

**TRANSLATORS AND INTERMEDIARIES:
A NOTE ON THE CHINESE LANGUAGE TEACHERS
ASSOCIATED WITH THE LONDON MISSIONARY
SOCIETY'S SHANGHAI STATION**

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ABSTRACT This study investigates the hiring practices by the British Protestant missionaries of the London Missionary Society (LMS) in treaty-port Shanghai (1843–1860) with regards to their language teachers. Recognizing the continued authority and cultural capital of Classical Literary Chinese, they hired local literary graduates (*xiuca* 秀才) to aid them in their translation efforts. Initially, the main purpose was Bible translation, but the practice was maintained when the missionaries turned to secular writings. Most of these language teachers remained anonymous. Using missionary and literati sources, this study sheds light on who the missionaries hired, and attempts to gather knowledge on the educational and social backgrounds of these men.

KEYWORDS LMS, Shanghai, Classical Chinese, Treaty Port Intellectuals



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Introduction

In studies of missionary efforts in China, the role of Chinese individuals who collaborated with missionaries is often overlooked. Numerous men and women worked alongside the missionaries in various capacities, actively participating in their efforts; however, beyond a few notable figures, little is known about them. This is partially due to the nature of our sources. As Thor Strandenaes has pointed out, “in the history of the first hundred years of Protestant Chinese Bible translation, it is rather typical that the names of the Chinese scholars are not mentioned, notwithstanding the obvious importance of their work.”¹ With regards to the Protestant Bible translation, some inroads have been made in recent years, but there are still many open questions with regards to the assistants’ identity, education, background, and social standing. To at least partially tackle this issue, the present study looks at the language teachers of the London Missionary Society (LMS) station in Shanghai, for which the sources available allow us to gain some additional insight.

The history of the Shanghai station began with the Treaty of Nanking signed in 1842, which granted merchants and missionaries the right to work in five treaty ports.² Walter Henry Medhurst 麥都思 (1796–1856) and William Lockhart 雒魏林 (1811–1896), long-standing members of the LMS, chose Shanghai as the place to carry out their calling. Like Hong Kong, Shanghai was to be the location for a missionary press. This choice was strategic, as Shanghai was a center of trade in the lower Yangzi region and therefore an opportune entrance into China’s interior. William C. Milne 美魏茶 (1815–1863) wrote in his *Life in China* that “The port of Shanghai is one of the principal entrances into the heart of the country”³ and likened it to “a great door and effectual opened unto them” (Corinthians 16:9).⁴

1 Thor Strandenaes, “Anonymous Bible Translators: Native Literati and the Translation of the Bible into Chinese, 1807–1907”, in *Sowing the Word—The Cultural Impact of the British and Foreign Bible Society, 1804–2004*, eds. Stephen Batalden, Kathleen Cann and John Dean, 121–48 (Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2004), 122.

2 For overview works on the story of the London Missionary Society’s efforts in China, see Jean Paquette, “An uncompromising land; the London Missionary Society in China, 1807–1860” (PhD Diss., University of California, 1987); and Su Ching, “The Printing Presses of the London Missionary Society Among the Chinese” (PhD Diss., University of London, 1996).

3 William C. Milne, *Life in China* (London: Routledge, 1857), 495.

4 Milne, *Life in China*, 495.

Medhurst and Lockhart began their activities in Shanghai in 1843,⁵ their main lines of work being preaching, hospital service, itinerating, translating, and printing religious writings.

For all these tasks, they needed assistance, and in particular, they needed language teachers. The most obvious requirement was to learn the Shanghai dialect, but interestingly, the available missionary sources also show a heightened awareness of the importance of being able to compose prose in the classical literary Chinese language. William Muirhead 慕維廉 (1822–1900), for example, observed that “the Chinese scholars love brevity and point”⁶ and that colloquial translations were “despised by Chinese scholars, and the sentiments contained in them are treated in a corresponding manner.”⁷ However, proficiency in writing literary Chinese was difficult to acquire. In Milne’s words, studying this “book-language” “accurately and thoroughly will tax every power a man has of body and mind, all his lifetime too.”⁸ These are not empty words. Despite fluency in often several spoken dialects, the missionaries struggled with the written language, as is famously attested by Wang Tao 王韜 (1828–1897), who dryly remarked: “When people from other states grapple with text and struggle for meaning, their words are questionable and vulgar. Even if we could bring Zhongni (Confucius) back to life, he would be unable to improve on them with pen and knife.” 彼邦人士拘文牽義，其詞詰曲鄙俚，即使尼山復生，亦不能加以筆削。⁹

Therefore, the missionaries needed help with their translation and printing activities and began to search for people experienced in the composition of classical Chinese texts to help polish their translations. They were found among the high numbers of literary graduates in the Jiangsu and Zhejiang areas. As a consequence of the examination system, in the mid-19th century, there was a high number of traditionally educated men of letters schooled in the composition of traditional Chinese prose and poetry who had no realistic chance of embarking on an official career, owing to a recent surge in population growth that was not accompanied

5 William Lockhart, *The Medical Missionary: A Narrative of Twenty Years’ Experience* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1861), 236. For the background of the LMS missionaries and the opening of the station, see also Gary Tiedemann ed., “Treaty port missionaries,” in *Handbook of Christianity 2* (Leiden: Brill, 2009). For a general survey of Catholic and Protestant missionary activities in China, see Gu Changsheng 顧長聲, *Chuanjiaoshi yu jindai zhongguo* 傳教士與近代中國 [Missionaries and Modern China] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1991).

6 William Muirhead, *China and the Gospel* (London: James Nisbet and co. Publisher, 1870), 50.

7 Muirhead, *China and the Gospel*, 50.

8 Milne, *Life in China*, 498.

9 Wang Tao 王韜, *Taoyuan chidu* 弢園尺牘 [Letters from the Taoyuan Retreat] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 5.

by a proportional growth in the number of government posts available for them.¹⁰

Some of the Chinese literati they found, in particular Wang Tao and Li Shanlan 李善蘭 (1810–1882), have become quite famous. The exchange the missionaries initiated laid the foundation for intense cultural exchange, producing experts for the West who played integral roles in introducing Western culture to late Qing China.¹¹ However, Wang Tao and Li Shanlan are just the tip of the iceberg and the sources available allow us not only to identify some of the other language teachers, but also to resolve open questions surrounding them. Who were they? Why did they choose to work with missionaries? What were their responsibilities at the LMS station? And what was their stance towards Christianity? By combining published and archival missionary sources with writings from the Shanghai treaty port literati, this article attempts to answer these questions and identify the Chinese literati hired by the missionaries. Divided into three phases—starting with the period before the opening of the Shanghai station, before considering the years of the Bible translation known as the *Delegates' Version*, and finally moving on to the years after its completion that saw an increased dedication to secular translations—this article will analyze their backgrounds, the tasks the missionaries gave them, the extent of their collaboration, and their relationship to Christianity. Not all questions are answerable for all language teachers, but as the following will show, it is possible to shed some light on these nearly invisible intermediaries.

1. Prior to the Shanghai Station

The first language teacher hired by the LMS missionaries for classical literary Chinese we know of is Zhu Delang 朱德郎,¹² and his hiring predates the Shanghai station. However, he is relevant for the present study, as the available sources on him clearly show the ideas Medhurst

- 10 Benjamin A. Elman, “Changes in Confucian Civil Service Examinations from the Ming to the Ch'ing Dynasty.” In Benjamin A. Elman and Alexander Woodside, eds. *Education and Society in Late Imperial China, 1600–1900* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1994), 122. The Yangzi Delta was also one of the areas with the highest number of successful examination candidates during Ming and Qing times, further intensifying the problem. For a detailed survey of the development, see Benjamin A. Elman, *Civil Examinations and Meritocracy in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 139–43.
- 11 For a helpful overview, see Xiong Yuezhi, *The Eastward Dissemination of Western Learning in the Late Qing Dynasty* (Singapore: Silkroad Press, 2013).
- 12 Strandenaes renders his name as “Zhu Dilang”; see Strandenaes, “Anonymous Bible Translators,” 137, but Alexander Wylie, *Memorials of Protestant missionaries to the Chinese* (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1867), 40, provides the Chinese characters *delang* 德郎.

had for translation work and its requirements.

Medhurst's story in China began in 1835, almost a decade prior to the opening of the Shanghai station, when he went on a journey up the Chinese coast to “ascertain whether or not that country was open to the Gospel.”¹³ The journey fully convinced Medhurst that the answer to his question was a resounding “yes”¹⁴ but he would remain locked outside of mainland China for another seven years. After this scouting trip, Medhurst returned to England in 1836, where he stayed for roughly two years until he returned to Batavia in 1838.¹⁵ For this brief stay, we have some interesting information about one of his first Chinese assistants and the work he did for him. Thanks to Alexander Wylie's 偉烈亞力 (1815–1887) *Memorials of Protestant Missionaries* we know that he was accompanied by a certain Zhu Delang (“Choo Tih-lang”), a “native of Kwang-tung province in China”, who served him as an “amanuensis for the Sacred Scriptures, which the latter was engaged in translating into Chinese.”¹⁶ Medhurst himself refers to Zhu as his “transcriber.”¹⁷

Medhurst brought Zhu to Hackney (in modern-day London), to assist him in revising a translation of the *New Testament*, which was later published under the title *Xinyi zhaoshu* 新遺詔書.¹⁸ Alexander Wylie in his *Memorials* remarks that while this was officially a committee translation together with Bridgman, Gutzlaff and Morrison begun in 1835, “it was understood to be chiefly the work of Mr. Medhurst, and underwent a final revision by him, when he returned to England in 1836.”¹⁹ Already at this point, Medhurst was aware of the high requirements with respect to style that accompanied a Chinese Bible translation. In his book *China: Its State and Prospects*, he strongly argued for the need for a

- 13 Walter H. Medhurst, *China: Its State and Prospects* (London: J. Snow, 1838), iii. See also Wylie, *Memorials*, 26.
- 14 See also Wang Liqun 王立群, “Jindai Shanghai kou'an zhishi fenzi de xingqi: yi Mohai shuguan de Zhongguo wenren weili 近代上海口岸知識分子的興起——以墨海書館的中國文人為例 [The Rise of Intellectuals in Modern Shanghai Treaty Port: The Case of Chinese Literati at the London Missionary Society Press]”, *Qing shi yanjiu* 清史研究 [The Qing History Journal] 3 (2003): 97–106.
- 15 Wylie, *Memorials*, 26.
- 16 Ibid., 40.
- 17 Medhurst, *China: Its State and Prospects*, 443. Zhu is known visually to those interested in the *Mohai Shuguan* 墨海書館 (Inkstone Press), as G. Baxter drew him and Medhurst together in what is presumably Medhurst's most well-known portrait. The picture is held by the British Museum, “Medhurst in Conversation with Choo-tih-Lang”; see https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1949-1011-90 (accessed April 8, 2024).
- 18 Wylie, *Memorials*, 40–41.
- 19 Ibid., 31.

revision and quoted a number of voices that support his claim. Among them, we also find Zhu Delang – here described as “a Chinese transcriber.” Zhu is quoted with the opinions that when it comes to such a translation, “verbosity”, and “much foreign phraseology” would make the Chinese “refuse to look into it.”²⁰ Zhu also warned against the damage a translation “in Chinese words but in many respects arranged according to English idiom” would have. Instead, “[t]he style should be conformable to the native models.”²¹ That Medhurst brought along Zhu for the final revision shows that he was aiming for a translation that fulfilled these requirements and was written in pleasant-to-read literary Sinitic.

