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The Cantonese dictionaries of two Eighteenth-Century European Traders

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Keywords: Cantonese-Swedish-English, dictionary, zazi, eighteenth century, non-professional translators

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Abstract

This article compares two manuscript dictionaries, that of John Bradby Blake and Johan Pontin. These dictionaries are Cantonese-English and Cantonese-Swedish respectively, and were both created as a result of a stay in the trading hub of Canton in the 1770s. Both dictionaries are shown to follow the word choice, word order and illustrations of Chinese textbooks for language learning, "zazi". Such zazi were common tools for the linguistic standardisation and schooling reforms of the Qing Empire, but were also used in early European attempts to learn Chinese. Thereby, European efforts to learn Chinese is here shown to follow a Qing imperial pattern, and a non-European structure and logic. The bulk of the scholarship on early sinology in Europe focus on missionaries, and on activities in Beijing. That the two dictionaries studied here translate between European languages and Cantonese, rather than other Chinese dialects, and that they were compiled as part of a commercial, not a scholarly or religious contact, help show the importance also of Canton in the eighteenth century European-Chinese translation history.

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Europe has a long history of interest in translations of different Chinese dialects and languages. The earliest steps in this story lead straight to missionaries, and for good reason. From the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, they had immense influence on the circulation of knowledge, not the least concerning comparative linguistics (cf. DONG 2011; WU 2017; MASINI 2005: 179-193). Therefore, this history of translation tends to focus on Catholic missionaries in Beijing during the sixteenth and seventeenth century. The bulk of the scholarship then skips ahead to the early nineteenth century, to diplomatic contacts and protestant missionaries, and their efforts to learn the language (cf. YANG 2012; ELMAN & WU 2005).

In contrast, this work focuses on the in-between, the eighteenth century, when Christian missionaries had been expelled, and before imperial pressure on China. This golden period in Qing history, when the empire consolidated and expanded, in fact provides an opportunity to go beyond a focus on published dic-

tionaries, and beyond Beijing and its court Jesuits. The gaze here is turned southwards, to the port of Canton.

Canton was a bustling multicultural contact zone, where British, French, Spanish, Swedes, Danes, Americans, Prussians, and others gathered in the hundreds to trade with China, and many had a great need for on-the ground communication. While the main port of commercial exchange with Europe, Canton lay far away from the political centre of Beijing, and far from the learned discussions at court. What is more, as a way to restrict their access to, and influence in, the country, European traders were strongly dissuaded, if not forbidden, to learn Chinese. Some tried to do so anyway. However, while European traders lived for months and years in China, with restricted but constant communication, the linguistic endeavours of the traders – and Canton as centre for language learning – have to date received limited attention.[1]

This article will therefore attempt to wrench the history of translation from the court to the port. It will do so using one manuscript dictionary by the British trader John Bradby Blake, and one by the Swedish trader David Pontin. Combining, for the first time, the translation efforts of these two traders might nuance the history of Chinese learning in Europe: comparing and contextualising these dictionaries provides a history from below of non-professional translation efforts, the intercultural use of multilingual pedagogic tools, and the underrated impact of Canton and Cantonese for European language learning. In short, this place and time provides a history of the intertwining of imperial power and language learning, a history in which the Qing empire holds the reins.

Both the Blake and Pontin dictionaries include Chinese characters, illustrations of the entries, a transliteration, and a short translation to English and Swedish respectively. There are several curious points to consider here: first, the transliterations are to Cantonese, a dialect mutually unintelligible with Mandarin. The historiography of this translation contact has primarily been following printed works focusing on the Mandarin dialect. In contrast, these manuscripts provide a chance to reconsider the importance of the locality of Canton for linguistic study: rather than an elite venture, this makes translation a matter of local, intercultural practices – and of the Cantonese dialect.

The second curious thing about the dictionaries are the format. They are arranged neither in stroke order nor alphabetically, but rather according to a few chosen themes. They range from the moon and the stars, past cherry and plum blossoms, and chrysanthemums, to incense holders and flutes. Examining the word choices and the word order make it clear that both dictionaries rely on a particular kind of Chinese printed educational material: *zazi* (miscellaneous words). They were a type of instructions books for primary education, meant to

[1] The sinologist Nicolas Standaert has summarised that "The most important actors in the eighteenth century were the French Jesuits", and makes no note of the Canton traders (STANDAERT 2012: 52).

make sure that young students learn the most basic characters of the Chinese script, and were commonly used in China since at least the fourth century (ZHIGONG 1962: 27-32). This study thereby illuminates how European learning depended on Chinese pedagogic traditions. Attention to these traditions, in turn, makes it necessary to consider Qing educational reforms, and the position of Cantonese in Qing eighteenth-century international relations.

