

**An Anthology of Chinese Discourse
on Translation**

Volume One

From Earliest Times to the Buddhist Project

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however. Instead he was highly respected by the King of the State of Qin, so much so that he incurred the jealousy of another minister, and died in prison as a result. In his lifetime he was a prolific writer, and produced a lengthy work bearing his name: *Hanfeizi*.

(Headnote prepared and translated by Martha Cheung)

THE MAN OF TRUE VIRTUE CHERISHES SUBSTANCE AND FROWNS UPON PURE EMBELLISHMENT

From “Jielao” 解老 (Explaining the *Laozi*), in *Hanfeizi* 韓非子, Volume 6 (Latter half of the Warring States Period, c. fourth to third centuries BCE)

... The man of true virtue trusts feelings and dispenses with appearance, cherishes **substance** [zhi 質] and frowns upon pure **embellishment** [shi 飾]... .

(Text prepared and translated by Martha Cheung)

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AUTHOR UNKNOWN

ZHOU RITES

Scholars of the Han Dynasty attributed the work to Ji Dan 姬旦, Duke of Zhou (d. 1105 BCE), a legendary statesman of the Western Zhou Dynasty (c. eleventh century–771 BCE). Others dated the work to the time of the Warring States (475–221 BCE). Yet others believed that the work was a fabrication by Liu Xin 劉歆 (53 BCE – 23 CE) at the end of the Western Han Dynasty. Today it is generally accepted that the work is about the Western Zhou Dynasty, and that its compilation should be dated to around the last years of the Warring States Period.³⁵ It gives what is purportedly a detailed description of the structure of government of the Western Zhou Dynasty – credited by legend to be a time of peace and prosperity, with the Duke of Zhou at the helm. The description includes a list of major and minor posts distributed among six ministries, and the duties of each official. It discusses government in general under the title “Office of Heaven”; education under “Office of Earth”; social and religious institutions under “Office of Spring”; the army under “Office of Summer”; justice under “Office of Autumn”; and the population, territory, and agriculture under “Office of Winter”. Together with the *Yili* 儀禮 (the *Ceremonials*) and *Liji* 禮記 (literally the *Rites Records*, more popularly known as the *Book of Rites*), the *Zhouli* 周禮 (*Zhou Rites*) took its place in the canon of Rites texts in the early Western Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 8 CE).

(Headnote prepared by Luo Xinzhang, translated by Jane Lai)

THE DUTIES OF GOVERNMENT INTERPRETERS IN ANCIENT TIMES

From “Xiangxu” 象胥 (Interpreting-functionaries), in “Qiuguan sikou xia” 秋官司寇下

³⁵ This is the view of Qian Mu and is generally considered to be definitive by twentieth-century Chinese scholars (Qian 1994). Michael Nylan (2001:175) argues that based on its grammar and content, the *Zhou Rites* cannot date from a time much before the Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE), but he also explains why it was possible for scholars of the Han and subsequent dynasties to treat the *Zhou Rites* as being descriptive of the government led by the legendary Duke of Zhou.

(Ministry of Justice, Part 2), collected in *Zhouli* 周禮 (*Zhou Rites*), Volume 10 (Late Warring States Period, c. mid to end of the third century BCE)

The *xiàngxū* [象胥, interpreting-functionaries: *xiàng* 象, likeness-renderers; *xū* 胥, minor government officials] are responsible for receiving the envoys of the tribes of *Man* 蠻, *Yi* 夷, *Min* 閩, *He* 貉, *Rong* 戎 and *Di* 狄. They are charged with conveying the words of the King and explaining his meanings to the envoys so that harmonious relations with these tribes may be maintained. At regular intervals, when the heads of these states or their representatives come to court to pay tribute, the *xiàngxū* are responsible for overseeing matters relating to protocol; they also serve as interpreters... .

(Text prepared by Luo Xinzhang, translated by Martha Cheung)

COMMENTARY

This is one of the earliest Chinese historical documents about “*fānyì*” 翻譯 (interpretation/translation). From the passage, it is clear that interpreting was just one of the many responsibilities of the *xiàngxū*. The activity of interpreting was not considered important enough to warrant the establishment of a separate government post in itself. For further information on the *xiàngxū*, see entries 22, 24 and 25. Entry 15 gives the common name of the *xiàngxū*: “tongue-men”. See also entries 11 and 23 for a possible reason as to why the social status of *fānyì* (interpretation/translation) was not high in those days. For another meaning of the character *xiàng* 象 that is closely related to the meaning the character has in this entry, see entry 12.

