this subject, who may be supposed to be equally learned in the Chinese language, equally devoted to their Master's work, and equally desirous of arriving at the truth, by adopting different definitions of God, and by employing *different* kinds of proof, have arrived at *widely different* conclusions in their reasonings on this most deeply important topic.

The advocates for Shángtí, on the one hand, assuming that power, authority, excellence, and the like, are prominent and essential elements in the idea of Divinity, have directed their inquiries after a term in Chinese, which contains this idea of Divinity. Hence their conclusions are (1,) that Divinity can not be properly predicated of *shin* in any case; (2,) that the Chinese themselves attribute divine titles and honors to no other being but to Shángtí; and (3,) by using Shángtí for the true God, in translating the Scriptures into the Chinese language, it is necessary to use *shin* only in respect to false gods. See Dr. Medhurst, Sir George Staunton, Bart., and other writers on this side of the question.

The advocates for *Shin*, on the other hand, assuming what they suppose to be a scriptural definition of *God*, viz., whatever deserves and receives that which God claims exclusively for himself, find no term in the Chinese language which conveys this idea of the true God. Hence their conclusions are, (1,) that all the objects of Chinese worship are destitute of Divinity, according to

the above definition ; *i. e.* none of them deserves or receives what the true God claims exclusively for himself, and consequently they must be considered as only false gods ; (2,) that as the term *shin* may be applied to all the objects of religious worship among the Chinese, so this term must be regarded as the generic term for *God* in the Chinese language ; and (3,) that as the sacred writers used generic terms for God in the Hebrew and Greek languages, and applied those terms to the true God as well as to false gods, so we ought to follow their example in the use and application of *Shin*, in translating the Scriptures into the Chinese language.

Such I conceive to be the main positions and conclusions of most of those who have written on this subject. My own mind, for some years, has been in favor of *Shin*, and of the positions and conclusions respecting it, as above stated. But as I have not yet met with the precise mode of reasoning on this subject, which is here adopted, and which has given my own mind so much light and comfort, and has placed my feet as it were on solid ground, and which I would hope may be of some service to others, I have therefore ventured to employ it in giving an answer to the first of the two questions above stated, *viz.*,

“What is the best term to be used for God, in translating the Sacred Scriptures into the Chinese language?”

In replying to this question, I wish to be as concise as the nature of the argument will allow. I shall therefore avoid making extended quotations, the introduction of foreign words, and the use of technicalities of all kinds, as far as may be possible. For the same reason, too, I must be excused from noticing particularly and

at length, the different arguments for and against the use of *shin*, which have already been employed by previous writers on this subject. Only those arguments, therefore, will be briefly noticed, which are thought to affect the position contended for in these remarks.

For the sake of brevity, then, as well as clearness, in answering the above question, the following order of inquiry is proposed :

1. What is the Scriptural definition of God? Or, the one which the Scriptures authorize us to adopt?
2. How do the sacred writers apply and use the terms, which they have selected to represent God?
3. What is our duty in this respect, in making use of the Chinese language, in view of their example?

1. Our first inquiry then is, What is the Scriptural definition of God? Or, the one which the Scriptures authorize us to adopt?

The Bible represents God as a being who deserves, and who claims the supreme affection and service of *all* his intelligent creatures. Thus our Savior says, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great Commandment.” Matt. xxii. 37, 38.

Hence, whatever being or object comes in the place of, or secures a part or the whole of what is here required for the true God, must be viewed as a false god. So the Scriptures give the same name to all such objects, whether they be persons or things,—whether imaginary beings or idols, “the work of the craftsman,”—and whether worshiped by few or by many; they are all nevertheless called gods, and they are so called, because they take the place of the true God, and rob him of that which is justly his due.

2. Our next inquiry is, How do the sacred writers apply and use the terms, which they have selected to represent God? Do they apply the same term, both to false gods and to the true God?

In the Old Testament, אֱלֹהִים *Elohim*, the plural form of the noun, is the term commonly used for *god*, and the same word is applied with equal freedom, both to false gods and also to the true God. The sacred writers seem to manifest no fear or hesitation in leaving their readers to decide from the connection, when the term refers to the true God and when to false gods.

Thus in Gen. i. 1, we read, "In the beginning Elohim (God) created the heavens and the earth." So in Exodus xx. 3, "Thou shalt have no other Elohim (gods) before me;" also xxiii. 13, "And in all things that I have said unto you, be circumspect, and make no mention of the name of other Elohim (gods), neither let it be heard out of thy mouth." So in II Chron. ii. 5, "And the house which I build is great, for great is our God above all (Elohim) gods." So in Jer. vii. 6, "If ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other Elohim (gods) to your hurt." So throughout the Old Testament, the same word, both in the singular and in the plural form, both singly and in conjunction with other parts of speech, is freely used; both as a designation for the true God and also for false gods, the reader being expected at the same time to determine from its connection in a sentence, when it refers to the former, and when to the latter class of objects.

