

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Accommodating cosmopolitan experiences: Jiang Dunfu's 蔣敦復 and Wang Tao's 王韜 autobiographical processing of their treaty port years

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(Received 8 March 2023; revised 31 October 2023; accepted 6 November 2023)

## Abstract

With the establishment of the treaty ports in 1842, contact between China and the Western world intensified. In Shanghai, the most extensive exchange of knowledge and ideas took place between the missionaries of the London Missionary Society and their Chinese assistants. By working and translating for the missionaries, these traditionally educated men gained intimate insights into the West and Western learning and established close personal relationships with the missionaries. But in the process, they also became outcasts, as working for Westerners was viewed critically by their contemporaries. This article sets out to analyse the way in which Jiang Dunfu 蔣敦復 (1808–1867) and Wang Tao 王韜 (1828–1897) processed and accommodated these cosmopolitan experiences in Shanghai in their prose autobiographies.

**Keywords:** Jiang Dunfu; Wang Tao; London Missionary Society; autobiography; Shanghai

## Cosmopolitan experiences and their autobiographical accommodation

When Shanghai became a treaty port in the mid-nineteenth century there was a sudden intensification of contact between East and West. The Treaty of Nanjing allowed traders and missionaries to settle there from 1842, and their numbers increased rapidly. By 1865, the foreign population of Shanghai had already grown from a handful to several thousand.<sup>1</sup> The city became the scene for day-to-day interactions between Western and Chinese intellectuals and literati on a hitherto unparalleled scale. Among the Chinese people with the highest exposure to the West and its learning and ideas

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<sup>1</sup>Henriot, Shi, and Aubrun give the following numbers: the population of foreigners in the French Concession was 285 in 1849 and 460 in 1865, while in the International Settlement, the population of foreigners was 50 in 1844. In 1849 the number had grown to 175 and by 1865 the population was 5,129. See C. Henriot, L. Shi and C. Aubrun (eds), *The population of Shanghai (1865–1953): A sourcebook* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp. 95–96.

were the assistants working for the European and American missionaries.<sup>2</sup> Eager to produce materials in the Chinese language, Protestant missionaries—among them Walter Henry Medhurst (1796–1857), William Muirhead (1822–1900), Alexander Wylie (1815–1887), Joseph Edkins (1823–1905), Benjamin Hobson (1816–1873), and Elijah Bridgman (1801–1867), to name just a few—looked for traditionally educated men to assist them in their translations and to work as their interpreters and language teachers. They found such men in the more traditional surrounding cities that were abounding with young literati who needed to make a living. Among others, the missionaries hired Wang Tao 王韜 (1828–1897) who had to provide for his family after his father's early passing,<sup>3</sup> Jiang Dunfu 蔣敦復 (1808–1867) who had come into conflict with officials for being too outspoken,<sup>4</sup> Guan Sifu 管嗣復 (?–1860) who had escaped from Taiping-occupied Nanjing, and Li Shanlan 李善蘭 (1810–1882) who had sought out the missionaries to learn more about Western mathematics and also to earn a sufficient income.<sup>5</sup>

In working for the missionaries, these men, who are often referred to as either treaty port intellectuals or *wenren* 文人, were torn out of their worlds, both physically and mentally. Although they were all from Jiangsu and Zhejiang, with some of them having grown up only a few dozen miles away from their new home in Shanghai, working for foreigners exposed them to a hitherto unknown world and made them think differently about their own. It would be rash to simply consider the city of Shanghai a cosmopolitan place: this attribution is already difficult to make even for modern cities,<sup>6</sup> but impossible for a mid-nineteenth century city with the complicated history and physical layout of Shanghai.<sup>7</sup> With its concessions, which had been created after the Opium War next to the traditional walled city, Shanghai was not really a multicultural melting pot. Rather it formed a delineated space where communities with diverse cultural backgrounds lived temporarily in close proximity. The city therefore turned into a potential contact zone that could offer its inhabitants a

<sup>2</sup>Yang Ziqiang 杨自强 compared the number of scientific publications in the treaty ports and demonstrated that Shanghai produced the highest output and was the 'center of the spread of Western Learning' 全國西學傳播的中心. See Yang Ziqiang 杨自强, *Xue guan zong xi: Li Shanlan zhuan* 学贯中西: 李善兰传 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 2006), p. 63. On the history of the Missionary Press in China, see J. Paquette, 'An uncompromising land; the London Missionary Society in China, 1807–1860', PhD thesis, University of California, 1987.

