

Article

From Timothy Tingfang Lew to Bing Xin: The Bible and Poetic Innovation at Yenching University

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Abstract: The sweeping spread of Christianity in China since the late Qing Dynasty contributed to the construction of modern Chinese literature. Among scholars, this view is widely recognized. However, how the Bible as literature crossed the linguistic boundary and specifically influenced modern Chinese literature, especially the study of Chinese vernacular poetry, has not been thoroughly researched. Yenching University (1919–1952), a legendary ecclesiastical university in Peking, is famous for producing many famous modern writers. In the 1920s, at this university, the Bible deeply inspired and influenced several key writers in the history of modern Chinese literature and culture. This paper will review the poetry of these writers and analyze the following three questions: (1) How did biblical poetry take root in a historically non-Biblical cultural context through Christian higher education? (2) How was biblical poetry inherited and recreated in early twentieth century China in the circumstances of Yenching University? (3) How did Bible-inspired poetry contribute to and change the creation of modern Chinese literature?

Keywords: biblical poetry; Yenching University; modern Chinese literature; Bing Xin; Timothy Tingfang Lew



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1. Introduction

When Chinese literature is discussed, a clear boundary distinguishes the periods before and after the twentieth century. The 1911 Revolution, also known as the Xinhai Revolution, ended China's last imperial dynasty (the Qing dynasty), and led to the establishment of the Republic of China. Its success marked the collapse of the Chinese monarchy, which had lasted for thousands of years, and the beginning of China's early republican era (Li 2007, pp. 13, 26–27). The revolution represents more than a shift in the political system; Chinese literature also underwent drastic changes during this period of historical upheaval. The early twentieth century was a period of anxiety sparked by a sense of national crisis, and intellectuals sought solutions to China's problems outside the Chinese cultural tradition. An overhaul of classical Chinese literature was also on their agenda. Radical reform first appeared in the written language that was used in literary works. Until the late Qing Dynasty (1840–1911), Classical Chinese, also known as Literary Chinese, was used for almost all formal writing. Because classical Chinese is a traditional style of written Chinese that evolved from the classical language, making it different from any modern spoken form of Chinese, it was usually only understood by scholars and officials. Beginning in the 1910s, the New Culture Movement (1910–1920) criticized classical Chinese ideas and promoted a new Chinese culture based on progressive, modern, and Western ideals such as democracy and science (Schwarcz 1986). One of the main aims of the New Culture Movement was the promotion of written vernacular Chinese over literary or classical Chinese, which allowed people with little education to read texts, articles, and books. Certainly, the switch from classical Chinese to vernacular Chinese was not sudden, and at least from the 1910s to the 1930s, this shift was driven largely by the elites.

The factors involved in the modern transformation of Chinese literature are complicated, and the historical figures and different schools of thought are many and diverse, so it

is difficult to generalize. However, according to broad scholarly consensus developed over the last century, the spread of Christianity in China since the late Qing Dynasty promoted and contributed to the construction of modern Chinese literature. The Bible, considered as a collection of religious texts as well as a classical work of literature, played a central role. In 1921, Zhou Zuoren (周作人 1885–1967), a key figure in the New Culture Movement, published a paper titled “The Bible and Chinese Literature”. He divided the relationship between the Bible and Chinese literature into two aspects, spirit and form, and then made a concrete analysis (Zhou 1921). In 1941, Zhu Weizhi, a Chinese theologian and author, published the scholarly book *Christianity and Literature*. Zhu wrote, “A great religious man must have all the gifts of a great poet, that is, an abundance of feeling, a vigorous imagination, great eloquence, and the ability to touch others”, and, he continued, “the transcendent works must also be beautiful in form” (Zhu 1941, p. 2). Many recent academic studies of Christianity and Chinese literature have been produced, focused primarily on the following questions. First, does the literature embody Christian thoughts, such as the consciousness of love, suffering, and atonement? Second, what are the writer’s own beliefs? Is the writer a Christian writer with a positive impression of Christian culture, or does he or she have the tendency to be anti-Christian (Yang 1998)?

However, how the Bible crossed the linguistic boundary and specifically influenced modern Chinese literature, especially Chinese vernacular poetry, has not been thoroughly explored. At the legendary ecclesiastical Yenching University in Peking in the 1920s, the Bible deeply inspired and influenced several key figures in the history of modern Chinese literature and culture. Both teachers and students echoed each other and creatively borrowed styles and forms from the Bible to gradually create a new form of Chinese vernacular poetry. Many of their poems were first published in a Christian literature magazine named *The Life: A Journal of Christian Thought and Practice and The Amethyst Quarterly Journal* (hereinafter referred to as *The Life*), which was sponsored by the Peking Christian School Enterprise Association. Then, these writers left the campus and joined the largest new literature society—The Literary Association (Wenxue yanjiu hui)—in existence at that time. They further popularized the form and technique of biblical poetry and eventually integrated it into the revolutionary direction of modern Chinese literature. This paper aims to explore the groundbreaking path taken by this group of writers.

2. The Encounter between the Bible and a Chinese Writer at Yenching University

The best place to begin the discussion is with a modern female writer who enjoys a high reputation both in China and the Western world. Bing Xin (冰心 1900–1999), whose birth name was Hsieh Wan Ying, graduated from Yenching University in 1923 with a bachelor’s degree and continued her studies at Wellesley College in the United States. There she earned a master’s degree in literature in 1926. The University of Tokyo hired Bing Xin as the first foreign female lecturer to teach a Chinese New Literature course. She is one of the most well-known Chinese women writers of the twentieth century, and her unique and influential literary style led to the birth of the “Bing Xin Style”.