This use of the term *Elohim*, must I think very much, if not wholly remove the following objection to the use of *Shin* for the same purpose. Sir George Staunton observes, "As the Chinese language possesses no

article or plural termination, the distinctions which we express in those modes can not be gathered from the context. A command to worship *Shin*, if conveyed without any qualification, will, therefore, be understood as a command to worship *shin* collectively, that is, all the *shin*, in fact, the whole Chinese mythology." page 30. Above, Elohim is not only frequently used without the article, but it is also employed in the plural form, to denote both the true God, as well as false gods, "the context" showing in each case to which it refers. We see not why *shin* may not be used with equal success, in the same way.

The generic character of Elohim is further seen in that remarkable passage in Exodus vi. 3: "And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob by the name of God Almighty, but by my name Jehovah was I not known to them:" *i. e.* though the patriarchs worshiped the true God under the name of Elohim, yet by his peculiar and specific name Jehovah was he not known, till he revealed himself by it to Moses, who, in writing the Pentateuch uses the term יהוה Jehovah, translated Lord in our English version, whom the patriarchs worshiped, though ignorant of this his specific name.

Thus it appears, that God suffered himself to be known and worshiped under the generic term Elohim, for about 2500 years from the Creation, till he made known his specific name to Moses, who being the first of the Old Testament writers, made use of this name in his writings; and hence its use in the same manner, by all the inspired writers who followed him. The importance and appropriate use of both the common and the specific terms for God, are beautifully exhibited in the following passages, *viz.* Josh. xxiv. 15, and I Kings, xviii. 24.

Thus in the former we read, "And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord (Jehovah), choose you this day

whom ye will serve ; whether the Elohim (gods) which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the Elohim (gods) of the Amorites in whose land ye dwell ; but as for me and my house we will serve (Jehovah) the LORD." So, in the latter passage we read, "And call ye on the name of your Elohim (gods), and I will call on the name of Jehovah (the Lord) ; and the Elohim (God) that answereth by fire, let him be Elohim (God). And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken."

The writers of the New Testament follow those of the Old in using the same generic term for the true God, that they do for a false god.

Thus in John i. 1, we read, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with (Theon) God, and the word was (Theos) God." The two words, "*theon*" and "*theos*," are both the same noun, only in different cases. In Acts xii. 22, we read, "And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a (theos) god, and not of a man." In Phil. iii. 19, there is a class of persons spoken of, "Whose (theos) God is their belly ;" and in II Cor. iv. 4, the Apostle speaks of another class, "in whom the (theos) god of this world hath blinded the minds of them." In both these passages, the same term, with the definite article prefixed, is used to denote a false (theos) god, that is used in John i. 1, to denote the true (theos) God.

Hence it is clear, that the writers, both of the Old and the New Testaments, do use, throughout the entire Scriptures, a common generic term, to denote the various objects of religious worship of which they have occasion to speak ; and also, that it is expected of the reader, in a large number of cases, to decide "from the context," when this term refers to false gods, and when to the true God.

But in this, they only did what we suppose they were compelled to do, in order to communicate just those truths, which they were taught by the Holy Spirit to communicate. Take, for example, the First Commandment. Here, God forbids equality with himself, in honor and worship. But how can these be bestowed on any object, unless the same name and titles, as well as the same kind of worship, are bestowed, which God claims exclusively for himself? We conceive the thing to be impossible.

Whatever, therefore, claims or receives that which God demands exclusively for himself, is correctly and necessarily called a *god*. True, it is a false god. But it is nevertheless a god, because it stands in the place of his honor and glory. To give to such an object any other designation, than that of god, or a God, would come vastly short of giving to it its true designation. When the people gave a shout to Herod (Acts xii. 22), saying, that his voice was "the voice of a God and not of a man," they intended to bestow divine honors upon him, and therefore they used "*theos*," the common generic term for God in their language, meaning thereby any god, including even the highest divinity known to them. So when we say, as is very common, that an individual makes of this, or that particular thing, whether wealth, or honor, or pleasure, or whatever it may be, a God—or that he makes it his God, we mean that he bestows upon it those affections and that service, which belong exclusively to the true God.

Such an object is therefore most truly denominated a god, because nothing else will express the idea intended to be conveyed by this term. Nor will any other term than this, fully express the high moral turpitude of idolatry, as a sin committed against the true God. There

seems then, to have been a necessity, which compelled the sacred writers to use a common generic term for *god*, as they have done throughout the Scriptures, in order fully to convey those ideas, which they had to express on this subject.