<sup>3</sup>For a summary of Wang Tao's life in Shanghai, see C. V. Yeh, 'The life-style of four *wenren* in Late Qing Shanghai', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 57, no. 2, 1997, pp. 419–470. For a detailed study of his life and works, see P. Cohen, *Between tradition and modernity: Wang T'ao and reform in Late Ching China* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1974); and Zhang Hailin, 张海林, *Wang Tao pingzhuan* 王韬评传 (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 1993).

<sup>4</sup>Zhang Zhichun 張志春, *Wang Tao nianpu* 王韜年譜 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1994), p. 25.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 25; Yang, *Xue guan zhong xi*, p. 64.

<sup>6</sup>Yeoh and Lin, for example, have argued that 'the simple co-presence of diverse populations' is not sufficient to call a city cosmopolitan. See B. S. A. Yeoh and W. Lin, 'Cosmopolitanism in cities and beyond', in *Routledge international handbook of cosmopolitanism studies*, 2nd edn, (ed.) G. Delanty (Milton: Routledge, 2019), p. 305. They remark that 'a diverse and transnationally mobile urban population by no means guarantees the development of cosmopolitan attitudes and characteristics' (p. 307).

<sup>7</sup>Lisa Rofel tackled this problem by defining Shanghai's cosmopolitanism as a particular type, referring to it as 'European-oriented cosmopolitanism'. See L. Rofel, 'Between *tianxia* and postsocialism: Contemporary Chinese cosmopolitanism', in *ibid.*, p. 519.

window into knowledge and awareness unavailable in mainland China at that time.<sup>8</sup> Simply residing there did not automatically make its inhabitants cosmopolitans. But cosmopolitanism has, as Delanty pointed out, a dialogic dimension: 'The cosmopolitan condition emerges out of the logic of the encounter, exchange and dialogue.'<sup>9</sup> Thomas Bender suggested treating 'cosmopolitanism' as an experience rather than a category or mindset. He argued that a cosmopolitan is someone who has new experiences that are 'moderately unsettling', which 'stimulates inquiry into the novelty or difference' and 'prompts introspection'.<sup>10</sup> It is in this sense that I would suggest we classify the interaction between the assistants of the London Missionary Society and the missionaries. They did not necessarily become cosmopolitans—at the very least, I would argue that this is impossible to stipulate with the limited sources to which we have access. Our sources are mostly autobiographical, and this article's third section will demonstrate the limits of this type of source. But while working at the Inkstone Press, the assistants certainly exposed themselves to cosmopolitan experiences and in the process gained new perspectives on their own culture and tradition. Their interaction with Westerners exposed them to the world beyond China's cultural confines, and their work at the Inkstone Press introduced them to religious and secular Western writings. In turn this made them reflect on their own culture and tradition.

What interests me here is not whether some, or all, of the assistants (or the missionaries) were or were not cosmopolitans, but rather how the treaty port intellectuals dealt with their cosmopolitan experiences in their autobiographical writings. As is well-known, autobiographies do not provide factual accounts, nor are they intended to. Wolfgang Bauer cautioned that they 'are often full of disguises'. He went on to explain that 'in many of them, the poets don't describe their Self like it was, not even how they subjectively perceived themselves, but simply how they would have liked their Self to be'.<sup>11</sup> Wu Pei-Yi similarly remarked that Chinese biographies were 'mainly a way of transmitting to posterity certain aspects of a life'.<sup>12</sup> David Herman, in his work on Yeats and Gonne, upon remarking that it is a given that 'all identities are but particular constructions of a self, serving particular descriptive functions in particular cultural contexts',<sup>13</sup> deduced that, as a consequence, 'there are better and worse ways of describing who we are'.<sup>14</sup> It is this point that I would like to address here. How, and

<sup>8</sup>For the role of port cities, see H. Driessen, 'Mediterranean port cities: Cosmopolitanism reconsidered', *History and Anthropology*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2005, pp. 129–141, pp. 130–132; Yeoh and Lin, 'Cosmopolitanism in cities and beyond', pp. 301–302.

