Forgotten Treasures: Two Missionary-Scholars' Contributions to Studies of Chinese Characters

- John Chalmers(1825-1899) and Léon Wieger(1856-1933)

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1.   Seemingly Forgotten Contributors to the Study of Chinese Characters

Though both John Chalmers 湛约翰 (1825–1899) and Léon Wieger(1856–1933) were both prolific scholars while serving as missionaries during the final years of the Qīng dynasty, it seems that much of their substantial contributions were overshadowed by the culturally transformative period during which they lived. Chalmers died before the 1911 Revolution took place, but from his residence in Hong Kong he must have been quite aware of the fundamental cultural changes occurring after 1895 in China;[1] as a Jesuit scholar Wieger lived, taught, and worked in Héběi 河北 province until his death in 1933, and was a self-determined chronicler of the revolutionary nature of the period from 1911 till 1932, publishing ten volumes of journalistically styled interpretive works related to contemporary

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[1] An interesting side note is that his son and daughter-in-law were serving as missionaries in Korea and he was visiting them when he became ill and died, even though he had been a resident of the city of Guǎngzhōu 廣州 and later of the British colony of Hong Kong since the 1850s.

movements, political changes, and life in the Republic of China.[2] These two missionary-scholars published bilingual materials(English-Chinese and French-Chinese respectively) involving extensive studies of both Chinese written characters and spoken languages where they lived; nevertheless, even in spite of the fact that some their works were republished more than once due to their usefulness, their main writings were prepared primarily for Anglophone and Francophone audiences.[3] As a consequence, at least as far as I have been able to learn up to this point, they have manifestly become unknown among Chinese scholars who study the history of Chinese characters.

From all indications one is able to discern from their own published works, these two missionary-scholars were apparently unaware of each others' writings.[4] On the one hand, in Chalmers' case

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2 Starting with a volume dealing with the period from 1911 to 1920, Weiger subsequently wrote one volume for each year from 1921 to 1925, ending with volumes covering the periods from 1926-1927 and 1927-1931 [sic] respectively. The whole series was given the title Chine moderne. Mouvement d'émancipation et de modernization. [Modern China: Movement of Emancipation and of Modernization]. The full list, many times given titles which were symbolic of the times and not merely descriptions of the content, appear on the back flyleaf of the fifth edition of his volume devoted to the study of Chinese characters. Most of these volumes are kept in the collection of the Xújiāhuì 徐家匯 Library in Shànghǎi.

3 Nevertheless, as we will see below, Chalmers also wrote explicitly with the hope of being a source of scholarly contribution to Chinese intellectuals as well.

4 Both Chalmers and Wieger in introductions to their various works mention the Chinese-English dictionaries compiled by Samuel Wells Williams, an earlier American missionary-scholar living in southeastern China during the 19th century, but beyond this they are not aware of common foreign sources of sinological information. Both were more focused on Chinese precedents,

he was already a senior missionary scholar within the last decade of his life by the time Wieger began publishing some of his works on Chinese language in the 1890s; as a result, he probably had very few possibilities of coming to know about this younger Jesuit's interests in Chinese language. On the other hand, even though it may have been historically more feasible for Wieger to have known of Chalmers' philological interests, there were other obstacles making this practically impossible: the two men lived and worked in very different parts of China, and were associated with different forms of Christianity which did not often have communication with each other during the 19th century. What remains interesting is the fact that both men were drawn to offer systematic supplements to traditional philology; in this way both also attempted to provide alternative ways for foreign students of Chinese to gain access to a greater range of understanding the complexities and meanings of Chinese characters.

Chalmers' association with China and Chinese language began as a missionary of the London Missionary Society in Hong Kong in 1852. There a cousin of his wife(Mary Isabella Legge, d. 1852) was also serving under the same missionary society with her husband, a Protestant missionary who later became a well-known sinologist at

and so sought to portray their significance and the means of using them to foreigners who would be interested in learning Chinese language and literature. For citations, see John Chalmers' mention of Williams in 湛約翰 著 王揚按 述釋《康熙字典撮要》(廣東：倫敦教會藏板，光緒四年 [1879A.D.])，English preface, p.2, point 9; John Chalmers, An Account of the Structure of Chinese Characters under 300 Primary Forms: After the Shwoh-wan, 100 A.D., and the Phonetic Shwoh-wan, 1833(London: Trübner, 1882), vii; and Léon Wieger, s.j., Caractères chinois. - Etymologie, Graphies, Lexiques(Hien-hien [Xian-xian 獻縣, Hebei]: Impr. de la Mission catholique [Catholic Mission Press], 1932), pp.21-22, where he mentions among modern bilingual dictionaries those by Williams, Giles, and Couvreur.

Oxford, James Legge 理雅各 (1815-1897).[5] Working initially with Legge at the Anglo-Chinese College 英華書院 and becoming very involved in helping to manage the College press run by the later well-known Christian publisher in Hong Kong, Wong Shing 黄胜(died c. 1890s?), Chalmers became actively engaged with the publications of Legge's famous volumes, *The Chinese Classics*.[6] Not only was he involved in the process of publication, Chalmers also produced most of the indexes for those hefty volumes; in that process he also had the opportunity to demonstrate his mathematical acumen by publishing an article in one of those prolegomena related to ancient Chinese astronomy.[7] Nevertheless, it appears that his life-long fascination was with Chinese language itself. Already by 1859 he had produced what became

5 Two major studies of James Legge's life and career have been produced by Norman Girardot and this author. The former is Norman Girardot, The Victorian Translation of China: James Legge's Oriental Pilgrimage(Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), and Lauren Pfister, Striving for 'The Whole Duty of Man': James Legge's Scottish Protestant Encounter with China(Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004), two volumes.

6 Originally published in Hong Kong at the Anglo-Chinese College Press between 1861 and 1872, the first edition was published in the form of eight tomes in five volumes, and included the Chinese text, English translation, accompanied by extensive prolegomena and annotations to the classical texts for The Four Books, The Book of Historical Documents, The Book of Poetry, and The Spring and Autumn Annals with its Zuǒ Commentary. The second partially revised version was published in five volumes by the Clarendon Press in Oxford, and is the version which is normally found in libraries. It is also this later version that is still able to be purchased.