Unfortunately, we know little more about Zhu Delang’s background and contributions. Mostly, Zhu is mentioned in the sources not because he aided or assisted Medhurst, but because during his time in Hackney he requested baptism. On July 6, 1838, shortly before returning to Batavia, he expressed his wish in a letter, and Medhurst baptized him only a few days later on July 20th at St. Thomas’ Square Chapel.²² With this, Zhu was one of the success stories of the LMS missionaries, and consequently, they proudly described the affair in their publication, *The Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* for the Year 1838. In the September issue, three full pages are dedicated to Zhu, and the missionaries included not only his letter with his reasons for requesting baptism but also translations of his answers while receiving the sacrament. His awakening of faith is described as follows:

Choo Tih Lang was brought over to this country, about two years ago, by Mr. Medhurst, as a transcriber, to assist him in the revision of the Chinese version of the Scriptures. He resided with Mr. Medhurst at Hackney, [...] At length, [...] a deep interest in the truths of the Gospel was awakened in his mind, and he gave his whole mind and heart to the study of the word of God.²³

Upon returning to Batavia, Medhurst sent a report on the voyage. He tells the LMS secretary in London that on the return journey he was able to work “every day, except one” on his “English and Chinese Dictionary of about 15,000” words.²⁴ It stands to reason that Zhu, being

20 Medhurst, *China: Its State and Prospects*, 443–44.

21 Ibid.

22 Wylie, *Memorials*, 40–41.

23 “September,” *The Missionary magazine and chronicle*, Vol. 2, No. 28 (1838), 138–41.

24 *The Evangelical magazine and missionary chronicle*, Vol. 17 (1839), 205.

present on the ship, helped him with these efforts as well, but Medhurst does not mention this and instead only writes proudly about the latter’s faith: “Choo-tih-Lang conducted himself very consistently with his profession, and engaged in prayer alternatively with me, during the voyage.”²⁵ After having arrived in Batavia on the 5th of November, Zhu went to Canton, where “he had been appointed to labour as Native Assistant, in the service of the London Missionary Society.”²⁶ It happened, however, that Zhu’s arrival in Canton coincided with the First Opium War (1839–1842), and therefore Zhu was not able to do his work. He “retired to his native village, and the engagement has not since been renewed.”²⁷

This is all the sources tell us about Zhu Delang. We do not know anything about his education, how he ended up in Batavia, or how he experienced his voyage to England. That Zhu worked on translations with Medhurst before being baptized indicates that baptism or faith was not a prerequisite for working at the LMS. Medhurst must have instead taken him on for his linguistic capacities. We further see that the term “transcriber” does not fully capture Zhu’s influence on the translation, as Medhurst specifically hired him for the style and language. We also see that bringing native assistants to England to continue translation projects was already done before James Legge 理雅各 (1815–1897) famously invited Wang Tao.

2. The Assistants Involved in the *Delegates’ Version*

Upon settling in Shanghai, the missionaries soon engaged in what would be the most influential and long-lasting achievement of the Shanghai station: the translation of the *Old* and *New Testaments* into classical Chinese, known as the *Delegates’ Version*.²⁸ The ambitious project took the missionaries from the mid-forties until 1853. Initially, they set their minds on the *New Testament*, and upon its completion in 1850, they decided to also do the *Old Testament*.²⁹ The name “*Delegates’ Version*” derives from the fact that the translation was the

25 Ibid.

26 Wylie, *Memorials*, 40–41.

27 Ibid.

28 For the *Bibel* translation, see Patrick Hanan, “The Bible as Chinese Literature: Medhurst, Wang Tao, and the *Delegates’ Version*,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 63, No. 1 (June, 2003): 197–239; Jost Oliver Zetsche, *The Bible in China: The History of the Union Version or The Culmination of Protestant Missionary Bible Translation in China* (St. Augustin: Monumenta Serica, 1999).

29 Paul A. Cohen, *Between Tradition and Modernity: Wang T’ao and Reform in Late Ching China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 22.

result of a collaboration that included a few people from outside the Shanghai station: The American Protestant missionary Elijah Bridgman 裨治文(1801–1861),³⁰ who came to Shanghai in 1847 but knew Medhurst from before, was one of the outside participants;³¹ they were further joined by William C. Milne, stationed in Ningbo, and Alexander Stronach 施敦力亞力山大(1800–1879), who was stationed in Amoy.³² However, the heart and center of the translation was Shanghai, where the delegates also met.

Producing a translation of the *New Testament*, or at least parts of it, had been attempted by several men connected to the Shanghai mission. However, previous translations had failed to meet the approval of Chinese literati, who did not like reading writings in either colloquial or stylistically lacking literary language. The LMS missionaries therefore sought help to polish their work and hired language teachers from the vicinity of Shanghai. The translation work of the committee has been reconstructed to a high detail by Zetsche, Strandenaes, and others, but so far little is known with regards to the Chinese teachers involved. Strandenaes wrote: “Unfortunately, only two of them have been identified: Mr. Wang Changgui 王昌桂 (d. 1849?) and his son Wang Lanqing (1828–1897).”³³ We will also begin our analysis with the two Wangs, but then identify a few more.

Wang Changgui

The first language teacher the Shanghai missionaries hired was Wang Changgui, Wang Tao’s father, who seems to have accepted the position for economic reasons. Lockhart writes about him that he had “a long time previously [...] taken the first degree” but had not succeeded in obtaining an official post and the resulting “poverty had prevented his proceeding to the higher examinations.”³⁴ Unable to further pursue his education and in need of providing for his family, the older Wang in 1847 eventually

30 For a study of the life and missionary work of Elijah Coleman Bridgman, see Michael C. Lazich, “E. C. Bridgman and the Coming of the Millennium: America’s First Missionary to China” (PhD Diss., University of New York, 1997).

31 Lazich, “E. C. Bridgman and the Coming of the Millennium,” 394–97.

32 Joseph Edkins, In *Memory of Rev. William Muirhead, D. D.: A Sermon Delivered in Union Church, Shanghai* (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1900), 7.

33 Strandenaes, “Anonymous Bible Translators,” 140.

34 Lockhart, *Medical Missionary*, 21–22.

went to Shanghai to look for work, despite being already sixty-five years old.³⁵ We have no writings from Wang Tao’s father himself, and in his autobiographical accounts, Wang Tao paints a blurry picture to evade telling the reader about his father’s dealings with foreigners.³⁶ Lawrence Wong pointed out that translators traditionally had a low position in Chinese society,³⁷ which is a reasonable explanation for Wang Tao’s attempt to obscure his father’s ties to the missionaries.

In reality, however, Wang Tao’s father took up a position at the Inkstone Press and became Medhurst’s personal language teacher as well as an editor.³⁸ This is known only thanks to the writings of the missionaries, and particularly to a report by Medhurst.³⁹ Medhurst describes Wang as primarily engaged in the “preparation of the *Delegates’ Version* of the *New Testament*, as far as the Epistle to the Romans.”⁴⁰ Wang Tao reports that his father went to Shanghai in “midsummer of 1847,”⁴¹ which means he was present from the beginning of the work and had worked on the Canonical Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. The *modus operandi* of the delegates was to meet daily from 10:00 am to 2:30 pm, and, headed by Medhurst as president of the committee, they would discuss previously prepared translations “verse by verse, word by word, allowing each individual opportunity to propose any alteration that he might deem desirable.”⁴² At the end of the

35 Ibid.

36 In the *Manyou suilu* 漫遊隨錄 [Selections from Jottings of Carefree Travels], Wang Tao does write that his father worked in Shanghai but remains very vague (translated by Tsui Wai): “In the midsummer of 1847, my father moved temporarily to the northern part of Shanghai to earn a living.” What he did to “earn a living” is left out. See Tsui Wai, “A Study of Wang Tao’s (1828–1897) *Manyou suilu* and *Fusang youji* with Reference to Late Qing Chinese Foreign Travels” (PhD Diss., University of Edinburgh, 2010), 473. For an analysis of how Wang Tao framed his and his father’s time with the missionaries in his autobiographical writings, see Sebastian Eicher, “Accommodating Cosmopolitan Experiences: Jiang Dunfu’s and Wang Tao’s autobiographical processing of their Treaty Port years,” *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 58, No.4 (July, 2024): 1181–1200.

37 Wang Hongzhi 王宏志, “‘Mai shen shi yi’ de Wang Tao: dang chuantong wenshi dang shangle yizhe ‘賣身事夷’的王韜：當傳統文士當上了譯者 [‘Selling Oneself to Serve the Barbarians’: Wang Tao, When a Traditional Literatus Became a Translator],” *Fudan xuebao* 復旦學報 [Fudan Journal] 2 (March, 2011): 25–40.

38 Lockhart, *Medical Missionary*, 21–22.

39 Hanan, “Bible as Chinese Literature,” 224; and Huang Xuan, “The Unbearable Lightness of Faith: Wang Tao’s Attitudes Towards Christianity” (M.A. Thesis, National Taiwan University, 2014), 17. See also You Xiuyun 游秀雲, *Wang Tao xiaoshuo sanshu yanjiu* 王韜小說三書研究 [A Study of Wang Tao’s Three Story Collections] (Taipei: Showwe information Co., Ltd, 2006), 18–19. It was also published in *The Missionary Chronicle* in 1855; See “China: Shanghai,” in *The Missionary Magazine and Chronicle* (March, 1855), 163.

40 “China: Shanghai,” *The Evangelical Magazine and Missionary chronicle* (1855), 163–64.

41 See Tsui Wai, “A Study of Wang Tao’s (1828–1897) *Manyou suilu* and *Fusang youji* with Reference to Late Qing Chinese Foreign Travels,” 473.