<sup>9</sup>See G. Delanty and N. Harris, 'The idea of critical cosmopolitanism', in *Handbook of cosmopolitanism studies*, (ed.) Delanty, p. 96.

<sup>10</sup>See T. Bender, 'The cosmopolitan experience and its uses', in *Cosmopolitanisms*, (eds) B. Robbins and P. Lemos Horta (New York: New York University Press, 2017), pp. 116–126, p. 117.

<sup>11</sup>My translation from the German original: 'Autobiographien und Selbstdarstellungen [sind] oft voller Verkleidungen. In vielen schildern die Dichter ihr Ich nicht so, wie es war, ja nicht einmal so, wie sie es subjektiv sahen, sondern lediglich so, wie sie es gerne gehabt hätten.' See W. Bauer, *Das Antlitz Chinas: die autobiographische Selbstdarstellung in der chinesischen Literatur von ihren Anfängen bis heute* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1990), p. 19.

<sup>12</sup>Wu Pei-yi, *Confucian's progress: Autobiographical writings in traditional China* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 4.

<sup>13</sup>D. Herman, 'Autobiography, allegory, and the construction of the self', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 35, no. 4, 1995, pp. 351–360, p. 351.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 352.

to what extent, the treaty port intellectuals wrote about their cosmopolitan experiences was ultimately a choice based on their own subjective judgements of what was appropriate for their audience. This raises the interesting question of how they chose to accommodate their treaty port experiences. What was the answer they found to the question of how best to tell their stories? What facades or aspects of their lives in Shanghai did they choose to present and what did they leave out?

To address these complex questions, I will analyse the writings of Jiang Dunfu and Wang Tao, who both left behind various autobiographical writings. Due to the size of the corpus, this article restricts itself at looking at the genre of prose autobiographies. Authors often appended these to their collected prose writings or poetry, and these brief accounts therefore give us an idea of how they wanted to be seen and remembered by their literati peers. As a first step, I will try to reconstruct the Shanghai years of Jiang Dunfu and Wang Tao, that is, the lives they lived, to obtain a clear idea of the actual extent of the two men's involvement with the missionaries. Then, in a second step, I will analyse their autobiographical writings.

### Jiang Dunfu's and Wang Tao's cosmopolitan experiences

Before looking at the way Jiang Dunfu and Wang Tao recounted their experiences with the Western missionaries in their prose autobiographies, I will briefly outline the extent of what I consider to be their cosmopolitan experiences, that is, their initial motivation for going to Shanghai; their professional and personal relationships with the missionaries; their interest in the West, Christianity, and Western learning; and their social status as assistants to the missionaries.

Wang Tao joined the London Missionary Society's (LMS) Inkstone Press in 1849. He took over his father's former position there to support his family after his father passed away.<sup>15</sup> Jiang Dunfu joined the LMS a few years later, in 1852 or 1853. He arrived in Shanghai in 1852,<sup>16</sup> but when exactly he started to work for the missionaries is difficult to establish. In a biography that Wang Tao wrote about him, Wang claims that Jiang joined the LMS in 1853 on his recommendation:

In the Renzi year (1852) of the Xianfeng reign, in the second month of winter, we met for the first time in Shanghai. [...] In the spring of next year (1853) he handed a letter to the authorities, but he was not hired, and he was in dire straits. At that time, I was just editing the *Gazetteer of England* (*Dayingguo zhi* 大英國志) and *A Universal Geography in Two Volumes* (*Dili quanzhi* 地理全志) together with the Western Scholar Muirhead. I used the opportunity to recommend Mister [Jiang] to him as a skilled historian suitable for the task.

<sup>15</sup>See P. Hanan, 'The Bible as Chinese literature: Medhurst, Wang Tao, and the Delegates' Version', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 63, 2003, pp. 197–239, p. 224; 'China. Shanghai', *The Missionary Magazine and Chronicle*, 1855, p. 163. The mission yearbooks are available in digitalized format at: <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000054677>, [accessed 4 December 2023].

<sup>16</sup>Wang Tao's diary entries for Jiang Dunfu are relatively scarce, but he begins to make regular appearances in 1852. See Wang Tao, *Wang Tao riji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2015), pp. 72, 75, 80.