Attention to dictionaries that follow the endeavours of two Europeans to learn Chinese, and the ways in which they adopt and adapt Chinese pedagogic practices and a Chinese organisation of linguistic knowledge also tie into a broader debate on translation. Europe at this time saw a sudden proliferation of dictionaries (SFEDS 2006; Burke 2004). In this enlightenment movement, organising language became another way of ordering, naming, and understanding the world – all practices of cultural power. However, such use of linguistic understandings was a tool for power also beyond Europe; the Blake and Pontin dictionary help provide a non-European balance to this story of language as power.

The organisation of knowledge and the on-the-ground language learning that these dictionaries illustrate can nuance the view of European-Chinese power relations in the eighteenth century. This study thus highlights unusual centres and actors of translation: it expands the geographical scope of the history of translations to include Canton, and Cantonese, and involves actors not connected to a religious mission. In doing so, this study relates European efforts to learn Chinese not to the coming age of European imperialism, but rather to internal language polices of the Qing expansion. By adding these three themes to the conversation of eighteenth-century translation, it shows not only that there is a power dimension in language, but rather how it operated in multi-directional ways.

The dictionaries of Blake and Pontin

The first of the two dictionaries studied in the following was produced, at least in part, by John Brady Blake (1745–1773). He joined the British East India Company in 1770 for an expedition to Canton. In his remaining papers, among carefully annotated and illustrated botanical drawings, there is an illustrated vocabulary between Cantonese and English, with both Chinese characters and a pronunciation guide – a dictionary which is today kept by the Oak Spring Garden Foundation (Chinese-English dictionary, M-152). This dictionary is carefully bound and produced with great effort, but lacks any introduction or explanatory text. It might have been intended as a showpiece, or a gift, but was never published.[2]

[2] A text critical edition of this dictionary will be published in 2022 by Oak Spring Garden Foundation, edited by Jordan Goodman and Peter Crane.

Recent years have seen several studies of Blake, in particular regarding his interest in botany, but also his language skills (RICHARDS 2020: 209-244, volume 34:4 of *Curtis's Botanical magazine*). Scholars have also discussed its linguistic curiosities, and strategies in the translation (ST. ANDRÉ 2017: 323-358). Just like most of the European traders, Blake knew little or no Chinese. He seems to have turned to a man he called Whang at Tong for translations and explanations of the cultural significance of the entries in the Chinese herbal system. Whang at Tong was connected to Joseph Banks (1743–1820), went to England, was introduced to the Royal Society, and arranged the Chinese dictionary in the library of St. John's College (CLARKE 2017: 498-521). This study, however, is concerned not primarily with Blake's mastery of Chinese, but his attempts to learn it. The best way to understand Blake's linguistic effort is to tie them to those of other contemporary Europeans in Canton, and or connect them to the Chinese traditions of language study – all of which is best made visible through a comparison.

Fig. 1: *Twelve of the 300 entries of the Blake dictionary*

In the Linköping Diocesan Library in Sweden is another dictionary nearly contemporary with that of Blake (*Xiuketu xiang zazi quanshu* O 1 24). It was probably brought to Sweden by the ship's priest David Pontin (1733–1809) who went to China with the Swedish East India Company in 1769, and it has remained near-forgotten as part of his archival remains ever since. Based on its typical eighteenth-century handwriting, and the Swedish spelling, it is the work of an

educated Swede in Canton – and that narrows the field considerably. It could have been written by Pontin himself, or one of his colleagues in the East India Company, but in either case it is the result of the commercial contact between Sweden and China. The dictionary lacks any introduction or structured paratext and has no cover. While it might have been a first step towards a more ambitious work, it is more likely a trace of the everyday effort of East India traders to learn Chinese. Blake's dictionary is an original manuscript, whereas the Pontin dictionary has as its basis a printed Chinese book. The end result is, however, much the same: a thematic and illustrated list of Chinese characters, with both a Cantonese pronunciation guide, and a Swedish translation. Both the pronunciation and references to the list of translations (or, in the first pages, the translations themselves) are crammed in on the sides or on top of the characters.