Bing Xin’s important achievements in literature reflect the education she received in Chinese mission schools. In China’s long feudal history, women did not have the opportunity or right to receive an education. The arrival of Western missionaries in the late Qing Dynasty helped break down this inequality, which had lasted thousands of years. In 1918, Bing Xin entered the science department of North China Union Women’s University, China’s first women’s university, and eventually transferred to the Department of Literature. Its precursor, Bridgman Academy, was a Christian academy offering female education, and was founded by the American Congregational Church in 1864. Mary H. Porter characterized Bridgman Academy as “the only chance of 200,000,000 people to secure a higher education for their daughters; the only institution to which an ancient but newly awakening people can look for highly trained leadership for its womanhood” (Porter 1914, p. 1). In 1905, Bridgman Academy founded the College Department named the North

China Union Women's College, with Sarah Luella Miner (1861–1935), an American educator and Christian missionary, as its first president (Harris 1994).

When North China Union Women's University joined Yenching University in 1920, Bing Xin became one of its earliest students. Yenching University is a legend in the history of Christian education, not only in China, but worldwide. It resulted from the merger of four Christian colleges between the years 1915 and 1920. John Leighton Stuart (1876–1962), a missionary educator and later United States ambassador to China, was appointed the first dean of the university in January 1919. Theology, law, medicine, arts, and science were the main schools of study at the university. The school distinguished itself by providing considerable academic freedom as well as a bridge between China and the United States. By 1930, the school ranked among the top universities in Asia. In particular, Yenching University contributed incomparably to the connection between Christianity and Chinese culture. Three notable professors, Timothy Tingfang Lew (刘庭芳 1907–1961), Tzu-ch'en Chao (赵紫宸 1888–1979), and Leichuan Wu (吴雷川 1870–1944), known as the “three titans of Yenching University”, engaged in both Christian theological research and Chinese literary creation. In addition, from 1922 to 1931, Zhou Zuoren, the founder of the study of Christian Literature in China, was a professor in the Department of New Literature at Yenching University.

Bing Xin studied the Chinese classics and began writing traditional Chinese stories as a child. However, after her attendance at Yenching University, her writing style changed considerably. The *Encyclopædia Britannica* describes the short poems that Bing Xin published during her years at Yenching University as employing a didactic, Western style, influenced by the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore (The Editors of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 1998). This reflects a consensus reached in Chinese and Western academic circles: Bing Xin's new style of vernacular poetry, which is different from traditional Chinese poetry, was, to a great extent, influenced by the Indian poet Tagore's *Stray Birds* (Zhang and Jiang 2015; Giuffré 2020). Bing Xin recalls her memories on this subject:

After the May 4th Movement, among the many forms of new poetry, there was a kind called “short poem” or “small poem”. The shortest of these poems is only two lines, because I wrote *Stars* and *Spring Water*, and these two collections are all short poems, so people think I wrote them first. I don't remember if I ever read anyone else's short poems at that time. When I wrote *Stars* and *Spring Water*, I was not writing poems, but collecting my many “fragmentary thoughts” in a collection under the influence of Tagore's *Stray Birds*. (Bing 1998, p. 1)

Bing Xin does not directly claim to be the originator of a new poetic style, nor does she recall ever reading short poems by her contemporaries. However, according to the historical data queried, the findings present a clear analysis of her literary development, and we can see that Tagore's influence is not the only or the earliest or even the most critical source contributing to Bing Xin's new poetic style. *My Literary Life*, written in 1932, is an autobiographical essay by Bing Xin that recounts her literary creation between the years 1920 and 1930, from her first contact with literature to the time of her independent writing. In this essay, Bing Xin said, “during the four years of middle school, I didn't read any new novels outside of class. What I got was English knowledge, and I formed my own philosophy of love under the influence of Christianity” (Bing 1932, p. 55). Included in this “English knowledge” was the study of the Bible in an English translation. Bing Xin had been systematically studying the Bible since entering Bridgman Academy in the fall of 1914. She once recalled the English Bible education at Bridgman Academy in detail, describing how “the Bible Study on Sunday brought together all the non-Christian students of the school, no matter what grade or class they came from. Before service at the Congregational Church, Mrs. Sarah Luella Miner, the principal of North China Union Women's College, would give us a bible story for half an hour” (Bing 1984, p. 70). However, after entering Yenching University in 1920, she received a more systematic education in theology and literature, studying with like-minded teachers and classmates. She converted to Christianity, and her beliefs soon became reflected in her writing. On the campus of Yenching University in the

1920s, Bing Xin was not the only one to write and promote a new style of poetry; in fact, her literary creation was also mentored by her teacher Timothy Tingfang Lew, who succeeded Stuart as president of Yenching University.

Timothy Tingfang Lew was an important figure in both religious and cultural circles in China between 1920 and 1940. Although there is no lack of research on him in the Chinese and Western academies, studies mainly focus on how he promoted and reformed Christianity in China in the early twentieth century. In fact, throughout his life, Lew balanced his role as one of China's religious leaders with that of a leading educator and litterateur. Lew received his early education at St. John's University, Shanghai. In 1911, he went to the United States and entered the University of Georgia, and later distinguished himself at Columbia University where he received a Bachelor of Arts (1914), Master of Arts (1915), and Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology and Education (1920). While a student at Teacher's College, Columbia University, Lew assisted in the department of religious education at Union Theological Seminary. In 1921, as Stuart's trusted friend and assistant, Lew was elected dean of the School of Theology at Yenching University and also served as assistant to the Chancellor of the University (Wu 2001).