咸豐壬子仲冬始見之於滬市。[。]明年春上當事書不見用而其窮益甚。時余方與西儒慕維廉改削英志及地理全志上下編。因薦君有史才,可當其任。<sup>17</sup>

This passage suggests that in Jiang's case too, economic reasons were the main driver behind his taking up a position at the Inkstone Press.

Together with their colleagues, Wang and Jiang assisted the missionaries in translating, editing, and printing religious and secular writings.<sup>18</sup> The religious component of the job was a problem for many of the Chinese assistants, who, except for Wang Tao, were not Christian converts. The missionaries were aware of this. In their report of Wang Tao's baptism, they stated that Wang and their other assistants commonly 'seemed not to feel themselves personally interested in what they were so well preparing for others'.<sup>19</sup> But the assistants did not merely react with a lack of interest in their tasks. They considered this line of work to pose a moral dilemma. In Wang Tao's diaries, we learn more about just how critical some of them were of their mission-related work. One entry records a discussion between Wang Tao and Guan Sifu (style name Xiaoyi 小異), in which they discussed what it meant for a traditional Chinese scholar to translate Western religious scriptures. The American missionary Elijah Bridgman had asked Guan for help with a religious translation,<sup>20</sup> but, Wang Tao tells us, 'because the religious books ran strongly counter to the teachings of the Confucians, [Guan] Xiaoyi had never wanted to translate them and ultimately excused himself and did not go' 小異以教中書籍大悖儒教,素不願譯,竟辭不往。<sup>21</sup> Wang Tao records that Guan Sifu's reason for refusing to translate religious tracts was that he considered himself someone who had 'entered the school of Confucius' (*ru Kong men*, 入孔門) and 'assisted in the Teaching of Names' (*fuyi mingjiao* 輔翼名教).<sup>22</sup> For him, translating religious writings crossed the line:

Only if until the end of my life I manage to never translate the books of their religion, thereby illuminating how they belittle the Sage, then can I

<sup>17</sup>The biography is appended to the collection of Jiang Dunfu's poetry; see Jiang Dunfu, *Xiaogutang shiji* 嘯古堂詩集 (Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University, 1885), juan 1, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup>For some remarks on the differing degrees to which the assistants were used in these activities, see S. Eicher, 'Beyond Shanghai: The inland activities of the London Missionary Society from 1843 to 1860 according to Wang Tao's diaries', *Monumenta Serica*, vol. 70, no. 2, 2022, pp. 423–455.

<sup>19</sup>'China. Shanghai', pp. 163–164.

<sup>20</sup>For a study of the life and missionary work of Elijah Coleman Bridgman (1801–1861), see M. C. Lazich, 'E. C. Bridgman and the coming of the millennium: America's first missionary to China', PhD thesis, University of New York, 1997. Bridgman had come to Shanghai in 1847 and joined in the work of translating the Bible (pp. 394–397). Through his involvement in the translation group, he must have known the Chinese assistants of the LMS well, which is presumably why he asked one of them to aid him in his translation. After finishing the Delegates' Version, Bridgman had started to prepare a Bible translation in vernacular language and in 1857, he reported that 'one half of the New Testament, and the books of Genesis and Exodus have been rendered into the Colloquial Mandarin; the Psalms are finished, and I am now upon Ecclesiastes'. See E. J. Bridgman, *The pioneer of American missions to China: The life and labors of Elijah Coleman Bridgman* (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph, 1864), pp. 222–223. He apparently needed help polishing the translation.

<sup>21</sup>Wang Tao, *Wang Tao riji*, p. 266.

<sup>22</sup>The term 'teaching of names' (*mingjiao* 名教) is a broad reference to the Confucian school.

enquire my heart without feeling shame and face my friends without feeling embarrassment.

