

# Introduction

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In order to understand the many topics covered by this book, we must begin at the beginning. Although the current age of global communication incorporates plenty of verbal communication, this is accompanied by a substantial exchange of information in textual form, covering a vast variety of languages. The overwhelming majority of these are written in scripts that derive ultimately from innovations some 3,500 years ago in the northeastern corner of Africa. But for a substantial minority of the world's population—three centuries ago, about one-third, and still now nearly 20%—their writing derives from a system devised on the lower reaches of the Yellow River at very roughly the same time. Both were based initially on mnemonic systems using pictures, but today one would have to stare for a very long time at the letter A before seeing the head of an ox, even if the letter M still does echo the undulation of waves on water; the character *niu* 牛, for its part, does not in its current form immediately suggest any bovine connections. Where these two main systems differ most significantly is not so much in the stories of their origins but in the levels of language that they represent. Apart from East Asia, the most common scripts used tend to relate to phonemes, the variations of sound that made the ancient word for water that began with an M different from a word that was the same but for its initial element; in East Asia it was the level of meaning, whether “ox” or “water”—in other words, morphemes—that was represented in the script rather than a sound that might have no meaning in itself. As it happens, in the language I am writing now “a” does mean something, but “b” does not. In the script going back to the Yellow River writing, a meaningless sound is actually quite difficult; one has to specify a meaningful morpheme that sounds like (or includes a sound like) a “b,” and then indicate that the meaning is to be ignored.

“Something that sounds like something else” was a common enough way of thinking of this script from early times that one can today sometimes see phonetic kinship between words despite the passage of time, whereas time can have an impact on orthography that can subvert the apparent simplicity of a writing based on sounds: compare “though,” “through” and “thorough” with 唐, 塘, 糖. In this way, the Yellow River morphemic script also inhabited a linguistic environment that made its phonetic presence felt. It would be wrong, therefore, to suppose that as peoples of the past who spoke different languages encountered these different writing systems, they found the division between a phonemic and a morphemic script added insuperable problems to the creation of written translations. Learning a new type of script in itself presented challenges, although through a thorough application of linguistic abilities already applied to writing, the new challenges of switching between two systems—as the historical record shows—could also be overcome. The most obvious demonstration of this is the approximately 40 million characters in Chinese that were translated from South Asian languages to become part of the canonical legacy of East Asian Buddhism. This vast corpus of materials has chiefly been studied to help reconstitute the scriptural development of that tradition, but its potential for illuminating the history of translation too is beginning to be realized.<sup>1</sup>

That corpus is historically of interest even for a volume like this one, which is concerned not with translation into Chinese, but translation out of it. Starting in the second century CE, a long line of translators had within half a millennium created a canon that was bound to influence non-Chinese Buddhists within the orbit of Sinophone civilization.<sup>2</sup> We

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- 1 See, for example, the remarks of Robert Neather in his review of C. Pierce Salgado’s *Translating Buddhist Medicine in Medieval China* in *Journal of Translation Studies* 2, no. 2 (December 2018), pp. 117–121, and of James A. Benn’s review of Martha P. Y. Cheung’s *An Anthology of Chinese Discourse on Translation* in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 19, no. 1 (2009), pp. 132–134.
  - 2 For a magisterial overview of this influence, see Peter Francis Kornicki, *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 240–245.

therefore possess even from quite long ago smaller bodies of Buddhist literature in contiguous linguistic areas that were translated from Chinese rather than from any South Asian tongue.<sup>3</sup> The earliest such translations to have survived may well be those in Sogdian; a survey conducted in 1978 identified Chinese originals for fifteen out of the thirty-six Sogdian Buddhist works known at the time, far outweighing the handful that could be traced to Sanskrit, and suggests that these translations were probably undertaken in the eighth century.<sup>4</sup> At about the same time, Tibetans, even if they were eventually to take the far greater part of their translated Buddhist literature directly from India, also undertook a surprising amount of translation from Chinese as well—a minimum of at least thirty-seven sutras, by one recent count, for instance.<sup>5</sup> Other Buddhist works translated from Chinese were perhaps even more significant; translated texts of early Chan Buddhism, for example, stand at the head of an important line of developments within Tibetan language Buddhism itself.<sup>6</sup> Research opportunities for the study of the actual techniques of translation also exist due to the survival of bilingual Buddhist materials connected to the process of creating Tibetan texts out of Chinese.<sup>7</sup>

The Dunhuang manuscript hoard that provides the early evidence for these developments also demonstrates the beginnings of another Buddhist

3 For an overview of translation both into and out of Chinese during the period up to the beginning of the tenth century, with a focus on the period that was dominated by Buddhist translation activity, see Daniel Boucher, “Translation,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Classical Chinese Literature (1000 BCE–900CE)*, eds. Wiebke Denecke, Wai-yi Lee, and Xiaofei Tian (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 494–509.

