

The Language of the Chinese 'Secret History of the Mongols'

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over-sophisticated literature written by and for a small, close-knit, and very highly cultivated circle of literati. This attitude is, of course, a misleading generalization, but much of the scholarly writing of the medieval period does assume in its readers a formidable common cultural background and an intimate knowledge of a range of earlier literature which makes translation all but impossible. However, in recent years the discovery of the Tun-huang MSS revealed a rich substratum of literature written by members of the large class of literate people who had not had a full classical education, but on whom depended to a large extent the day to day functioning of the Chinese state and society. Many studies have appeared in China and Japan on various of these works, to which the loose generic title *pien-wen* has been given. But it was only five years ago that the appearance of the splendid *Tun-huang pien-wen chi* 敦煌變文集 edited by Wang Chung-min 王重民, Wang Ying-shu 王應菽, Hsiang Ta 向達, Chou I-liang 周一良, Ch'i Kung 啓功, and Tseng I-kung 曾毅公 (Peking, 1957) collected, collated, and punctuated the MSS, which are scattered in England, France, China, and Japan, and brought all the extant corpus of *pien-wen* together so that we can view it as a whole.

These works, in spite of their popular origins, present the translator with immensely difficult problems. Only a few scraps of 'vulgar' literature of the same period survive in printed form, and we know next to nothing of T'ang colloquial idiom. The pieces abound with colloquial words for which there was no standardized orthography, words for which the authors employed characters selected arbitrarily for their sound, and debased and vulgar forms of characters. To make matters worse, the MSS themselves are often in a very bad state of preservation. I stress this point since nobody reading Dr. Waley's smooth and felicitous translations would imagine that these are some of the most difficult texts in Chinese. For example 'T'ai Tsung in Hell' (pp. 165–74), which reads so easily, includes long passages which are all but illegible, and the MS has lost the bottom two or three characters of each line.

Dr. Waley has overcome these difficulties amazingly well, and although there are numerous textual details where no final decision can be reached, it is most unlikely that any more accurate and still readable version will appear for at least a generation. His specialist readers may find it useful to consult the second edition of the work of Chiang Li-hung 蔣禮鴻, *Tun-huang pien-wen tzu-i t'ung-shih* 敦煌變文字義通釋, to which reference is made in the preface. This new edition is enlarged to nearly twice its former size, and contains much new material.

The selection has been wisely made, concentrating on the non-Buddhist items contained in chapters 1–3 of the *Tun-huang pien-wen chi*, and leaving aside the far more numerous, but for the most part tedious *pien-wen* on Buddhist religious subjects. A Russian translation of a MS of the *Wei-mo-chi ching chiang-ching wen*, of which several MSS are included in chapter 5 of *Tun-huang pien-wen chi*, was recently announced, which will provide European readers with one typical long example of this genre.

The only regret which I feel about the selection is for the omission of the two short fragments *Chang I-ch'ao pien-wen* 張義潮變文 and *Chang Huai-shen pien-wen* 張淮深變文 which deal with the local history of Tun-huang itself in the ninth century after Chang I-ch'ao had driven out the Tibetans and re-established Chinese rule. These represent a use of the mixed prose ballad-verse style for a purpose much closer to the conventional hero-epic than is the case with the other works, and in this they are almost unique in Chinese.

Beside the translations, Dr. Waley includes in an 'Afterword' some brief notes on various aspects of the collection. His interpretation of the term *pien-wen* as parallel to 變象 *pien hsiang* pictures of Buddhist religious 'incidents' is rather more convincing than other current theories, but what strikes one most is that, convenient as this word may be as a generic term for this very mixed category of writing (some pieces are in simple prose, some entirely in ballad-verse, and some in mixed verse and prose), the authors themselves had no consistent usage. *Pien* 變 alone, *fu* 賦, *tz'u* 詞, *shih* 詩, and *huah* 話 all appear in titles of pieces included in the collection.

Now that Dr. Waley has opened up this new field of 'popular' literature for us, dare we hope that one day soon we shall have in a Western language an equally readable and authoritative volume on the popular lyric poetry from Tun-huang?

D. C. TWITCHETT

M. A. K. HALLIDAY: *The language of the Chinese 'Secret history of the Mongols'*. (Publications of the Philological Society, XVII.) xvi, 235 pp., table. Oxford: Basil Blackwell for the Society, 1959 [pub. 1960]. £4 4*s*.