42 Milne, *Life in China*, 504–05.

session, the part of Scripture to be translated next was decided, and a draft translation was handed out to be used as a basis for preparation. Five delegates and their Chinese teachers were present.⁴³ As Strandenaes has shown, the delegates worked from the Greek *Textus Receptus*.⁴⁴

Muirhead and Lockhart praise Wang Tao's father in their writings and highlight his importance to the project. Medhurst emphasized, in particular, his memory and language skills: "He had an extraordinary amount of book knowledge, so as to acquire the name of the walking library."⁴⁵ Lockhart echoes this praise and describes the exact function that the older Wang had in a bit of detail:

This old man always sat at the translation table along with other native scholars who assisted in the important work. When the exact force and meaning of a Chinese character or word, as used in native works of acknowledged standing, was required, the question would be referred to him. After thinking a little, he would go to the shelves which contained the Chinese classics and the commentaries, along with many other works of poetry and history, and in a few minutes return with book after book in which he would produce a large number of passages where the word occurred and was illustrated. His services in this respect were invaluable, and made him a great help in the translation. [...] He was a living concordance of the entire range of Chinese literature. He could find any passage without hesitation, repeat page after page of most of the works, and could easily take up any citation which had been begun in his hearing, and finish it without hesitation.⁴⁶

This shows that the assistants' role far exceeded that of transcribing and that, as Strandenaes pointed out, "the Chinese literati became an integral part of the translation and revision teams, albeit without formal status."⁴⁷ Despite the integral role the older Wang had for the translation project, he was not baptized. The missionaries remark that

43 Ibid.

44 Thor Strandenaes, *Principles of Chinese Bible Translation* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1987), 51–52. Pointed out also by Milne, see Milne, *Life in China*, 504.

45 "China: Shanghae," in *The Evangelical magazine and missionary chronicle* (1855), 163–64.

46 Lockhart, *Medical Missionary*, 21–22.

47 Strandenaes, "Anonymous Bible Translators," 146.

he remained a devoted follower of Confucius for all his life, "saying, that as he had lived a disciple of that sage, so he would die one."⁴⁸ This shows that they had primarily hired him for his linguistic capabilities and were impressed and content with their choice, despite his lack of interest in Christianity.

However, the collaboration was to be short-lived. In 1849, Wang Tao's father, by then in his late sixties, passed away. The missionaries recorded that he had suddenly fallen ill.⁴⁹ They mourned his loss in their writings and pointed out that they "should find some difficulty in supplying his place."⁵⁰ Wang Changgui had stayed at the press for less than two years, but his impact had been considerable.

Wang Tao

The missionaries' fear of encountering difficulties finding a substitute for the older Wang proved to be unfounded. His father's death left Wang Tao as the oldest male in the family, and the pressure to provide for his mother and younger brother fell on him. What happened next was so logical that Wang Tao presumably did not reflect much before agreeing to the suggestion. Medhurst needed a new teacher skilled in classical composition to assist with the rest of the Bible translation. Seeing that the young Wang Tao, who had passed the civil service examinations only a few years prior, was in need of a position, his choice quickly fell on him:

His son, who was just then come of age, was spoken of as a man of singular talents, who, though not equal to his father in the amount of learning he had acquired, was superior to him in the ability to apply what he knew to the best uses. His style of writing was said to be elegant, and his judgment mature. He was engaged accordingly, and answered our expectations in every respect.⁵¹

48 "China: Shanghae," in *The Evangelical magazine and missionary chronicle* (1855), 163–64.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

Wang Tao's work for the LMS missionaries has already been treated elsewhere,⁵² for the purpose of this present article it is sufficient to summarize the results with regards to his deeds as a language teacher. In 1849, Wang Tao took up a position at the Inkstone Press and substituted for his father. When he arrived at the Press, the missionaries were in the middle of their translation of the *New Testament*. With his help, they managed to finish the rest of the relatively short book by July 1850 and quickly decided to continue right away and provide a translation of the much longer *Old Testament*.⁵³ Medhurst, Stronach and Milne formed "the committee for translating the *Old Testament* under the auspices of the London Missionary Society" and, according to Milne, "the work of translation itself was uninterrupted, and was pursued precisely on the same rules and principles which guided us in the *New Testament*."⁵⁴ In this way, the complete translation was eventually finished in spring 1853.⁵⁵ In his autobiographical writings, Wang Tao downplays his involvement up to the point of practically rendering it invisible.⁵⁶ The missionaries, however, praised Wang Tao's contribution to the fullest and openly credited him with the style of certain sections of the *Old Testament* translation:

Not only did he maintain a respectable position among the other teachers, much his seniors in point of age, but, being of industrious habits, he took upon himself most of the labour connected with the preparation of the work, which was generally adopted after some corrections by his compeers. In this way he went through the doctrinal parts of the *New Testament*, and all the *Old*. For many of the happy terms of expression to be met with in the translation of Job, and the Proverbs, as

52 Zhang Zhichun compiled a list of years with the most relevant information on developments in China and in Wang Tao's life in the form of an annalistic biography. See Zhang Zhichun 張志春, *Wang Tao nianpu* 王韜年譜 [Chronicle of Wang Tao's Life] (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1994); Zhang Hailin wrote a more traditional biography, see Zhang Hailin 張海林, *Wang Tao pingzhuan* 王韜評傳 [A Critical Biography of Wang Tao] (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 1993); Cohen, *Between Tradition and Modernity*; Henry McAleavy, *Wang T'ao. Life and Writings of a Displaced Person* (1953); Wang Liqun 王立群, *Zhongguo zaoqi kou'an zhishifenzi xingcheng de wenhua tezhen: Wang Tao yanjiu* 中國早期口岸知識分子形成的文化特徵：王韜研究 [The Cultural Characteristics of the Formation of Early Treaty Port Intellectuals: A Study of Wang Tao] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2009).

53 Wylie, *Memorials*, 123.

54 Milne, *Life in China*, 506.

55 Ibid.

56 Eicher, "Accommodating Cosmopolitan Experiences," 1194–95.

well as the chaste and easy style which prevails throughout, we are indebted to him.⁵⁷

Unlike his father, Wang Tao requested baptism, which introduced a (short-lived) Christian phase in his life.⁵⁸ Ultimately, this is the reason why the two Wang's are visible to us. In the March 1855 issue of *The Missionary Magazine and Chronicle*, the "China" section is practically devoted to Wang Tao and his conversion. The issue first tells us about his baptism, reiterates his career at the Press, and concludes with excerpts from the translation of his application for baptism.⁵⁹ The notice about the baptism reads: "On the 26th of August there were admitted to the church by the ordinance of baptism, in the chapel outside the city, on the Mission ground, Mr. Medhurst's Chinese teacher named Wang-lan-King, and three of Mr. Muirhead's scholars,⁶⁰ named Ching-keun-pang, Kin-heen-fuh, and Chang-she-ming."⁶¹ The missionaries point out that despite all his great achievements and his importance for the translation of the *Bible*, Wang Tao did not take much interest in Christianity until 1853, but then an illness changed his mind:

During the progress of the work, however, he, as well as the other teachers, seemed not to feel themselves personally interested in what they were so well preparing for others. After it was concluded, and the translation dispersed, Wan-lan-King⁶²

57 "China: Shanghai," in *The Evangelical magazine and missionary chronicle* (1855), 163–64.

58 The phase ended after a brief time. For more information, see Cohen, *Between Tradition and Modernity*, 19–23; and Sebastian Eicher, "Beyond Shanghai: The Inland Activities of the London Missionary Society from 1843 to 1860 according to Wang Tao's Diaries," *Monumenta Serica* 70, 423–55, 433, 440–41. A good overview is also provided in Duan Huaqing 段懷清, "Shilun Wang Tao de Jidujiao xinyang 試論王韜的基督教信仰 [A Preliminary Study of Wang Tao's Christian Faith]," *Qing shi yanjiu* 清史研究 [The Qing History Journal] 2 (May, 2011): 22–30. Duan argued that Medhurst's death played an important role in Wang Tao leaving Christianity behind, see *ibid.*, 26.

59 "China: Shanghai," in *The Evangelical magazine and missionary chronicle* (1855), 162–68. Hanan worked with the original report about these events that Medhurst sent to the LMS in October 1854 and that is preserved in the LMS archives at SOAS, see Hanan, "Bible as Chinese Literature," 224n9.

60 The "three of Mr. Muirhead's scholars" are students of Muirhead's boarding school, as is explained in a later edition of *The Evangelical Magazine*: "The following is a translation of a letter written by one of these boys, of whose baptism you are apprised in the last Semi-Annual Report. He is a most promising youth, and is now training for the sacred office of a preacher among his countrymen." See "China," in *The Evangelical magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (August 1855): 495.

61 "China: Shanghai," in *The Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (1855), 163–64.

62 This is Wang Tao's style *Lanqing*.

became seriously ill, and apprehended that he would soon die. His conscience was aroused, and the truths about which he had been busied came fresh into his mind, and he resolved to embrace Christianity. His desire was to be baptized immediately, but we, fearing that his anxieties might terminate as soon as the danger which immediately called them forth subsided delayed compliance with his wishes for nearly a year; during which time, seeing him continue to maintain the same steadfast resolve and observing no inconsistency in his conduct, we resolved on admitting him to the privileges of Church-membership.⁶³

Wang Tao therefore had been an integral part for most of the *Delegates' Version* despite not believing in Christianity. The passage cited above is also revealing with regards to the conservative conversion policies of the missionaries.

Wang Tao's Christian phase was brief, but he remained an integral part of the Shanghai station. He regularly accompanied the missionaries on their preaching tours to the inland and took over various tasks like tract distributing for them.⁶⁴ He also continued to work on important religious translations for the missionaries, and among other things was responsible for the religious materials supplied to the Taiping. We know, for example, that Wang Tao accompanied the missionaries on an early trip into "rebel territory" to Suzhou in 1858 and helped them write letters to Hong Rengan 洪仁玕 (1822–1864).⁶⁵ Joseph Edkins 艾約瑟 (1823–1905) writes:

This letter prepared by Wang lan king, who accompanied us, and who was Dr. Medhurst's assistant in translating the Scriptures, was received by an insurgent chief at Bingbong, who attuned us that he would send two or three of the "brethren" on horseback to take it direct to Nanking.⁶⁶

Later, from July 1 to July 6, 1860, Joseph Edkins, Griffith John 楊格非 (1831–1912),

63 "China: Shanghae," in *The Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (1855), 163–64.

64 Eicher, "Beyond Shanghai," 440–45.

65 See "Mission of Hung Jin to Tae-Ping-Wang, Chief of the Chinese Insurgents at Nanking," *The Missionary Magazine and Chronicle* (October 1860): 277–78.

66 Joseph Edkins, "Letter to Tidman, 16 July 1858," London Missionary Society (LMS) Archives, Central China Incoming Correspondence, box 2, folder 2, jacket D, 2.

Wang Tao and another, unnamed Chinese assistant went to Suzhou to meet with high-ranking Taiping functionaries, distribute Bibles, and religious tracts,⁶⁷ and Wang Tao again assisted them with the communication:

For the 'faithful king,' Chung wang, the chief in command at Suchow, Mr. John and I prepared together, with Wung lau king's (sic!) assistance, a theological statement on several important subjects, asking the Chung wang, after perusal, to submit it to the inspection of the 'celestial king' at Nanking. [...] All this was directed against the peculiar errors of the Insurgents.⁶⁸

Wang Tao therefore remained one of the translators of choice when it came to religious writings. Furthermore, he was also important in the production of secular translations, as we will see below. All this shows that Wang Tao's degree of involvement was exceptional. He would remain with the Shanghai station until 1862, when he famously had to flee to Hong Kong with the help of the missionaries because of accusations of being involved with the Taiping and joined James Legge.⁶⁹ He spent a total of around thirteen years with the Shanghai missionaries, and his level of involvement in the station's affairs far exceeds all the other language teachers considered in this article.