At Yenching University, Timothy Tingfang Lew was an outstanding professor of theology. One of his major reforms to the religious education model of Yenching University was the promotion of the localization of Christianity in China. Central to this reform was the movement from the previous universal teaching mode of Chinese missionary universities, which mainly focused on instruction using the English version of the Bible, to instruction using the Chinese Union Version translation of the Bible. The Chinese Union Version (CUV, 和合本, Ho Ho Ben) is the predominant translation of the Bible into Chinese used by Chinese Protestants, first published in 1919. The CUV was translated by a panel with members from many different Protestant denominations, using the English Revised Version (ERV) as a basis and original-language manuscripts for crosschecking. It must be noted that non-Chinese missionaries were primarily responsible for the Union Version translation, which resulted in many translation problems, including problematic choices regarding terms, grammar, and style (Strand 2018). Nevertheless, CUV was embraced by the Chinese people as soon as it came out.

At the same time, Lew was widely renowned as a modern writer. He was particularly keen on writing and translating poetry, and his main literary activities occurred during his academic career at Yenching University (1920–1936). During this period, he published poems in Chinese literary journals and newspapers, such as *Yusi, Literati (Shanghai)*, *Morning Supplement (Peking)*, *Literary Quarterly*, and *Literary Monthly*. More importantly, he founded and edited various Christian literary journals, including the well-known periodical *The Life*. In 1930, he published a collection of poems titled *The Rain in the Mountain* (Lew 1930), composed of 37 short poems written from 1921 to 1929.

Lew's poems are very similar to Bing Xin's poems in form. In 1922, the magazine *Yusi* and the newspaper *Morning Supplement (Peking)* serialized several of Bing Xin's poems found in *Stars* along with many of Lew's poems published in *The Rain in the Mountain*. It was not a coincidence. Bing Xin officially became a student at Yenching University in 1920, the same year that Lew taught at the university and became editor of *The Life*. Seizing this publication as an opportunity, Lew and Bing Xin developed a close literary relationship. In 1921, Lew published the short article "The Bible—Poetry" in *The Life*, volume 1, no. 8. In this essay, Lew elaborated on his understanding of biblical literary values and poetic forms:

The value of the Bible is not to be grasped by the prejudiced, nor can it be grasped by the short-sighted. But those willing to study the Bible in good faith will not be disappointed. Some people get the beauty of literature, some people get the sense of aesthetics, some people go further, conducted by the literature and aesthetics to the cultivation of their spirit. (Lew 1921a, p. 5)

With this essay as an introduction, *The Life* subsequently published five short poems by Bing Xin, titled *Evening, Dusk, Midnight, Dawn, and Morning* (傍晚, 黄昏, 夜半, 黎明, 清晨). The five poems tell of a process of praising God and receiving instructions from

God, which inspire the author's heart and expand her spiritual sense. Before these poems, Bing Xin recorded a short sentiment about the Bible and poetry that echoes Lew: "This one book, the Bible, seems to me, whenever I read it, morning and night, to convey to me a constant transcendent beauty in its words . . . From the Bible I took my favorite verses and played them out" (Bing 1921, p. 8). Hence, these five poems skillfully combine the form of Chinese poetry with the spiritual influence of the Bible. From 1921 to 1923, before Bing Xin graduated and went to study in the United States, *The Life* published at least 18 of her poems, which display a similar creative style.

Timothy Tingfang Lew and Bing Xin were not the only teachers and students who made efforts at that time to develop "short poems". The names of several other important Yenching teachers and students can be found among the writers who wrote poems for *The Life* in the 1920s. Among them, Tzu-ch'en Chao was one of the leading Protestant theological thinkers in China in the early twentieth century. He graduated from Soochow University in 1910. In 1914, he went to the United States to study at Vanderbilt University, where he graduated in 1917 with an MA in sociology and a BD in theology. Chao taught at Soochow University after returning to China (Aubin 1982). He met Lew in 1921, and Lew immediately invited him to work at Yenching University. In 1926, Chao officially began his professorship at Yenching University in the School of Religion and the Chinese Department. He soon became the third member of the "three titans" of Yenching University. Chao would become Lew's closest friend and partner throughout life, mainly because of their shared love for biblical literature and the common ideal of retranslating biblical poetry into vernacular Chinese. In the article "Believers and Chants in China," Lew recalls the following:

In the decade of the Republic of China, I got to know Tzu-ch'en Chao, and we stayed up all night discussing how to improve biblical poetry. The two of us were able to make friends, and our desire to improve the translation quality of biblical poetry was a very important medium. (Lew 1932, p. 2)

Therefore, although Chao did not officially join the Yenching University faculty until 1926, he published several short poems in *The Life* beginning in 1921, and worked with Lew to translate various English hymns into vernacular Chinese, such as Mary A. Lathbury's *Day Is Dying in the West* (1878). Chao published at least 18 poems in *The Life* from 1921 to 1926. In his literary creation practice, he always insisted on the Bible as a necessary force to create culture.

Another great writer of modern Chinese literature, Xu Dishan (许地山 1893–1941), wrote short poems at Yenching University during the same period. In Chinese religious literature, he is a distinguished figure. In 1917, Xu Dishan attended Yenching University for his undergraduate studies. He graduated in 1920 with a bachelor's degree in literature and enrolled in the seminary at Yenching University to continue his studies in comparative religion. He and Bing Xin were schoolmates at Yenching University¹. In 1922, Xu received his bachelor's in religious studies. He pursued his postgraduate work at Columbia University and graduated in 1924 with a master's degree in comparative religion and the history of religion. He completed another bachelor's degree at the University of Oxford (Chan 2002).