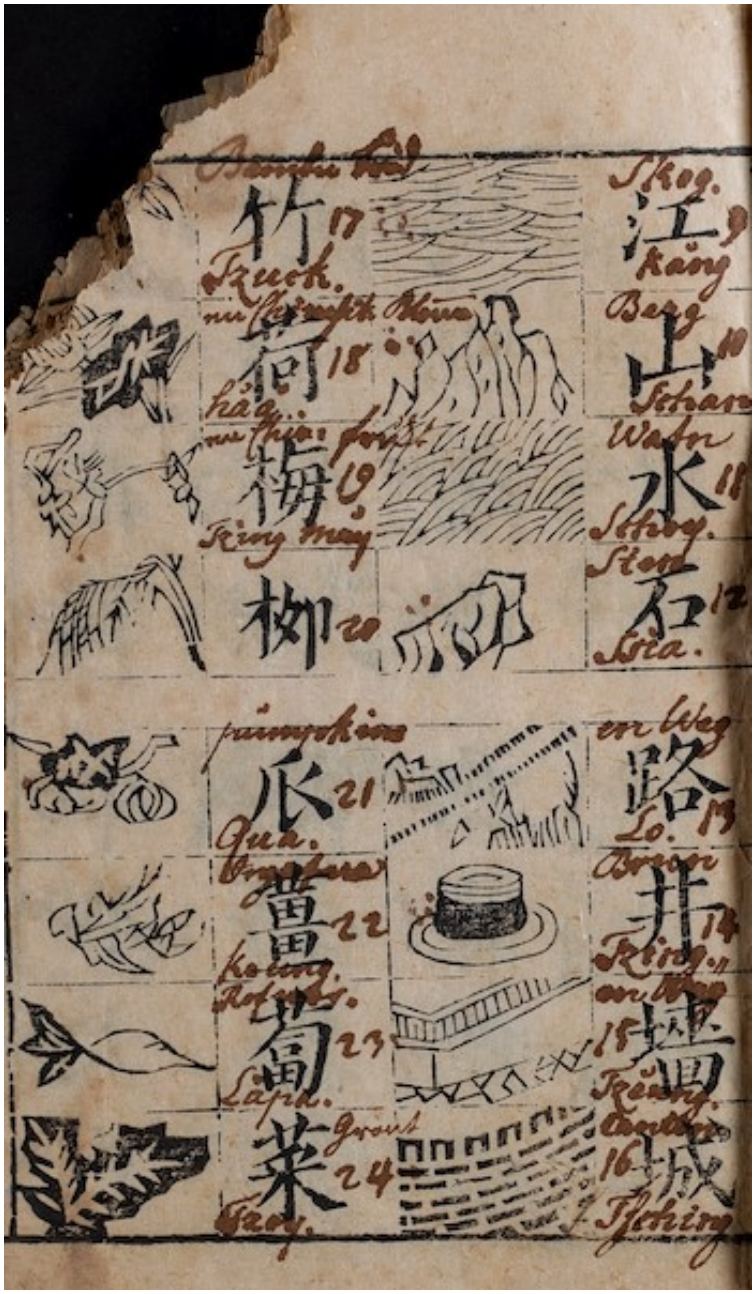

Fig. 2: *Sixteen of the 288 entries in the Pontin dictionary*

Behind the superficial visual differences, there are striking similarities between Pontin's dictionary and the Blake manuscript: the majority of Blake's 300 entries correspond with the 288 entries of the Pontin zazi. Whereas Blake's dictionary has coloured illustrations and the Pontin illustrations are printed in black and white, they refer to almost the same words, with the same transliterations, similar translations, and in a similar order. This is clear for example in the section on animals, where the entry order is butterfly-turtle-snake-tiger-elephant in the Pontin dictionary, while the Blake dictionary has the butterfly two page earlier, and then tiger-elephant-turtle-snake.

The similarities between these two works, created within a few years from each other, demonstrate the gains of multi-archival research for intercultural connections. There are no traces in the Blake papers of the original Chinese work, and Blake's dictionary does not cram in the translation around the illustrations, but has provided ample space for the translation, and for the Cantonese pronunciation, in the book itself. The Pontin dictionary can thus be used to illustrate the in-between step between printed Chinese zazi, the adapted European version of the same, and the Blake version in which the Chinese book is no longer visible.

The zazi basis and Cantonese

Both the Pontin and the Blake dictionaries were based on Chinese textbooks, zazi which explains the similar selection of vocabulary, illustrations, and internal organisation between the entries. The Pontin dictionary, specifically, was made by adding Swedish notes to a near complete copy of a cheap and widely spread zazi called *Xiuketu xiang zazi quanshu*. (Learning the name of things from images). This would have been bought either in Canton or in the nearby port of Macao, and was made use of with the help of someone who knew Cantonese.

It is highly likely that Blake himself had access to the same, or at least a similar, textbook. In fact, several copies of this particular zazi stand to be found around Europe; there is for example one in the Bodleian, and one in the Leiden University Library – both in the same edition as the one acquired by Pontin (Sinica 108 and SINOL. VGK 5161.109 respectively). However, the Bodleian and Leiden copies lack any signs of European use or annotations, making them less useful for tracing their usage.

Zazi textbooks were used extensively within China for learning how to read and write characters at least since the Tang dynasty, but as prints became cheaper and more available in the Ming dynasty, they became ubiquitous. There are many texts of this genre, but in general they assemble the most important words and characters to make sure that students, whether children or adults, learn the basic characters (Zheng & Zhu 2007). For the sake of easy learning, the text was usually written in verses with rhymes. In China, as well as in Chinese

studies in Korea, Japan and Vietnam, the standard texts for learning to read and write were not illustrated lists like this, but the *Qianzi wen* (Thousand Character Classic). It rhymes, and is sung, akin to an alphabet song.