Woo Tan-zhin

Another Chinese assistant present at the translation sessions who has so far received little attention was William C. Milne's language teacher Woo-tan-zhin. Here, we have to rely almost exclusively on Western sources, but we can still gather a comprehensive picture. Bridgman explicitly mentions the presence of the teacher that had previously accompanied Milne to England during the translation sessions:

In regard to native assistants, it may be mentioned that, in addition to each member having its own, there are three others in attendance at the sessions of the

67 Zhang, *Wang Tao nianpu*, 51.

68 "Christian Instruction Supplied by the Missionaries to the Insurgents," *The Missionary Magazine and Chronicle* (October 1860): 275.

69 See Cohen, *Between Tradition and Modernity*, 44–55.

Committee: one, the teacher who accompanied Mr. Milne to England, another, a literary graduate who was baptized in Shanghai two years ago; and a third, a native of this province [...].⁷⁰

In his writings, Milne mentions this teacher a handful of times from 1842 (his arrival in Ningbo)⁷¹ onwards and once also mentions him by name: “I was fortunate to have the aid of Woo, a native tutor of the language, in whose judgment I had good reason to confide [...].”⁷² Milne further provides scarce information on his origins, writing that he was “a native of Hangchow, the capital of the province of Chihkiang,”⁷³ and informs us that they met when Wu was already somewhat older, as he calls him “My aged friend Woo-siensang.”⁷⁴

Wu was to Milne what Wang Tao was to Medhurst: a longstanding teacher, travel companion, and friend. Milne praises him in the highest tones:

I was fortunate to have the counsel and aid of a teacher, on whose judgment I could rely, whose talents I had learned to appreciate, and for whose uniform kindness and obliging deportment I consider myself laid under a heavy debt of gratitude.⁷⁵

He brought Wu along when he returned to England from 1844 to 1846,⁷⁶ where they worked on a revised version of Morrison’s 馬禮遜 (1782–1834) Bible translation.⁷⁷ Several years later, Milne published a prose translation of Wu’s travel account in the Edinburgh-based *Chambers’s Journal of Popular Literature, Science, and Art*, under the title “England and the English: By a Chinese,” and it is here that we find the crucial lacking details about Wu’s education and how he found employment with the missionaries. The

70 Hills, *A complete Concordance to the Old and New Testament*, 36. Quoted by Zetsche, *Bible in China*, 91. I was unfortunately unable to access the original.

71 William C. Milne, *China and the Chinese* (London: Routledge, Warnes & Routledge, 1856), 62–65.

72 Milne, *Life in China*, 74.

73 Ibid., 233.

74 Ibid., 77.

75 William C. Milne, “Seven Months’ Residence in Ningpo,” in Elijah Coleman Bridgman ed., *The Chinese Repository*, Vol. 13 (Hongkong: Victoria, 1844), 14.

76 Wylie, *Memorials*, 123.

77 Ibid., 124.

introduction to the piece describes Wu as “a Chinese, of the literary class”⁷⁸ and therefore a literary graduate. The journal goes on to explain that Wu had fled Qing-China to work as a spy for the British:

In 1842, he made his appearance in Chusan, having come from the mainland—being dissatisfied with the state of things in his own country—to offer his services to the British as a spy. He failed in this application, but was received into the house of the gentleman to whom we are indebted for the Notes, as a teacher of Chinese;⁷⁹

We do not know what difficulties made Wu leave China, but while in Chusan he met Milne and the two would work together for the next eleven years. It is the trip to England that allows us to identify Wu in the Chinese sources. In his *Wengyou yutan*, Wang pointed out Wu’s pioneering role as a traveler to the West in a piece entitled *Xingshi wang Ying* 星使往英 (Embassies to England), where he states that whereas the visitors that came to China from the West were “all nobles and officials of their states, rich merchants, members of important families, or great worthies” 皆其國之貴爵顯秩、富商巨室、賢豪英俊也, the visitors from China that went to the West were “all of the kinds of sailors and oarsmen, rustic and vulgar fellows” 類皆舵工傭豎、俗子鄙流, and “no scholars undertook these travels” 無文墨之士一往游歷.⁸⁰ In the remainder of the essay, Wang Tao then names the only two exceptions to this rule, and one of them is a certain “Wu Qiaoshan from Zhejiang, who had accompanied Milne [to England]” 浙人吳樵珊從美魏茶往.⁸¹ Wang Tao also tells us that the original poem that Milne translated into prose for the *Chambers’s Journal* had the title “Bamboo Branch Poem on London” 倫敦竹枝詞.⁸² According to Yin Dexiang 尹德翔, who dedicated a chapter of his book to this poem, this was “the oldest piece of writing by a Chinese who travelled to England”

78 “England and the English: By a Chinese,” *Chambers’s Journal* 23 (1855): 153–55. Preserved by HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uva.x030231253> (accessed January 20, 2026).

79 Ibid.

80 Wang Tao, *Wengyou yutan* 甕牖餘談 [Gossip from a Poor Man’s Window], 77–78.

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid.

中國人遊歷英國的第一部著作。⁸³ Yin also succeeded in identifying Wu Qiaoshan's appearances in Wang Tao's diaries, where we encounter him several times in 1852 as Wang Tao's acquaintance and landlord under his style name Wu Danren 吳澹人。⁸⁴ Wu is conspicuously absent from the majority of Wang Tao's other writings, and Yin therefore made the convincing suggestion that the two men were not on good terms.⁸⁵

After their return from England, the *Chambers's Journal* informs us, Milne and Wu went "to Shanghai, where our author assisted his patron in the revision of the Chinese translation of the Scriptures."⁸⁶ We have no further information about Wu's participation in the translation sessions, but judging by the high praise Milne uttered for him, it stands to reason that he was of great help in these as well. In the early 1850s, Milne, after a long stay in China, eventually developed health problems and in early 1854 he left China.⁸⁷ The last piece of information we can gather from the *Chambers's Journal* (published in 1855) is that Wu was "now an assistant in the office of Her Majesty's China secretary, Mr. Medhurst, at Hong Kong."⁸⁸ Using the missionary connections, he therefore found work with Walter Henry Medhurst junior (1822–1885).⁸⁹ From there on, we lose track of Wu.

If we summarize the above, we can gather that Wu was a literary graduate who sought out the British. He does not seem to have been baptized but his piece about England speaks positively about Christianity. Wu remained with Milne for more than a decade from 1842 to 1854 and kept the ties with the British circles afterwards.

Ang Po ch'ò

We also have some very limited information about Stronach's language teacher present during the translation sessions, a certain Ang Po ch'ò, who is described as "a very able Chinese scholar, and was pro-eminently useful at Shanghae in assisting at the

83 Yin Dexiang 尹德翔, *Wang Qing Haiwai Zhuzhi ci kaolun* 晚清海外竹枝詞考論 [A Study of Late Qing Overseas Bamboo Branch Poems] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2016), 46. Yin describes his fruitless efforts to find the original version, and offers a retranslation into Chinese, 46–47.

84 Ibid., 62–63.

85 Ibid., 67.

86 *Chambers's Journal* (1855), 154–55.

87 Wylie, *Memorials*, 123.

88 *Chamber's Journal* (1855), 154–55.

89 Yin has identified the farewell also in Wang Tao's diaries. See Yin, *Wang Qing Haiwai Zhuzhi ci kaolun*, 63.

preparation of the new version of the Sacred Scriptures in Chinese."⁹⁰ The missionaries referred to him as a Chinese scholar, suggesting that he was also a literary graduate. In his case, unfortunately, there seem to be no Chinese language sources to provide us with additional insights.

Like Wang Tao, Ang eventually requested baptism. The missionaries reported roughly ten years later in 1857: "Pride of intellect kept him for many years from receiving into his heart the humbling doctrines of the Gospel. The struggle in his breast has been long and arduous; but we rejoice that the Lord has at length subdued his heart to the obedience of the faith."⁹¹ This passage reinforces the point made repeatedly above: the fact that Ang initially did not accept the Christian faith did not keep the missionaries from relying on him in their translation efforts; for their project, they valued linguistic capability over faith. Milne in his account of the *Delegates' Version* pointed out that "The several members of the delegation had their native tutors with them, three of whom continued with us for six years in our daily sittings, rendering most valuable assistance." To this, he added the note "Two of them have since been converted to the truth."⁹² This should refer to Wang Tao, and Ang, meaning for one that the others did not get baptized, and for another that they were not permanently present for the sessions.

Qian Wenyi

The two Wangs, Wu and Ang, can be connected with certainty to the translation sessions of the *Delegates' Version*. We also have information about one more man working for the Inkstone Press, who might have been involved, but we lack clear evidence: Qian Wenyi 錢文漪, Lianxi 蓮溪, a native of Louxian 婁縣.⁹³

Unlike Wang Tao, Qian did not live in Shanghai, but in Songjiang, about 40 km from Shanghai. He continued to take over tasks for the missionaries, and they habitually stopped at his house when passing through Songjiang. Based on this, I had previously

90 "The Report of the Directors to the Sixty-Third General Meeting of the Missionary Society, Usually Called the London Missionary Society," 1857, 14, available at SOAS Digital Collections, <https://digital.soas.ac.uk/Documents/Detail/report-of-the-directors-to-the-sixty-third-general-meeting-of-the-missionary-society-usually-called-the-london-missionary-society/288586> (accessed June 24, 2024).

91 Ibid.

92 Milne, *Life in China*, 505.

93 Wang, *Wang Tao riji*, 23.

argued that he might be a native agent of the LMS who manned an outstation in Songjiang. The missionaries had early on judged the town as having potential for the establishment of a missionary outstation.⁹⁴ Agents stationed in outstations were, according to the missionaries, “set apart to the service of the Gospel, and maintained by church funds.” They “are not ordained, and do not administer the sacraments, but many of them are practically ‘put in trust with the Gospel’ as preachers and teachers.”⁹⁵ Qian was, however, not a native agent. In a letter the missionaries sent to LMS Secretary Tidman in 1855, Muirhead wrote the following about a recent trip to Songjiang:

I went to the house of a literary graduate, who had been employed here for several years by missionaries as a teacher of the language, and resided at Loo-choo for some time with Dr. Bettelheim.⁹⁶

Qian was therefore, like Wang Tao, a language teacher but lived outside the Press. The most fascinating bit of information is that the missionaries sent him to the Ryukyu Islands. Muirhead mentions this offhandedly, without going into much detail, and I have reconstructed the event with the aid of Wang Tao’s diaries and a few articles published in the North-China Herald elsewhere.⁹⁷ What is important for this article is that while in Ryukyu, Qian helped Bernard Jean Bettelheim (1811–1870) with his Bible translation:⁹⁸

On July 23rd as I was writing out the Gospel of John in the Loochooan character for my new patron, resting on the table pencil in hand, the house suddenly became

94 Eicher, “Beyond Shanghai,” 433.

95 “On Native Agency,” *The Chinese Recorder*, Vol. 1, No. 6 (1867).