4 David A. Utz, *A Survey of Buddhist Sogdian Studies* (Tokyo: The Reiyukai Library, 1978), p. 8.

5 Jonathan A. Silk, “Chinese Sūtras in Tibetan Translation: A Preliminary Survey,” *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University* 22 (2019), pp. 227–246.

6 On this, see Sam van Schaik, *Tibetan Zen: Discovering a Lost Tradition* (Boston and London: Snow Lion, 2015).

7 James B. Apple and Shinobu A. Apple, “A Re-Evaluation of Pelliot tibétain 1257: An Early Tibetan-Chinese Glossary from Dunhuang,” *Revue d’Etudes Tibétaines* 42 (2017), pp. 68–180.

tradition that drew extensively on translations from the Chinese, namely the pre-Islamic religious literature of the Uyghurs. A late twentieth-century stocktaking of the textual remains of this tradition counted forty-one Chinese translations out of a total of eighty-one titles, stretching in time from the late tenth to the fourteenth century.<sup>8</sup> By that point a very large amount of material had also been translated from the Chinese language into Tangut, including also significant non-Buddhist materials of purely Chinese origin; in this case, however, the transfer was being made from one morphemically based script to another.<sup>9</sup> Unlike some other peoples of the periphery of the area—who added elements of their own languages phonetically represented using borrowed Chinese characters mixed with Chinese morphemic indicators—the Tanguts devised their own system of morphemic representation from scratch, turning it into a code that offered no clues to anyone familiar with Chinese or any other script.<sup>10</sup> Both for this reason, and also because the Tangut language is still much less perfectly known than the others so far mentioned, this rapidly expanding and highly valuable field of research would seem to offer fewer immediate prospects for the devotee of translation studies.

The Mongols, who extinguished the realm of the Tanguts along with many others in the thirteenth century, seem to have been little concerned with keeping their written communications confidential; they simply borrowed the phonemically oriented script from the Uyghurs in the first instance, and though it is recorded that some secular Chinese materials were translated into their language under their rule, nothing of this has survived.<sup>11</sup> One famous work, *The Secret History of the Mongols*, was transmitted in China in a bilingual version, but this seems to be because it was used by Chinese interpreters after the end of the Mongol period.<sup>12</sup>

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8 Johan Elverskog, *Uyghur Buddhist Literature* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), pp. 10–11.

9 Imre Galambos, *Translating Chinese Tradition and Teaching Chinese Culture: Manuscripts and Printed Books from Khara-khoto* (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2015).

10 Kornicki, *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia*, pp. 62–63.

11 Kornicki, *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia*, p. 189.

12 T. H. Barrett, “The Secret History of the Mongols: Some Fresh Revelations,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, LVI, 1 (1992), pp. 115–119.

A substantial body of linguistic information used by those charged with communicating with foreign visitors survives from late imperial China, but it forms part of the history of interpretation, rather than translation.<sup>13</sup> A significant consequence of the rise of the Mongol Empire, however, was that Chinese materials were now translated into at least one language for which there is no earlier evidence of transmission, namely Persian.<sup>14</sup> Much no doubt remains to be learned about this, but so far it would seem that nothing in Chinese was at this stage rendered into any European tongue; only rumors of the nature of the Chinese writing system had reached Europe, and these were not detailed enough for the differences between East Asia and the rest of the world to be grasped.