The current research on Xu Dishan is mostly about his later novels and prose works and largely ignores his translation of the Song of Solomon, or Song of Songs, and its effect. Mark A. Strand has pointed out that the missionary translators did not expect the CUV translation to be the final product. They expected Chinese Christians to improve upon it; unfortunately, this never happened (2018). In fact, this view is half right and half wrong. Starting in 1919, with reference to the English version by Richard Green Moulton, Xu Dishan retranslated the Song of Solomon into vernacular language with a new poetic format different from those recommended by classical Chinese poetry, and imported fresh content and original poetic expressive techniques. Moreover, Xu was not the only Yenching University student of his time who was interested in retranslating the Bible. Lü Chen Chung (振中, 1898–1988) is best known for his 30-year endeavor translating the Bible into Chinese. He graduated from the University of Hong Kong with a bachelor of arts degree

in 1921. In 1922, he went to Yenching University to read Theology and graduated in 1925 (University of Hong Kong 2002, p. 60). While he was at Yenching, he also studied Hebrew and Greek, which allowed him to be an effective Hebrew Bible translator later in life (Young 1973). In 1946, Lü Chen-Chung's *New Testament Translation* (吕译新约初稿) was published by Yenching University, which was translated from Alexander Souter's *New Testament: Oxford Greek Testament* (1910). In the preface, Lü clearly pointed out that his translation adopted the method of literal translation, and tried to faithfully restore the meaning represented by each word and punctuation mark, and maintain the structure of the original text (Lü 1946, p. 1).

Xu's *Introduction to the New Translation of the Song of Solomon* (Xu 1921a) and *New Translation of the Song of Solomon* (Xu 1921b) were published in the Second volume of *The Life*, No. 4 (15 November 1921, pp. 1–8) and No. 5 (December 1921, pp. 1–18), respectively. Xu mentioned in the introduction that this translation was retranslated from Moulton's *The Modern Reader's Bible* (Moulton 1896). This is the first complete translation of one part of the Bible into vernacular Chinese by a modern Chinese writer. In terms of structure, Xu Dishan completely borrowed the structure of Moulton's English edition. He divided the whole poem into seven separate parts, each with its own title, and added explanatory language in the middle. This translation breaks through the structural limitations of traditional Chinese poetry in form. In terms of language, Xu Dishan's translation is mainly in vernacular Chinese and employs daily spoken words. It opened a "window" for Chinese writers and ordinary readers outside the church to understand and appreciate the literary value of the Bible. For example, because of their similarities in form and content, it formed a meaningful dialogue with Bing Xin's poetry. One commonly accepted view of the structure of the Song of Solomon is that, "the Song of Solomon is structured on the principle of ring composition. This means that we progress through a series of units, then reach the midpoint, and then progress through the same general subject matter of the first half of the book but in the reverse order. The effect is one of moving through a series of concentric rings" (Ryken 2015, p. 225). This chiasmic structure is frequently applied in Bing Xin's short poems, which this paper will explain in detail in the following sections. Furthermore, Moulton defined the genre of the Song of Solomon as biblical idyll, an idea that Xu Dishan accepted. Therefore, his translation emphasizes the Song's pastoral images, such as vineyards, lilies, roses, doves, and sheep. These images, which are extremely rare in Chinese classical poetry, also appear in Bing Xin's later short poems.

Hence, a grand encounter between the Bible and Chinese literature took place at Yenching University in the 1920s, generating a brilliant ideological spark. It is difficult to find explicit texts telling us which versions of the Bible precisely influenced these writers. However, this paper arrives at a conclusion from their educational background, language ability, and translation activities: they had systematically studied the ERV in their early years, and after 1919, they had come into contact with the CUV and other Chinese translations made by their colleagues, and perhaps they even had some knowledge of the Hebrew and Greek original texts. In general, though their languages vary, these versions strive to be faithful to the language and ideas of the Bible itself, presenting a writing style completely different from classical Chinese poetry. At this once most famous mission university in China, the Bible had a profound influence on the campus' literary community. Returning professors and young students alike used *The Life* as a publishing platform, actively translating biblical poetry and promoting new poetic forms. In the next section of this paper, I will analyze the specific poetic texts created by these writers and delve into the literary techniques they used.

3. Chinese Vernacular Poetry's Imitation of and Reference to Biblical Poetry

To see how Yenching writers creatively developed a new style of Chinese poetry by absorbing substance from the Bible, we first need to have a clear understanding of the genre and form of classical Chinese poetry. Classical Chinese poetry is traditional Chinese poetry written in classical Chinese and typified by certain traditional forms. Many of these

poetic forms were developed by the end of the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE), and the use and development of classical Chinese poetry actively continued up until the late Qing Dynasty. Therefore, in the childhood or youth of these Yenching writers, they were exposed to and learned mainly the Chinese classical poetry form called Jinti poetry. Jinti poetry, also well known as Tang poetry, is widely acclaimed to be the peak of achievement of Chinese classical poetry due to its great number of profoundly influential poets and its vast collection of poems that are thematically extensive and artistically ingenious (Zuo 2002). Jinti poetry is further characterized by a restriction on the number of lines within a poem to either four or eight: Jinti poems consisting of four lines are referred to as Jueju (literally meaning “truncated line”) and those consisting of eight lines as Lüshi (literally “regulated verse”). The two variables of line length and verse length result in four sub-genres of Jinti: 5-syll. Jueju, 5-syll. Lüshi, 7-syll. Jueju, and 7-syll. Lüshi. Yet another distinctive feature of Jinti poetry is the conscious use of lexical tones; that is, it pays great attention to the balance of syllables and tones, called “phonetic rhythm” (Ripley 1980). In the Table 1, a 5-syll. Jueju by Li Bai, one of China’s most famous poets of the Tang dynasty, is placed next to a short poem by Bing Xin. Both poems are about stars. Whether the reader can read Chinese or not, the great generic difference between the two poems is evident.