惟我終生不譯彼教中書以顯悖聖人，則可問此心而無慚，對執友而靡愧耳。<sup>23</sup>

Translating Christian writings that ran counter to the Confucian classics clearly caused the assistants a moral dilemma. In the case of Jiang, we have little information on the religious translations he worked on, but he expressed strong criticism of Christianity in his letter to Thomas Francis Wade.<sup>24</sup> In Wang's case, we know that he assisted for years in the translation of the Delegates' Version of the Bible and eventually even converted to Christianity. But during the Arrow War years, he, too, began to view religious translations more critically and expressed this in his writings.<sup>25</sup>

Contrary to this uneasiness about or, in some cases, unwillingness to translate religious texts, the scientific translations drew the interest of the assistants. Together with Benjamin Hobson, Alexander Wylie, Joseph Edkins, and William Muirhead, they worked on books on mathematics, mechanics, botany, medicine, and other subjects.<sup>26</sup> These collaborations in turn sparked the assistants' interest and led them to compile their own original works. Jiang Dunfu, for example, almost immediately set out to write his own *History of England* (*Ying zhi* 英志).<sup>27</sup> A few years later, having left the missionaries, Wang Tao would, among other titles, write a *Summary Outline of France* (*Faguo zhilüe* 法國智略) and *Annals of the Franco-Prussian War* (*Pu Fa zhanji* 普法戰記). Li Shanlan translated mathematical works. The assistants might have initially joined the missionaries for financial reasons, but in the process they discovered their interest in the West and its traditions and established profound professional relationships with the missionaries.

What we see in the sources, apart from intense professional relationships, also points to intimate personal relationships between individual missionaries and assistants. Wang Tao's diaries are our most detailed source here, and they paint a picture of familiarity and mutual respect. Benjamin Hobson (Chinese name Hexin 合信),<sup>28</sup> for example, is mentioned regularly, and the diary entries tell us that Wang Tao and the other assistants were close to him, visiting him and presenting him with gifts. We read, for example: 'Boshen sent Hobson several kinds of books on medicine'

<sup>23</sup>Wang Tao, *Wang Tao riji*, p. 266.

<sup>24</sup>The letter is a bitter complaint against the treaty clauses and, after lamenting about the greed of British merchants, it contains a lengthy section in which Christianity is compared negatively to Confucianism and described as a harmful religion. See Jiang Dunfu, 'Ni yu Yingguo shichen Wei Anma shu' 擬與英國使臣威安瑪書, in Jiang Dunfu, *Xiaogutang wenji* (Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University, 1865), juan 3, pp. 14b–23b. A digitalized version is available at: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044067923383&seq=325>, [accessed 4 December 2023].

<sup>25</sup>For a summary of Wang's stance towards Christianity and the missionaries, see Eicher, 'Beyond Shanghai', pp. 426–430.

<sup>26</sup>For introductions to the collaborative translation projects, see Xiong Yuezhi, *The eastward dissemination of Western learning in the Late Qing dynasty* (Singapore: Silkroad Press, 2013), vol. 1, pp. 134–148.

<sup>27</sup>Cohen, *Between tradition and modernity*, p. 17.

<sup>28</sup>Hobson had arrived in China in 1840. See Paquette, 'The London Missionary Society in China', pp. 81–82. He was first responsible for opening a Western hospital in Canton. After relocating to Shanghai, he took control of the hospital there. See *ibid.*, pp. 174–175.

伯深寄贈合信醫書數種。<sup>29</sup> Elsewhere, Wang Tao tells us that Guan Sifu 'bought two white silk fans and wanted to give them to Hobson as a present' 購紉扇二柄, 將以貽合信也。<sup>30</sup> Wang Tao's own sympathies for Hobson are most perceptible in his description of seeing Hobson off at the time of the latter's return to England:

In the afternoon, I accompanied Hobson to the bank of Huangpu River. We held each other's hands with utmost reverence and then parted. From here on now, he is setting sail and travelling into the distance, I do not know what day I will meet him again! Mister (jun)<sup>31</sup> Hobson specializes in the principles of medicine. He is generous and honest, and also a preeminent Western medic.

午後, 送合信至黃浦邊, 珍重攜手而別。從此開帆遠去, 不知何日再相見矣! 合君精於醫理, 為人渾厚朴誠, 亦泰西醫士中之矯矯者。<sup>32</sup>

Wang Tao expresses similar sentiments towards Walter Henry Medhurst in a poem titled 'Seeing the Western Scholar Medhurst off to his country' ('Song Mai xishi huiguo' 送麥西士回國), in which Wang Tao processed Medhurst's farewell from Shanghai in 1856 and called him 'the person I revere the most from the people from overseas' 海邦物望最為崇 and somebody who 'received his learning from Heaven and is unmatched' 學從天授推無敵. He finishes the second verse of the poem with the line: 'Eight years ago, we met, and it feels like yesterday; the years and months have passed and I sigh with regret' 八年聚首情如昨, 歲月因循感慨中。<sup>33</sup> Such high praise for Westerners is rare to find in Chinese writings from these years.