96 William Muirhead, “Letter to Tidman, 5 April 1855,” SOAS Archives, box 2, folder 1, jacket A, 3–4.

97 Wang Tao narrates how Qian went to the Ryukyu Islands for unspecified, work-related reasons in a short string of entries in 1853. In 1854, the LMS missionaries published an article series in *The North-China Herald* that covered the experiences of an unnamed “native of China” who went to the Ryukyu Islands. See “Description of Loochoo by a Native of China,” *The North-China Herald*, February 25, 1854; March 4, 1854; March 11, 1854; April 15, 1854. A Chinese version was published in the *Chinese Serial* under the title “*Liuqiu zaji shulüe*” 琉球雜記述略 [Brief Records of Ryukyu]. For an analysis, see Eicher, “Beyond Shanghai,” 438–39.

98 On Bernard J. Bettelheim’s translation of the Bible into Japanese, see Teruya Yoshihiko, “Bernard J. Bettelheim and Okinawa: A Study of the First Protestant Missionary to the Island Kingdom, 1846–1854” (PhD Diss., University of Colorado at Boulder, 1969), 341; as well as Junko Nakai Hirai Murayama, “The Japanese Bible: A Historical and Analytical Study of Its Development with Particular Focus on the Period 1837–1888” (PhD Diss., The University of Manchester, 2007), 135–47.

dark and the wind entering blew the books in all directions.⁹⁹

At the very beginning of the report, Qian explains that he was sent to Bettelheim with a letter from the Shanghai missionaries: “Dr. B. nodded and asked if I brought any letter. Having looked over the letter I presented, he invited me to enter. In answer to his inquiries I told him my profession was that of a writer.”¹⁰⁰ Qian also mentions preparing religious instructions for a statesman: “The next day Dr. Bettelheim asked me to prepare a document to send to the chief minister of state, containing religious instructions. When it was sealed he entrusted it to me to take to the local magistrate that it might be forwarded.”¹⁰¹ I would argue that the fact that the missionaries chose Qian to go and assist Bettelheim with religious translations suggests that he was one of the unnamed assistants present for some of the *Delegates’ Version* translation sessions, as he must have possessed some knowledge in the translation of religious writings in order to be of help to Bettelheim. Furthermore, the missionaries state that he had been employed as a language teacher for years, and given that the other language teachers we know about were involved in the translation, it is rather reasonable that he was present. He might very well be the “native of this province” whom Bridgman listed as present during the translation sessions. However, to the best of my knowledge, no source states Qian’s involvement explicitly, and therefore, it remains speculative.

Sources on Qian’s work for the LMS are sparse. In 1858, Alexander Wylie¹⁰² and Qian Lianxi joined the Earl of Elgin on his journey up the Yangzi to act as an “interpreter” (*tong shi* 通事).¹⁰³ After the treaty of Tianjin, the British were allowed to establish trade posts between Shanghai and Hankou. Hankou itself was one of the new treaty ports, and therefore Elgin embarked on what was planned as a three-week-long expedition up the Yangzi.¹⁰⁴ The goal of this mission was two-fold: one was to identify the potential for

99 “Description of Loochoo by a native of China,” *The North-China Herald* (1850–1867), February 25, 1854, 119.

100 Ibid.

101 Ibid., 128.

102 Description of Loochoo by a native of China,” *The North - China Herald* (1850–1867), March 11, 1854, 128. Ian Gow recently published a monograph dedicated to Alexander Wylie; see Ian Gow, *Two-way Knowledge Transfer in Nineteenth Century China: The Scottish-Missionary Sinologist Alexander Wylie (1815–1887)* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2023). Gow emphasizes the driving role Li Shanlan played in their collaboration. See *ibid.*, 94–120.

103 Wang, *Wang Tao riji*, 201.

104 Stephen Platt, *Autumn in the Heavenly Kingdom: China, The West and the Epic Story of the Taiping Civil War* (London: Atlantic Books, 2014), 38.

trade in the Chinese inland. The other was, as Gow pointed out, to “meet, understand, and possibly negotiate with the Taiping leadership on future trade prospects.”¹⁰⁵ Wylie does not mention Qian’s presence, but Wang Tao covers the journey in his diaries, based on what his friend and colleague told him.¹⁰⁶

Despite the missionaries’ trust in him, Qian himself was not a convert. In the above mentioned letter from 1855, Muirhead reports that Qian did not want to be baptized, “saying, that for himself he was not fit to become a disciple of Jesus, (alluding to certain faults in his character, which have often brought him into trouble).”¹⁰⁷ Qian did, however, send one of his sons to Shanghai to work for the missionaries as a typesetter: “One of them, an adopted son named Lan-You-chow accompanied me home, soon afterwards obtained a situation in the mission printing office as compositor.”¹⁰⁸ This was, in fact, the main reason for Muirhead to write the letter, as Qian Lianxi’s son was one of the press’s success stories. Upon arrival, Lan requested instruction in the Protestant faith from Muirhead, desiring “as he had done from the first, to become a believer in Jesus,”¹⁰⁹ and he also sometimes “at his own request, [...] went out with me on Sunday to distribute books.”¹¹⁰ Shortly thereafter, Lan-You-chow was also baptized and became the chapel keeper at the missionary station, where he earned the missionaries’ praise for “exerting himself ever since, in impacting instruction to all, who are willing to receive it from him.”¹¹¹ He does not seem to have been a *xiuca*, as the missionaries usually did not fail to point this out. Qian Lianxi’s adopted son is, unfortunately, not traceable in the Chinese sources. Therefore, we know little about his background.

The above study of the assistants involved in the translation of the *Delegates’ Version* is incomplete, as our sources are limited. Nevertheless, it shows that the missionaries sought literary graduates for the work on the Bible translation and, for this purpose, valued knowledge higher than faith. They were aided in their search by the overabundance of literati who could not find posts in the Qing administration. The language teachers acted as living concordances, searching for words that were to be used, and those experienced

105 Gow, *Two-way knowledge transfer*, 164.

106 Wang, *Wang Tao riji*, 201–29. For the analysis, see Eicher, “Beyond Shanghai,” 438–39.

107 Muirhead, “Letter to Tidman, April 5, 1855,” 3–4.

108 Ibid..

109 Ibid.

110 Ibid.

111 Ibid.

in Bible translation matters continued to do religious translations for them after the *Delegates’ Version* was finished. The missionaries’ strategy was a success, as the result of the intercultural group translation was an elegant rendering of the Bible into classical literary Chinese. The tendency for economic expression and elegance was analyzed in detail by Strandenaes, who argued that: “When reading DEL (= *Delegates’ Version*) it is evident that the translators aimed at a controlled sentence length and a good rhythm by adhering to standards of Literary Chinese.”¹¹²

3. The Assistants Hired for Secular Translations

Towards the end of the *Delegates’* project, we can observe an innovation: an increasing number of translations of secular writings.¹¹³ The Shanghai station had taken on three new members in the late 1840s: Alexander Wylie, William Muirhead and Joseph Edkins. After completing their language training and partaking in missionary activities for some time, all three began translating secular materials, developing a new area of work at the Shanghai Press. One of the first things Alexander Wylie did, for example, was to write an article on Chinese sciences titled “Jottings on the Science of the Chinese” for the *North China Herald*, published in 1852.¹¹⁴ In 1853, he published the *Shuxue qimeng* 數學啟蒙 (Compendium of Arithmetic) in Chinese.¹¹⁵ Around the same time, Muirhead began to diversify his translations. He decided to write two works that would illuminate his Chinese readership with regard to global geography and British history (these were

112 Strandenaes, *Principles of Chinese Bible Translation*, 54.

113 Xiong Yuezhi summarized that “The publication of the 33 non-religious titles began after the translation of The Bible in 1852” and that the works “covered a wide range of subjects, including astronomy, geography, botany, mathematics, physics, and medical studies.” See Xiong, *The Eastward Dissemination of Western Learning in the Late Qing Dynasty*, 134. Xiong counts a total of 210 Chinese language books. Wang Liquan has slightly different numbers and speaks about a total of “more than 170 works,” 大約170多種書刊, but equally counts 33 scientific works among these. See Wang, “Jindai Shanghai kou’an zhishi fenzi de xingqi,” 97–98. Yang Ziqiang stated that via these efforts Shanghai became the “center of the spread of Western Learning,” 全國西學傳播的中心. See Yang Ziqiang 楊自強, *Xueguan zhongxi: Li Shanlan zhuan* 學貫中西：李善蘭傳 [Bridging Chinese and Western Learning: A Biography of Li Shanlan] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 2006), 63.

114 Wylie, “Jottings on the Science of the Chinese,” *North China Herald*, No. 108 (August 21, 1852); Nos. 111–13, 116–17, 119–21 (November 20, 1862). See Henri Cordier, “The Life and Labours of Alexander Wylie, Agent of the British and Foreign Bible Society in China: A Memoir,” *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, New Series, Vol. 19, No. 3 (July 1887), 351–57.

115 Wylie, *Memorials*, 173–75. Further, see Cordier, “Life and Labours,” 368.

largely translations of English works by Milner),¹¹⁶ and also made an effort to translate more diverse religious writings, for example abbreviated translations of religious fiction like John Bunyan's (1628–1688) *The Pilgrim's Progress* (published in 1852 as *Xingke jingli zhuan* 行客經歷傳) or John Angell James' (1785–1859) *The Anxious Enquirer* (published in 1856 as *Jiuling xianlu* 救靈先路). He also translated works from the field of natural philosophy, such as *Gewu qiongli wenda* 格物窮理問答 (Catechism of Nature).¹¹⁷ Joseph Edkins' very first translation into Chinese, published in 1852, was similarly of a calculation made on a solar eclipse.¹¹⁸ He then began working on the translation of "An Elementary Treatise on Mechanics" (*Zhongxue* 重學), which would take him until 1854.¹¹⁹

This diversification—one should not assume that the secular writings ever overshadowed or even replaced the religious ones—was partially an expression of the interests of the missionaries. Edkins was a trained classicist, Wylie favored the natural sciences, and Muirhead was deeply fascinated with natural theology. Another reason was that the missionaries found it difficult to win the interests of Chinese literati with solely religious translations. Edkins would later remark: "The Chinese are a practical race, preferring the secular to the spiritual."¹²⁰ The new arrivals recognized this and accordingly adjusted their approach, not restricting themselves to theological matters. These developments are well-studied, but much like with the *Delegates' Version*, little is known with regards to the assistants involved in the secular translations. As the following section will show, these exerted a strong influence not only on the translations themselves but also on which works were translated.

