

An American Pioneer of Chinese Studies in Cross-Cultural Perspective: Benjamin Bowen Carter as an Agent of Global Knowledge. By Man-shun Yeung. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2021. xvi + 447 pages. ISBN 9789004498969.

It has been a long-standing opinion that Chinese studies in America sprouted from the so-called Missionary Sinology in the 1830s. Man-shun Yeung's highly original work challenges this view by discovering Benjamin Bowen Carter (1771–1831), “the first American who has learned Chinese,” as early as 1805 (5). Drawing on a wealth of newly discovered primary sources, the book reconstructs Carter's life story with in-depth investigations of his language learning experience, exchanges with academics, and endeavors to advance Chinese studies in the United States before the 1830s. Through this important yet overlooked case, Yeung urges “a re-examination of our understanding of the early development of Western Sinology” and the global circulation of Sinological knowledge in the early nineteenth century (17).

The book offers a comprehensive account of Carter's life. A native of Providence, Rhode Island, Carter was educated at Rhode Island College. After receiving a master's degree in 1789, he studied medicine in Philadelphia and operated a medical practice for several years. In 1798, Carter joined the Canton trade by serving as a surgeon and later an assistant supercargo for Brown & Ives. From 1798 to 1807, he undertook five voyages to China and learned both Mandarin and Cantonese during his long residence in Canton. Carter's linguistic expertise enabled him to assist the U.S. consul in diplomatic affairs, which convinced him of the importance of learning Chinese in safeguarding American interests in China. Back in the States in 1807, he tried hard to lobby the U.S. government to appoint an interpreter in Canton and recommended himself for the post but did not succeed. He then traveled to Europe and built close ties with European sinologists, such as Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat (1788–1832). Carter spent the last six years of his life pursuing an academic career. Although his attempt to establish Chinese programs in American universities failed, Carter's experience in Chinese studies marks a clear beginning in the history of American Sinology.

The most noticeable merit of the book is Yeung's mastery and creative use of the primary materials. For instance, in order to reveal how Carter learned Chinese, Yeung collects various learning materials with

Carter's notes and annotations, including (1) manuscript dictionaries and grammar books compiled by the Catholic missionaries in the eighteenth century, such as a manuscript copy of *Dictionnaire Chinois* 漢字西譯; (2) Chinese classics, such as *Sanzijing* 三字經 and *Shijing* 詩經; and (3) local English textbooks like *Xiuxiang hongmao fanzi* 繡像紅毛番字. Some of these unpublished materials, together with other sources, are transcribed and included in the long appendix attached to the book, which, in itself, is a contribution to related research fields. In the analysis of these materials, Yeung especially focuses on Carter's notes left on the books and relevant manuscripts to reconstruct his learning process. As revealed by the author, Carter not only learned Chinese characters from the Catholics' works but also relied on the manuscript dictionaries to read and translate the Chinese classics in order to grasp the syntax and expressions. In addition, the book traces changes in Carter's phonetic transcriptions left in his textbooks to show how he gradually gained systematic knowledge of Mandarin and Cantonese. In this way, Yeung (126) further points out that these annotations make Carter "not only a receiver... but also a creator" of Chinese knowledge in the learning process.

Another commendable aspect of the book is Yeung's elaborated study of Carter's Chinese teachers. As the author puts it, early sinologists "were not the only actors on the stage of Sinology" (349). Chinese teachers were indispensable assistants in their study and writing. However, this important group remains little known to us. Yeung's discussions on them, especially Abel Yen 嚴本明, deepen our understanding of these almost "invisible" figures—they actually played multiple roles and were "the center of a network" connecting Western sinologists at that time (195). Through a close reading of the handwritten dialogues between Carter and Yen, for example, Yeung finds that Yen was serving as not merely a language instructor but also a book supplier and even a diplomatic translator for the Americans. Yeung analyzes how Yen cooperated with Carter in translating a diplomatic document in 1805. It was probably the failure of this diplomatic action that reminded Carter of the strategic value of Chinese studies in Sino-U.S. diplomacy and that urged him to coerce the U.S. government into appointing a translator in Canton.

Moreover, the book's focus is not limited to Carter's activities in China. Instead, Carter's case is examined in the global context with circumspection, which foregrounds his position and roles in the transatlantic network of sinologists of his time. To this end, the author tracks Carter's footsteps in his tours in Britain from 1808 to 1812 and

finds that he was immersed in the Chinese collections of the Royal Society and the British Library. An examination of Carter's list of books purchased in Britain also demonstrates that he "kept abreast with the latest European publications on Chinese language and literature" (250). As pointed out by the author, Carter's comments on those works indicate that he had developed an academic interest in Chinese studies. The most intriguing episode of Carter's sojourn in Europe is his interactions with Abel-Rémusat from 1815 to 1819. Building on eight newly found letters, Yeung elaborates on their lesser-known academic exchanges. More importantly, Yeung finds that Carter's close relations with Abel-Rémusat enabled him to act as an intermediary between sinologists in other parts of the world and as an agent in disseminating Abel-Rémusat's work in America. Yeung's study of Carter's European experience provides a fuller picture of the intellectual networks of nineteenth-century sinologists and Carter's position in them.