Table 1. Comparison between Jinti poetry (left) and new poetry in vernacular Chinese (right).

夜宿山寺	繁星(一)
李白(唐)	冰心
危楼高百尺, 手可摘星辰。 不敢高声语, 恐惊天上人。	繁星闪烁着—— 深蓝的太空, 何曾听得见他们对话? 沉默中 微光里 他们深深的互相颂赞了。

However, the Bible has its own conventions, literary devices, and techniques. The impressive poetic format is parallelism, one of the most important features of Hebrew poetry. This is different from classical Chinese poems, which involve constrained tone patterns intended to balance the four tones of Middle Chinese within each couplet. Hebrew poems do not pay too much attention to phonetic rhyme; instead, attention is given to the relationship between the ideological content of the poem and its rhythm, namely “logical rhythm”. These literary devices or techniques are rarely found in Chinese classical poetry. We can draw a general conclusion that Chinese classical poets want their sounds to rhyme, but Hebrew poets wanted their ideas to rhyme. The following rich parallel forms based on “logical rhythm” were learned and used for reference by the Yenching writers.

3.1. Synonymous Parallelism

Synonymous parallelism, as described by modern scholars, who were anticipated by Abraham Ibn Ezra and Kimhi in the Middle Ages, is the feature of biblical poetry in which the same idea is repeated for effect in different words (Boling 1960). In other words, it is a poetic literary device that involves the repetition of one idea in successive lines. The first half of a verse will make a statement, and the second half will essentially say the same thing in different words. In many cases in the Bible, synonymous parallelism involves repetition in the second part of what has already been expressed in the first while simply varying the words. Psalm 120:2 provides a typical example of synonymous parallelism:

“Save me, O Lord, from lying lips
and from deceitful tongues”.

Song 2:1 is another instance:

“I am the rose of Sharon,

And the lily of the valleys”.

In Timothy Tingfang Lew’s short poems, the use of synonymous parallelism is clear:

“Though the sun set,

Dusk is not far away”. (*Revisiting the American South* 重游美南卓支亚省寄内子卓生)²

The meaning of “the sun set” in the first line is repeated in the second line as “dusk”. The meanings of both lines are synonymous. Here is another example:

“Loneliness in a lively place,

Autumn sounds in the endless spring”. (*Return* 归来)

It may not be easy for cross-cultural readers to understand that “loneliness in a lively place” is equal to “autumn sounds in the endless spring”, because its meaning is tied to the traditional Chinese understanding of the four seasons. In Chinese culture, seasons are symbolic. Spring marks the beginning of a year and the season of growth and germination; it represents youth, vitality, and hope. On the contrary, autumn is associated with the emotions of loneliness and sadness. The shortened days and baring of the trees symbolize the inevitable decline and end of life. Hence, the two expressions use different words to describe the same thing—a sense of isolation from the bustle of external surroundings. That is synonymous parallelism.

Compared with Timothy Tingfang Lew, the usage of synonymous parallelism in Bing Xin’s poems is more obvious and typical:

“Omnipotent love without parting,

Omnipotent love without death!” (*Address* 致词)

“Parting” is synonymous with “death”. In other cases, the second or parallel line states nearly the same concept as the first. That is to say, Bing Xin skillfully uses synonymous parallelism—the first part of the poem lines up neatly (the two lines also have the same number of words in the Chinese version) with the second part—for emphasis.

Chao (2003) also uses synonymous parallelism in his poetry:

“No one is on alert,

No one gives warning”. (*Why are we tolerant?* 何忍)

“Alert” is equal to “warning”. The first part of the poem, again, lines up neatly with the second part.

3.2. Antithetical Parallelism

As opposed to synonymous parallelism, antithetical parallelism brings together opposing ideas in marked contrast. More specifically, instead of saying the same thing twice, a verse states one meaning and then an opposite meaning (Breck 1987). Antithetical parallelism is defined as text where the meaning in the first part of the poem contains an opposite description in the second. The antithetical parallelism in Ecclesiastes 10:2 is quite apparent:

“The heart of the wise inclines to the right,
but the heart of the fool to the left”.

In many cases in the Bible, antithetical parallelism is set up with the conjunction “but”. For example:

“The young lions lack and suffer hunger,

But those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good thing”. (Psalms 34:10)

The Yenching poets used the technique of antithetical parallelism to create vernacular poetry. Among them, Bing Xin’s and Tzu-ch’en Chao’s poems refer to the Bible. Their use of antithetical parallelism is very typical and easy for readers to understand:

“The larger the flower of speech grows,

The smaller the fruit of the action”. (Bing Xin, *Stars* 45繁星第 45)

“Those who know me know that I am at ease,
Those who do not know me, say that I am aloof”. (Chao, *Occasionally Feeling*
偶感)

In contrast, Timothy Tingfang Lew’s and Xu Dishan’s poems contain examples of more complex structures, but they also use antithetical parallelism:

“Creepers suddenly cut across the road.
Endless touching, in the light of the torch, feel them, fresh, green.
But look!
The crushing canyon, thousands of feet deep, was right in front of us”.
(Lew, *You Go*你去罢)

Strictly speaking, in this poem, the paired antonyms cannot be found. However, by comparing the two scenes described in the poem as a whole, two things appear to be complete opposites—a beautiful mountain trail and a dangerous trap hidden by green grass and lush plants. Lew connects the two scenes in a typical biblical pattern with the conjunction “but”, and this is what makes the poetry rich.