As a result, when the first speakers of European languages initiated the modern period of contacts between East and West half a millennium ago on the South China Coast, they were scarcely prepared for the news that written Chinese required reading skills that they had never encountered before. Would-be missionaries found this novel challenge a vexatious obstacle to their ambitions, but scholars pondering their reports in Europe read into them a much more hopeful meaning. Might not this way of writing offer a path to the “perfect language” that some thinkers were already in search of, that would constitute a system as in mathematical notation that could convey the significance of any message independently of the vagaries of actual human speech?<sup>15</sup> Was this not what was happening when Japanese, Chinese or inhabitants of what is now Vietnam could—without sharing their different languages at all—all understand

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13 The opening pages of the latest study of a portion of this material provides a useful introduction to what we have, though the scholarship that it has generated is actually rather copious: Yong-Sōng Li, “The Uighur Word Materials in a Manuscript of *Huá-yí-yǔ* (華夷譯語) in the Library of Seoul National University (V),” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 29, no. 2 (April 2019), pp. 257–318.

14 For one example, see Vivienne Lo 羅維前 and Wang Yidan 王一丹, “Chasing the Vermilion Bird: Late-Medieval Alchemical Transformations in *The Treasure Book of Ilkhan on Chinese Science and Techniques*,” in *Imagining Chinese Medicine*, eds. Vivienne Lo and Penny Barrett (Leiden: Brill, 2018), pp. 291–304.

15 Umberto Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language* (London: Fontana Press, 1997).

a text in Chinese characters as having the same content?<sup>16</sup> The past half millennium of translation into European languages with which this present volume is chiefly concerned may be seen at one level as narrating a shift from heady hopes to mundane realities. But in prefacing it with a brief sketch of a broader history of translation, the intention of these remarks is to contextualize this narrative, and to qualify any thoughts it might suggest of European efforts as exceptional: add another millennium of earlier translation history and the last few centuries appear less special.

One might indeed add as well the continued translation of newer Chinese texts into the languages of contiguous and nearby peoples in Asia. The austere canons of the Chinese Classics and of the Buddha's Word in translation had long been known in the area, but in early modern times people wanted more entertaining things to read, tales as likely to be in the vernacular Chinese of the new age as cast in the style of past literature. Of course any tale may be retold rather than simply reproduced, and even in countries like Korea and Japan—where fairly mechanical translation preserving Chinese characters, as well as filling out the story by recourse to the local vernacular, was always possible—no one was under any obligation to do this, leaving precise filiations sometimes in doubt.<sup>17</sup> But whether in translation or retelling, we find traditional Chinese stories not only in these languages and in Manchu, the language of the Qing dynasty, but also in Mongol, Vietnamese, Thai, Cambodian, Malay, Javanese, Madurese, and Makassarese, at the very least.<sup>18</sup>

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16 Dinu Luca, *The Chinese Language in European Texts: The Early Period* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 41–42. This study provides a richly documented survey both of medieval glimmerings of knowledge concerning Chinese and also of the first century of significant direct encounter.

17 For one well-known case, see Glen Dudbridge, *The Hsi-yu Chi: A Study of Antecedents to the Sixteenth-Century Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 99–100; cf. W. E. Skilleud, *Kodae Sosöl: A Survey of Korean Traditional Style Popular Novels* (London: SOAS, 1968), p. 107, no. 171.

18 These are the languages covered in Claudine Salmon, ed., *Literary Migrations: Traditional Chinese Fiction in Asia (17<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> Centuries)* (Beijing: International Culture Publishing Corporation, 1987).

In short, the linguistic communities surrounding China found translation from the Chinese script a quite routine matter, and if the visitors who eventually arrived from Europe with the intention of establishing sustained interaction with users of that script found the experience of translation difficult, it was as much for cultural as for strictly linguistic reasons. Coming from cultures quite unfamiliar with the Chinese way of life, they were more puzzled than the average East, Central or Southeast Asian by what Chinese texts had to say as much as by how their content was recorded. The previous conference volume in this series on Sinologists as translators naturally put its emphasis on the language that Sinologists encountered, especially since the assumption that they worked from anything like the standard language of today is quite false: even when they were working from Mandarin, it was initially in a form rather different from the current norm.<sup>19</sup> Though such linguistic matters remain important in this volume, it will be noted that more space is occupied by another frequent theme in translation studies, the discussion of cultural factors.<sup>20</sup>

This comes out immediately and with great clarity in Thierry Meynard's study of the "Canton Conference" of 1668 and of the translations that it prompted. The conference was an involuntary one: the twenty plus missionaries had been detained in Canton on their way to banishment in Macao as the result of attacks at the Manchu court in Beijing on the Jesuits employed there in the politically and ideologically sensitive matter of determining the calendar.<sup>21</sup> Its existence has long been known to the English reader, since one of its chief participants, Domingo Navarrete (1618–1689),

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19 See the remarks on pp. xiii-xvi of Bernhard Fuehrer, "Introduction," in *Sinologists as Translators in the Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries*, eds. Lawrence Wang-chi Wong and Bernhard Fuehrer (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2015), pp. xi-xx.