Seen from the point of view of European traders, an illustrated and thematic list like that of the *Xiuketu xiang zazi quanshu* might actually have been quite approachable. In Europe, illustrated tools to learn one's ABC were becoming common during the eighteenth century. British battledores, for example, provide a tool for learning how to read which is also based on lists of nouns, and with clear illustrations (cf. BANNET 2017). An illustrated zazi, like those Pontin and Blake used, full of concrete nouns and of images, was probably far easier to grasp for an European than the unillustrated rhymes of the Thousand Character Classic.

This brings us back to the specific locality of Canton. Here, and maybe only here, was there a place where hundreds of European traders converged, had a need for on-the-ground communication, and easy access to Chinese books. The conditions for translations were favourable, the power relations of this port notwithstanding: the zazi were cheap, their format was approachable, and there were plenty of Cantonese speakers around.

Most importantly, such zazi could provide a potential direct link between the traders' own language, regardless of which that was, and Cantonese, that is, the local language a trader needed. Blake was a man with scholarly interests, as was Pontin. Just as many of his contemporaries with scholarly ambitions, the latter worked as a priest for the East India Company. In Canton, however, scholarly activities were curtailed by the local authorities, and religious gatherings primarily took place on board ships. European life in southern China at this point was dictated by the needs of the commercial endeavours. The Canton locality, and this time frame, by necessity make these dictionaries less of a religious endeavour than was the case earlier and later.

That the Blake and Pontin dictionaries are between, on the one hand, Cantonese and, on the other hand, English or Swedish respectively make them particularly exciting. The transliteration is not done into Chinese, that is Mandarin, or for that matter Manchu, another official language of the empire. This places Cantonese at the centre of this linguistic exchange and reminds us of linguistic plurality of the Qing empire. It is important to remember that, as its spelling could remain the same, the *Xiuketu xiang zazi quanshu* is a Cantonese text; at same time, it was a Mandarin text; the characters can be read in each of these, and many others, Chinese dialects, just like the word spelled 'nation' can be read in many European languages. In this way the Blake and Pontin dictionaries can be argued to be multilingual dictionaries. In a sense, when Europeans added their translations to their volumes, they were conforming to the pronunciation-flexible use of these linguistic guides.

According to the standard historiography, the first printed dictionary between Cantonese and a European language is the British missionary Robert Morrison's *A Vocabulary of the Canton Dialect* from 1828 (2001). Both Blake's English-Cantonese dictionary and Pontin's Swedish-Cantonese one are, of course, of a limited scope, and never published, but they still precede Morrison's work with almost half a century. For the purpose of this study, it does not matter greatly that neither Blake nor Pontin's dictionaries were published – the focus here lies on their production, and not their reception. In fact, historical linguists are increasingly arguing that when approaching the history of language use from below, it is by using manuscripts rather than printed works that other parts of the story emerge (AUER et al. 2015: 1-12).[3] The Blake and Pontin dictionaries exemplify such a divergent story through their fronting of Cantonese and demonstrate from-below language learning in the Chinese-European contact.

The Canton locality

Both Blake and Pontin were in Canton in the 1770s, a multicultural hub with particular language constraints. To consequently re-centre the history of translation from Beijing to Canton does not only help highlight a different linguistic exchange than that of the capital, but also places us in a different temporal and political context.

In Canton at this time, there was a language barrier in place, used to control the foreign traders. In theory, foreigners here were not allowed to learn Chinese, meaning that all communication had to go through a handful of officially appointed interpreters. Most traders would spend only about half a year in the port, be largely restricted to the walled-in foreign quarters, and see little of the city proper – not to mention of the mainland. While direct communication between local Chinese merchants and foreign traders could have facilitated the trade contact, forcing these two groups to interact solely through interpreters enabled the local authorities to keep a close eye on this intercultural interaction (VAN DYKE 2005: 77-93).

It is widely stated that most European traders did not know Chinese, and it is unlikely that Blake and Pontin could themselves become proficient during their time in port. Nevertheless, the archives do provide examples of traders who tried – and managed – to get around the language ban. There are, in both 1753 and 1768, mentions of French traders able to speak Chinese, and in the 1750s the Dutch attempted to educate a few men in Chinese to lessen their dependence on the Chinese interpreters (HAUDRÈRE 1989: 952; LIU 2009: 58; CHEN 2015: 76). As for the British East India Company, the most famous example is

[3] The importance of the circulation of non-printed texts has also been made clear for the Jesuits in China (see BROCKEY 2008: 243-286).

James Flint. He learnt Chinese with commercial, and neither diplomatic nor religious, contacts as his aim. However, his language skills did not extend to writing Chinese characters, and he underestimated the need to adapt to the protocol of Qing official documents. His first petition in 1753 led to even stricter trade restrictions, and his second attempt at a petition led to his being imprisoned for two and a half years, and then expelled. The men who transcribed this petition were executed, and foreigners could no longer openly study Chinese (PUGA 2013: 94-95; cf. REED STIFLER 1938). After this time, the ban on language learning seems to have been more strictly enforced; by the time that Blake and Pontin came to Canton, instructors were not easy to find; indeed, Europeans who wanted to learn Chinese met with resistance long into the nineteenth century (see MORRISON 2010: 153).