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AUTHOR UNKNOWN

ZHOU RITES

THE TRAINING OF INTERPRETERS

From “*Da xingren*” 大行人 (Senior Messenger), in “*Qiuguan sikou xia*” 秋官司寇下 (Ministry of Justice, Part 2), collected in *Zhouli* 周禮 (*Zhou Rites*), Volume 10 (Late Warring States Period, c. mid to end of the third century BCE)

... One way by which the King ensures that the princes and other states remain content with his rule is to attend to the proper training of the *xiàngxū* 象胥 [interpreting-functionaries]... Every seven years, the *xiàngxū* are gathered together to receive training in foreign languages and in the proper use of diplomatic language... .

(Text prepared by Ma Zuyi, translated by Martha Cheung)

COMMENTARY

- (1) This is one of the earliest historical documents on the training received by interpreters/translators in the Western Zhou Dynasty.
- (2) From a sociological perspective, it is interesting to note that within the structure of government of the Western Zhou Dynasty, the post of the *xiàngxū* belonged to a comparatively low rung of the “messenger” echelon.

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LÜ BUWEI (D. 235 BCE)

A native of Puyang 濮陽 in the State of Wei (present-day Hebei Province), Lü Buwei 呂不韋 was a merchant before becoming Minister of the State of Qin, one of the small feudal kingdoms fighting others for political dominance during the Warring States Period (475–221 BCE). While serving as minister, Lü Buwei established his own private court and engaged more than three thousand people in his service. Amongst them were people of the finest intellect – politicians, historians, experts in economic matters, and writers – and they helped Lü compile the famous *Annals of Lü Buwei* 呂氏春秋 (*Lüshi chunqiu*), a compendium of the writings of the various schools of thought of the time. Under Lü's statesmanship, the State of Qin engulfed many of its neighbouring states and became a formidable power. But Lü was implicated in a revolt against the boy emperor in 238 BCE. As a result, he was banished from the capital to Henan and then to the present-day central province of Sichuan, where he is said to have ended his life with poison.

(Headnote prepared and translated by Martha Cheung)

ONE WOULD HAVE NO NEED FOR XIÀNG, YÌ OR DĪDĪ

From “Shenshi” 慎勢 (Heeding the Circumstances), in *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (*The Annals of Lü Buwei*), Volume 17 (239 BCE)

... In a country of cap and sash [a civilized country], as large an area as one covering 3,000 square miles would be accessible by boats and carriages, and one would have no need for the *xiàng* 象 [likeness-renderers], *yì* 譯 [translators/interpreters], or *Dīdī* 狄鞮 [they who know the *Di* 狄 tribes]³⁶...

(Text prepared and translated by Martha Cheung)

COMMENTARY

- (1) *Xiàng* 象, *yì* 譯 and *Dīdī* 狄鞮 were the titles of government functionaries in charge of communicating with the neighbouring tribes in ancient times (entry 24).
- (2) This entry resonates with entry 11 to show how little translation/interpretation was thought of in ancient China. To the Zhou people, the notion of a civilized country clearly did not include a deep intellectual curiosity in communicating with other peoples, let alone the ability to speak their languages. In their geopolitical view, the tribes and races residing in different parts of the known world had not developed an understanding and practice of rites and music, and hence were hardly people with whom one could have meaningful interaction. Such a view was at first the outcome of the Zhou people's preoccupation with survival, but gradually it became the blind spot of their highly developed

³⁶ According to the annotation of the Tang Dynasty scholar Kong Yingda (1982:1338), *Di* 狄 is a collective name for the tribes living in the western part of ancient China, and *dī* 鞮 means “know”.

ethical, aesthetic and material culture. Later on, such a view was shared by Kongzi 孔子, Mengzi 孟子 and many of their disciples. It is hardly surprising that discourse on translation did not flourish in the centuries before the era of Buddhist sutra translation, which started some time in the second century CE.

- (3) This picture of a civilized country in which translation did not figure prominently was not broken until Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (145?–86? BCE) seminal *Historical Records* 史記 (*Shiji*),³⁷ the “rediscovery”, by the Duke of Huainan, of the Chu culture (in the past considered primitive),³⁸ and later, the journeys to the Western Regions and the Indian subcontinent made by the faithful for Buddhist truths.

24

DAI SHENG (FL. 74–49 BCE)

A specialist in the ancient rites, Dai Sheng 戴聖, together with his uncle (considered by some to be his father), salvaged and edited a body of writings on the ethical, political, aesthetic, and anthropological aspects of the rites. Unknown in his time, he stayed out of the controversies surrounding the authenticity of the ancient-classical texts, and provided a liberal assemblage of the diverse interpretations and delineations of the many different cultural forms through which individuals related to society and nature.