20 This is of course nothing new: a quarter of a century ago Chan Sin-wai listed plenty of research in this area in *A Topical Bibliography of Translation and Interpretation* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1995), pp. 111-120. But in these remarks the emphasis is as much on translation as an issue in culture as on culture as an issue in translation.

21 John D. Young, *Confucianism and Christianity: The First Encounter* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1983), pp. 83-84.

wrote a lively account of his adventures on four continents that was partially translated into English in 1704, and though that translation only mentions the conference itself in passing, a scholarly presentation of Navarrete's writings produced in Britain in 1962 does explain what was going on, though very much from the Dominican's point of view: we learn that his Jesuit opponent Francesco Brancati (1607–1671) was suffering from gout, and was dubbed by Friar Domingo “the white elephant”.<sup>22</sup>

In this study, however, the focus is neither on the circumstances nor on the personalities of the participants but upon the research into and translations from Chinese sources that were prompted by the debate, as a consequence of the very different interpretations they held concerning the state rituals devoted to Confucius. Did they mark the worship of a divine figure or the civil commemoration of a human one? This question was not one formulated within the belief system of the seventeenth-century Chinese themselves and so not one readily answered, but it was of clear import for mission policy, at least at that time.<sup>23</sup> The answers depended not simply on ethnographic evidence supplied by converts but by appeal to published Chinese norms, and here issues of interpretation, and quite specifically of translation, came to the fore. The era of Sinological research had begun.

The conference that bequeathed these precious materials to us was, as stated, an involuntary one, and it is not clear where the participants found the published sources that they used. Eugenio Menegon, by contrast, shows that in Beijing in the eighteenth century completely different circumstances prevailed, and drawing in part on the research of Noël Golvers, that the missionaries there disposed of considerable bibliographical resources both in Chinese and in the classical and modern languages of Europe. Divided as they were between the four churches of the capital, they constituted collectively a veritable miniature university of

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22 J. S. Cummins, *The Travels and Controversies of Friar Domingo Navarrete (1618–1686)* (London: Cambridge University Press, for the Hakluyt Society, 1962), pp. 244, 418, 419.

23 As is concluded here, and by Cummins in *Travels and Controversies*, p. lxxii, by the twentieth century the question came to be seen as less urgent.



Chinese studies, the publications and records of which we ignore at our peril. For this center not only produced the great masterworks, usually in French, that informed and indeed influenced Europe on a host of China-related topics, but also a yet greater number of what would today be termed “internal reference materials,” and other related correspondence, that still exist in European archives.<sup>24</sup>

Though the reader will discern that the internal workings of this tiny university, which lacked any central structure, was not always harmonious, it is worth pointing out that such an institution representing China to the outside world took a very long time to replicate. The *École Française d'Extrême-Orient* of Hanoi, founded in 1900, was fortunate from the start to have the bibliographical expertise of Paul Pelliot (1878–1945) at its disposal, and it also possessed the self-confidence to resist attempts at censorship by the French colonial authorities, but at its inception it only counted five academic posts to cover far more than China alone.<sup>25</sup> Despite the obvious advantages for Westerners in acquiring an understanding of China within at least the orbit of Chinese civilization, rather than in Europe or North America, such arrangements continued to be overstretched and underfunded. Scholars such as Derk Bodde (1909–2003) and George Taylor (1905–2000), who were to establish the Chinese studies profession in the United States, were sent to Beijing in the 1930s, to find themselves under the aegis of a tiny institution with yet more far-flung ambitions, the highly individual Sino-Indian Institute of Baron Alexander von Staël-Holstein (1877–1937).<sup>26</sup> It has by contrast been argued that the colonial authorities of the main European power to hold Chinese territory, the

24. Overviews of the published materials and their impact have been available for some time, for example Zhimin Bai, *Les voyageurs français en Chine aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007), pp. 59–68, but the approach adopted here brings us right into the processes of the production of knowledge for Europe in eighteenth century China itself.