7 This is found as the article by John Chalmers in the prolegomena of this volume. Consult "Appendix on the Astronomy of the Ancient Chinese" in James Legge, trns., The Chinese Classics : Vol. III - The Shoo King(Hongkong [sic]: Anglo Chinese Press, 1865), pp.90-104.

a best selling bilingual English-Chinese "pocket-dictionary" of Cantonese, a volume that went through many editions and was continuing to be published even after his death in 1899.[8]

Though Chalmers lived in the city of Guǎngzhōu 廣州 for nearly 20 years, where he was also involved in producing a newspaper in Chinese for most of that period,[9] he and his wife returned to Hong Kong in 1879. There for several years (1879-1881) Chalmers served as the pastor of Union Church, a Protestant congregation of primarily overseas Christians using English in their worship, and a place where James Legge himself had also served as a pastor (from 1870-1873).[10] Still it was during the 1870s that Chalmers was already working diligently on matters related to the *Kāngxī Dictionary* 康熙詞典 and Chinese etymology, resulting in the publication of a complicated Chinese companion to that famous dictionary the year that he ended up moving to Hong Kong.[11] Earlier explorations of the significance of

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8 Consult John Chalmers, comp., An English and Cantonese Pocket-Dictionary, for the use of those who wish to learn the spoken language of Canton Province. Originally published in Hongkong [sic], 1859. Revised and enlarged by T. K. Dealy. 7th Edition. (Hongkong: Kelly and Walsh, 1907)

9 The title of the newspaper was《中外新聞七日錄》. Copies of some of its issues appearing between 1865 to 1868 are kept in the collections of the University of Hong Kong.

10 Details of Legge's role as pastor of the English speaking Union Church congregation from 1870 to 1873 have been provided in Lauren Pfister, Striving for 'The Whole Duty of Man', volume two. The current site of Union Church differs from its 19th century predecessors because the building's bricks were used by Japanese occupying forces for their own purposes. Nevertheless, two stone tablets commending both Legge and Chalmers for their pastoral services are also now found rebuilt into the wall of the entrance to the sanctuary, and so may still be seen there.

11 This is the following volume found in the Harvard-Yenching Library, and

this philological and etymological research were recorded in several articles in English during this period. [12] He continued this direction of his studies during his years of pastoral responsibility at Union Church, so that in the early 1880s he was able to produce a guidebook for Chinese etymological studies based on his understanding of a 19th century phonetic version of the Hàn dynasty *Shuōwén Dictionary* 說文解字. [13] Nevertheless, as we will see below, this second work was a critical rereading of the philological and etymological methods he had assumed in his preparation of the previous volume; perhaps it was for this reason that he used English to prepare the work, and had it published in England rather than in Hong Kong or elsewhere in China. [14]

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now available in microfiche format: 湛約翰 著，王揚按 述釋,《康熙字典撮要》(廣東：倫敦教會藏板，光緒四年[1879A.D.])

12 See John Chalmers, "Kanghi's [sic] Dictionaries", China Review 2(1873-1874), pp.335-341 and "Chinese Etymology", China Review 5(1876-1877), pp.296-310.

13 This is Chalmers' monograph entitled An Account of the Structure of Chinese Characters under 300 Primary Forms: After the Shwoh-wan, 100 A.D., and the Phonetic Shwoh-wan, 1833 (London: Trübner, 1882). Afterwards Chalmers also wrote several other articles handling aspects of this work in John Chalmers, "The Six Modes of Development of the Chinese Written Language - 六書", China Review 16(1887-1888), pp. 10-18 and "On the Term 轉注 Chuan Chu as Applied to Chinese Characters. Translated from the Introduction to the Phonetic Shuo-wên(1833) - Perhaps the latest and best native exposition of the Question", China Review 16(1887-1888), pp.25-31.

14 Other factors which may have influenced the place of publication included the fact that he had been presented with a honorary doctorate from a Scottish university, and dedicated the volume to his alma mater, Aberdeen University. So far this author has not been able to pursue appropriate research into archival materials in which Chalmers' indicated his motivations for doing this work in English.

Though Chalmers was also involved in a number of other culturally significant areas of Chinese studies, including being chosen in 1890 to serve as part of the committee which would seek to produce a new version of the Chinese New Testament(later published in 1919 as the Union Version 和合本新約聖經), the focus of our attention here will be on the two works related to his study of Chinese characters mentioned above.

Far less is known about the Jesuit missionary-sinologist Wieger. Apparently due to concerns about the safety of his Chinese teachers and other Roman Catholic converts among the Chinese people with whom he lived, archives related to his and other Jesuits' work in northeastern China were moved to Paris sometime before the Chinese Communist government began to rule.[15] Nevertheless, the back flyleaf of his major etymological and lectionary work on Chinese characters documents the fact that he produced twelve major works in Chinese studies as well as ten volumes of documentary stories related to the traumatic years in the Republic of China from 1911 to 1931.

The focus of our descriptive study here will be on three works published by Chalmers and Wieger dealing with Chinese characters: these are Chalmers' monographs dealing with the *Kāngxī Dictionary* and the *Shuōwén Dictionary*, and Weiger's large volume republished for the fifth time in 1932, a year before he died, entitled straightforwardly in French, *Caractères Chinois* [*Chinese Characters*].

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15 Only in 2008 did I learn that some of the archives related to his work are now kept in a Jesuit archive in Paris, but I have not yet had the opportunity to visit them. As a consequence, there are no studies which indicate which Chinese teachers he worked with, the nature of his daily responsibilities as a teacher or researcher while living in northeast China, or any further details about the character of the Jesuit community and the Roman Catholic churches in that area of China during the years he was engaged in these studies.

Any interpretive suggestions made within these comments have been based on a very elementary knowledge of the *Kāngxī Dictionary* and the *Shuōwén Dictionary*, supplemented here only by some comments made by Endymion Wilkinson. [16] For this reason, I present these materials for the evaluation of those present here in this conference, hoping that a more precise and critical assessment of their value can be made by those who have expertise in the history of Chinese philological and etymological studies.