(Headnote prepared and translated by Martha Cheung)

MAKING ACCESSIBLE WHAT IS IN THE MINDS OF DIFFERENT PEOPLES AND

MAKING THEIR LIKINGS AND PREFERENCES UNDERSTOOD

From “Wangzhi” 王制 (Royal Institutions), in *Liji* 禮記 (*Book of Rites*)³⁹, Volume 4

³⁷ The *Historical Records*, compiled at around 100 CE by Sima Qian, gives fascinating accounts of the neighbouring countries of China. The compilation and writing of this work was started by Sima Tan 司馬談 (d. 110 BCE), an imperial historian for Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty 漢武帝 (r. 141–87 BCE), but he died before completing the task and the writing was carried on by Sima Qian who, before inheriting the office, had read and traveled widely after the tradition of pre-Qin scholars to view the land, the people, and their writings. The *Historical Records* was for centuries considered unparalleled in its multiplicity of narratives and philosophical perspectives, and in its exuberant invention of characters and situations.

³⁸ The Duke of Huainan (Liu An 劉安, 179–122 BCE) was a patron of the arts and culture in the style of pre-Qin princes as well as a lover of poetry. His passion for Chu-style poetry contributed to the spread of appreciation of Chu (the area straddling present-day Hunan and Hubei) culture, especially of the great patriotic poet Qu Yuan's poetry. He committed suicide after being found guilty of a plot to overthrow the government.

³⁹ The *Book of Rites* 禮記 (*Liji*, literally “Rites Record”) was compiled from many sources. It is a collection of different types of material on the rites and rituals observed in the Western Zhou Dynasty (c. eleventh century–771 BCE). It also contains treatises, ascribed to Kongzi 孔子 and his disciples, on the shaping influence of rites and ritual on the character of the individual and on their usefulness as tools to bring harmony to society. In addition, it carries tales of exemplary behaviour. It was one of the three texts accorded canonical status in the early Western Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 8 CE), the other two being the *Zhou Rites* 周禮 (*Zhouli*) and the *Ceremonials* 儀禮 (*Yili*). Since the *Book of Rites* came into existence as a book to support state promotion of the practice of rites and rituals in court and by people from different walks of life, it will be referred to as the *Book of Rites* to highlight at once its canonical status and the ideological function it was meant to serve.

(Early Western Han Period, after 206 BCE)

... The people living in the five regions⁴⁰ spoke different languages and had different customs, likings and preferences. In order to **make accessible** [dá 達] what was in the minds of different peoples, and in order to make their likings and preferences understood, there were functionaries for the job. Those in charge of the regions in the east were called *jì* 寄 [the entrusted; transmitters]; in the south, *xiàng* 象 [likeness-renderers]; in the west, *Dídī* 狄鞮 [they who know the *Di* tribes]; and in the north, *yì* 譯⁴¹ [translators/interpreters]...

(Text prepared by Luo Xinzhang, translated by Martha Cheung)

COMMENTARY

- (1) This excerpt contains one of the earliest historical records of the ancient perception of the function of what is today known as translation/interpretation.
- (2) Entry 21 gives *xiàngxū* 象胥 (semantic translation “interpreting-functionaries”) as the collective name and entry 15 gives *shérén* (舌人, tongue-men) as the common name for the government officials in charge of communicating with the neighbouring tribes of the Zhou Dynasty. This entry provides information on how these *xiàngxū* were given titles designating the regions in their charge. These three entries, together with related entries on the topic (entries 11, 25 and 23), show that – based on extant literature – translation and/or interpretation in the periods before the Qin Dynasty was essentially functional in nature rather than an activity inspired by a genuine intellectual curiosity about other languages and cultures. Translation and/or interpretation was brought into existence by the administrative and communicative needs of the state and institutionalized as a minor government post, and served as a means of livelihood for some people. Significantly, in those days the activity now called *fānyì* 翻譯 (translation/interpretation) did not even have a fixed and stable designation, let alone a clear definition. This being the case, the terms *xiàngxū* (interpreting-functionary), *shérén* (tongue-man), *jì* (sender/transmitter), *xiàng* (likeness-renderer), *Dídī* (he who knows the *Di* tribe), and *yì* (translators/interpreters) – used either as titles

⁴⁰ Before the Qin Dynasty (221–207 BCE), which saw the first unification of the country now known as China, the people of “the five regions” referred to those of the Central States (*Zhōngguó* 中國) inhabiting the Central Plain (which encompassed what is now most of the areas of Henan Province, the western part of Shandong Province, Hebei Province, and the southern part of Shanxi [*Hanyu dacidian* 1995(1):600]), and also to the tribes living in the four directions. It should be noted that for the pre-Qin eras, the “Central States” (or the “Middle States”) rather than the “Middle Kingdom” is a more accurate translation of *Zhōngguó* (中國), which for millennia has been known in the English-speaking world as China. In addition to its geographical reference, the term “Central States” refers to the various states which had strong clan affiliations and a shared sense of cultural affinity with one another, and which existed before unification. “Middle Kingdom”, on the other hand, is post-unification in temporal reference. See Nylan (2001:166-167) for a more detailed discussion of the term “China”. See also Introduction (V-7) of the present anthology for an explanation of why in referring to the pre-unification eras, the apparently anachronistic term “China” is used rather than “Central States”.