Having seen the circumstances in which the inspired writers were placed, and the course which they pursued in those circumstances, we now come to the third question proposed under this head, *viz.*,

3. What is our duty in this respect, in making use of the Chinese language, in view of their example?

To answer this question, it will be necessary to show what is the generic term for *god* in this language, and that this term meets the demands of the case. According to the Scriptural definition of *God*, already given above, we think that even the advocates for Shángtí must admit, that he can be regarded only as a false god.

Sir George Staunton on this point says, "Although the above argument of Mr. Medhurst against the supposed analogy between the Shángtí of the Chinese, and the Jupiter or chief god of Roman and Greek mythology, seems conclusive, it must not be dissembled, that the adoption of the term Shángtí in the sense of the true God of the Christians, is attended with some difficulties of another kind. It has, I think, been fairly proved that the Chinese, when they speak of Shángtí, intend to convey by that term, with more or less of distinction, the sublime idea of a supreme Ruler and Governor of the universe. It has also been shown, that Shángtí, or Tien, may be said to be the immediate object of the emperor's public and personal worship on certain state occasions. Yet it must be confessed that neither Tien nor Shángtí practically speaking, is viewed by the people of China generally as an object of direct worship at all!

The religious worship of the Chinese people, such as it is, is practically transferred to the multitude of *shin* ("gods," according to some translators, and "spirits," according to others), whose images are honored under various names and titles in the innumerable idolatrous temples which meet the eye in every part of the empire." —pp. 17, 18.

From this, I think it must be admitted, that the Chinese people do bestow that worship upon their *shin*, which belongs only to the true God ; and therefore, that *shin* is properly translated "God," or "gods," as the context may require.—And further, that as the Chinese classics nowhere claim for Shángtí, those attributes and that worship, which belong exclusively to the true God, so Shángtí can not properly be used to represent the true God, but must be viewed only as a false god, to whom the Chinese attribute more authority, power, excellence, &c., than they do to any of the rest of their gods. These attributes simply however, can never constitute any being the God of the Bible. His attributes are discriminating and exclusive, and nowhere fully revealed except in his own inspired word. The character of Shángtí, therefore, must be widely different from that of the true God, as set forth in this word. The passage above quoted admits that *shin* is generic for false gods, and so do the writers generally on that side of the question.

It remains, then, to show that *shin* is properly applied to any one, and to all the objects of worship among the Chinese, and that it is an equivalent for translating *elohim* and *theos* into their language.

For the sake of brevity, I will here simply state the main objections to the use of *Shin* for God in Chinese, and then attempt to meet them by establishing the above proposition.

"*Shin*," it is said, "is sometimes employed by the Chinese to signify the human spirit, and also the spirits of deceased parents; on the one hand, the word *shin* is too low and too wide in its acceptation, to be applicable to the true God; and, on the other, the phrase *Shángtí* is too high and too exclusive in its meaning, to be applicable to any purpose less exalted." Sacred Phra-seology and Religion of the Chinese, p. 37, pp. 44, 45. See also, Drs. Medhurst and Legge, and likewise "An American Missionary in China," on the same subject.

According to Chinese authority, the Emperor Ming, A.D. 61, saw in a night vision a golden man of a very large stature, and whose head had the brightness of the sun and moon. On inquiring of his minister about it, he was informed that in the West, there was a *shin* (god) whose name was Budh, and that this was probably the person whom he saw in his vision. Here Budh is clearly called a *shin*, because of his being an object of worship, and not because of his spiritual nature. So in the Compendium of Geography, published by the late governor of Fuhkien province, "a Chinese authority of great and acknowledged weight," *shin* is applied to a serpent, to trees, and to wild beasts, as well as to our Savior, because these are objects of worship in the different countries he describes, and not because they are spirits, nor because of their spiritual nature. The objection therefore that "*Shin* means simply spirits, or spirit," is, I think, fairly removed by the above authorities.

Sir George Staunton observes (p. 44), "Whenever the false gods of the heathens generally, or any specific false god by name, is in question, the word *Shin* is not only proper, but necessary." This admission is directly to the same point; it "is not only proper, but necessary" to use *Shin* to designate "the false gods of the hea-

thens ;" certainly not because they are all "spirits," but because they are objects of religious worship, and because the Chinese language furnishes no better term for this purpose. Again, the admission, that "it is not only proper, but necessary" to use *shin* "whenever any specific false god by name is in question," wholly removes the objection, sometimes urged, that *shin* is necessarily plural in its signification, and therefore can not properly be applied to the true God.