Jiang Dunfu's professional relationship with the missionaries seems to have been similar to that of Wang Tao. During his Shanghai years he, too, worked closely with the missionaries on their publications, contributing a biography of Gaius Julius Caesar to the missionary journal *Liuhe congkan* 六合叢談<sup>34</sup> and, as already seen above, working intensively with William Muirhead on the *Gazetteer of England* and *Universal Geography*.<sup>35</sup> As in the case of Wang, the collaboration seems to have sparked his interest. His work with Muirhead laid the basis for Jiang's own previously mentioned History of England

<sup>29</sup>Wang Tao, *Wang Tao riji*, p. 202.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>31</sup>Over the years, Wang began to refer to the missionaries as *jun* 君, 'Misters', and as a group as *xiru* 西儒, 'Western scholars', in his diaries. In this he deviated from many of his contemporaries, who continued to use the term 'foreigners' (*yi* 夷).

<sup>32</sup>Wang Tao, *Wang Tao riji*, p. 225.

<sup>33</sup>So Fa Kai, 'Wang Tao qianqi shige yanjiu' 王韜前期詩歌研究, MA thesis, University of Hong Kong, 2012, p. 125. So Fa Kai has presented the most comprehensive study of the autobiographical poems written by Wang Tao during his Shanghai years, identifying a total of 157 pieces. See *ibid.*, p. 92. So Fa Kai also included a helpful table of all titles, see *ibid.*, pp. 92–96. Wang Tao also praised Medhurst in the fondest terms in a letter written to Ying Yugeng 應雨耕. After notifying Ying about Medhurst's passing, he writes: 'This was an intimate friend from abroad. My sadness is truly deep-rooted, and the pain makes me want to gouge out my heart' 此滬海外一知己也, 悲真刻骨, 痛欲剜心. See Wang Tao, *Wang Tao riji*, p. 185.

<sup>34</sup>See *Liuhe congkan*, vol. 1, no. 2 (February 1857), 6b–8a. Shen Guowei 沈國威, *Liuhe congkan* 六合叢談 (*Shanghai Serial*) (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2006), pp. 543–545.

<sup>35</sup>P. Hanan, 'Chinese Christian literature: The writing process', in *Treasures of the Yen-ching: Seventy-fifth anniversary of the Harvard-Yenching Library*, (ed.) P. Hanan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard-Yenching Library, 2003), pp. 261–284, p. 277; Su Ching, 'The printing presses of the London Missionary Society among the Chinese', PhD thesis, University of London, 1996, p. 325.



(*Ying zhi*) and he later also revised his Caesar biography and paired it with an account of the life of George Washington, thus creating the ‘Biographies of Two Distinguished Foreigners’ 海外兩異人傳 which was included in his prose collection *Xiaogutang wenji* 嘯古堂文集.<sup>36</sup> His personal relationship with the missionaries is, however, much more difficult to assess, due to a lack of suitable sources. Jiang himself does not talk about the LMS missionaries in his writings. Wang Tao does not mention many interactions between Jiang and the missionaries in his diaries either, unlike Li Shanlan and Guan Sifu. Considering Jiang Dunfu’s personal history, it is probable that he was initially more reserved towards them. Jiang was a native of Baoshan 寶山, which had been attacked by the British fleet during the Opium War.<sup>37</sup> His collected prose writings suggest that this was a traumatic event for him. In the piece ‘Writing down the whole course of the affair with the exemplary women from Baoshan and their difficulties with the Foreigners’ (‘Shu Baoshan lienü si yinan benmo’ 書寶山列女死夷難本末),<sup>38</sup> he attempted to gather anecdotes about women who had suffered and were sometimes forced to commit suicide during the attack on Baoshan. Compared to Wang Tao, who was following in his father’s footsteps and had met the missionaries at least once prior to going to Shanghai when he visited his father in 1848,<sup>39</sup> Jiang’s decision to take up work at the Inkstone Press must have been an emotionally charged one. Despite this, for several years he collaborated closely with Joseph Edkins and William Muirhead, which suggests that there must have been, at the very least, mutual respect. In his diaries Wang also tells us that Thomas Francis Wade asked Jiang to select collections of poetry for him to translate into English:

Second day, Jiaxu day: After lunch, Jiang Jianren came and paid me a visit. He brought along the books ‘Source of classical poetry’ and the ‘Treasures of Tang Poetry’ and said: ‘Mister Thomas Francis Wade, the translator of the English Emissary (Elgin), asked for help in selecting poems from the past dynasties. He is going to circulate them in the western territories to enable them to know about the flourishing of Chinese poetry and learning.’ This can be called a sophisticated gentleman. That [Jiang] Jianren did not himself strive to create a collection but merely selected [existing] anthologies and fetched them is truly a lazy way of fulfilling this task!

二日甲戌：午後，蔣劍人來訪，攜《古詩源》、《唐詩珍》數帙去，云：英公使翻譯官威君餞瑪倩渠選歷代詩，將流傳西土，俾知中夏詩學之盛。是亦可謂風雅主人也。特劍人不求專集，而僅就選本撮取，真屬模糊了事矣。<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup>See *Xiaogutang wenji*, juan 5, pp. 2a–7a. For a translation, see S. Eicher, ‘Biographies of two distinguished foreigners by Jiang Dunfu’, *Renditions*, vol. 98, 2022, pp. 89–99. For a study of the column ‘Western literature’ in which the Caesar biography first appeared, see S. Eicher, ‘Echoes of Victorian Hellenism in mid-nineteenth-century China: Joseph Edkins’ recurring column “Western literature” (*Xixue shuo* 西學說) in the journal *Liuhe congkan* 六合叢談 (Shanghai Serial)’, *Annali Di Ca’ Foscari. Serie Orientale*, vol. 58, 2022, pp. 649–671.

<sup>37</sup>On the 1842 battles, see also S. Platt, *Imperial twilight: The Opium War and the end of China’s last Golden Age* (New York: Vintage Books, 2019), pp. 403–404.

<sup>38</sup>See *Xiaogutang wenji*, juan 6, pp. 33a–35a.

<sup>39</sup>Zhang, *Wang Tao pingzhuan*, pp. 25–26.

<sup>40</sup>Wang Tao, *Wang Tao riji*, p. 189. Cohen, *Between tradition and modernity*, p. 16.



Wang Tao therefore hints at a certain amount of mutual respect and collaboration between Jiang and Wade, but also a lack of commitment. But our knowledge does not exceed anecdotal information like this and we are therefore left in the dark when it comes to the level of Jiang Dunfu's intimacy or friendship with the missionaries. However, from at least the perspective of knowledge exchange his cosmopolitan experiences were comparable to those of Wang Tao. Jiang, too, joined the LMS for financial reasons and discovered his interest in the West in the process of working and living with the missionaries.

Wang's and Jiang's exposure to the West brought them knowledge and insights, but it came at a price: they faced heavy criticism from their own society.<sup>41</sup> We see traces of the backlash from society in the abovementioned discussion between Wang Tao and Guan Sifu. Guan explains that his friends reprimanded him from the beginning for 'lowering his value and for compromising his moral integrity because he wanted to appease the Westerners' 貶價屈節, 以求合西人.<sup>42</sup> Here we encounter the argument that working for Westerners ran counter to 'moral integrity' (jie 節). Guan Sifu explains that he nevertheless assisted the missionary Benjamin Hobson because of his 'desire for Western learning' 欲求西學 and personally did not consider studying to be 'running away from Confucianism' 逃儒,<sup>43</sup> implying that others did hold this opinion. This passage provides an idea of how, in the years between the First Opium War and the Arrow War" the missionaries' assistants faced criticism for their involvement in the Western translations. Traditional literati considered this a violation of scholarly conduct and grounds for shame.