The 'Secret history of the Mongols' is a biography of Genghis Khan, written in the thirteenth century A.D. and surviving in a

Mongolian version (but transcribed in Chinese characters, the so-called ' Sino-Mongolian '), with an interlinear translation (the ' Chinese gloss '), and a Chinese version. The Mongolian text has already received attention from linguists and historians, but the Chinese version has been relatively neglected, and it is this that Dr. Halliday is dealing with in the book under review.

The text of the version, historically of little interest as compared with the Mongolian original, is subjected to a comprehensive linguistic analysis as a representative example of a particular variety of Chinese. Dr. Halliday's work is a major contribution to linguistic scholarship on three counts. Firstly, we have a full description of a form of Chinese (called Early New Chinese by the author), belonging to the colloquial rather than to the literary style, though recorded in writing, which is closer to contemporary Mandarin than to any other variety of Chinese and is consequently a stage in the historical development of modern Pekingese. Secondly, we have here an example, all too rare as yet, of rigorously formal techniques of analysis successfully worked out in the grammar of a language of the ' isolating ' type ; and thirdly, Dr. Halliday gives us for the first time an example of the linguistic methods of Professor J. R. Firth (to whom the book is dedicated) applied to the complete description of a given body of language material.

In this last connexion one may draw attention to several characteristic features of Firth's theory illustrated in Dr. Halliday's work. By its nature the material studied constitutes a ' restricted language ', a closed or delimited field ; and the recognition of such ' restricted languages ', within the totality of a ' whole language ', as proper objects of separate analyses has been stressed by Firth. Dr. Halliday regards his entire analysis of the text as a statement of its meaning at various levels (ch. 2), treating its phonological, grammatical, and lexical structuring, together with the functioning of the text as a whole in its historically successive contextualizations (ch. 3), as constituting its total meaning, in so far as this falls within the purview of linguistics. This does not, of course, mean that the levels are confused, or that grammatical analysis is dependent on semantic criteria ; both in Firth's theory and Halliday's practice each level is strictly distinguished, but all the levels of analysis are the analysis of function in an appropriate context. The vocabulary (Lexis, ch. 7) is in part analysed and classified by collocations (individual words habitually recurring in specific recurrent groups) ; and the transcription employed (ch. 8) is derived from the one used by Dr. Halliday for modern Pekingese,[1] and based on an analysis of the Pekingese syllable in prosodic terms (tone, however, is left untreated), and this is further explained in a separate appendix, worth study by itself as a clear illustration of the prosodic method of phonological analysis pioneered by Firth.

While pointing out the possible place of the text along with other examples of early colloquial styles in a history of Chinese, Dr. Halliday keeps his work purely descriptive and synchronic, except for occasional forward references to contemporary Pekingese. After a brief historical account and an outline of the methods he is using, the author deals successively with the graphic analysis of the written text as it stands (a few emendations are suggested in an appendix), the grammar, the vocabulary as far as it exhibits systematic interrelations, and the phonology to the extent that this is recoverable. The bulk of the description is of the grammar, since in a written corpus the phonology can of necessity be only indirect and incomplete.

Dr. Halliday's method is instructive, as one way of dealing with languages of the type represented, whether in written or spoken form. The elements recognized are, in descending order of size : sentence, clause, word, and character, only the last coinciding exactly with a division in the written text, though clauses are frequently coextensive with punctuationally marked ' pieces ' (p. 47). The major word classes are noun and verb, defined in the first place by their grammatical interchangeability with the corresponding nominal and verbal groups, these consisting of more than one word and assigned to their classes by the interior relations of their component words (p. 60). Beside these there are adverbial groups (consisting of nominal and verbal words), and a separate class of adverbs. These three word classes are further divided into subclasses (p. 48), and within them are distinguished free and bound words according to their ability or inability to function alone in a clause or only as part of a group. Clauses (free or bound, according to whether they can by themselves constitute complete sentences) are nominal or verbal according to their word composition (p. 55), and admit various internal structures ; they are further characterized by the categories of voice, aspect, and mood (p. 47), each comprising three members two of which are marked by a specific structure involving a marker word (pp. 56–7), the third being neutral and unmarked (in both senses) and the most frequent clause class in each category.