Another Year Gone(一年又过去) is a mourning poem written by Xu Dishan for his wife, in which the first section contains two pairs of antithetical parallelism:

In the course of this year, when I have thought of your death, it has not grieved
me much,
It filled my heart with boundless joy.
But pleasure is only pleasure,
Unconsciously, unconsciously, my tears could not stop.

In *Another Year Gone*, “grieved” is the opposite of “boundless joy”, and “pleasure” is the opposite of “tears”. Their inclinations are antithetical: two contexts, two emotions. The poet who lost his wife alternates between joy and sorrow, but the poem lets readers more deeply experience the poet’s great pain in the tearful smile.

3.3. Emblematic Parallelism

Emblematic parallelism is another form of parallelism found in the poetic books of the Bible. This technique places a symbol or metaphor side by side and uses similes or metaphors to compare one element to another. The lines in emblematic parallelism rely on each other and are intentionally paired together to create comparison or contrast to enhance meaning (Geller 1979; Berlin 1992). Proverbs 25:12 is a typical example of emblematic parallelism:

“Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold,
is the rebuke of a wise judge to a listening ear”.

Proverbs 27:15 provides another example:

“A continual dripping on a rainy day,
and a quarrelsome wife are alike”.

Bing Xin’s poems contain many emblematic devices similar to what is found in the book of Proverbs. As the most progressive and successful Christian woman writer in early twentieth-century China, Bing Xin wanted to teach her readers lessons through the use of a lively symbol choice:

“The criticism and judgment from ignorant people,
Like a group of blind men in the clouds discussing the moon”. (*Stars* 51 繁星
第51)

This couplet compares the criticism of ignorant people with the blind men’s discussion of the moon. Through this vivid emblematic parallelism, Bing Xin warns readers not to

adhere to other people's criticism or evaluation because it is just like a blind person's understanding of the moon: subjective with no practical value. *Spring Water 3* is another example of the use of emblematic parallelism by Bing Xin:

"Young people!
If you cannot fly like the wind,
You should be as calm and steady as a mountain". (春水第 3)

Emblematic parallelism is also found in this poem by Timothy Tingfang Lew:

"As the morning star can be counted,
We can also suck up all the air of freedom". (*You Go* 你去罢)

3.4. Synthetic Parallelism

Unlike the above three clear and less controversial forms of parallelisms, synthetic parallelism, the fourth type, is more heavily used and harder to identify. The word synthetic means the composition or combination of parts or elements so as to form a whole, which suggests that, compared with other kinds of parallelism, synthetic parallelism is greater in volume and more complex in form. The definition of synthetic parallelism varies. One theory suggests that synthetic parallelism is any parallelism that does not fit into any of the other three categories. Therefore, if the structure of the poetry is not synonymous, antithetical, or emblematic, it could be considered synthetic parallelism. In contrast to such a broad definition, there is also a strict view that synthetic parallelism is not parallelism at all. Instead, related thoughts are brought together to emphasize similarities, contrasts, and other correlations (Geller 1979; Gitay [1981] 1984; Berlin 1992). Some scholars have tried to give a more detailed explanation: synthetic parallelism brings together related thoughts to compare, contrast, or correlate them. McQuilkin (1992) states that synthetic parallelism is found when "the poet adds to the original concept". He sees the first two verses of Psalm 1 as an example of this.

"Blessed is the man
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners,
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
And in His law he meditates day and night".

This view is echoed by pastor Lin Peiquan from The Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. Lin is a Chinese Bible scholar who helped revise the Chinese Union Version (CUV). He considers the first line of a synthetic parallel poem as a precursor that is not complete enough to form a single sentence and must be supplemented and clarified by the next line (or lines) to form a complete poem. Lin (2007) believes this definition comprises the mainstream Chinese perception of synthetical parallelism. Psalm 139:4 is an example:

"Even before there is a word on my tongue,
Behold, O LORD,
You know it all".

Since this paper focuses on Chinese poets, and the interpretation of the Bible by Chinese translators and scholars directly affects Chinese writing, it makes sense to see Lin's definition as the most acceptable for the purposes of this paper. We can develop many other definitions of synthetic parallelism, but Lin's is the best for analyzing these Chinese poets heavily influenced by the Bible. In the poems of the Yenching writers, the following three examples of synthetical parallelism are found that begin with a line without complete meaning, followed by other lines to explain it:

"Then you should,

In front of this broken mountain and river,
 Dry your tears.
 Taking the great hatred of 400 million people,
 Tied with twine,
 Hang it on the wall temporarily with the sword". (Lew, *Dalian Trip* 大连旅次)
 "A wise man!
 Throw away the imaginary flower in your hand!
 She's just an illusion,
 But it took the light out of your eyes". (Bing Xin, *Stars 137* 繁星第137)
 "When one is tired,
 Sanskrit books are messy to his eyes.
 Bowed head to sleep but could not sleep,
 The heart is more sour when facing the lonely bed". (Xu Dishan, *Tears of the Moon* 月亮的眼泪)

3.5. Chiastic Structure

Chiastic structure, also called ring structure, is a literary device in which a sequence of ideas, often in a related form, is presented and then repeated in reverse order (Scott 1985). Each idea is connected to its "reflection" by a repeated word, and the result is a mirror effect that emulates the ideas in a passage. Many passages in the Bible exhibit chiastic structure, for example, Mark 2:2, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath", and Matthew 23:12, "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted".