2. John Chalmer's Contributions to the Study of Chinese Characters

One can imagine that due to the usefulness and long term popularity among foreigners of his Cantonese-English dictionary, Chalmers was encouraged to explore other possibilities in working with the standard reference work for Chinese vocabulary, the *Kāngxī Dictionary*. Having lived in Guǎngzhōu for nearly twenty years and working extensively with both spoken and written Chinese during those two decades, the 54 year old Chalmers publishing what he referred to in English as his *Concise Dictionary of Chinese* the year he left that city to return to Hong Kong in 1879. [17] A more precise rendering in English of the Chinese title of his work could be *A Concise Summary of the Kāngxī Dictionary*.

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16 Here I am relying on various descriptive accounts and evaluative statements found in Endymion Wilkinson, Chinese History: A Manual Revised and Enlarged (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University, 2000), especially Chs. 2 ("Dictionaries") and 16 ("The Characters: Evolution and Structure"), pp. 60-91 and 407-426 respectively.

17 The English title is found on the first page of the short English preface, 湛約翰 著，王揚按 述釋,《康熙字典撮要》.

2.1. Characterizing John Chalmers' Concise Summary of the Kāngxī Dictionary

Judging by the length of the modern Shànghǎi reprint of the *Kāngxī Dictionary*, which extends to nearly 1900 individual pages, Chalmer's Chinese abridgment of the work managed to shorten the original to only 500 folio pages(or 1000 individual pages).[18] His purposes in producing the text were primarily to help Chinese and foreign readers to have easier access to appropriate pronunciations of characters as well as the most basic meanings of a wide variety of Chinese characters, so that Chalmers reorganization of this standard work in Chinese philology and etymology was based upon a very utilitarian principle. Ultimately Chalmers hoped to reduce the complexities in the traditional dictionary published first in 1716 to a reasonable level of straightforwardness reflecting certain 19th century linguistic developments, making the pronunciations and meanings of a larger range of Chinese characters available for interested persons who were not necessarily intent on becoming Chinese specialists or indigenous scholars.

So, for example, when comparing the entries of one of the first characters in both dictionaries, 丁, Chalmers offers three alternative pronunciations for the character, each being placed within an encompassing rectangular shape in order to indicate that these pair of characters are to be read using the 反切 method.[19] Following these terms for pronunciation, there is a brief definition

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18 The comparison is made here with (清) 张玉书 等编,《康熙字典》(上海: 上海书店, 1985). The version used by this author is the fourth printing of this work published in 1991.

19 Here I am following the text on the first page(recto of the folio page) of the main body of the work, found on 湛約翰 著, 王揚按 述釋,《康熙字典撮要》, p.1.

of the character offered in this case with a brief elaboration, including the important note that it can be also a family name. Compared to the lengthy entry found in the 18th century original,[20] Chalmers provides no alternative ancient form of the character and chooses the denotations of the character from sources different from the *Shuōwén Dictionary*; even though he presents a summary of the basic definition, he does not offer even one of the many examples of the use of the term from classical sources which are found in the original text. When this is compared to his entry for one of the final characters in his *Concise Dictionary*, the character 黑, there are some notable differences which may indicate something of the flexibility he had.[21] Instead of having only one character, Chalmers offers three, but all are characters in the modern form, and not pre-imperial bronze script characters found in the upper margin of the *Kāngxī Dictionary*. Here one finds two pronunciations for the term, followed by a quotation of the basic meaning of the character from the *Shuōwén Dictionary*, even though it is not recognized as such in this passage. Elaborations of its use including its appearance as a family name are indicated, yet all this is done in two lines constituted by 31 characters. The parallel entry in the *Kāngxī Dictionary* is nearly six lines in length, and so is about ten times the size of the entry in Chalmers' *Concise Dictionary*.[22]

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20 Comparing Chalmers' text here with 张玉书 等编,《康熙字典》(上海: 上海 书店, 1991), p. 73. (or according to the body of the work in the first section, p. 1.) In terms of the length of these two passages, Chalmers' reduced version is only 23 characters in length, while the entry in the《康熙字 典》continues for nearly 16 full length lines, each line consisting of about 45 characters.   The latter is more than 30 times the size of the former.

21 Consult the text on the verso side of 湛約翰 著, 王揚按 述釋,《康熙字典 撮要》, p. 496.

22 Referring here to 张玉书 等编,《康熙字典》(上海: 上海书店, 1991), p. 1696,

While these examples indicate just how pragmatic and brief Chalmers' summary of the *Kāngxī Dictionary* was, it should be stated that in his English guidelines he had already alerted readers of the limits of the work. "This Dictionary is not intended to supersede either *K'ang-hi*(Kāng Xī) or [Samuel Wells] *Williams'*, but while those valuable works are kept at hand for occasional reference the *Concise Dictionary* will be found most convenient for constant use." [23] Even though there are other parts of Chalmers' modern abridged Chinese version of the *Kāngxī Dictionary*, [24] we can comprehend the basic

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or the verso side of the seventh page in the very last section of the dictionary(亥集下).

23 Found in the ninth and last point made in his English preface to the work, which is located immediately after the initial title page of 湛約翰 著, 王揚按 述釋,《康熙字典撮要》. His reference to "Williams'" is to the dictionary produced by the American missionary-scholar, Samuel Wells Williams.

24 In the introductory section entitled 檢字, Chalmers does not present all the characters found in his dictionary, and so unlike the Kāngxī Dictionary in this regard as well. Instead, he presents only those characters which might be difficult for a reader to find, adding beneath the printed character in a smaller font the particular classifier under which they can be located. These appear on the three folio pages of the introductory portion of his work, 湛約翰 著, 王揚按 述釋,《康熙字典撮要》, pp.10-12. He also provided a comprehensive chart 總音表 of what appears to be all the homophones with different tones 韻府通表, identifying them in one part of the chart by a traditional notation involving four circles representing the four classical tones. See 湛約翰 著, 王揚按 述釋,《康熙字典撮要》, 總音表， pp.1-11. Following this, he presents charts by which readers could not only identify different pronunciations of northern 北音, central 正音 and southern 南音 Chinese languages, but also provided Latin characters for these various sounds, so that a reader could construct a

character of the work. Essentially speaking, Chalmers hoped that this new form of a concise and pragmatically organized "modern" edition of the Kāngxī Dictionary would ultimately become the "most convenient" text for readers, simply because it offered brief and more easily accessible accounts of a many modern Chinese characters. This can be seen also from the first page of the main body of his Concise Dictionary, for after the character 丁 there come many other characters based on this particularly character as their phonetic classifier, something not found in the original Kāngxī Dictionary. What Chalmers explained in both his English and Chinese prefaces was that he had organized the order of all the characters("several myriad characters" 数万字) included in the Concise Dictionary on the basis of their 884 phonetic "heading characters" or 声母字.[25] The complication here came with how these phonetic heading characters, which included most of the 214 "radicals"(部首) used in the Kāngxī Dictionary as the primary structure for the original work, would be related to each other. Chalmers at this point was a principled pragmatist: all of the 884 phonetic characters which were not already "radicals" were placed under the "radicals" they were normally associated with, but then the subordinate groups of