In following Dr. Halliday's grammatical

[1] See his ' Grammatical categories in modern Chinese ', *TPS*, 1956, 177–224.

analysis one finds the whole scheme of formal classification and categorization based on the two criteria of 'interior form' and 'exterior form' (the presence and relative position of other elements (p. 49)). One may recommend its careful study as likely to be helpful not only to workers in the field of the 'isolating' languages, but also to those dealing with the superficially unlike group of languages (in South East Asia and elsewhere) in which morphological formations are largely derivational rather than inflectional, and the basic grammatical categories of the sentence are marked only syntactically and not by the morphological forms of certain words as in familiar Indo-European pastures.

Dr. Halliday's exposition is clear; a criticism might, however, be made of the large number of substantial footnotes which interrupt the comprehension of his closely reasoned paragraphs. A plea can be made, to many beside this author, to keep footnotes (other than references, originals of translated passages, and the like) as few and as short as possible, and to incorporate their matter in the running text or separately in appendixes.

The book is very attractively produced, and misprints are few. The author and publisher are to be congratulated on an important and valuable production.

R. H. ROBINS

NGHIÈM TOAN and LOUIS RICAUD (ed. and tr.): Étude de texte: annales chinoises. Une traduction juxtalinéaire commentée de la biographie officielle de l'Imperatrice Wou Tsö-t'ien d'après le texte du 新唐書 (Nouveau livre des T'ang). [Reprint from *Bulletin de la Société des Études Indochinoises*, Nouvelle Série, Tom. XXXIV, No. 2, 1959, paged separately.] 171 pp.

The Empress Wu Tse-t'ien, the impressive and totally unscrupulous consort of Kao-tsung who dominated the T'ang court for more than half a century and eventually established a dynasty of her own, is one of the great romantic figures in Chinese history. The hostile picture given by her biographies in the dynastic histories, deriving from the *Shih-lu* of her times written after her fall and death, provided the basis upon which the writers of novels and plays have further embroidered a popular image compounded of ruthless cruelty and sexual depravity. In very recent years two books about her have appeared in English. Lin Yu-tang presented in semi-fictional form the traditional picture with a new perspective in that he sees her as the prototype of the Stalin of the purges and one of a select band of mass murderers of history. Fitzgerald provided a more sober account of her life following the Chinese histories. Neither work is satisfactory as history, for they neglect entirely to take into account the basic political stresses within the ruling class which prevented the imperial family and the aristocracy from frustrating her career, nor do they pay any attention to the widespread economic and social changes which were rapidly transforming and enriching the empire. There is still room for a good book on the Empress and her reign.

The work under review certainly does not fill this gap. It is a literal translation of the exceedingly biased biography in *Hsin T'ang-shu* 76. Even this would have some limited value, had it met the standards of modern scholarship. But alas, the work of Mm. Nghièm Toan and Ricaud takes us straight back to the nineteenth century. Not only are they totally unaware of all modern historical scholarship in Chinese—this would be excusable, since presumably current publications do not reach Saigon regularly—but they have equally failed to take into account well-known parallel material in other classical sources, and the work of Ch'ing scholars on the T'ang histories.

The presentation of their translation is extraordinary. In the first days of studying classical Chinese it is normal for beginner students to copy out their texts noting the reading and meanings of each character as a preliminary to attempting to puzzle out the meaning. But for a mature scholar to expose his use of the method in print to his fellow scholars is simply inviting ridicule. To read in the preface the claims of the translators to have consulted together the *Tz'u hai* and the *Chung-kuo jen-ming* [*ta tz'u-tien*], and to find quoted as authorities Giles' *Biographical dictionary* and Wieger's *Rudiments historiques*, which should long ago have been consigned to oblivion. shows that they are out of touch with the standards of modern scholarship.

The translation itself is passable, though it seldom uses one word where several will suffice, and has a sprinkling of minor errors. At first glance the notes appear to be full, but in reality they contain little of substance, and cite no authorities. They are to a considerable extent concerned with taking to task Lin Yu-tang and Fitzgerald, often giving the impression that the authors have read these works in as cursory a way as they have skimmed the Chinese authorities—for instance when they rebuke Fitzgerald (p. 31) for not translating 'par pudeur' an anecdote which is in fact given in full in Fitzgerald's main text (p. 17). Such notes as 38, which assumes that Lin Yu-tang might have meant Ho-nei province when he mentions Hanoi (i.e., Chiao-chou, seat