Bing Xin is very skilled and practiced in the use of chiastic structures, and many typical examples can be found in her poems. Using an ABBA scheme, the words are repeated in reverse order:

"There is God in all things,
 All things represent God". (*Yearning* 向往)
 "The way that came is the way back,
 The way back is also the way that came". (*To Meet the Divine Comedy* 迎神曲)

Unlike Bing Xin's poems, which hardly need any additional explanation, Chao's poems present a less standard example that breaks the structure of classical Chinese poetry and consciously borrows from the biblical chiastic structure:

"He hates the fox who read books,
 Singing with its mouth of righteousness and righteousness,
 He hates the fox who read books.
 He hates the tiger who practiced Buddhism,
 It follows the orphans and widows,
 He hates the tiger who practiced Buddhism". (*He Hates* 他恨)

This poem is closer to a longer chiasm like that found in Matthew 6:24 or Amos 5:4–6a. The ideas presented follow an ABA/ABA scheme. The chiastic structure of the whole poem is formed by this model.

4. From the Campus to the Field of Modern Chinese Literature

When discussing religious literature, publicness, culture, and dogma are some key words that scholars usually pay attention to. An excellent work of religious literature should, at its best, be able to convey doctrine accurately, be rich in literariness, and also have a positive influence among non-believers. However, the reality is that these three

elements tend to check and balance each other. How is the significance of religious literature established in the tide of secularization and the wider community? This has always posed a problem in the creation and study of religious literature.

The Yenching writers made several bold attempts to address this issue. From the beginning of their poetic revolution, their work and ambitions were not confined to university campuses, churches, and Christians. Their writing was closely related to the background of China's New Culture Movement, which criticized classical Chinese ideas and promoted a culture based upon progressive, modern, and Western ideals such as democracy and science. As part of this New Culture Movement, China's intellectuals attacked traditional Chinese literature. They called for a new literature, a new system of thought, and a new orientation toward modern society. In 1919, the Chinese Union Version of the Bible was published. Because the translation shows the literary quality of the Bible to a certain extent and is translated into the vernacular Chinese, Zhu Weizhi regarded the birth of the Chinese Union Version of the Bible as "the pioneer of the new literature movement" (1941). Because this edition was consistent with the goal and program of the New Culture Movement and exhibited a wide influence in the cultural circle at that time, it is believed to have the dual identity of "foreign literature" and "vernacular pioneer".

In fact, the translation and promotion of the Bible is inseparable from the efforts of Yenching writers. As discussed above, Xu Dishan's translation of the Song of Solomon is the first complete translation of one part of the Bible into vernacular Chinese by a modern Chinese writer. It started the tradition of translating the Bible by Chinese writers. In 1921, he and Bing Xin walked out of the campus of Yenching University and participated in the establishment of the earliest and most influential literary association in the New Literature Movement: The Literary Association (Wenxue yanjiu hui). The association's goal was to "study and introduce world literature, sort out old Chinese literature and create new literature" (Hockx 1998, pp. 49–50). At its peak, the Literary Association had more than 170 members, including nearly all of China's most prominent novelists, poets, and literary theorists. Zhou Zuoren also joined the association. Timothy Tingfang Lew did not explicitly join the association, but he maintained extensive contacts with the leaders of the New Literature Movement and literary society, such as Peking University President Hu Shih (1891–1962) and the famous poet Xu Zhimo (1897–1931). On June, 1921, Lew published a long article, "The Duty of the Christian Minister in the Present Renaissance Movement" (Lew 1921b, vol. 9–10, pp. 1–45). In addition, as the editor-in-chief of *The Life*, Lew actively invited several representatives of the New Culture Movement outside the Church, including Chen Duxiu, Hu Shi, Zhou Zuoren, Qian Xuantong, and Gao Yihan, to share their views on Christianity. He then collected these views into the column "The Attitude of Modern Chinese Intellectuals toward Christianity," which was published in the 7th and 8th issues of *The Life* in 1922 (Lew 1922). It further promoted the exchange and collision between the New Culture Movement and Christian thought. He consciously promoted the New Culture Movement within the Christian Church, and the new poetry was an important part of this promotional initiative.

Among the early members of the Literary Association were several famous non-Christian writers who made it clear they were culturally inspired by the Bible. Guo Moruo (1892–1978), who was held in high regard in Chinese contemporary literature, history, and archaeology, says he read the Bible as a daily lesson. Ba Jin (1904–2005), one of the most revered writers in modern China, opposed Christianity in his early days. However, after reading the Bible, his understanding changed greatly. He called Christianity "the religion of the poor" and wanted to meld the holy love he found in it into literature's humanitarian concern (Gálik 2004, p. 135).

The early platform of the members of the Literary Association was a newspaper named *Morning Supplement*, founded in 1916 and published independently in 1921. This daily literary newspaper was rich in content, emphasizing the promotion of new literature and publishing novels, poems, essays, and academic papers. The *Morning Supplement's* list of

authors included the names of those who were active in the church literary journal *The Life*, such as Timothy Tingfang Lew and Xu Dishan; Bing Xin is a star author on both sides.

