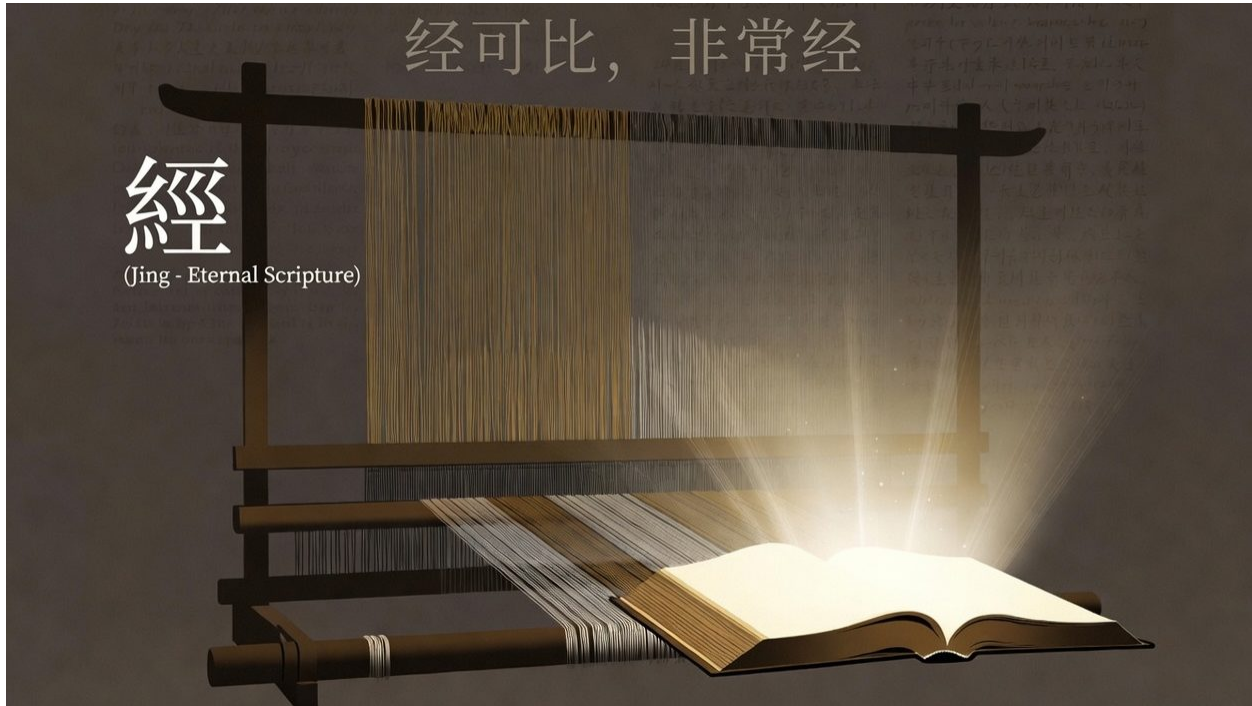


“Scripture” Is Comparable, But Not the Eternal Scripture: Conceptual Sleight-of-Hand at the Level of the Chinese Language and the Irreconcilability for Christians

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I. One Article, One Operation

On May 15, 2026, *Tianfeng* magazine published an article by Professor You Bin of Minzu University of China: “Systematically Advancing the Sinicization of Christianity: The Three Basic Attitudes That Chinese Biblical Studies Should Possess.”

The article is erudite, fluent in style, richly documented, and not without inspirational value upon first reading. You Bin cites Zhu Xi on the way of reading the Classics—emphasizing an open mind, personal relevance, and unity—and calls for the establishment of a distinctively Chinese tradition of biblical interpretation. At first glance, it seems to help Chinese believers enter the Bible more effectively.

Yet there is one operation hidden in the article’s structure, almost invisible.

The core thesis of the article is that Christianity’s Bible should be incorporated into the traditional Chinese framework of “Classics studies” (*jingxue*) for research and interpretation. The reasoning is: Taoism has the *Daodejing*, Buddhism has the *Dazangjing* (Tripitaka), Islam has the *Quran*, and Confucianism has the *Thirteen Classics*—each religion refers to its canon as “*jing*”

(scripture/classic). Therefore, the Christian Bible should also enter this pluralistic lineup of classics.

This argument reads almost unassailable in Chinese.

But please translate it into English and read it again.

II. Invalidation After Translation

You Bin's argument, rendered roughly in English, would be:

Christianity has the Bible (Holy Scripture), Taoism has the *Tao Te Ching* (Taoist Canon), Buddhism has the *Tripitaka* (Buddhist Sutras), Confucianism has the *Thirteen Classics*—all religions have their “scriptures,” therefore we should study them comparatively within a unified framework.

Did you catch it? The equivalence disappears.

In Chinese, “*Shengjing*” (Holy Scripture), “*Daodejing*,” “*Dazangjing*,” and “*Shisan Jing*” (Thirteen Classics) each contain the same character: 经 (*jing*). The visual overlap of the character silently completes an equivalence in the reader's mind: these are all “*jing*,” so they belong to the same category.