While the formal restrictions on learning Chinese are well known, it is rarely discussed *how* traders might actually have tried to get around them: the Blake and the Pontin dictionaries must be put into the context of other learning attempts. As part of the early modern genre of travel writings, it was common to include small vocabularies. Such lists of Chinese can be found both in manuscripts and published texts (BOLTON 2003: 139). These lists were influenced as much by information from Jesuit scholars in Beijing, published and read in Europe, as by local informants in Canton. The word lists tended to only include a handful of written characters, most commonly numbers, days, and a few other terms, often the sun and the moon. Typical examples include both manuscript travelogues by Carl Johan Gethe and Gustav Fredrik Hjortberg in the Royal Library of Sweden (M 280, M281a), and printed eighteenth-century works (BRELIN 1973: 48-49; OSBECK 1969: 167). In comparison with such lists, both Blake and Pontin actually offer both a large and varied vocabulary.

A similarity between the basic word lists and the works of Blake and Pontin work, is the clear signs of their being cultural co-productions. An example is the word list in the manuscripts of Swedish supercargo Christopher Henric Braad in 1748 in Uppsala University Library (X 391). In his preparatory drafts, there is a list of Chinese words in Chinese characters written with ink and brush that are remarkably well drawn and correct in grammar and style. In the later drafts, these characters are written with a pen, have lost their proportions and are lopsided (X 390). Someone with knowledge of Chinese must have written the original list for him.

Such co-productions also reflect the other side of this language learning, that is, that local people in Canton learned to speak European languages, at least to some degree. There were even Chinese monopoly merchants who learned foreign languages (VAN DYKE 2011: 13, 98-100, 124). One of Pontin's Swedish predecessors in China, Pehr Osbeck, argued in the 1750s that knowing Chinese was superfluous, saying it was: "en mindre nödvändig kunskap, när de kunna hjälpa sig med Franska, Portugisiska eller Ängelska, som drängar och handlande lärt

sig […]. Här finnas jämwäl en och annan af de Chinesiska drängarna, som lärt sig Swenska" (OSBECK 1969: 173) = [a less necessary knowledge as they could make their way with French, Portuguese or English, which the hands and traders have learnt [...]. There are also one or two of the Chinese hands here who have learnt Swedish].

The specific locality of Canton, and the conditions of language learning there, are reflected in the development of pidgin English, which by 1720 became the main language of trade. It was a mix of English, Portuguese, Malay, and Patois Macanese; it even included Scandinavian terms (BOLTON 2003: 153, 169-172). Pidgin English facilitated communication, but also constituted a language barrier: missionaries argued that Pidgin English – while being an essential communication tool – was overused and prevented the foreigners from learning Chinese (see SI 2009). Glossaries for pidgin English show the limits of the official vocabulary: as Governor-General Li Shiyao stated in 1759, the foreign traders should have no need for a vocabulary beyond that needed for selling and buying goods (quoted in CHEN 2015: 76-77). This commercial aim is apparent in printed pidgin dictionaries such as Johan Francis Davis' *A Vocabulary Containing Chinese Words and Phrases* (1824). The same focus is found in corresponding works for the Chinese market, including *Aomen fanyu zazi quanben* (Miscellaneous Collection of words in the Macao Language) which for example can be found in Staatsbibliothek Berlin (Libri sin. N.S. 849) and the *Hongmao tongyong fanhua* (the Language of the red-haired foreigners), which was printed in 1838 (cf. YIN & ZHANG 1992: 87-89). According to the British trader William Hunter, such pamphlets were "continually in the hands of servants, coolies, and shopkeepers". (HUNTER 1882: 63-64) Albeit widely accessible, these vocabularies had a reduced linguistic register. From this point of view, the Blake and Pontin dictionaries, despite all their limitations, might actually have represented a linguistic expansion.

Compilations of linguistic information by European traders depended on reading Jesuit works in Europe, and on local informants in and around Canton. Such compilations reflect the need to place the efforts of multiple foreign groups side by side to make sense both of the Chinese writing system and the Cantonese pronunciation – and the ongoing exchanges both between and within foreign and local groups. In Canton, and maybe only here, could European traders, without court access, buy cheap Chinese books, find Cantonese partners to provide transliterations and, in Blake's case, pay someone if they wanted illustrations: the export art market was large and accessible for foreigners. In this place and at this time, hundreds of people had an ongoing need, and a will to communicate, but were not provided any official channels to do so. It is not impossible that also other traders did what the men behind the Blake and Pontin texts did, that is: buy a zazi, and make a dictionary for their own language out of it.