In regard to the objection, "that the word *Shin* is sometimes employed by the Chinese to signify the human spirit, and also the spirits of deceased parents," it may be remarked, 1, That this is not the common term for the human spirit, either before or after the death of the body. While living, a person's mind is called *sin*, and his soul *ling-hwan* ; and after death his ghost is called *kwei* ; and his soul still, *ling-hwan*. 2, That *shin* alone, is very rarely, if ever, used in the Chinese Classics to denote "the human spirit," or "the spirits of deceased parents." I have looked through the "Five Classics" and the "Four Books," for this purpose, but do not recollect finding a single instance of the kind. I have occasionally met with this use of the word *shin*, in other writings of the Chinese, and only occasionally. And 3, That when the souls of "deceased parents," or of "ancestors," are referred to as objects of religious worship, the term for "parents," or for "ancestors," is used, and not the single term *shin*. Thus in the Chinese Geography above alluded to, the writer, speaking of the Japanese, says they worship their ancestors, using the common term for ancestors. So, in speaking of those who believe in Christ, he says those who believe in this God (*Shin*) do not worship their ancestors ; using the same term for ancestors as before.

In view of these considerations, I have no fears whatever, that the Chinese will mistake our use of *Shin* for God in translating the Scriptures into their language.

The remaining objection to the use of *Shin* for God, viz., that it "is too low and too wide in its acceptation to be applicable to the true God," will be noticed hereafter.

From the testimony above given, I think it must be admitted, that, while the word *shin* means *spirit*, it is also the common term used by the Chinese to denote any, and all objects of religious worship, not simply or mainly because they are spirits, or spiritual in their nature; but more generally, because they are objects of religious worship, and because the Chinese language furnishes no better term for this purpose.

Having thus established the generic character of *shin* for God in Chinese, it only remains to show under this head, how far we can properly speak of it in the same way, and apply the same epithets, and the same qualifying expressions to it, that the sacred writers do to *elohim* and *theos*, in the word of God.

In John iv. 24, we read, that "Theos (God) is a spirit." *Shin* is also defined to be a spirit. (See Dict.)

In Heb. iii. 4, we read, "He that built all things is God." So the first definition given of *shin* in Medhurst's Dictionary is, "the celestial gods, who draw forth, or develope all things." The first definition given of *shin* in Morrison's Dictionary is thus expressed; "Every evanescent, invisible, inscrutable, operating power, or cause, is called *shin*." So God is said to be "an invisible," "inscrutable," and "spiritual," being.

Thus taking the definition which the Chinese themselves are wont to give of a class of beings whom they call *shin* (gods), and worship as such, I can with perfect

propriety attribute to any one particular individual of this class of beings, whom the Chinese have not yet known, all the attributes which belong alone to Jehovah, without doing any violence to the *usus loquendi* of their language.

As a monotheist and Christian writer, making use of the Chinese language, I do no violence to any principle of this language, in attributing to *our Shin*, eternity, spirituality, unity, immensity, immutability, knowledge, truth, faithfulness, holiness, wisdom, power, goodness, justice, and the like, because I am making known to the Chinese, a new *Shin*, whose specific name and character they have yet to learn; and because the generic nature of the term *shin* most clearly admits of such appendages to any particular individual of the class, in such circumstances.

In this way, the last named objection to the use of *shin*, viz., that it "is too low and too wide in its acceptation to be applicable to the true God," seems to me to be wholly removed. By attributing to our *Shin*, what God claims exclusively for himself, we give to the *Shin* of the Bible, a character as much more exalted than any other *Shin* of the Chinese, as the Bible is more perfect than their Classics, or any other of their writings.

With such perfections as we may properly claim for our *Shin*, it is easy to see, that he may truly and consistently be the maker and governor of the universe, the author of miracles, the inspirer of the Bible, the searcher of hearts, the hearer and answerer of prayer, and that he can reward the righteous, and punish the wicked, both in the present, as well as in the future life.

But we can not, with the same propriety, affirm these things of Shángtí, because he is an individual god of the Chinese, and has received from them, his specific name

titles, and character ; and therefore their idolatry, and other customs and practices connected with the worship of false gods, which the Bible everywhere condemns, are all consistent with their notions of Shángtí ; and many, if not most of them, are in their view, pleasing to him. Hence, the specific character of this chief god of the Chinese must necessarily be widely different from what is said of the true God in his holy word.