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transliteration for each character according to the kind of Chinese language which they were using. This section includes a shorter version of the pronunciations of homophonic characters within the three forms of Chinese language mentioned above, summarized on a single opening(from the verso of one page to the recto of another) in just over 30 phonemes (pp.11-16.) These technical matters go far beyond this author's ability to understand and assess, and so I leave these notes for interested and more competent scholars.

25 Here reference in being made to the his guidelines found in the paragraphs numbered 2 through 4 in the English preface and the first through third paragraphs of the 書法 section in the Chinese preface to his work.

characters would be ordered under the characters with which they share a phonetic classifier. [26] Noting that in some cases certain characters had no obvious phonetic classifier to which they were linked, Chalmers arranged for them to be placed under the "radical" where they were normally found. [27] In order to overcome as much confusion as might be created by this way of ordering the characters, Chalmers also provided the number of the radical found in the sequence of the 540 radicals found in the *Shuōwén Dictionary* next to the pronunciation of each phonetic classifier in his comprehensive list of all the phonetics at the beginning of his book. [28]

Obviously, this was simply Chalmers' way at the time to overcome what were significant etymological problems in assuming the phonetic classification adopted from 19th century sources without having to deal

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26 Stated in paragraph 4 of the English preface and the second paragraph of the 書法 section in the Chinese preface to his work.

27 His example in the third paragraph of the 書法 section in the Chinese preface to his work is that certain "scattered characters" 零散字 such as tū 凸 and āo 凹 would be found under their traditional radical known as 山字底 or 凵, even though they had no obvious phonetic relationship to that particular classifier.

28 This appears in the 声母总目 of his《康熙字典撮要》, where the characters which are phonetic classifiers in Chalmers' work and also serve as "radicals" 部首 are given numbers from the sequence in the Shuōwén Dictionary in formal characters 正字, while those which are not radicals are given numbers in the alternative numerical system called the "Suzhou business characters" 码字, as in Endymion Wilkinson, Chinese History: A Manual Revised and Enlarged, p.122. What I understand this to mean is that these "radicals" are among the 540 classifiers found in the Shuōwén Dictionary, and if they were not identified there as a "radical", they were given the number of the phonetic character under which they were found in that dictionary.

with the earlier Hàn dynasty accounts of the same characters. As we will see below, Chalmers became very aware of these differences and demonstrated his understanding of their differences in his second work.

The most pronounced difference between Chalmers' Concise Dictionary and the *Kāngxī Dictionary* was that he chose to order the vast forest of Chinese characters under the 884 phonetic classifiers he had identified rather than the 214 radical classifiers established in the *Kāngxī Dictionary* or the 540 phonetic classifiers employed in the *Shuōwén Dictionary*. Though he did not indicate in this work the source for his insight into identifying so many phonetic classifiers, three years later Chalmers noted that the work which he called the *Phonetic Shuōwén* identified 883 phonetic classifiers; the likelihood that this was the source for his own list of classifiers is extremely high.[29] What Chalmers recognized to be a sizeable problem at the time, noting this in his rules for reaching the Chinese text 書法, are characters which are not easily categorized under these phonetic classifiers. In sum, he identifies four kinds of relatively problematic characters and explains in this Chinese preface the ways he resolved how to classify them. There were those which had no phonetic root 本屬 and so they were placed under the classifier which in modern written characters 今文字 was most like that character's written form 形.[30] There were also characters whose phonetic was originally different from the ancient classifier, but in the form and sound of modern Chinese characters had become similar; here he once more chose a pragmatic approach, and so placed those characters under the modern

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29 Find Chalmers' reference to the "Phonetic Shwoh-wan" in the footnote to page iv in the introduction of An Account of the Structure of Chinese Characters under 300 Primary Forms.

30 See the fourth paragraph in the 書法 section or "Chinese preface" of 湛約翰 著，王揚按 述釋,《康熙字典撮要》.

classifier rather than insisting on placing it next to the ancient classifier with which it was originally associated.[31] In other cases the character did share the same phonetic as the original classifier, but in the form and sound of modern characters they had become very different; in these cases, which he recognized to involve "numerous characters"（此类字繁多） Chalmers preferred to place these characters under phonetic classifiers which reflected their modern pronunciations.[32] Finally, there were also modern forms of Chinese characters which were both different and numerically more diverse than their ancient forms; in these cases Chalmers referred his readers to the *Shuōwén Dictionary* in order that they become more aware of these contrasts.[33] It was precisely for this reason that he also had provided inter-textual numerical references between his work and the *Shuōwén Dictionary* in his initial list of all the phonetic classifiers within his own *Concise Dictionary*.

It is manifest from all these qualifications and explanations of Chalmers' principles for ordering the characters in his Concise Dictionary that he was aware of the diachronic differences and developments in the nature of Chinese characters, but that he had not chosen to study these matters in any depth. Instead, he chose to

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31 Found described in the fifth paragraph in the 書法 section or "Chinese preface" of 湛約翰 著，王揚按 述釋,《康熙字典撮要》, followed by 23 examples of characters(mostly pairs of terms, but also including three sets of three characters and one set of four characters) which illustrate this kind of problem.

32 This is described in the sixth paragraph in the 書法 section or "Chinese preface" of 湛約翰 著，王揚按 述釋,《康熙字典撮要》, and is illustrated by 22 specific examples, the vast majority being pairs of characters, and only one of them being a set of three characters.