European and Asian converging traditions of learning

While Cantonese was the natural language of this particular contact, although not of the Qing Empire, neither the Blake nor the Pontin dictionaries were organised based on what a trader might have needed to communicate. Instead, the word order, the word choices, and the way these are presented comes from the Chinese zazi and represent Chinese cosmological and visual traditions. A clear example of this is the section containing the sun, moon, and stars. The depiction of the stars in both the Pontin and the Blake case is typically Chinese. In Pontin's dictionary, the original zazi used the Dipper as an example of a constellation of stars. This constellation is not the same as the Big Dipper – it differs utterly from the astrological tradition Pontin might have known, and he left the space for translation blank.

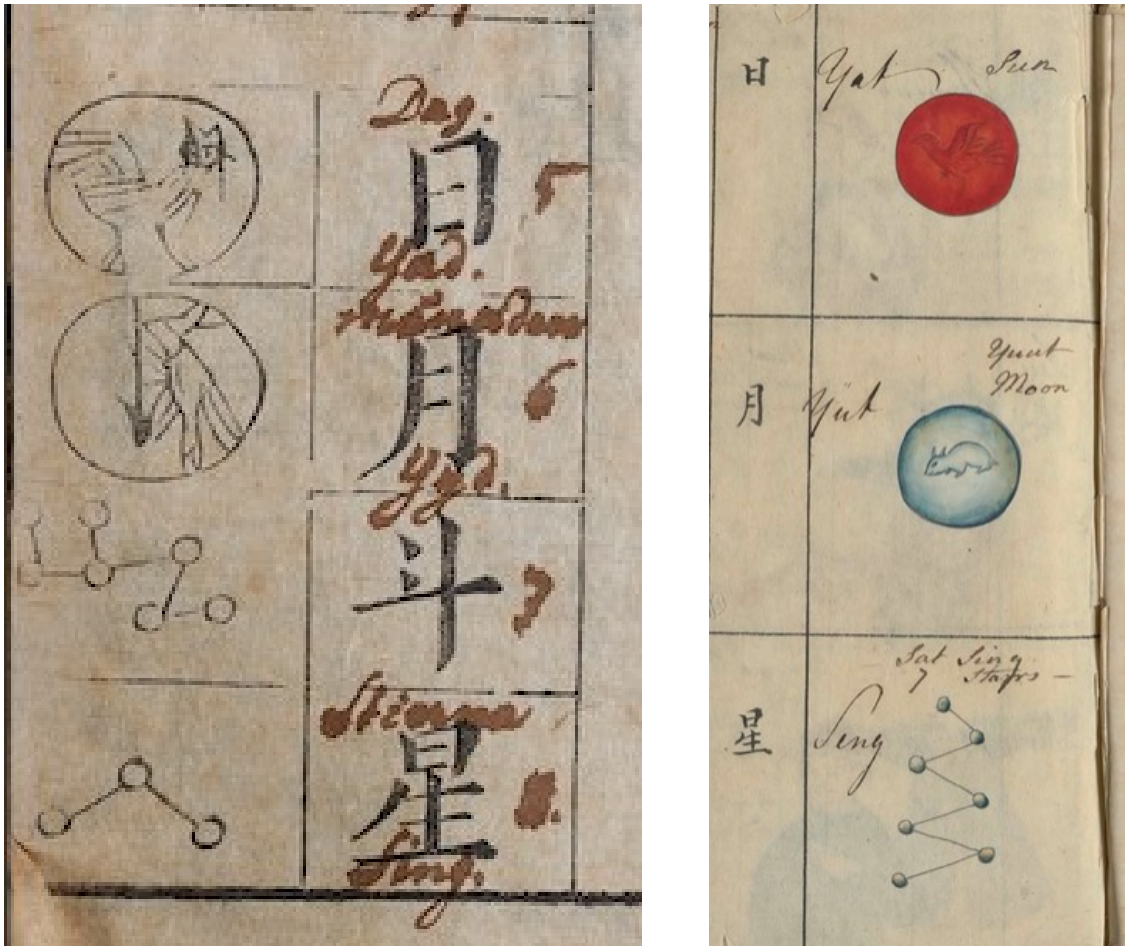

Fig. 3: *The entries for 'sun', 'moon' and 'star' in the dictionaries of Pontin (left) and Blake (right)*

Two further examples of Chinese cosmological symbolism, and how the images can show more than the words, are the sun and the moon. The sun is depicted with a rooster, and the moon with a rabbit inside it. Both the sun as a rooster,

and the moon rabbit, are well-established myths within the Chinese tradition. Pontin had no choice but to include this, his sun and rooster were pre-printed, but the Blake copy (to the right) also has a rooster in the red sun, and a rabbit painted into the blue moon. Huyi Wu has convincingly argued both for the power of, and the difficulty with translating cosmological symbols in Chinese-European early modern text exchanges (Wu 2017: 278). The vocabularies that Pontin and Blake used in their attempts to learn Chinese came imbedded in knowledge that was cultural, local, and religious – a knowledge that also came with norms of depiction.