In view of such facts and testimony as have now been stated, and also in view of the example of the sacred writers on this subject, it is perfectly clear and satisfactory to my own mind, both, that a generic term for God should be employed in translating the Scriptures into the Chinese language, and that *shin* is the best term that the language affords for this purpose. Still, I have no controversy with those who differ from me in opinion on this subject, nor have I written with this end in view ; but with the design of first giving some reasons for my preference for *shin*, and its use as expressed above, and then of suggesting some plan for a compromise on both sides. This brings me to the second general question proposed above, *viz.*,

“ What is the proper basis to be adopted to reconcile the present conflicting opinions on this subject ? ”

Two plans have already been proposed to obviate the difficulty in question. One is to make use of “ marginal readings,” where there is a difference of opinion as to the proper character to express the same idea. The other is to prefix the character *tien* for *heaven* to *shin*, in order to distinguish the true God from false gods, making use of *shin* alone to denote the latter.

The former of these was proposed by a Select Committee of representatives from the British and Foreign

Bible Society, the London Missionary Society, and the Church Missionary Society, convened at the Church Missionary House near the close of 1850. The latter has been more recently proposed by the Right-Rev. George Smith, D. D., Bishop of Victoria, in a Letter on the Chinese Version of the Holy Scriptures, to the British and Foreign Bible Society, dated Hongkong, August 20th, 1851. Let us examine these separately, commencing with the last proposition. And here let me state, that it is with great reluctance that I find myself compelled to dissent from both of the above plans, but can only give my reasons for so doing, and leave the public to judge, whether those reasons are well founded or not.

According to this latter proposition, the advocates for Shángtí must give up their term to designate the true God in Chinese, and adopt a new combination to express that idea, while they will continue to use *shin* simply, as they have heretofore done, to denote false gods only. The concession on their part then, would only be, to exchange one specific term for the true God for another, viz., Shángtí for Tien-shin.

That the latter term is preferable to the former, for the end proposed, rests on the authority of that eminent Chinese scholar, the author of the Geography in Chinese, already quoted above, and who is frequently alluded to as such, by the Bishop, in his Letter to the British and Foreign Bible Society above cited.

It should, however, be carefully noted, that the Governor only gives a specific name to the true God, to distinguish him from the (*shin*) gods of the Chinese, but that this by no means shows us what term for God he would use in translating the Scriptures into the Chinese language, had he a competent knowledge of the Hebrew and Greek languages, to do such a work.

Judging however from his own practice in his recently published Geography, we may conclude with much certainty that he would not only use a generic term for God in translating the Bible into his own language, but that that term would be simply *Shin*. We judge thus, because he has so used and applied this term in the work abovementioned, both to false gods and to the true God, and also to Christ as God, and we can see no good reason why he should take a different course, were he engaged in publishing the Scriptures in his language. The advocates for *Shángtí*, notwithstanding, have already signified their unwillingness to accede to this proposition, as a basis of compromise. See "Reply to the Bishop of Victoria's ten Reasons in favor of Tien-shin. By W. H. Medhurst, Sen."

The advocates for *Shin*, by adopting this proposition as a basis of compromise, must also give up the idea of a generic term for God in translating the sacred Scriptures into the Chinese language, and allow the character for heaven (*tien*), to be prefixed to *shin*, which they now use as a generic term, to render it a specific term for the true God. This, it will be perceived at once, will be a much greater sacrifice than is required of the other party, who have already decided against the proposition.

In doing this, those in favor of *Shin* must not only go contrary to the known practice of the distinguished Chinese scholar above alluded to, in his celebrated work on geography, and also contrary to what we have good reason to believe would be his practice were he engaged in translating the Bible into his own language; but they must likewise go contrary to what we have already shown to be the practice of the sacred writers throughout the entire Scriptures. So great a sacrifice as this,

and on the part of so many as are here concerned in it, we think ought not to be expected, unless good and weighty reasons can be urged in favor of such a course.

The reasons for it, mainly relied on in the "Letter" already referred to, may be arranged under the three following heads: (1.) *Tien-shin* may be used for the true God; (2.) *Shin* alone seems not to be the proper term for this purpose; (3.) This plan seems to be the most practicable one for a compromise, of any that is likely to be adopted.

The second, that *Shin* alone seems not to be the proper term for this purpose, we think has already been fully answered under the first general question above stated. The third head has also in a good measure been already decided upon by the advocates for Shángtí. It therefore only remains for me to offer some remarks upon the first head, viz., that *Tien-shin* may be used for the true God.

Tien-shin is obviously too indefinite a term for the end proposed, viz., to represent the one true God. True, the Governor, as a polytheistic writer, and also writing for the benefit of his countrymen, who are likewise worshipers of false gods, might with perfect propriety use *Tien-shin* to denote the God of western nations; and so to be consistent with his own practice, in his interview with the Bishop, he should of course give the same term that he had previously used in his Geography for this purpose.