33 This is found in the seventh paragraph in the 書法 section or "Chinese preface" of 湛約翰 著，王揚按 述釋,《康熙字典撮要》.

organize Chinese characters under classifiers that most 19th century Chinese persons would more easily identify, rather than on the basis of a scholarly account of the actual etymology of those characters. Consequently near the end of his Chinese preface he specifically appealed to "great scholars" 大儒 to clarify these matters and so resolve the conflicts within different accounts of the phonetic and etymological classification of Chinese characters.[34] In this sense, Chalmers' rearrangement of the *Kāngxī Dictionary* was not only brief and pragmatic, but also modern in character and reductionistic in terms of its diachronic cultural value.

2.2. John Chalmers' Critical Advance: Responses to the Phonetic Shuōwén

Having worked so long with the assumption that the *Kāngxī Dictionary* was authoritative and adequately grounded in appropriate philological research, Chalmers published his *Concise Dictionary* in 1879 while retaining many doubts about its reliability. Within three years he produced a critical evaluation of his own work in the preface to his study of the *Shuōwén Dictionary* and the so-called *Phonetic Shuōwén*, the latter presumably being the work compiled by Zhū Jùnshēng 朱駿聲

(1788-1858) and published in 1833 under the title 說文通訓定聲.[35]

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34 Chalmers' appeal to contemporary Ruists is found in the eighth and penultimate paragraph of the 書法 section or "Chinese preface" of 湛約翰 著，王揚按 述釋,《康熙字典撮要》.

35 This scholar is one of four etymologists noted by Fang Chao-ying as having made critical advances on Duàn Yùcái's 段玉裁(1735-1815) contributions in this field. Consult his article on "Tuan Yü-ts'ai" in Arthur W. Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* (Washington D. C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1943), p.783, right column.

Criticisms of both the *Kāngxī Dictionary* editors and his own work based upon it were explicit:[36]

> The native scholars have for the past eighteen centuries accepted, consciously or unconsciously, avowedly or unavowedly, the authority of the Shwoh-wan [Shuōwén], and it is the fountain-head of accurate information on the philology of China. . . . [Xú Shēn 徐慎(d. circa 120)] arranged the characters under radicals, of which he made in all 540. Subsequent lexicographers have sought to improve upon [Xú Shēn] by reducing the number of radicals, and in [the Kāngxī Dictionary] the 40,000 characters are all arranged under 214. Beginners are impatient [with] the large numbers, and fancy the reduction a great improvement. But it was in truth a great scientific blunder. The real radicals . . . are more than the [Shuōwén] has, not fewer; and reducing them to 214 necessitates the arbitrary placing of many words under radicals with which they have no connection whatever beyond an accidental resemblance. . . . The Concise Dictionary on the Basis of [the Kāngxī Dictionary] partiakes too much of [Kāngxī's] defects, having been undertaken with too much confidence in [Kāngxī] as an authority.

This assessment of the *Kāngxī Dictionary* entails the self-critical reflections which Chalmers makes explicit about his earlier work, but here we should step further toward indicating what

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36 Quoted from John Chalmers, An Account of the Structure of Chinese Characters under 300 Primary Forms, vi in passim.

kind of corrections the Scottish missionary-scholar made in his etymological judgments of particular characters. But we should do this only after providing a brief description of the whole work.

The full title of this second work by John Chalmers is long but descriptive: *An Account of the Structure of Chinese Characters under 300 Primary Forms: After the Shwoh-wan, 100 A.D., and the Phonetic Shwoh-wan, 1833.* Undoubtedly, the study of the *Shuōwén Dictionary* and its continuing scholarship in 19th century Chinese intellectual circles had pushed Chalmers to a new critical point of appreciation for Chinese etymology; though other "European Sinologists" had "touched upon" the topic "only lightly and superficially" motivated Chalmers further to attempt something more daring. Admitting that the small monograph of just under 200 pages was "a book for learners, among whom the author must still rank himself",[37] Chalmers offers a more careful definition of what he counts as radicals ("contributing to the sense of the derivative" character) and phonetics ("having no bearing on the sense but only giving the sound"). How did Chalmers determined that there were "300 primary forms" as the basis for his discussion in English of this Chinese etymological study? Of great significance to his project was the conviction, gained apparently from further study of the Phonetic *Shuōwén*, that many of his previously designated "phonetic classifiers" were in fact composite characters, including more fundamental classifiers within them, so that he could identify them as "subordinate phonetics" under a more basic "primary phonetic".[38] Chalmers was self-conscious that some of these

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37 All quotations in this passage above and following come from John Chalmers, An Account of the Structure of Chinese Characters under 300 Primary Forms, iv.

38 The details about his means of reducing the former 884 classifiers into 300 primary phonetics, many more subordinate phonetics, and reclassifying others as characters which should not be considered phonetics in and of

etymological evaluations involved a certain degree of arbitrariness; he admitted in print both the number of those classifiers determined to be "primary phonetics" as well as their order of presentation could still be debated. Nevertheless, he believed that the 300 classifiers he had decided upon represented what was "very nearly the truth of the case". So, while making "no claim to originality", Chalmers continued to hope that this new effort at critical Chinese etymology would reflect a "careful collation of facts".[39]

The main body of the work is constituted by mini-essays related to specific "primary phonetics" and how they are related to other subordinate phonetics as well as with many other characters. Generally speaking, these essays may be as short as one paragraph, but in the longest examples they stretched for four to five pages and involved a complicated internal sub-structure of various phonetic sub-groups. Each began with a modern version of the character

themselves were made explicit in an index created for the work. There Chalmers listed all the classifiers used in the Concise Dictionary, but placed those who he no longer considered to be phonetics to the right of the primary or subordinate classifiers to which they were related phonetically as examples. In addition, he added brackets to indicate which characters should now be structured under a single primary phonetic, putting to the right of each character or pair of characters the number of the section which one would fine them in this current work. This resulted in the following groups of characters being reduced to a unique "primary phonetic": 81 pairs, 76 triplets, 37 quadruplets, and 52 groups which ranged from five to ten characters within their distinct groups. Find the index in John Chalmers, An Account of the Structure of Chinese Characters under 300 Primary Forms, pp. 173-187.

