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Huiyi Wu, *Traduire la Chine au XVIIIe siècle. Les jésuites traducteurs de textes chinois et le renouvellement des connaissances européennes sur la Chine (1687-ca. 1740)*. Paris : Honoré Champion, 2017. ISBN 978-2-7453-3182-3.

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Two publication events provide the time-frame for Huiyi Wu's investigation: in 1687, *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* was published in Paris under the royal patronage of Louis XIV and the editorship of the Belgian Jesuit Philippe Couplet; in 1735, the French Jesuit Jean-Baptist Du Halde published a huge volume, *Description géographique, historique, chronologique, politique, et physique de l'empire de la Chine etc.*, based on the letters sent by French Jesuit missionaries from China over the preceding half-century. Both works represented translations of a sort: *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* was a Latin translation of three titles in the Confucian *Four Books* Canon--i.e. *Great Learning*, *Golden Means*, *Analects* (*Mencius* being omitted) and Du Halde includes several Chinese works translated into French by his confreres in China, notably excerpts from *The Orphan of Zhao* and small selections from Li Shizhen's *Ben cao gang mu*, the great Ming dynasty encyclopedia of herbal medicine and cures. For the first work edited by Couplet, there exists a critical edition and translation by Thierry Meynard;[1] on Du Halde the scholarship of Isabelle Landry-Deron represents the standard work.[2] Wu, therefore, has wisely chosen to focus her investigation on the translations of François-Xavier Dentrecolles (1664-1741), a frequent contributor to the *Lettres édifiantes* and whose translations from Chinese works were also included in *Description*. But *Traduire la Chine* is much more than a close reading of Dentrecolles. It also analyzes the translated works of two other French Jesuits, Joachim Bouvet and Claude Visdelou; it gives an outline of the Jesuit mission in China, especially on the work of the French Jesuits and their scientific endeavors; and it discusses at some length the controversy over "Figurism", the effort by three French Jesuits--Bouvet, Joseph-Henri de Prémare, and Jean-François Foucquet--to find pre-figurations of Christian doctrines in the ancient Chinese classic, the *Yijing*, the *Book of Changes*, an effort condemned by the Society of Jesus and the Catholic Church.

In her Introduction, Wu gives a brief account of the Jesuit mission before the arrival of the French, the first effort at translations, the characteristics of the production and marketing of Chinese books, and some reflections on the problematic of studying translations. The real orientation to the book, however, really comes in Chapter 1, "Apprendre pour Traduire. Traduire pour apprendre." Here Wu describes the linguistic education of Jesuit missionaries before their departure and their effort at learning Chinese. She is quite right in pointing out that many, if not most, of the Chinese texts translated into European languages first originated as language exercises, as European missionaries proceeded to learn the written language as well as spoken Mandarin. *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, for example, originated in the textual studies of the first Jesuits in China, namely the Italians Michele Ruggieri and Matteo Ricci. The final Latin text represented the cumulative effort of several generations of Jesuit scholars in "learning and translating" the Confucian classics.

With the 1684 arrival of Jesuit mathematicians dispatched by Louis XIV, the history of translation entered a new phase: instead of translations into Latin, the French Jesuit mission rendered Chinese texts almost

exclusively into French, thereby, in the process, helping to propel France and the French language to the forefront of Sinology in the 18th and 19th centuries. Before Jesuit missionaries could turn their interest to translating the scientific, historic, literary, and philosophical Chinese texts, they had to cope with the Rites Controversy. In defending their position and against their opponents' standpoint that rites honoring departed ancestors and Confucius constituted idolatry, the Jesuits included excerpts of Confucian canons and commentaries in their reports to Rome, translated into Latin for the benefit of the Curial congregation that ultimately decided the issue against their position. This is the first part of Chapter II, after which Wu turns her attention to the work of the three French Jesuit Figurists mentioned earlier. She delves into some detail in their readings, interpretations, and translations from the *Yijing*, drawing on the considerable scholarship published in western languages and Chinese.

Chapter III is a strange mélange of themes: the first section surveys the debate in Europe about the Jesuit mission in China and its intellectual effort, and the rest of the chapter analyzes in detail Dentrecolles' translation of an obscure Chinese work, *Dou peng xian hua* (Idle Conversations at the Bean Shed). Wu goes into great detail comparing the original Chinese text and Dentrecolles' French in order to reconstruct the precise philosophical points on creation and the universe that the missionary wanted to refute. An excursion into Song dynasty neo-Confucian cosmology rounds out the discussion of this chapter.

The most coherent portion, the heart of the book, is Chapter IV. This is the subject that goes to the central interest of the author: the rendering of scientific information on natural history, mineralogy, sericulture, and porcelain manufacture by Bouvet, Visdelou, and Dentrecolles, translations that were published in the *Lettres édifiantes* and in *Description*, which testified to the mercantilist and scientific orientation of the French Jesuit mission and its reliance on the French state. Again, Wu gives the reader the Chinese background and goes into detailed discussion that help to frame the projects of translation.

Traduire la Chine comes with an introduction, four chapters, an index, three appendices, three chronological tables, a long conclusion, and a long bibliography. Originating as a dissertation at the University of Paris Diderot, without doubt it is a work of impressive erudition that shows the author's command of the scholarship in different western languages and in Chinese and her mastery of the original sources. As a book, it lacks coherence. There are simply too many topics, too many tangents; as the reader is immersed in one discussion, he is led often to some interesting but not central discussion that shows off the author's erudition. It is good to contextualize, but there can be too much of a good thing. In the end, this long text reads less like a book than several erudite articles built upon a large and impressive scholarly apparatus.

NOTES

[1] Thierry Meynard, *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus (1687): The First Translation of the Confucian Classics* (Rome: Institutum historicum Societatis Iesu, 2011).

[2] Isabelle Landry-Deron, *La preuve par la Chine: la "Description" de J.-B. Du Halde, jésuite, 1735* (Paris : Éditions de l'EHESS, 2002).

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