Li Shanlan

In 1852, Li Shanlan, a native of Haining 海寧 in Zhejiang and together with Wang Tao the most famous assistant of the LMS, joined the press. He is a well-researched figure, but for the purposes of this article his years at the Shanghai station need to be briefly reiterated. Born in 1810, Li was 40 years old when he went to Shanghai, and he was a

116 Ibid., 144.

117 Ibid., 168–70.

118 Ibid., 187.

119 Gow, *Two-way Knowledge Transfer*, 124.

120 Edkins, *In Memory of Rev. William Muirhead*, 11.

well-experienced scholar. Already in young years, he had turned to mathematical writings. His biography recounts that "at the age of 10 *sui* he had understood the Nine Chapters" 十歲即通九章, which refers to the Han text *The Nine Chapters on Mathematical Procedures* 九章算書, before making his way to Li Zhi's 李治 (1192–1279) *Ceyuan haijing* 測圓海鏡 (Sea Mirror of Circle Measurements) and Dai Zhen's 戴震 (1724–1777) *Jugu gehuan ji* 句股割圓記 (Record of Mathematics and Geometry). He soon became an expert in mathematics, authoring mathematical treatises, like in 1846 the *Duishu tanyuan* 對數探原 (Origins of Algebra),¹²¹ and established extensive ties with other mathematicians of his time.¹²² However, he was curious about how mathematics was done outside of China; therefore, in 1852, he decided to go to Shanghai to seek out the foreigners residing there to learn more about their way of doing mathematics. The *Qingshi gao* 清史稿 (Draft History of the Qing) makes it seem like a chance-meeting of scholars:

At the beginning of the Xianfeng reign, he lodged in Shanghai where he got to know the three Englishmen Alexander Wylie, Joseph Edkins and William Muirhead. Alexander Wylie was an expert in Astronomy and understood the Chinese language. 咸豐初，客上海，識英吉利偉烈亞力、艾約瑟、韋廉臣三人，偉烈亞力精天算，通華言。¹²³

Muirhead also recounts Li Shanlan's arrival in his writings, describing how Li purposefully sought them out, approaching the missionaries after a service:

At the close of Dr. Medhurst's service in the chapel one Sunday afternoon, a Chinaman went to the pulpit and handed a small book to him, asking if he knew what it was about. It seemed to contain a number of figures or diagrams, and Dr. Medhurst requested him to call at his place next day. On examination, it was found to be a treatise on the higher mathematical calculus. The owner of it said it was the product of four years' arduous study. He was engaged by Mr. Wylie as a teacher, and prosecuted a course of mathematics with him for many years. He

121 Yang, *Xueguan zongxi*, 66.

122 *Qingshi gao* 清史稿 [Draft History of the Qing] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), *juan* 507, 14011–2.

123 Ibid.

had a perfect genius for it, and experienced no difficulty in any department.¹²⁴

Li himself, in his preface to his translation of the *Elements*, gives a similar version to the one of the missionaries, but he pays attention to carefully justifying his going to Shanghai:

In the Renyin year of the Daoguang era the state allowed its soldiers to rest and stabilized a treaty with the Western states. After this, Western scholars wanted to study Chinese classics and histories, and Chinese scholars wanted to study Western Astronomy and Mathematics. When I heard about this I was overjoyed. 道光壬寅，國家許息兵，與泰西各國定約。此後西士願習中國經史，中士願習西國天文算法者。聽聞之心竊喜。¹²⁵

Li Shanlan specifically names Euclid's *Elements*, which had only partially been translated by Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) and Xu Guangqi 徐光啟 (1562–1633), as a motivation to go to Shanghai: “In the Renzi year I came to Shanghai and agreed with Mister Alexander Wylie to read the missing parts [of Euclid's *Elements*] that Misters Ricci and Xu had not finished.” 歲壬子來上海，與西士偉烈君亞力約續徐利二公未完之業。¹²⁶ Unlike his colleagues, Li therefore primarily went to Shanghai for the exchange of knowledge. Economic distress, might have, however, played an additional role. Yang Ziqiang 楊自強 has argued that Li prior to going to Shanghai, “despite having reached the peak in mathematics, was living in poverty” 生活雖是落魄，在數學研究上卻到達了一個高峰。¹²⁷ Interestingly, Li Shanlan's interests clearly influenced his collaboration with Wylie. Ian Gow recently argued that “the Euclid translation project was much more driven by the Chinese side.”¹²⁸

Wylie recognized Li's unique training and interests and the two men engaged in

124 Muirhead, *China and the Gospel*, 193–94.

125 Li Shanlan 李善蘭, “Xuyi yuanxu” 續譯原序, *Jihe yuanben* 幾何原本 [Elements of Geometry], in *Xuxiu Siku Quanshu* 續修四庫全書 [Continuation of the Complete Library of the Four Treasuries] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002), *juan* 1300, 148–52.

126 Li, “Xuyi yuanxu,” 148.

127 Yang Ziqiang, *Xueguan zhongxi*, 62.

128 Gow, *Two-way Knowledge Transfer*, 109. Gow offers in-depth introductions into the mathematical works translated by Li and Wylie in the 1850s in chapter five of his book, “Wylie's Translations as Knowledge Transfer to China”.

an intense collaboration to spread knowledge about mathematics. We know from the missionaries that Li Shanlan was never baptized. He seems to have played with the idea, at least W.A.P. Martin (1827–1926) wrote:

[w]hile he was with Mr. Wylie, he came very near professing Christianity. Deterred by fear of prejudice to his official preferment, he retained in considerable measure the impressions he then received. [...] His faith, if he had any, was a compound of West and East.¹²⁹

To the best of my knowledge, he did not work much on religious translations while at the Press.

Li Shanlan left the LMS station after about seven years during the Arrow War (1856–1860). His intimate knowledge of the West made him attractive to important political figures.¹³⁰ In his *A Cycle of Cathay*, Martin attributes this employment to Li Shanlan's mathematical skills: “The works above named having brought Mr. Li to the notice of high officials.”¹³¹ Consequently, Li Shanlan was in 1859 first appointed to Xu Youren's 徐有任¹³² and later in 1862 to Zeng Guofan's 曾國藩 (1811–1872) staff,¹³³ where he became a member of the latter's “brain trusts”, as Stanley Spector has termed it.¹³⁴ The LMS was therefore in many ways of help in Li's career.

Jiang Dunfu

Less than a year after Li Shanlan, in 1853, the Shanghai station was further joined by Jiang Dunfu, a native of Baoshan 寶山. I have treated his life and reform proposals elsewhere, and this article will just look at his ties to the Shanghai station and his role as

129 W.A.P. Martin, *A cycle of Cathay, or, China, South and North, with Personal Reminiscences* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1896), 370.

130 See for example Leigh K. Jenco, *Changing Referents: Learning Across Space and Time in China and the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 10.

131 Martin, *Cycle of Cathay*, 369.

132 Cohen, *Between Tradition and Modernity*, 52.

133 You, *Wang Tao xiaoshuo sanshu yanjiu*, 24. Wang, *Wang Tao yanjiu*, jie 4, Appendix 2.

134 Zhang, *Wang Tao nianpu*, 59–60; and Stanley Spector, *Li Hung-chang and the Huai Army* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964), 19–20.

a language teacher.¹³⁵ Of all the assistants treated, Jiang's connection to the press was the loosest, visible in the fact that the missionary sources remain almost entirely silent about him. He was hired specifically to assist William Muirhead with two works, a British history, the *Dayingguo zhi* 大英國志 (Gazetteer of England), and a work on geography, *Dili quanzhi* 地理全志 (A Universal Geography in Two Volumes). According to Wang Tao, he himself was supposed to aid Muirhead but was unable due to time constraints and therefore suggested to take on Jiang Dunfu because of his "historical skills" (*shi cai* 史才): "I seized the opportunity to recommend Mister [Jiang] as a man of historical skills who was suitable for the task." 因薦君有史才，可當其任。¹³⁶

During this time, Wang Tao, too, was already engaged in the translation of Western Learning and Sciences, a field of work that he would massively expand over the coming years. Edkins had founded the *Zhong-Xi tongshu* 中西通書 (Chinese-European Almanac), in which he fused religious and secular content for a Chinese readership, and in 1853, Wang Tao joined him in this effort.¹³⁷ The secular content of the Almanac's first issue, according to Wylie, had a focus on comparative chronology, dealing with "equation of time for various places throughout the world, eclipses, calendar containing phases of the moon, comparative table of Chinese and English days, and the various celestial phenomena" and "a Chinese and European comparative chronology."¹³⁸ The second number in 1853 contained "a series of scientific articles illustrated by figures, on the conic sections, the solar system, motion of light, precession of the equinoxes, optics, nebulae and the planets, concluding with a chronology of scientific discovery,"¹³⁹ and the third issue contained "short treatises on Gravitation and Optics."¹⁴⁰

Jiang Dunfu's motivation to aid Muirhead was mainly economic hardship. Towards the end of 1852 and briefly before recommending him to the missionaries, Wang Tao

135 For his life and political thought, see Sebastian Eicher, "The Muddiness of the World: Jiang Dunfu's 蔣敦復 (1808–1867) Entanglement with the West," *T'oung Pao* (forthcoming). For an analysis of how Wang Tao framed his time with the missionaries in his autobiographical writings, see Eicher, "Accommodating Cosmopolitan Experiences," 1190–93.

136 Wang Tao, "Preface," in Jiang Dunfu, *Xiaogutang wenji* 嘯古堂文集 [Collected Works of the Xiaogutang Studio] (Cambridge, MA: Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University, 1865), *juan* 1, 2. For a discussion of the passage, see also Eicher, "Accommodating Cosmopolitan Experiences," 1184–85.

137 Wang, "Jindai Shanghai kou'an zhishi fenzi de xingqi," 98–100.

138 Wylie, *Memorials*, 188–89.

139 Ibid.

140 Ibid.

records meeting Jiang in a tea house, where the latter told him that "recently his situation had gotten very difficult" 訴以近况甚艱。¹⁴¹ Jiang had passed the imperial examinations but had been unable to obtain a position for almost a decade at this point. His efforts to make himself a name with political advice to the authorities remained fruitless and the need to supply for his family put economic strain on him. Edkins later pointed out that Jiang also had an Opium problem and considered this his true reason for joining the Inkstone Press: "he worked with us, not because he loved Christianity, but to be able to continue the enjoyment of the opium pipe."¹⁴²

Jiang picked up working with Muirhead in early 1853, and the geography and history were published swiftly in 1853 and 1856, respectively.¹⁴³ The collaboration is not mentioned anywhere by Muirhead and we only know about it via Wang Tao. The missionary sources also do not contain information about other jobs Jiang Dunfu performed at the press, apart from one instance in which he helped the French sinologist Stanislaus Julien (1797–1873) with translations of some Buddhist terminology via the mediation of the British missionaries.¹⁴⁴ He did, however, remain connected to the press and was respected by the missionaries, as is indicated by the fact that he published a biography of Gaius Julius Caesar (100 BC–44 BC) in the missionary journal *Liuhe congtao* 六合叢談 (Shanghai Serial) in 1857.¹⁴⁵ In 1860, Jiang left Shanghai for Hangzhou.¹⁴⁶ His career remained unsuccessful, and after being hired to work for the Circuit Inspector of Shanghai in the mid-1860s, Jiang passed away in 1867.