We can not suppose, however, that either he or his countrymen, in using such a term, intend by it that there is actually but one *Tien-shin* (true God), and that all their *shin* are only so many false gods. His Excellency, as well as some others of his countrymen, may be aware that we entertain such views, both of our *Tien-*

shin, and of their *shin* respectively; yet with them, this is a matter that still remains to be proved, as the terms themselves (*viz.*, *Tien-shin* and *shin*) necessarily imply no such definite ideas, as we here attribute to them. According to the authority of the Governor, as well as that of many others of his countrymen, *shin* alone may mean the true God or a false god, just according to the connection in which it is used. Philologically considered, and according to the *usus loquendi* of the Chinese language, *Tien-shin* may refer to several celestial gods as well as to one. So far as the literal meaning and appropriate sense of the term *tien-shin* is concerned, therefore, it may be applied to Shángtí, to the Goddess of the Sea, and to a host of other celestial "invisible agents," with as much propriety as it can be to the true God.

But *Tien-shin* is not, nor can it properly be made, a translation of *Elohim* or of *Theos*. Thus in Gen. i. 1, "In the beginning, *Tien-shin* (heaven's God) created the heavens and the earth," is by no means a correct rendering of the passage. The Hebrew contains no such idea, as that a heavenly being created the heavens and the earth. This makes God a local being; whereas he is no less the God of earth than the God of heaven. *Tien-shin* is also deficient in other respects for the end proposed. Thus in the Bishop's "Letter," we have the following proposed as a translation of the First Commandment:—"Tien-shin said, . . . Thou shalt worship no other *shin* but me." Here heaven's gods or God is represented as forbidding the worship of false gods, or *shin* simply. But suppose a worshiper of Shángtí, or of the Goddess of the Sea, should aver that he obeyed this command, for he worshiped a *Tien-shin*; who could dispute or gainsay his assertion?

Take another illustration of the sense of the passage thus rendered. Every Christian man will admit that idolatry is treason against God and his government, and the First Commandment is the first and great penal statute on this subject. Here Tien-shin forbids the worship of *shin* simply, just as a king might forbid his subjects to petition any other prince or officer but himself. But suppose they do; what is their crime? It is disloyalty merely. But this is very far from treason, the highest crime that a subject can commit against his sovereign. So in the other case. Suppose the Chinese do continue to worship *shin*: what is their crime? It is simply disloyalty to *Tien-shin*, in disobeying one of his commands in respect to the worship of *shin*. The First Commandment thus translated, seems not to forbid the worship of other *tien-shin*, besides the one who gives the command; and therefore it can not truly be said to forbid idolatry in the sense above given, and in the sense in which the Bible uniformly employs that term.

To make use of *Tien-shin*, or indeed of any other specific name for God, which he himself has not chosen, seems calculated to degrade our ideas of him, and also to introduce confusion, if not contradiction, into his Word. So in the present case, prefixing *tien* to *shin* is very much calculated to localize the idea of the true God in the minds of the Chinese, and to lead them to regard him as the *Shángtí* of western nations, or as belonging to a class, or representing a class of celestial beings, who lay claim to the exclusive worship of mortals.

The term *Tien-shin* is also much more indefinite in many passages which might be quoted than that of *Shin* alone. Take the one already introduced, containing the First Commandment, for an illustration. Thus; "Shin said, . . . Thou shalt have no other *shin* before me."

Here the whole is definite and natural ; it is easily explained and enforced. One of a class of beings is manifestly speaking. He claims the exclusive worship of all men. This is what belongs only to the true God. It is also what no other *shin* of the Chinese has ever claimed for himself, and therefore it must be a different one from any that they have yet known.

According to this translation of the First Commandment, the Chinese are not allowed to worship any other *shin* (which term has been shown to designate any object of worship), but the one who is here speaking. Who this *Shin* is may be learned from what he says of himself, and from what is said of him, in his holy word ; just as we learn the same things respecting him, by consulting the same holy word, in our own language. Thus it seems to me, that *Shin* alone, applied to the true God, assumes a vastly higher and more of a Divine character, than it could be made to do, with any prefix or suffix to it, that can be found in the Chinese language.

In view of such considerations, all of them in favor of the use of *Shin* as a generic term for God in translating the sacred Scriptures into the Chinese language, and all of them opposed to the use of *Tien-shin* as a specific name for the true God in such a translation, I am unable to see how it can possibly be the duty of the advocates for the former term, to yield to any compromise which requires them to abandon it for the adoption of the latter term.

The plan proposed by the Select Committee above named, of making use of "marginal readings," where there is a difference of opinion as to the character to be used to express the same idea, seems to be a very liberal and catholic one, and one on which all parties ought to unite : but unhappily there is a serious objection to this

in the present case, and one very similar to that which we have just been considering. It arises from the use of both a generic and a specific term for the true God in translating the same word.