39 Quotations here and in the preceding sentences come from John Chalmers, An Account of the Structure of Chinese Characters under 300 Primary Forms, vii.

accompanied by Williams' tonal notation; this was normally followed by an image of the ancient character in parenthesis for which it is the modern equivalent.[40] Subsequent to the characters came first the Cantonese and then the "Pekingese" transliteration of the sound of the phonetic being discussed. To these basic calligraphic and phonetic aids was added a basic denotation for the term, leading to the substance of the etymological and philological discussion. What is particularly helpful in this text is that each time that a subordinate phonetic or compound character is mentioned, especially if it is placed in contrast to the primary phonetic being discussed, the number of the section where that character is discussed as either a primary or subordinate phonetic is also added immediately following the written character. As a consequence, the dynamic quality of the inter-textual references aids a reader to follow Chalmers' interpretive judgments related to the characters. [41] A major part of

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40 In order to produce the work in Scotland, Chalmers arranged to write all the characters‐both modern and ancient‐into the typescript of the monograph by hand. Although in most cases there was only one ancient character added to the initial images, nearly forty of these entries included two ancient characters, and among these there were five which displayed three ancient characters. For those with three ancient characters following the modern version of the primary phonetic, see John Chalmers, An Account of the Structure of Chinese Characters under 300 Primary Forms, sections 155, 201, 237, 238 and 245. The "section" referred to here is the mini-essay devoted to a particular primary phonetic, and so does not indicate the actual page number within the text.

41 Hoping to avoid being seen as arbitrary, Chalmers at times refers also to the Shuōwén Dictionary as well as the Phonetic Shuōwén to justify his claims. For examples of references to the latter work, see John Chalmers, An Account of the Structure of Chinese Characters under 300 Primary Forms, sections 118, 130, 186, 233, 238, 239, and 300.

Chalmers' etymological and philological concerns were manifest in his efforts to indicate how the phonetic characters were identified in various composite characters, while also warning readers about common mistakes in both the writing and etymological accounts of various characters. [42] In order to make the text less cumbersome, Chalmers developed an annotation system of fourteen abbreviations, most dealing with how primary phonetic characters were integrated into more complex subordinate phonetics and compound characters. [43] In the largest of these mini-essays, there were paragraph headings revealing some of these methods for constructing characters – such as "reversed", "inverted", "doubled" and "tripled" [44] – and at other times the paragraphs would be ordered alphabetically to indicate different

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42 Warnings related to misreading and misinterpreting characters occurred occasionally within the text, sometimes by simply pointing readers to "compare" the etymological discussion in another mini-essay or section. For examples of these kind of critical notes, see John Chalmers, An Account of the Structure of Chinese Characters under 300 Primary Forms, sections 13, 58, 63, 74, 83, 113, 118, 122, 126, 129, 166, 181, 208, 215, 226, 241, 251, and 295.

43 These ways of shaping subordinate characters included them being contracted, doubled, tripled, and even quadrupled, but also to describe how they were shifted horizontally and vertically, or appeared in reversed, inverted, and oblique forms. The abbreviations appear on open page forming the back side of the first page of the main text.

44 The largest number of specific paragraphs devoted to particular ways of forming characters appeared under the sub-category of "doubled" and "tripled". Though a relatively smaller number of phonetic classifiers were used in "reversed" and "inverted" forms, they were properly noted and generally appears as a secondary paragraph after the more general etymological information had been more or less thoroughly discussed.

sub-groups of phonetically related characters. [45] From Chinese etymological and philological points of view, this later text by Chalmers is a much richer source of study, and represents something of a pioneering effort among Protestant missionary-scholars in his day.

2.3. Modern Roman Catholic Advances in the Study of Chinese Characters

Between the dates of publication of John Chalmers' study on the scholarly significance of Hàn etymological studies for advances in European sinology and of the large volume produced by Léon Wieger was just over fifty years. During that half century vast changes within mainland Chinese cultural landscapes had occurred, not only due to revolutions and the demise of the imperial Qīng, but also involving the archeological discoveries of bronze artifacts and oracle bones. What the Jesuit Wieger was able to prepare as his own contribution to studies in Chinese characters was a multi-functional volume of nearly 950 pages in length, advancing what Chalmers had come to understand as a critical appreciation of the complexities of Chinese etymological and philological studies to a relatively new level of coverage and analysis. In order to understand these matters in a relatively precise manner which can lead to some critical assessments of his work, we need first of all to describe the different dimensions of this single volume and some of its distinctive qualities.

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45 Find examples of these more complicated mini-essays in John Chalmers, An Account of the Structure of Chinese Characters under 300 Primary Forms, sections 1(一), 14(人), 37(又), 59(大), 72(口), 91(子), 127(木), 130(火), 136(日), and 155(目).

2.4. Characterizing Léon Wieger's Caractères Chinois

Initiated in 1899 in the first edition of this text, Weiger had already provided a new section regarding ancient bronze characters for the third edition produced in 1916.[46] Continuing to refine and extend his reflections on Chinese etymology as found in traditional Chinese sources and their study by those European and American sinologists he had come to know, Wieger completed his slightly revised fifth edition a year before he passed away in 1933.

This fifth edition of Wieger's work included the following general content:

1. An introductory essay of 17 pages summarizing relevant philological, etymological, and sinological information as well as his assessment of the "state of the art";

2. A series of 177 etymological "lessons", followed by a list of relevant Chinese characters arranged by stroke order for the sake of locating these characters within the etymological lessons(pp.23-359);

3. An appendix providing images of texts construed in ancient bronze characters representing texts from the ancient Xià dynasty through to the Zhōu dynasty. Their texts most often rewritten in modern Chinese characters, accompanied by a modern French rendering of their meanings(pp.361-452).