But in English, *Holy Scripture*, *Taoist Canon*, *Buddhist Sutras*, and *Confucian Classics* are four completely different terms, coming from four different linguistic and cultural traditions, and representing four distinct theories of textual authority. To place them in the same framework, the full burden of proof is exposed. The arguer must directly answer: In what sense are these four truly the same kind of thing?

In Chinese, You Bin does not need to answer this question, because the shared character “*jing*” has already answered it for him.

A genuine conceptual equivalence will still hold after translation. A conceptual sleight-of-hand that relies on the shape of characters is exposed for what it is once translated.

This is not a technical issue of translation; it is a test of logic.

III. A Philological Counter-Evidence

You Bin invokes the Chinese tradition of Classics studies as a resource, which serves as the source of legitimacy for his argument. Yet philology—the most fundamental method of Chinese philology—directly opposes his approach.

Xu Shen's *Shuowen Jiezi* states: “*Jing* means the vertical threads in weaving.”

The original meaning of “*jing*” is the longitudinal threads in fabric, contrasted with the horizontal “*wei*” (weft). Duan Yucai’s commentary notes: “The vertical threads in weaving are called *jing*. There must first be *jing* before there can be *wei*. Therefore, the Three Bonds and Five Constants, and the Six Arts, are called the constant *jing* of heaven and earth.”

From the longitudinal threads of fabric, the term extends to the constant Way of the universe, and further to the canons of the sages. This extension has direction and hierarchy. The core semantic element shared by all these meanings is: that which runs through from beginning to end and cannot be altered.

Zhu Xi, commenting on *Mencius* (“The superior man simply returns to the constant *jing*”), writes: “*Jing* means the constant; the unchanging Way for ten thousand generations.”

This is the essence of the character “*jing*”: that which does not change.

You Bin cites Zhu Xi on reading the Classics but forgets that Zhu Xi’s very definition of the character “*jing*” itself stands in direct opposition to any relativization. Once the “unchanging Way for ten thousand generations” enters a comparative framework and is classified as “one among many *jing*,” it ceases to be “*jing*” at all.

The fundamental principle of philology is: grasp the original meaning, let the original meaning govern the extended meanings, do not confuse extended meanings with the original, and certainly do not use superficial similarity in character shape to erase substantive differences between extended meanings.

You Bin’s operation precisely uses the shared visual form of the character “*jing*” to obscure the fundamental differences in the sources of authority among the various “*jing*.” In philological terms, this is called substituting character shape for character meaning.

Laozi already said: “The Way that can be told is not the eternal Way.”

So it is with *jing*: “*Jing* that is comparable is not the eternal *jing*.”

The moment the Bible can be “compared,” “classified,” and “placed side by side”—it is no longer “*jing*” in the sense of “the unchanging Way for ten thousand generations.” At the moment You Bin establishes comparative Classics studies, what he deconstructs is not the Bible, but the character “*jing*” itself.

IV. The Irreconcilability for Christians

Some may say: This is merely a linguistic issue; the common usage of “*jing*” is a historical fact, and we need not be overly attached to the written form.

But there is a wall here—not linguistic, but one of theological ontology.

At its core, You Bin's framework of comparative Classics studies inherits the theory of the religious studies scholar Wilfred Cantwell Smith: "Scripture" is not a sacred text in an ontological sense, but a human activity to which faith communities ascribe sacred status. The classics of various religions are functionally parallel and academically comparable.

In a religious studies classroom, this framework has disciplinary legitimacy.

However, *Tianfeng* is not a religious studies journal. You Bin's article is written for the Chinese church with the aim of constructing a biblical view for Chinese Christians. In this context, the framework is no longer methodologically neutral but quietly introduces a theological premise: the authority of the Bible derives from the reverence accorded to it by the faith community.

The historical Christian position is fundamentally different: the authority of the Bible derives from the fact that it is the Word of God itself.

These two propositions are irreconcilable in any language. They are not altered by the common usage of the character "*jing*," nor dissolved by civilizational dialogue.

The fundamental reason early Christians were persecuted in Rome was not that Romans forbade them from believing in Jesus, but that they refused to say "Caesar is Lord"—they refused to place Jesus among the pantheon of gods.

You Bin's comparative Classics studies is another form of invitation to the pantheon: Your Bible may remain, but please come in and stand in line with the other classics.

The answer of believers throughout the ages has always been one: Christ is Lord—not one lord among many.

V. One Question Left

This article was published in *Tianfeng*, using academic language, drawing on Chinese tradition, and arguing for a Sinicized path in biblical studies. It reads like theological progress, like cultural confidence, like the Chinese church finally having its own voice.

But we need to ask ourselves one question:

When the "Holy Scripture" stands side by side on the same bookshelf with the *Daodejing* and the *Dazangjing*, all called "*jing*," all entering the same comparative framework—what exactly have we lost?

This question cannot be answered by the character "*jing*."

It is a question that every Christian reading the Bible in the Chinese linguistic context must answer.