The Blake and Pontin dictionaries demonstrate how Europeans could use a Chinese tradition of image learning and follow a Chinese visual logic in the illustrations. While Pontin uses the Chinese illustrations unchanged, the Blake dictionary exemplifies a co-production also in the case of the imagery itself: the illustrations in his Blake book are most likely done initially together with a Chinese artist in Canton (Crane & Loehle 2007: 215-230).

The very fact that these depictions were typically Chinese might in fact have been a reason to reproduce them: part of the appeal of learning Chinese was its absolute foreignness. Translation efforts, however rudimentary, of European traders must be placed in the wider context of eighteenth-century *chinoiserie*: Chinese history, culture, and politics was used both as a deterrent and an idealised utopia in Europe, and to publish writings about one's journey there could open doors to scholarly or religious circles (see Johns 2016). This is well known for learned figures, but the practice also included a broad set of primarily commercial actors, who took the opportunity to publish travel writings or small pamphlets, although many – like the Blake and Pontin dictionaries – were never published (Hellman 2014). In this formidable stream of more or less reliable information on China, the Chinese language was a constant point of discussion. For a long time, learning Chinese was considered as breaching the ultimate language barrier and allowing access to something inscrutable. Catholic missionaries, who had been learning Chinese since the sixteenth century, balanced between stressing the difficulty of the language and showing themselves as being able to bridge this gap and making their skills and position invaluable (Wu 2017: 126). Some such statements about the Chinese language, notably those collected by Jean Baptiste Du Halde (1674–1743), trickled down and were reproduced almost verbatim in the Canton traders' travelogues (cf. Osbeck 1969: 173; Le Comte 1696: 376). So even a dictionary that was not useful for on-the-ground communication could bring advantages at home. In this sense, a certain degree of exoticism in the entries and illustrations, and of clear symbolic difference, might well have been something an author wanted to keep or highlight.

Notably, the Blake and Pontin dictionaries do not just enumerate a Chinese order of things, illustrated according to a Chinese logic – the examples are of Chinese things. The religious objects, games, instruments, flowers, and clothes

listed here are specific to a culture foreign to both Blake and Pontin. This is clear from their translations, which are either vague or become short explanations rather than translations per se. In the Blake dictionary, for example, an *erhu* fiddle only become 'a musical instrument', whereas a *go* board is explained as 'a game board which is used with white and black stones or men'. As the words chosen for the dictionaries were not part of a European tradition for music, games, or clothes, they also pose the question of what knowledge a trader would have access to, or even want access to. Such examples include the word for a civil servant ('a man who has passed the imperial examination', chrysanthemums, or instruments for prayer by Buddhist monks. These words might not have been those most useful for a European trader, even if learning Chinese would be. Through this format of language instruction, the learning of Chinese also imposed – or offered – types of knowledge that was cultural, local, or religious.

These concepts might not have made perfect sense for all within the Qing empire either. During its imperial expansion, zazi were spread throughout the Qing empire. This was part of the empire's consolidation, in which the teaching of knowledge, a certain worldview was codified, and language was standardised (see ROWE 1994: 417-457; CROSSLEY 2000: 177-192).[4] This linguistic organisation model exemplifies intercultural learning in many ways, and included Chinese who travelled abroad, foreigners in China, and – not the least – the use and exchange of pedagogic tools within the larger sinosphere. These clothes, plants, or games might not have been part of the daily life of early eighteen-century Uigurs or Taiwanese. There was a Chinese tradition of using zazi in translation settings, and for teaching non-Chinese people the language, and the Blake and Pontin dictionaries should be considered as much as belonging to that context as to that of European scholarship.

The use of *zazi* to learn Chinese was not unique to the Canton traders. Jesuit missionaries in the seventeenth century used such textbooks to learn Chinese, and brought these books back to Europe (STANDAERT 2012: 52-53). An example is François-Xavier Dentrecolles (1664–1741), who described how Chinese children used zazi (Wu 2017: 103–4). There are also zazi references in the early nineteenth century, for example in joint translation work of Antonio Montucci (1762–1829) and the missionary Robert Morrisson (1782–1834), published as *Arh-Ckhih-Tsze-Tëen-Se-Yin-Pe-Keáou* (1817: 24-25). In time, such knowledge would be put to work in the imperial ambitions in China, as well as the field of sinology in Europe (LEHNER 2010: 71-92). European missionaries, particularly in the early years, were thus also concerned with practical and on-the-ground language study, but they were not the only ones. This article serves as a reminder that between these two groups – between the Jesuit missionaries of the seventeenth century and the protestant missionaries of the nineteenth century – were

[4] For a nuancing of what standardisation means for a Chinese scholarly context, see Schäfer 2017: 621–28.

commercial actors, active in Canton and concerned with the dialect of Cantonese. Throughout the eighteenth century, what their use of zazi-textbooks reflected was a Chinese dominance of the linguistic order.