For example, the advocates for *Shin* translate Gen. i. 1, thus: "In the beginning Shin created the heavens and the earth." In the margin, and as another rendering of *Elohim*, is Shángtí. Now, according to the common usage of generic and specific terms respectively, the Being referred to under the common name of *shin*, can be none other than the specific individual Shángtí. So, throughout the entire Scriptures, where the true God is mentioned, he must in the same way be represented as the specific individual Shángtí. Thus the designed use of *Shin*, as a generic term for God, would be wholly nullified by such a use of the specific term Shángtí.

The plan of adopting marginal readings therefore, may be safe and very useful in respect to many other phrases and obscure passages, which occur in the Scriptures, and doubtless ought to be employed in respect to them; but it manifestly can not be so employed, either with propriety or safety, in the present case, in respect to the single term to be used for the true God in Chinese.

Before offering further remarks on the general question under consideration, it may be useful to refer to the present state of things on this subject, both in and out of China, and in view of it, and of the legitimate inferences therefrom, suggest the proper course to be pursued.

There are at the present time three different versions of the entire Bible in the Chinese language, and some six or seven different versions of the New Testament in the same language. In two of the former, one by Dr.

Marshman, and the other by Drs. Morrison and Milne, the generic term *Shin* is used for God. In the third version by Mr. Gutzlaff, *Shángtí* is used as a specific term for the true God, and *shin* for false gods.

In the versions of the New Testament by Dr. Medhurst and others, both of the above terms are used in a similar way. That part of the New Testament in Chinese, which was brought to China by Dr. Morrison in 1808, and which he found in manuscript in the British Museum, employs the generic term *Shin* for God.

In the revised edition of the New Testament in Chinese lately made at Shánghái by a Committee of Delegates from the different Protestant missions to the Chinese, the Greek word for God (*Theos*) is left untranslated, the members of the Committee agreeing among themselves, that the spaces in the translation thus left might be filled either with *Shin*, or with *Shángtí*, just as each party might choose.

This revision, though in some respects, it has many excellencies, yet it is far from giving entire satisfaction to all parties concerned. Indeed, there are some who have been long in the field, who think that it is not as good as some previous versions that have been published; and therefore, that it ought to undergo another revision before it can be profitably circulated among the people.

Two other revisions of the Old Testament are now in progress. One is being made by the missionaries of the London Missionary Society, and the other has been commenced by delegates from a part of the mission stations now in China. In the former of these, *Shángtí* is used as a specific term for the true God; in the latter, the generic term *Shin* is used for this purpose. The two versions differ from each other, likewise, in their

style of composition, as well as in the use of different terms for God.

Such is the present aspect of things on this subject in China. Let us now notice for a moment, what it is in relation to the same subject, out of China.

“Three years ago, the British and Foreign Bible Society decided unanimously, that *shin*, the common term for the false divinities of China, was not a term which could be employed for expressing the true God in Chinese.—In December last, however, the American Bible Society decided unanimously, that *Shin*, and *Shin* alone, should be used in all of their copies of the Holy Scriptures, in Chinese.” See the Letter from the Bishop of Victoria to the Rev. T. W. Meller, M. A., on the Chinese Version of the Holy Scriptures, dated Hongkong, August 20th, 1851.

Judging therefore, from past experience on this subject, and also from the present state of things in China in relation to the same subject, the conclusion is strongly forced upon us, that the time for a strictly uniform version of the Holy Scriptures in the Chinese language, *has not yet come*.

We are further reminded also, in view of the same facts, that such a work can not reasonably be expected from foreigners alone, after only a few years of acquaintance with this people and their language, if ever. The Chinese themselves are the ones most deeply concerned in the work, and they are consequently the ones to whom we must mainly look to produce such a work, when they shall have become sufficiently enlightened and interested in it, to appreciate its importance.

There seems then, to be something unnecessarily stringent and coercive, as well as premature, in the idea of now having only one uniform, stereotyped ver-

sion of the Scriptures in Chinese, to be used at all the ports at present open to foreigners, and by all subsequent missionaries to China, without any alteration or improvement, except by those who are concerned in publishing it, or by their authority.

The present controversy respecting the proper term to be used for God in Chinese, whenever rightly and satisfactorily settled, must be so done by those who are laboring on the ground, and who are the most deeply interested party in its final issue. This is a part of the work to which missionaries to the Chinese have devoted their lives, and by patient and laborious investigation, and by calm and dispassionate discussion of the subject, they may reasonably hope to perform this part of their task as properly and as satisfactorily to all parties concerned, as any other part of their work. Within the past few years, very considerable changes have taken place in respect to the relative number, belonging to the different parties in China, and also in respect to the different positions taken on this subject, from what were formerly adopted by the same individuals. Recent native authorities have likewise contributed valuable assistance on this subject. Hence judging from the past, we confidently hope that the time is not far off, when this unhappy controversy will be properly and satisfactorily settled, both in the view of missionaries laboring for the diffusion of the knowledge of this Name, and also in the view of their friends and patrons at home.