4. A chart of 858 Chinese phonetics followed by a long list of Chinese characters arranged phonetically beneath their appropriate phonetic classifier(pp.453-623);

5. A chart of the sounds found in the standard northern Chinese

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46 This information is drawn from the one page preface found at the beginning of the volume. Consult this "Préface" found in Léon Wieger, s.j., Caractères chinois. - Etymologie, Graphies, Lexiques(Hien-hien [Xian-xian 獻縣, Hebei]: Impr. de la Mission catholique [Catholic Mission Press], 1932), p.3.

language followed by a syllabary created by producing characters
related to specific sounds and tones(pp.624-779);

6. Ending with a chart of the 214 "keys" (*clefs*) based upon the
Kāngxī Dictionary, followed by what might be seen as a more traditional
dictionary listing of characters arranged under these standardized
"radicals" or "keys". This section includes also a list of
"Characters difficult to find" located in the last few pages this
section. (pp.785-943)

Speaking comparatively, Wieger's introduction is conceptually
more systematic and his Chinese and foreign sinological bibliographic
references relatively wider, even though he was manifestly unaware
of John Chalmers' contributions to this realm of study. To his
advantage were advances made in publication techniques: his large
bilingual volume was made with French prose and printed Chinese
characters in all forms – whether in bronze scripts, ancient written
forms, or modern characters. Like Chalmers' second work which
presented a more critical vision of etymological accounts and their
phonetic repercussions, Wieger's not only participates in this same
trend of scholarship, but includes cross-textual references so that
phonetics and characters found in the etymological lessons can also
be located in the vocabulary list for sounds as well as the lists
generated for phonetic groupings and the more traditional ordering
of characters under the 214 classifying "keys" made authoritative
through the influence of the *Kāngxī Dictionary*. What becomes
frustrating for any serious student is the various inconsistencies
of cross references between these various portions of the volume, and
the lack of order within various lists of Chinese characters which
requires much more time to work with, especially if they are not used
to dealing with the pre-1949 French transliteration system which
Wieger employed.

2.5. Léon Wieger's Advance: Seeking a Synthetic View of Chinese Characters

What distinguishes Wieger's volume is the appearance of comprehensiveness, and a greater effort at providing cross-referential notes to encourage readers' understanding of any particular Chinese phonetic or other characters. Unlike Chalmers, Wieger was critical of both the *Shuōwén Dictionary* and the *Kāngxī Dictionary*. The former was inconsistent: various accounts of its declared phonetic classifiers are "very rich" in describing the elements of meaning, especially among complex phonetics. It also provided a more logical form of presentation on the basis of its preferred 540 classifiers. But at other times, its accounts of those primary characters was "very poor". In the case of the influential 18th century Qīng dynasty dictionary, Wieger complained that it was ultimately "badly arranged" and "extremely cumbersome".[47] All this had to do with his own conclusion that the 214 classifiers employed in the *Kāngxī Dictionary* entailed a forced reduction of the actual number of "primitive" phonetics, which he determined would involve about 300 characters, while the number of other "complex" phonetics constructed from aggregates of the primitive classifiers along with other forms amounted to over 1400 characters. As a consequence, the total number of identifiable phonetic classifiers (what Chalmers would call "primitive" and "subordinate" phonetics), came to just under 2000 characters.[48]

Regarding the various sections of his work, one can add more

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47 Wieger's assessment of both of these works mentioned above is found in Léon Wieger, s. j., Caractères chinois, p. 19.

48 These details are found in his "Conclusion" to the nature of characters and their composition, found in Léon Wieger, s. j., Caractères chinois, p. 18.

details to the summaries found above as well as evaluate various
aspects of each major part. Within the first major section dealing
with "etymological lessons", each begins with a particular
primitive phonetic, presented always in both modern and ancient forms,
and then links up a number of subsidiary examples of etymologically
related characters. Among these, some lessons involve only three
characters, where in others, there can be over twenty.[49] Regularly
Wieger divides his larger lessons into a series of alphabetically
ordered paragraphs, providing the means for a reader to locate
particular phonetics and other characters by means of the lesson
number and letter(such as 15A or 47R) in other parts of the volume.
Sometimes special "notes" occur to alert readers of complications
or errors which should be avoided in making etymological judgments;[50]
other times he provides more extensive appendices within the lessons
themselves, so that details related to various etymological
derivations can be worked out more carefully.[51] In both of these aspects
Weiger's text appears more readable, elaborate and informative than

49 See, for example, smaller lessons with only three characters in Léon Wieger,
   s. j., Caractères chinois, lesson 9(p. 34) and lesson 42(pp. 118-119); the
   longest lesson is lesson 47(with 26 distinct paragraphs ranked from A to
   Z), the next longest having 18 paragraphs. For these latter examples,
   consult Ibid., lesson 47, pp. 130-134 and lesson 71, pp. 176-179.

50 My review of this section of the volume discovered 35 times within the
   etymological lessons were Wieger provided these kind of notes. See, for
   example, Léon Wieger, s. j., Caractères chinois, pp. 43, 47, 62, 72, 78, 82,
   84, 95, and so forth. In one place(pp. 222-223) three such notes appear
   within the single opening.

51 In this realm there were ten appendices found, some being quite extensive,
   others serving more as a critical note. Consult Léon Wieger, s. j.,
   Caractères chinois, pp. 43, 55-056, 61, 97, 114, 161, 172-173, 175, 227,
   and 252.

Chalmers' 1882 text with its critical revision of Chinese phonetics. Having said this, however, it is surprising to discover just how many times Chalmers and Weiger agreed in their judgments with relation to revising the classifier system related to the phonetics found in the *Kāngxī Dictionary*.[52]

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52 My approach to making this judgment was to take the two lists of groups of characters (most of them being pairs) specifically identified by Chalmers in his Concise Dictionary as terms that would either be assumed to have the same phonetic root or would have different roots. Because he made these judgments on the basis of the convenience for 19th century readers of his book, Chalmers hinted by this fact that there were significant problems yet to be worked out in all of these cases. This appears in the Chinese section for "methods for reading the book" (書法) and is mentioned above in footnotes 31 and 32. Taking the 23 groups of characters in the first category and 22 groups in the second, I compared how Chalmers in his 1882 book and Wieger in this 1932 edition of his work evaluated the 45 groups. Though they did not always agree with each other, and there is no common number system between them for these classifiers and other characters, the general tendency was the same. In the case of the 23 groups of characters which Chalmers in 1879 determined to place under the same classifier, Chalmers in 1882 only admitted one of these groups to have the same classifier, while Wieger discerned that three of the groups should have the same classifier(and there was no overlap in their judgments). This amounts to saying that Chalmers in 1882 agreed with the Kāngxī arrangement in less than 5% of all these examples, while Wieger agreed with something like 13% of the cases. Overall, they agreed that the vast majority of judgments made by the 18th century imperial editors of the dictionary were etymologically incorrect. Similarly, in the case of those 22 groups of characters which Chalmers in 1879 determined to place under different classifiers, there was only one case where Chalmers in 1882 agreed with this arrangement, and four cases where he had doubts, while