⁴¹ According to Jia Gongyan’s annotation (1983:620), 譯 (*yì*, translate) means the same as 易 (*yì*, changes), that is to say, to change and replace the words of one language with those of another to make them understandable – hence 譯 (*yì*) is rendered as “translators/interpreters”.

of government posts or as common or collective names for those engaged in the activity of interpreting/translating – assume great theoretical significance. They throw light on the ancient perception of what the activity now called *fānyì* 翻譯 (translation/interpretation) was. Looked at from a theoretical angle, these terms can be said to have encapsulated some of the defining features of *fānyì* 翻譯 (translation/interpretation).⁴² It should also be noted that *xiàng* 象 (likeness-renderer) – a title for those who spoke the languages of the south – also means “images” (entry 12).

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(ATTRIBUTED TO) FU SHENG (268–178 BCE)

Fu Sheng 伏生 was an Academician in the Qin Dynasty (221–207 BCE). When in 213 BCE Emperor Shi of the Qin Dynasty 秦始皇 (r. 221–210 BCE) gave an order prohibiting all learning not sanctioned by the government, Fu Sheng was said to have hidden away the *Shangshu* 尚書 (a collection of historical material often considered to be the first history of China, including records of deeds, edicts, and pronouncements on the responsibilities of the ruling elite towards Heaven and the common people). With the rise of the Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE), Fu Sheng started to teach the *Shangshu* in modern script (that is the clerical script in use during the Western Han period, not the archaic script of the pre-Han periods). When Emperor Wu 漢武帝 (r. 141–87 BCE) conferred canonical status on five ancient texts in 136 BCE, Fu Sheng’s version of the *Shangshu* (generally translated as the *Book of History* to indicate its canonical status) was included. It was said that Fu Sheng also prepared the *Shangshu dazhuan* 尚書大傳 (*Amplification of the Book of History*), a text that explicated and commented on the *Book of History*. However, it has also been said that much of the work of compilation and explication was not actually done by Fu Sheng but by his students Zhang Sheng 張生 (fl. 180–157 BCE) and Ouyang Sheng 歐陽生 (fl. 180–157 BCE), or by even later scholars.

(Headnote prepared by Ma Zuyi, translated by Jane Lai)

AN ANCIENT RECORD OF INTERPRETING ACTIVITIES

From “Jiahe” 嘉禾 (Luxuriant Grain), in *Shangshu dazhuan* 尚書大傳 (*Amplification of the Book of History*), Volume 4 (c. 179–157 BCE)

... To the south of Jiaozhi⁴³ was the kingdom of Yuechang. In the sixth year of the regency of the Duke of Zhou 周公 [d. 1105 BCE] during which he established rites and music and there was peace in every corner of the world, an envoy from Yuechang arrived with three *xiàng* 象 [official title of interpreting-functionaries in charge of communicating with the regions in the south], who interpreted in relay to present the rare gift of a white pheasant. The envoy said, “The road is long. High mountains and deep valleys obstruct the way. To overcome the language problems encountered along the way, several *yì* 譯 [official title of interpreting-functionaries in charge of

⁴² For an exploration of these issues see Martha P.Y. Cheung, “‘To translate’ means ‘to exchange’? a new interpretation of the earliest Chinese attempts to define translation (‘fānyì’)” (Cheung 2005b).

⁴³ Before the Han Dynasty, “Jiaozhi” referred to the area circumscribed by the borders of the provinces of Hunan, Jiangxi, Guangdong and Guangxi (*Hanyu dacidian* 1995(2):337).

communicating with the regions in the north] have been sent to accompany your humble servant in order to pay tribute to Your Excellency.”... .

(Text prepared by Ma Zuyi, translated by Martha Cheung)

COMMENTARY

From this passage, it is clear that *yì* 譯 and *xiàng* 象 were not just Zhou Dynasty government titles. *Yì* and *xiàng* were also used in a general sense to refer to people engaged in interlingual communication. The envoy from Yuechang referred to *yì* because people from the south had to interpret the languages of the north. The words of the envoy (and especially his use of the title *yì* rather than *xiàng*) show an interesting reversal of perspective: they reflect a view from the “periphery” rather than that of the “centre”.