Toward the end of the book, the author returns to the topic of American Sinology, detailing Carter's unsuccessful pursuit of a Chinese professorship and the subsequent development of Chinese studies in America. Yeung concludes that Carter emphasized both practical use and academic studies of the Chinese languages. The author also argues that, to a certain extent, the later generations of American sinologists echo Carter in the purposes, approaches, and nature of their studies, although there was no personal connection between them. Clearly, Yeung's study of Carter renews the existing arguments on American Sinology by pushing its founding date to the first decade of the nineteenth century. In the meantime, the book also reminds us that the existing "three period model" of Western Sinology, that is, evolving from "Proto-sinology" to "Missionary Sinology" and "Academic Sinology," needs to be revised to reflect the diversity in the early history of Chinese studies in America.

Adopting a cross-cultural perspective, the book connects Carter's case with the international problems the world is now facing. It points out that Carter regards Chinese language learning as a channel for dialogue. Furthermore, he pays attention to the shared values of different civilizations in order to maintain peaceful relations between China and America. The author hopes that Carter's cultural attitude will inspire us when facing the intensified situations between the two countries today.

Although the book is chiefly concerned with the origin of Sinology in America, it touches upon key issues in translation studies, especially

the field of Chinese translation history. While sinologists have been major actors in Chinese translation history since the seventeenth century, Benjamin Bowen Carter, as shown in the book, might be the first American sinologist to assume the role of a translator. A considerable part of the book discusses Carter's translation activities during different stages of his career.

In chapter 3, for example, Yeung carefully analyzes Carter's translation manuscripts, including selective translations of *Lunyu* 論語 and *Shijing*, to demonstrate his learning process and level of Chinese knowledge. Regarding translation as "a creative activity in its own right" (23), the author moves beyond the linguistic level to argue that these translations also show Carter's reinterpretation of China under various factors. It is worth noting that Carter was learning about Chinese culture by translating the classics. In other words, his translations were one of the shaping forces contributing to his understanding of China. Undoubtedly, Carter was not the only sinologist who learned Chinese through translation. The case suggests another perspective for us to understand their translation of Chinese classics as both language learning and knowledge production method.

The book also deals with a significant cultural phenomenon in the history of translation in nineteenth-century China: sinologists acting as diplomatic translators. This phenomenon has attracted great scholarly attention in recent years. However, there are few studies concerning the role of sinologist translators in Sino-U.S. relations before the 1840s. Therefore, Yeung's analysis of Carter's diplomatic translation activities deserves our special attention. In 1805, the "New Jersey Incident" ignited a clash between British and American traders in Canton. The American consul asked Carter to translate a petition to the Chinese Viceroy for support. Yeung reveals that the translation concerned actually resulted from the joint efforts of Carter and Abel Yen. Carter first produced a Latin version of the original. It was then translated into Chinese by Yen. The book goes to great lengths to analyze the discrepancies between the Chinese text and the English original. It holds Yen accountable for making changes to the original in a way incompatible with the political conventions of that time, which is one of the reasons for the failure of diplomatic contact. Notwithstanding the insightful analysis, it is a pity that the author does not include Carter's Latin text in comparison, leaving some uncertainties pertaining to the translation process. Still, the case

is a piece of solid evidence that the American sinologist in the 1800s already realized the strategic significance of translation and was actively involved in diplomatic affairs on the Chinese coast. Apart from that, Yeung also briefly discusses Peter Parker's (1804–1888) diplomatic career in chapter 6, unveiling how this sinologist translator acted in a different historical context of the 1840s. It led us to rethink the innate consistency and diversity within the group of translators that greatly influenced the development of Sino-U.S. relations in the nineteenth century.

Finally, the book provides new information concerning the “Term Question,” the question of what the appropriate Chinese term for God is, which is a frequently discussed topic in historical studies of Bible translation in China. This translation problem has caused controversies among missionaries and scholars since the seventeenth century. However, it is believed that no American joined the debates until 1835. In chapter 5, Yeung's detailed study of discussions between Carter and Abel-Rémusat on the Term Question in 1819 doubtlessly enriches our understanding of American sinologists' contribution to the Chinese translation of the Bible.

To sum up, this is a highly original work based on solid historical data and critical analysis. It contributes new insights into several related academic fields, including the history of American Sinology, the history of overseas Chinese teaching and learning, as well as Chinese translation history.

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