Jiang was never attracted to Christianity and Edkins wrote about him that he "had a partiality for Buddhist reading [...] that would prejudice him somewhat against Christianity."¹⁴⁷ As they had done with all literary graduates seen thus far, the missionaries fully accepted this.

141 Wang, *Wang Tao riji*, 75.

142 Joseph Edkins, "Dislike to Foreigners in Modern Chinese Books," *The North-China Herald*, September 18, 1891, 394.

143 For descriptions of length and content, see Wylie, *Memorials*, 168–69.

144 Edkins, "Dislike to Foreigners," 394.

145 The missionary journal was another instrument to show the value of European Culture to a Chinese audience, for the motivation behind it, see Han Qi 韓琦, "Liuhe congtao' zhi yuanyuan' 《六合叢談》之緣起." *Wakumon* 或問, Vol. 145, No. 8 (2004): 144–46.

146 Jiang, *Xiaogutang wenji*, *juan* 1, 4a.

147 Edkins, "Dislike to Foreigners," 394.

Guan Sifu

In the mid-1850s, another collaboration formed at the Inkstone Press that was important for secular translations despite its brevity: Benjamin Hobson 合信 (1816–1873) and Guan Sifu 管嗣復 (1822–1860). Both men joined the Shanghai station relatively late in their careers. Hobson had arrived in China already in 1840, just when China “and Britain were on the Brink of the First Opium War”,¹⁴⁸ but had been first responsible for opening a Western hospital in Canton. It was only the last years of his career that he spent in Shanghai, after taking control of the hospital there.¹⁴⁹ Apart from medical work, Hobson also engaged in the translation of medical texts into Chinese, and in this he was assisted by Guan Sifu, style name Xiaoyi 小異.

Practically all the assistants we have seen so far have been in a tight economic spot when they joined the missionaries, but Guan Sifu’s troubled background surpasses them by far. Guan fled from Taiping-occupied Nanjing after the city was conquered in 1853. He sought refuge in Suzhou, and through a chance meeting with Edkins, he eventually came to work at the missionary station in Shanghai. Wang Tao recounts: “The Western scholar Joseph Edkins met him while going to Wu and after talking to him they got along with each other very well and he brought him back [to Shanghai].” 西士艾約瑟至吳遇之，與之談禪，極相契合，載之俱來。¹⁵⁰ We do not know when exactly this meeting between Guan and Edkins happened due to a lacuna in Wang Tao’s diaries from 1855–1858. Wang Liqun argued for an entrance date of around 1854 for Guan.¹⁵¹ However, Wang Tao’s diaries do not mention him until 1855. When Wang Tao then, after a gap of several years, took up diary writing again in 1858, Guan was already at the Press and seems to have been well established in the assistant’s circle. Therefore, it is more probable that his entrance date was between late 1855 and 1857.

Guan Sifu’s father was Guan Tong 管同 (?–1831), style Yizhi 異之, a representative

148 Paquette, “The London Missionary Society in China,” 81–82.

149 Ibid., 174–75. For a detailed survey of Hobson’s missionary activities in China, see chapter 3 of Paquette’s dissertation.

150 Wang, *Wang Tao riji*, 9.

151 Wang, *Jindai Shanghai kou’an zhishi fenzi de xingqi*, 104.

of the Tongcheng pai 桐城派.¹⁵² Guan Sifu’s family was well connected. Wang Tao points out the ties to the powerful minister Chen Shishi 陳石士, who, after Guan Sifu’s father passed away when Xiaoyi was only nine sui old, helped out the family, thus allowing Guan to be “able to live in peace and study” 能安居讀書.¹⁵³ Guan Tong died in 1831, which means that Guan Sifu must have been born around 1822. When the Taiping conquered Jinling, Guan was around 31 years old. He told Wang Tao in several conversations about his experiences, and Wang Tao considered them worthy of noting them down in his diaries. On October 25, 1858, he noted:

Xiaoyi told me about the circumstances of how in former years he had been a captive of the bandits and then about how he escaped the tigers’ lair. I cannot help being moved and shaken in the soul by this and I sigh about how he obtained help from heaven. 小異言昔年陷賊中情形及出虎穴事，不禁為之動心蕩魄，而歎其得邀天佑也。¹⁵⁴

Upon conquest, the Taiping used to conscript people into lodges (*guan* 館),¹⁵⁵ depending on their capabilities and physical constitution. Guan managed to cheat himself into one of the less demanding ones, but his ruse was discovered:

Later the bandits arrested somebody who knew that he was not disabled or sick, so they ordered him to study letters and documents and calculate days, and he barely avoided receiving the cane several times. Henceforth, they interrogated him and were more severe with him. 後賊緝知其非廢病者，強令學書記數日，而逸獲之杖几殆。自此防詰益嚴。¹⁵⁶

Guan then decided to escape. He seized an opportunity while on patrol and managed

152 Ibid. For a short biography, see *Qingshi gao*, juan 486, 13426.

153 Wang, *Wang Tao riji*, 268.

154 Ibid., 194.

155 The “guan” mentioned here were “the primary social unit of the Taiping state [...] organized according to occupation,” according to Withers. See John L. Withers, “The Heavenly Capital: Nanjing under the Taiping, 1853–1864” (PhD Diss., Yale University, 1983), 105. For an introduction into the social organization of the Taiping state and the role of the guans, see *ibid.*, 105–17.

156 Wang, *Wang Tao riji*, 23–24.

to hide from his captors. On his flight, he met a farmer who helped him by giving him some money, thus saving his life, and after finding someone to shave his head in the style required for subjects of the Qing, Guan was able to reunite with his family.¹⁵⁷

At the LMS station, Guan Sifu met Benjamin Hobson and they immediately began their collaboration.¹⁵⁸ Prior to coming to Shanghai, Hobson had already written the work *Quanti xinlun* 全體新論 (New Treatise on Anatomy) in collaboration with a certain Chen Xiutang 陳修堂, a “friend from China” 華友, whom he describes as very involved in the translation project.¹⁵⁹ He therefore had his first experience in translating medical writings with a Chinese assistant and continued this line of work in Shanghai. In the preface to the work *Xiyi lüelun* 西醫略論 (Principles of Western Medicine), Hobson explicitly mentions Guan as the spark that set the translation of said work in motion:

This year I traveled to Shanghai and had much leisure in my accommodation. I met Flowering Talent (*Maocai* 茂才) Guan from Jiangning, and we discussed medical learning. Based on our discussions we completed this book together. 今年游上海，旅館多暇，適江甯管茂才談論醫學。因相與商確，共成此書。¹⁶⁰

Guan is further mentioned as the co-compiler (*tong xuan* 同撰) of the work; *Juan 1* begins with “Author: The English Doctor Hobson, Co-Compiler: Flowering Talent Guan from Jiangning” 英國醫士合信氏著，江甯管茂材同撰。¹⁶¹ The exact same formula

157 Ibid.

158 Hobson had arrived in China in 1840, just when China “and Britain were on the Brink of the First Opium War”. See Paquette, “The London Missionary Society in China,” 81–82. He was first responsible for opening a Western hospital in Canton. After relocating to Shanghai, he took control of the hospital there. See *ibid.*, 174–75.

159 In the preface, Hobson remarks: “Recently I got help from my Chinese friend Chen Xiutang and thereupon we gathered a record of Western Medicine. We checked and corrected each other, cut out and pasted depictions of humans on paper, discussed together, decided on the wording and deleted what was too complicated, and picking what was important and writing it down we completed this book, which is titled *Quanti xinlun*.” 近得華友陳修堂相助，乃集西國醫譜，參互考訂，復將鉅連骨骼及紙塑人形，與之商榷，定論刪繁，撮要譯述成書，顏曰全體新論。See Benjamin Hobson, *Quanti xinlun* 全體新論 [New Treatise on Anatomy]: <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/003295615> (accessed January 20, 2026), *juan* 1, 1b.

160 Benjamin Hobson, *Xiyi lüelun* 西醫略論 [Principles of Western Medicine]: <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/103433776> (accessed January 20, 2026), *juan* 1, 1a.

161 Ibid.

that identifies Guan as the co-compiler is applied also in the treatise on midwifery *Fuying xinshuo* 婦嬰新說 (New Treatise on Obstetrics and Infants)¹⁶² and in the preface to the *Neike xinshuo* 內科新說 (Treatise on Internal Medicine), Hobson even more explicitly states that he developed the idea for all his medical translations together with him:

I recently came to Shanghai and had the opportunity to discuss medical learning with my Chinese friend Guan Maocai. Thereupon I deliberated with him, and we translated the three books *Xiyi lüelun*, *Fuying xinshuo* and *Neike xinshuo*. 近歲來上海，因華友管茂材喜談醫學，遂與商酌酌著西醫略論婦嬰新說及內科新說三書。¹⁶³

That Hobson so proudly mentioned his co-translator in the works themselves is rather unusual,¹⁶⁴ and certainly gives testament to the close relationship he had with Guan. We also see that, like in the case of Li Shanlan, the initiative of Guan was integral to the beginning of the collaboration.

What we can learn about Guan Sifu as a writer is very limited. Unlike in the case of Jiang, Li, and Wang, there are few original materials preserved. The only exception are a few prose pieces that have been attached to the collective prose writings of his father, the *Yinji xuanwen chuji* 因寄軒文初集.¹⁶⁵ The pieces were also published by Wang Tao in his collection *Wengyou yutan* 甕牖餘談.¹⁶⁶ The selection is

162 Benjamin Hobson, *Fuying xinshuo* 婦嬰新說 [New Treatise on Obstetrics and Infants]: <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/103433773> (accessed January 20, 2026).

163 Benjamin Hobson, *Neike xinshu* 內科新說 [New Treatise on Internal Medicine]: <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/102974461> (accessed January 20, 2026), folios 1a–1b.

164 As Wang Liqun has identified, Hobson also mentioned Guan in the preface to his *Neike Xinshuo*. See Wang, “Jindai Shanghai kou’an zhishi fenzi de xingqi,” 104.

165 Note that not all editions of this text contain Guan Sifu’s writings. The 1878 edition has it: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044067916981&seq=393>. The version published in the *Qingdai shiwenji huibian* 清代詩文集彙編 [Compiled Collection of Qing Dynasty Poetry and Prose] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2010), which contains the *Yinjixuan wen chuji* 因寄軒文初集 [First Collection of Prose from the Pavilion of Entrusted Thoughts] (10 *juan*) and *Yinjixuan wen erji* 因寄軒文二集 [Second Collection of Prose from the Pavilion of Entrusted Thoughts] (6 *juan* with a supplementary *juan*), is unfortunately lacking it.