The European use of zazi also fit with the Chinese use of such works for learning other languages. Qing translators used zazi as a model for compiling dictionaries, for example in the *Huihui guan zazi* (A miscellany of Persian words) or *Gaochang guan zazi* (A miscellany of Uigur words) (Yong & Peng 2008: 394–395). The zazi was part of a larger set of pedagogical tools used in broad contexts of language learning: during the Ming and Qing dynasty there were both Manchu and Mongolian primers that were essentially adaptations of these zazi – such books were even used for language learning in Edo-period Japan (Lee 2000: 441-442; Wu 2005: 239-276; Wu 2007: 109-116). Seen in this context, the long use of zazi by foreigners was simply following the norm: the Asian norm, that is.

The traders in Canton thus played a part, however small, of the evolution of dictionaries between Cantonese and European languages, and tackled this linguistic challenge in connection with two developments in China. First, the affordability and accessibility of the zazi make the European translations dependent on the achievement of the Qing literacy campaigns as well as the Chinese printing revolution of the eighteenth century (von Spee 2010: 15-25). Second, the traders acted in relation to Chinese institution for language learning, and the intertwined language hierarchies and control mechanisms. The first institution for the study of foreign languages was established in 1276 and was amalgamated in 1748 into the Office of Interpreters and Translators (Bolton 2003: 165-168). The Qing empire was multi-ethnic and encompassed speakers of diverse languages: the very state administration was bilingual, being carried out in both Chinese and Manchu. The empire's multi-lingual composition affected its education policies. While there was a considerable expansion of education both qualitatively and quantitatively, not the least affecting schooling on the frontiers and among non-Han Chinese minorities, the authorities balanced this higher level of literacy with the fear of destabilizing society; there were political, social, and cultural limits to language learning (Elman & Woodside 1994: 525-560). The rules restricting language learning in of Canton were thus only a small part of a larger national pattern of trying to both understand and control diverse groups.

Multiple spheres of translation

A focus on the zazi-based dictionaries of Blake and Pontin allows a broadening of the context of Chinese learning in the eighteenth-century. While connected to the well-known chinoiserie of this era, and to religious scholars disentangling Chinese, the fact that these dictionaries were created by traders introduce a different set of actors to early European sinology. This focus on the port of Canton,

rather than the court of Beijing, help stress the context of Qing expansionism and linguistic reforms, rather than that of European ambition or imperialism.

The eighteenth century in Europe witnessed a quick increase in the number and form of dictionaries that were being published, changing the way in which languages were arranged, and learnt. That has now been placed in a larger framework of how the ordering of knowledge, not the least of language, is also a mechanism of power (MUGGLESTONE 2014: 207-222; BURKE 2004: 89-111). The Blake and the Pontin dictionary can be said to fit well within this larger story of language learning from above and a history of linguistic standardisation – but only if seen from the context side of Qing empire. The dictionary craze, the standardisation, and the linguistic organisation they relied on was an Asian one.

As Lydia Liu has argued, intercultural translation and organisation of language is also part of a relationship of power (LIU 1999: 13-41). However, Liu's study focusses on nineteenth-century China and its connections to Great Britain, and her theory is based on this imperial relationship. Similarly, Li Chen argues convincingly for language being an important tool of power within the early modern European expansion, saying that "colonial explorers considered it a priority to not just master the local languages they came across – by studying, publishing, and classifying their alphabet, vocabulary, and grammar – but also to *displace* them whenever possible" (CHEN 2015: 73). The traders in Canton in the 1770s, however, lived in a completely different reality, in which European traders were constantly adapting to the local rules and the Chinese authorities. It is to identify such actors that Joshua Fogel, in his criticism of Liu, underlines on-the-ground exchanges (FOGEL 2001: 1-15). In the Blake and Pontin dictionaries, the classification and word choices followed a Chinese model. In Canton, as an effect of the Qing language policies, it was the European languages that were displaced.

Thereby, the on-the-ground efforts of European traders – rather than scholars – to learn Chinese allows the nuancing of power relations in the history of translation. Doris Bachmann-Medick has argued for the importance to include studies of non-official translations, by those lacking formal training, to illuminate not only the many reasons behind a process of translation, but also its multiple forms. In short: a translation shows an actor's scope for action (BACHMANN–MEDICK 2009: 2-16). For Blake and Pontin, that scope might have been not very large. Employees in European East India Companies might have been more engaged with the learning of Chinese than previous research has led us to believe, and tackled this linguistic challenge in coherence with a long Asian pedagogic tradition.

While fitting into narratives of the imperial ordering of linguistic knowledge, these two dictionaries are also works from below, meaning by traders, working in a harbour, without formal training as translators and with a focus on one regional dialect. These examples help show how Europeans did not just appropri-

ate, but also adopted, and adapted, Chinese practices of translation and education – practices that come with both a European and Chinese imperial and ethnic bias. This allows us to nuance past power relations, and add other centres of translation and actors to the early history of translation between Europe and China.

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