Driven by the New Culture Movement and the Literary Research Society, Bing Xin's short poems were all the rage at that time and aroused much response. From 1921 to 1928, the *Morning Supplement* published 121 of Bing Xin's literary works, which inspired an upsurge of reading and discussion among readers. In 1921 alone, *Morning Supplement* published 11 readers' letters, who expressed their impressions of Bing Xin's works. Bing Xin was among the first generation of Chinese new vernacular poetry writers, and Bing Xin's readers were the first batch of new literature readers. Different from their elders who were accustomed to classical literature, most of these readers were in their twenties. They had received a certain degree of new education and were nourished by the atmosphere of the open era. Their attitude toward Western culture was quite different from that of previous generations. Some of these readers who loved Bing Xin's poetry stepped into the path of literary creation under the direct influence of her poetry.

One example is Yan Yuming (燕遇明 1907–1982), who published "Reading Spring Water". He began writing at the age of 17 and later tried to write vernacular poetry. Two of his poems were selected for inclusion in the book titled *Chinese New-Vernacular Literature* in 1935 (Zhao 1935). Xiao Baohuang (肖保瓚 1904–1931), who published "Echoes of Spring Water," was introduced to new poetry while studying in middle school in 1919. In 1924, he entered the Chinese Department of Peking University and became a young literary critic. Zhang Xiuzhong (张秀中 1905–1944), who published "Reading Stars and Spring Water," began to learn to write new vernacular poetry in 1923 and founded a student literary journal. He also founded the Haiyin Book Company, which published more than 20 kinds of literary works and translations.

The Chinese new vernacular poetry movement, which fully absorbed the skills of biblical poetry creation, has since been passed down from generation to generation by writers and readers and has deeply seeped into the creation tradition of modern Chinese poetry. For example, a three-line poetry writing competition has become popular in Chinese universities in recent years, and many entries integrate the parallel elements. Perhaps these young Chinese students, born in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, do not consciously study, imitate, and promote biblical literature as the Yenching university students did 100 years earlier, but unconsciously they replicate the parameters of the "the Bible and literature" field of that time.

5. Conclusions

The modernity of Chinese literature, to some extent, is a late and forced modernity formed from the collision and intersection of Chinese and Western cultures. Christianity, as one of the important sources of Western ideology and culture, undoubtedly played a huge role. The example of the inheritance of biblical poetry and the innovative literary response to that inheritance at Yenching University, as discussed in this paper, yields several important historical observations. First, the germination and growth of modern Chinese literature directly benefited from the educational activities carried out by the church in China. In particular, the birth of Yenching University as a mission university opened a door for Chinese scholars and students to understand and appreciate the literary value of the Bible. As a result, the teachers and students of Yenching University spearheaded the main body of early related new literary activities, and the literary publications funded by the church became the publication platform for their literary works.

Second, scholars widely agree that the encounter between the Bible and Chinese literature "provided a novel source of imageries, poetic genres and worldviews for the experimentation of modern Chinese poetry during the Republican period, particularly between the 1920s and 1940s" (Lai 2020, p. 163). Scholarly research has focused on "The Bible as Devotional Inspiration"; Tsz Pang Lai, for example, argues that "Bing Xin composed a series of 'sacred poems' as her own poetic response to the striking beauty of biblical images", and that "Zhou Zuoren regarded the Bible as a treasured anthology of

Jewish literature and appreciated the humanistic values embodied in the teachings of Jesus” (ibid.). Outside of Yenching University, in the fourth part of this paper, I have shown how other famous non-Christian writers made it clear that they were culturally inspired by the Bible. In fact, during the Republican period, the Bible encouraged in its literary-minded readers a new look at structural arrangement, dialog processing, language usage, and other forms, especially highlighting the paralleling features of Hebrew poetry. This new form of extraterritorial writing showed Chinese readers a completely different way of writing from classical Chinese poetry, and partly helped add a new writing genre to modern Chinese literature: vernacular short poetry. Around the 1920s, the new poems created by Yenching writers were highly consistent with biblical poems in both language forms and writing standards. Hence, this paper specifically points out that the internal logical connection between the development of modern Chinese literature and Christianity in China stems not only from the popularizing of Christian theological ideas and virtues, but also in the form of innovative literary writing techniques. This form of poetic creation spans time, ethnic groups, and sects, and becomes a vehicle for the literary ideals of different people. Hence, the two ways of understanding the Bible, as conveying doctrine and as exemplifying literary aesthetics, sometimes conflict, but sometimes they develop independently in a balanced way.

Finally, this trend of literary creation was not confined to the church and believers, but was closely related to the mainstream of the New Cultural Movement in China. Through writers like Bing Xin and Xu Dishan, who enjoyed excellent reputations both within the church and in the wider public community, the spread and promotion of the literary societies they participated in influenced other Chinese writers at that time. In the period of the New Culture Movement, Chinese writers mainly sought to dilute the religious nature of the Bible and highlight its literary value. At the time, the process of consciously studying foreign cultures to promote both the meaning and form of Chinese literature was highly practiced, and the Bible was recognized as a part of classic world literature. Hence the significant role of the Bible in the construction of new Chinese literature began to receive sufficient attention. More and more writers outside the church realized the historical role that introducing and imitating foreign poetry played in the construction of the new Chinese poetry. The Bible’s influence lasted for a century, and although many of today’s writers and readers are not aware of it, the writing techniques of this poetry are still found in vernacular Chinese poetry. Finally, and more generally, this example of the impact of the Bible on modern Chinese literature provides a specific case and cultural perspective for further understanding the biblical influence in literature more broadly, and describes an approach to literary engagement with the Bible outside the English-speaking world.

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- ¹ Some secondary literature suggests that Xu Dishan expressed romantic feelings for Bing Xin, and that Bing Xin rejected his advances. But neither commented directly on the subject.
- ² In this paper, the original poems of Yenching writers were all in Chinese. All English translations from poetry originally written in Chinese in this article are by the author.

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