166 Wang, *Wengyou yutan*, 22–26.

not very rich, and the editors focused on the biographies of Taiping victims Guan compiled to preserve their memory. As a result of this scarcity of sources, it has previously been overlooked that Guan's interest in medical translations was not by chance. In the *Yingruan zazhi* 瀛壖雜誌, a type of local gazetteer for mid-19th century Shanghai, Wang Tao describes Guan Sifu as an expert for medicine:

When the other bandits occupied Jinling, Xiaoyi was trapped in the city and only after a year was he able to escape. He moved to Suzhou and then onwards to Shanghai, where he was employed under the Englishman Hobson. Hobson had become famous for his medical skills, and Xiaoyi was also well versed in the arts of the Yellow Emperor. Using [their knowledge], they completed three treatises on Medicine, [...]. 緒寇踞金陵，小異陷身賊中，經歲始得脫。移家吳會，繼來滬上，主于英人合信。合信以刀圭擅名一時，小異亦雅好岐黃術，因詳成醫書三種，[...]。¹⁶⁷

Where and how Guan Sifu acquired his knowledge is not clear, as we lack information on his education and background. But it shows that he was more than a simple translator in the collaboration. Wang Tao also preserved a *qigu* 七古 poem by Guan, which narrates the "history of medicine" 醫學源流 in China. Guan's poem begins with several verses each for the most important works and authors of Chinese medicine history until Tang times, and it also contains some verses that provide us with insight into Guan's self-understanding:

Recently I have studied the Western methods a bit; 邇來略習泰西法，
Their discussions of inner properties and external manifestations are outstandingly refined and detailed. 所論藏象殊精詳。¹⁶⁸

In the *Yingruan zazhi*, Wang Tao also explicitly states that Guan served Hobson as a language teacher, as "after arriving in Shanghai, [Hobson] invited Master Guan

167 Wang Tao, *Yingruan zazhi* 瀛壖雜誌 [Miscellaneous Records of Shanghai] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1989), 152.

168 Wang, *Yingruan zazhi*, 152–53.

Xiaoyi of Jinling to be his teacher and devoted himself entirely to writing." 至滬後，延金陵管君小異為師，專事著述。 Their collaboration resulted in "Western medical science becoming fully illuminated in China" 西國醫學大明於中土。¹⁶⁹ Hobson's and Guan's collaboration was therefore akin to the one of Wylie and Li. An expert from the West collaborated with an expert from the East on a particular topic.

In Wang Tao's diaries, we also learn more about Jiang Dunfu's reasoning and activities: he was convinced of the need to study the West. Guan is quoted by Wang Tao as saying: "The reason why the state's actions and policies often go wrong is because the officials are not familiar with the situation in the borderlands." 國家之舉動設施，每致多左者，由於四裔之情，未能熟悉也。¹⁷⁰ According to Guan, understanding the West was important because there were things that were worth listening to:

Some people have only seen the negative aspects of the West and have made up stories to slander it. When asked about the inside stories of the West, they are all confused and have no basis. Even those who have traveled to the West are mostly poor and have little foresight. 或鏡見其弊，而立一說以詆之。詢以海外掌故奧地，皆茫然無據。即有一二從其游者，類皆役於飢寒，鮮有遠識。¹⁷¹

Guan Sifu therefore argues for the necessity study Western Learning: "The West has specialized books on manufacturing guns, cannons, ships, and carriages, as well as on measuring the distance traveled by lead bullets. If one can understand the characters, then there is nothing he cannot translate." 西國製造槍砲舟車及測量鉛丸所落遠近，皆著有專書，苟識其字，則無不可譯。¹⁷² Guan identifies the reason for the lack of knowledge as the lack of translators and language skills. This is related to the low status of translators:

The languages and scripts of China and the West are very different from each oth-

169 Ibid., 198.

170 Wang, *Wang Tao riji*, 259.

171 Ibid.

172 Ibid.

er. In the West, there are government translators and missionaries who can speak Chinese and understand Chinese culture and politics. They also pay attention to the geography and topography of China and write books about it to teach their people. In China, however, those who can speak and write foreign languages are mostly idlers, poor people, and the ignorant. They do not care about the government's successes and failures or the evolution of its institutions. Chinese scholars often look down on these people and do not associate with them. 中外言語文字，迥然各別。彼處則設有翻譯官員，及教中之教士、神父等，效華言，識漢字，明華之風俗政治，留心中國之山川形勢，勒之成書，以教其國中之民，而中國之能夷言夷字者，類皆無賴赤貧愚發寡識之流，手其政事得失，制度沿革，毫不關心。至於中國文士，多鄙之而不與交。¹⁷³

From our modern perspective, these statements do not seem surprising, but they actually pose a very modern point of view. Guan Sifu argues that China had to learn from the West, but that there were no incentives to do so. This reasoning was considered worthy of being written down, as demonstrated by the fact that Wang Tao entrusted it to his diaries.

Guan Sifu made, however, a clear distinction between religious and secular texts and actively stayed clear of religious work. There is a revealing passage that recounts a discussion Wang Tao had with him about what it meant for a traditional Chinese scholar to translate Western religious scriptures for a living. The discussion begins with the American missionary Elijah Bridgman seeking assistance for a religious translation. Through his involvement in the *Delegates' Version*, he was well acquainted with the LMS's Chinese assistants. After finishing this work, Bridgman started to prepare a Bible translation in the vernacular language. In 1857, he reported that "one half of the *New Testament*, and the books of Genesis and Exodus have been rendered into the Colloquial Mandarin; the Psalms are finished, and I am now upon Ecclesiastes."¹⁷⁴ He apparently needed help polishing the translation and had Guan Sifu in mind, but, as Wang Tao tells us, Guan was unwilling: "As the religious books

173 Ibid.

174 The letter to the secretary is quoted in Eliza Jane Bridgman, *The pioneer of American missions in China: the life and labors of Elijah Coleman Bridgman* (New York: A. D. F. Randolph, 1864), 222–23.

went strongly counter to the teachings of the Confucians, Xiaoyi had never wanted to translate them and ultimately excused himself and did not participate." 小異以教中書籍大悖儒教，素不願譯，竟辭不往。¹⁷⁵

Guan Sifu's stay at the press was brief. He found a post in the administration of Shaoxing in 1859,¹⁷⁶ but we lack details about the nature of this engagement. In the *Yingruan zazhi*, Wang Tao states that Guan was then transferred to Shanyin 山陰, a county of Zhejiang, in the spring of 1860, but in the panic created by the Taiping attack on Suzhou he "took to the road" 奔走道路, and "ultimately perished from anguish" 竟以憂殞.¹⁷⁷ The *Wengyou yutan* account is a bit more detailed, here Wang Tao adds that during the Taiping turmoil, Guan Sifu requested leave from his recently obtained office and "was residing in temporary lodgings at Dengwei, when the situation became untenable. Ultimately, he succumbed to anguish and passed away." 小異方僑寓于鄧尉，勢不可居，竟以憂死。¹⁷⁸ Guan Sifu's escape from Taiping occupied Nanjing therefore bought him only a handful of years before the rebellion caught up with him again in the Suzhou area.¹⁷⁹

Guan is the last language teacher we can identify in the sources. He was not baptized and joined the missionaries out of economic difficulties, but this did not prevent the development of an amicable, intense and fruitful collaboration and knowledge exchange.

175 Wang, *Wang Tao riji*, 266. For a longer discussion of this passage and its implications on the social standing of missionary assistants, see Eicher, "Cosmopolitan Experiences," 1185–86.

176 Zhang, *Wang Tao nianpu*, 48. Wang Tao mentions meeting him when he comes for a visit in the second month of 1860 and exclaims that they had not met for a full year. See Wang, *Wang Tao riji*, 311.

177 Wang, *Yingruan zazhi*, 152.

178 Wang, *Wengyou yutan*, 24.

179 See also Wang, "Jindai Shanghai kou'an zhishi fenzi de xingqi," 105.

Conclusion

This article has examined one specific type of assistants at the LMS station in Shanghai: literary graduates involved in translation, whom the missionaries collectively referred to as “language teachers.” As demonstrated, the missionaries deliberately sought traditionally educated men to assist first with Bible translation and later with secular writings. Gaining insight into the lives and roles of these men remains difficult due to the nature of the sources. The missionaries did not routinely mention them unless they were baptized, and often we have to rely on brief side references. Identification therefore in many cases depends on additional Chinese materials such as Wang Tao’s diaries, which are however equally limited in scope and confined to specific social circles. Nevertheless, by combining Western and Chinese sources, it was possible to identify a number of these figures and to obtain a clearer picture of their backgrounds and roles.

Of the eight men we can identify that were hired between 1840 and 1860 to aid with translation projects, all were literary graduates. The LMS missionaries were acutely aware of the importance of Classical Chinese prose and selected their teachers accordingly. Of the individuals treated above, all but one had passed the first level of the imperial examinations, and it is significant that this exception was recruited in the late 1830s, prior to the opening of the Shanghai station. In all cases where we know the reason for joining the press it was economic pressure that drove the literati, caused by the difficult employment conditions of their time. Only one joined the missionaries out of interest in Western learning, but he, too, was under financial strain and without an official post when he did so. As a consequence, the missionaries did not actively seek out assistants but rather benefited from chance encounters.

None of the literary graduates considered here was baptized prior to joining the missionaries. Wang Tao and Ang eventually requested baptism years after they began working, but most of the language teachers refused it. The missionaries accepted this and nevertheless continued to commend their contributions. The assistants’ exposure to Christianity varied and depended on their own willingness. Not all teachers were involved in the translation of religious writings. Their length of stay and degree of involvement also varied considerably. Some remained only for a few years and were assigned limited responsibilities, such as secular translations. Others became more deeply integrated into the missionary enterprise.

Lastly, it emerges clearly that their work consistently exceeded simple transcription or translation. In accounts of translation sessions, they appear as

integral participants who bore primary responsibility for the style of the texts. In a number of cases, the assistants also emerge as the driving force behind the translation activities themselves.



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看不見的中介者： 倫敦傳道會上海站所僱用的語言教師

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摘要 本研究探討英國新教倫敦傳道會（London Missionary Society, LMS）在條約口岸上海（1843–1860）聘用語言教師的實踐。傳教士意識到文言文仍具持續的權威與文化資本，遂延聘當地的秀才作為語言教師。此舉最初旨在協助《聖經》翻譯，但當傳教士開始從事世俗著作時，這一做法仍得以延續。本文結合傳教士與士人資料，考察被僱者的身份、教育與社會背景。

關鍵詞 倫敦傳道會（LMS） 上海 文言文 通商口岸知識分子



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