The different versions of the Old and New Testaments, already in this language, and referred to above, are sufficiently uniform in giving the sense of the originals (aside from the terms for *God* and *Spirit*), to satisfy the most ardent and conscientious friends of the Bible cause, that they may be circulated with much pro-

fit, till other versions, more idiomatic and better suited to the wants of the people, can be furnished.

In view of the above facts and statements, and in answer to the general question respecting the proper basis for a compromise already stated, it is respectfully suggested, that the best compromise that can be adopted at the present time, and indeed the only one imperiously demanded by the circumstances of the case is, that those two noble Institutions for the circulation of the Holy Scriptures, the British and Foreign Bible Society and the American Bible Society, should so modify their previous action on this subject as to disburse funds to the different Missionary Boards operating in China, to be used by their missionaries, in publishing and circulating the Scriptures in Chinese ; and leaving it with them to employ such terms for God and Spirit, in this language, as they may judge best. I see not why the communities sustaining those Societies will not be as fairly represented in this way, as they could be in any other which can be suggested.

The design of those Societies in passing the above Resolutions, we suppose, was to assist in bringing the present controversy to a successful termination. It is however, respectfully suggested, that a modification of those Resolutions as proposed above, will do this much sooner, better, and more to the entire satisfaction of all parties concerned, than the Resolutions will, as they now stand. "This is a question," says Dr. Medhurst, "which can not be settled by authority. The views entertained by both parties are too strongly held to be altered, except upon good and sufficient reasons ; reasons which will bear investigation, and carry with them conviction."

Every missionary on coming to China feels it to be his duty to examine this question, and decide for himself. Thus information on the subject is constantly accumulating, so that subsequent missionaries to this field will find it less difficult for them to examine and decide this question, than it was for those who preceded them.

But if the question is prejudged and determined beforehand, and the subject is no longer left open for further investigation and discussion, it will not only throw embarrassments in the way of missionaries doing their duty in the field, but we think it will have a strong tendency to prevent men from entering the work.

The plan now proposed would give each missionary, in connection with the mission to which he belongs, the privilege of exercising his own judgment on one of the most important subjects connected with his whole missionary work, *viz.*, the expression he is to use for the true God, in publishing the Gospel to the heathen. Each Mission would then be rightly, happily, and fully employed in its appropriate work (so far as this subject is concerned), covering the whole field, and occupying all the ground which justly belongs to it.

The consequence would be, that the printing and circulation of the Scriptures would keep pace one with the other, much better than they now do, while vastly greater efforts would be put forth, in both departments, and far more would be accomplished for the cause than can now be done, while things remain as they are.

The difficulty in question, and for which a compromise is required, is not one which simply concerns a few tens of missionaries in China, or the Bible and Missionary Societies of England and America only: it is one which concerns the whole Christian Church. God in his

providence has at length brought his people into such a relation to China, that thousands and thousands of them, in England, in Europe, and in America, now feel called upon to aid in giving to the perishing millions of its inhabitants, the Word of life. But an obstacle has occurred which threatens to impede their advancement in this glorious work. How infinitely important then, that that obstacle should be speedily removed, in order that the sacramental host of God may go forward, till they shall have fully completed so glorious and blessed a work!

Such a compromise as is here sought would be productive of great good. It would save much valuable time and labor, as well as other expense, in publishing the Holy Scriptures in the Chinese language.

It would allay much unprofitable harshness and excitement, which now exist on the subject, while it would tend most powerfully to produce harmony of feeling and action among missionaries in the field, as well as among their friends and supporters at home.

The call for a large increase of missionaries to China, would then become obvious and urgent, and candidates for this work would thereby be constrained to come forward with more readiness, and in still greater numbers. The mouths of gainsayers would then be stopped, and God would be honored in the work before us. Christians would then pray with more earnestness, perseverance, and sincerity, for the salvation of China, and we can not doubt but God would then hear their prayers, and pour out his blessing in answer to them, upon the people of this benighted land.

May the gracious Lord enable all of the friends of Protestant Missions to the Chinese, so to act in the pre-

sent case, as thus to secure his blessing upon their efforts, and that his own name may be glorified, in the midst of this heathen people !

Very sincerely your's in the Gospel of Christ,

L. B. PEET.

Fuhchau, Nov. 27th, 1851.