25. See Yves Goudineau, “Paul Pelliot, franc-tireur de l'*École française d'Extrême-Orient*,” in *Paul Pelliot: de l'histoire à la légende*, eds. Jean-Pierre Drège and Michel Zink (Paris: Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, 2013), pp. 21–27.

26. Wang Qilong and Deng Xiaoyong, *The Academic Knight between East and West: A Biography of Alexander von Staël-Holstein* (Singapore: Cengage Learning, 2014).

United Kingdom in Hong Kong, did nothing at all to engage at an institutional academic level with Chinese culture.<sup>27</sup> In fact the immense and truly incalculable contribution made by Hong Kong to the global understanding of Chinese civilization was—notwithstanding the role of a number of non-Chinese pioneers such as David Pollard—very largely due to the efforts of Hong Kong people themselves. And notwithstanding the important role of worthy heirs of the eighteenth-century fathers, like the initiators of today's Beijing Center for Chinese Studies, if non-Chinese can now acquire a sound academic grounding in the Chinese humanities in the capital of China, that is notably due to the willingness of farsighted scholars at Peking University and elsewhere to take the time to support them.

But who knows where these early twenty-first century developments will lead? Lesser beginnings have had more profound impacts. Two hundred years ago the handful of Britons based in Canton and Macao who signaled a major cultural shift within the European translators of Chinese by initiating the era of Anglophone Sinology were a group far smaller and much more disparate than their eighteenth-century Francophone predecessors in Beijing, in that they neither owed any allegiance to a single church, nor did they come from socially compatible backgrounds. Sir George Staunton (1781–1859) was an Anglican and a baronet; Robert Morrison (1782–1834) was a Presbyterian and the son of a craftsman. And who was Thomas Manning (1772–1840)? That he was the son of a Norfolk vicar and a gentleman of independent means is clear enough, but as Edward Weech shows, his intellectual and religious disposition, while it indubitably animated his remarkably broad-minded willingness in trying to understand China and also brought him into contact with some of the most well-known and well-studied literary figures of the age, is nonetheless hard to pin down. Even though, for example, he expressed himself uncomfortable when a friend wrote to him insinuating a tendency

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27 For an entertaining but all too cogent presentation of this case, see Hugh D. R. Baker, *The Chop Suey Connection: Hong Kong. An Inaugural Lecture Delivered on 8 December 1993* (London: SOAS, 1994).

towards atheism, his rejection of that charge comes in an unusual context.<sup>28</sup> Manning was certainly afraid of a possible rise in religious intolerance, but also of surveillance of the post by authorities clamping down on any subversive ideas.

For the Britain that gradually came into contact with China beyond the confines of the Canton factories, wherein all foreign traders were obliged to dwell, was a Britain overshadowed by fears engendered by centuries of hostility to France, now further overlaid by terrors stimulated by the sight of violent revolution. Atheism was certainly suspect, but a robust rejection of Catholicism was also routine even among Manning's younger contemporaries, so that, for example, Sir John Francis Davis (1795–1890), in describing Chinese Buddhism—and in particular its ritual aspects so reminiscent to Europeans of Catholic Christianity that some historical contact was often adduced in explanation—could not resist concluding, “To those who admit that much of the Romish ceremonies and rites are borrowed directly from paganism, there is less difficulty in accounting for the resemblance.”<sup>29</sup> Manning was not a man for such slurs, and was certainly cognizant of the debt he owed in his Chinese studies to Catholics, and especially to Chinese Catholics. But when in his only intervention in British national affairs he argued in print for the removal of restrictions on Catholicism, he adopted the persona of “An Englishman” and a good Anglican, despite having rejected a chance to claim a Cambridge degree rather than assent to Anglican doctrine.<sup>30</sup> Given that the issue of emancipation was so controversial that the Duke of Wellington was eventually obliged to fight a duel over it, his circumspection is perhaps understandable. In fact, as this chapter shows,

28 Gertrude A. Anderson, ed., *The Letters of Thomas Manning to Charles Lamb* (London: Secker, 1925), p. 32.

29 John Francis Davis, *The Chinese: A General Description of the Empire of China and Its Inhabitants*, vol. II (London: Charles Knight, 1836), p. 29.

30 His published letters on the restrictions are preserved in the Manning archive of the Royal Asiatic Society, TM 9/10/3; his passing reference to “the grand lama” speaks of his own broad experience of world religion, but he gives no hint whatsoever that he was personally acquainted with that figure.