A careful reader can find more to complain about in Weiger's presentation and ranking of characters in the phonetic lists he provides(pp.413ff.). This is one of the most useful parts of the work, because each character is presented in both its modern and ancient bronze script form, with a reference number to the etymological lesson in which it is found beneath these characters. This is very helpful as a source for cross-referencing, and so makes finding particular characters and their etymological accounts relatively convenient. Some phonetic lists are relatively small, involving no more than four or five subsidiary characters, where others are extremely long. Though the lists generally start with characters which share the same phonetic, and move toward listing others bearing different sounds(separated by a dividing line for the sake of easier identification), the ordering of the characters within these phonetically homophonic groups appears to be arbitrary.

The syllabary based on French transliterations can be learned(pp.627ff.), so that the lists are helpful for an informed reader. They always group characters with the same sound and tones together, and so help to bring precision to one's understanding. Generally speaking, the internal ordering of characters is presented

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Wieger identified only three groups which should be placed under different phonetic classifiers. In their judgments among these latter cases, only one of their assessments dealt with the same group of characters. The result of this exercise, then, as far as it could be determined, is that both Chalmers in 1882 and Wieger in 1932 agreed that the vast majority of problematic classifications in the the Kāngxī Dictionary were wrongly assessed on the basis of faulty etymological understandings. But to provide insight into the nature of their own differences and the etymological arguments they employed to justify these assessments, this author submits these results to more qualified etymological scholars for their evaluations.

from the more simple to the more complex, but there is no other discernible principle of ordering that is manifest here as well, making it necessary for a reader to peruse the whole list in order to find unusual characters. Finally, the lists provided under the traditional radicals tend to be longer and share similar features of presentation of characters, sounds and tones, and lack of a clear principle of internal ordering with the other lists. From point of view of their presentation, it should be added that the etymological lessons are presented in prose statements extending across the full page, while the other lists tend to be presented in three columns on each page.

One point of skeptical doubt began to arise in my own mind as I reviewed particularly significant phonetic characters in each of the subsequent lists. I was surprised, for example, that the phonetic list under the character 高 was relatively lengthy, and could imagine why the lists under the sound *gāo* would be quite different, but since the character is also a radical(#189) in the *Kāngxī Dictionary*, it was expected that the list of characters there would be quite impressive. Much to my surprise, it only involved three characters.[53] What principle of choice was employed to make such an uneven representation of characters in this case? This question I leave for colleagues who are far more qualified than I to assess the problem.

3. Concluding Reflections

For more than 20 years I have pursued comparative philosophical and comparative religious studies in 19th and 20th century Chinese and

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53 For the relevant passages see Léon Wieger, s.j., Caractères chinois, lesson 75, pp.191-192, phonetic #526, p.568(with 26 related characters), the sound "kao" on p.658, and the short list of three distinct characters under radical #189 on p.932.

sinological literature, so that with this background I became aware of the unusual contributions to Chinese etymology and the philological study of Chinese characters which both John Chalmers and Léon Wieger had made. Since that time, there have been some major advances in the study of missionary-scholars, including a number of major monographs on specific missionary-scholar figures as well as in Chinese philology in Chinese and European languages, but I have not found anything published so far that has made any substantial research discoveries related to the two figures mentioned here in this article.[54]

The fact that works of this sort by such substantial missionary – scholars have been basically "lost" to 21st century academic circles inside and outside of China does prompt a number of reflections.[55]

On the one hand, it seems that the traumatic periods in which they lived in many ways overshadowed their scholarly contributions. Theirs was an age of violent transformations, so that their own disciplined efforts in pursuing scholarly works of such a technical nature would only address the needs of some of the most adroit cross-cultural missionaries and professional scholars. In Wieger's case, he had the advantage of other Jesuit support, especially in the USA, so that several of his works were also rendered into English versions soon after they were published in revised French-Chinese

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54 Here I am specifically thinking of the important work by David B. Honey, Incense at the Altar: Pioneering Sinologists and the Development of Classical Chinese Philology(New Haven, Connecticut: American Oriental Society, 2001). Within this volume of over 350 pages Chalmers is not mentioned even once, and Weiger is referred to only once in a footnote for his work in translating texts from "religious and historical sources" (p.42), but not for his own etymological and philological work.

55 If there are colleagues who can correct this impression, I would be grateful.

versions. Nevertheless, one must often go to the best of sinological libraries in order to find extant copies of their works, and in the cases where Chalmer's articles were published in the *China Review* in Hong Kong, one may not be able to find these pieces unless there is a substantial library which had already began collecting sinological and/or missionary journals in the mid-19th century.

On the other hand, I am now convinced that there are far more missionary- scholars who worked and produced significant materials in mainland China before 1949 than even historians have previously known. Some of these, such as the Canadian Presbyterian missionary Denzies serving in Qìlǔ University 齊魯大學 in Shāndōng province during the 1920s and part of the 1930s - the discoverer, collector, and interpreter of the Shang dynasty oracle bones - have yet to be fully understood, even though they have only recently been "rediscovered". Many more have not been identified or studied. Part of this has come about because of the interpretive tendencies within a secularizing academic arena where persons who were missionaries were automatically suspected of having motivations which made it essentially impossible for them to be substantial scholars. What should now be underscored is that these critical interpretive perspectives are important, but they cannot explain or anticipate the disciplined efforts of those like Chalmers and Wieger who were obvious sinological scholars of the highest caliber during there own eras.

Having stated all this, I want to repeat that I submit these descriptive statements above to colleagues who have expertise in the history of Chinese etymology and philology, because these are areas in which I am obviously not informed. I would be extremely grateful to have more critical assessments of these works offered by qualified scholars here, and hope that this very shallow attempt to describe their efforts might stimulate some interest among such persons.

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