This is the extent to which we can summarize the cosmopolitan experiences of Wang Tao and Jiang Dunfu. We have established four key elements. First, it was not curiosity but economic hardship that drove both authors to engage with the Westerners: they joined the Inkstone Press first and foremost to make a living. Second, their social status suffered from this decision, as they faced strong prejudice from their social peers who considered them to have sold out to a wrong cause. Thirdly, they developed strong professional relationships with the missionaries. Their exposure to Westerners and Western learning was initially a side-effect, but in the process of polishing religious and secular translations, they engaged with the materials they worked on and eventually discovered their own interest in Western learning and history. Fourth, to differing extents they also formed personal ties with the missionaries. In Wang Tao's case we can say with certainty that he built intimate personal connections with some missionaries. In the case of Jiang Dunfu, the extent of his personal relationships is not clear, but he, too, had intimate dealings with the missionaries and they seem to have valued him for his knowledge.

<sup>41</sup>Vittinghoff points out that their true status is contested, and that both very negative and very positive judgements can be found. The more positive assessments are, however, from the people with close ties to the journalists and translators. For some negative opinions, see N. Vittinghoff, 'Social actors in the field of new learning', in *Mapping meanings: The field of new learning in Late Qing China*, (eds) M. Lackner and N. Vittinghoff (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 75–118, pp. 79–81.

<sup>42</sup>Wang Tao, *Wang Tao riji*, p. 266.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

## Wang Tao's and Jiang Dunfu's autobiographical processing of the cosmopolitan experiences

Having introduced the 'lives lived', that is, the cosmopolitan experiences of Jiang and Wang in their treaty port years, it is now time to turn to the 'lives written' and see how they wrote about them in their autobiographical writings. Wang Tao and Jiang Dunfu both wrote brief prose autobiographies in which they addressed their time in Shanghai. Jiang Dunfu chose to compile a *zixu* 自敘 (self-narration), and Wang Tao a *zizhuan* 自傳 (autobiography). Authors often appended these to their prose or poetry collections, where they served as a self-introduction to their readership. This means we can use Wang's and Jiang's accounts to gain insight into how they wanted the readers of their poems and essays—traditionally educated literati—to understand their Shanghai years. Later Wang Tao also published a pictorial autobiography (*tuji* 圖記), organized around the topic of place, which also deals with his time with the missionaries, and we will look at how he presented his Shanghai years there, as he tells a very different story, which thus provides a useful contrast.

### Jiang Dunfu's quest for military intelligence

The older of the two prose autobiographies is Jiang Dunfu's account, which dates from the year 1860. So far, it has not received much attention,<sup>44</sup> despite being the most important source on Jiang.<sup>45</sup> The piece bears the title 'Autobiography of the Recluse from the Linong Mountains' 麗農山人自敘 and is included in Jiang's collection of prose writings, the *Xiaogutang wenji*.<sup>46</sup> The autobiography was written in the aftermath of the Arrow War (1856–1860) and during the turmoil of the Christian-influenced Taiping uprising, for which the West was held responsible by Chinese literati. In his own words, Jiang—referring to himself throughout as 'the Recluse from the Linong Mountains'—decided to compile this work to preserve his memory: 'But his children are young, and he is afraid that the later generations will not know about him. Accordingly, he outlined his autobiography in the seventh month of the tenth year of the Xianfeng reign in the autumn' 子幼恐後世無聞焉。自敘梗概如此，咸豐十年秋七月。<sup>47</sup>

That Jiang wrote his account when tensions between the West and China were high is apparent in his treatment of Westerners. Let us first look briefly at the time leading up to his move to Shanghai. Jiang relates that, having angered officials for being too outspoken, he was forced to become a Buddhist monk. He returned, however, to

<sup>44</sup>The most in-depth study undertaken so far on Jiang Dunfu is the groundbreaking master's thesis by Xu Chang, 'Man of letters, self-ordained minister, and madman: Jiang Dunfu (1808–1867) in nineteenth-century Shanghai', MA thesis, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2018.

<sup>45</sup>Wang Tao also wrote two short biographies for Jiang. One is appended to the collection of Jiang Dunfu's poetry, the *Xiaogutang shiji* 嘯古堂詩集, and the other can be found in Wang Tao's guidebook for Shanghai, the *Yingruan zazhi* 瀛壖雜誌. See Wang Tao, *Yingruan zazhi* 瀛壖雜誌 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1989), pp. 76–77.

<sup>46</sup>See Jiang Dunfu, 'Linong shanren zixu' 麗農山人自敘, in *Xiaogutang wenji* 嘯古堂文集, juan 1, pp. 1a–4b.

<sup>47</sup>*Xiaogutang wenji*, juan 1, p. 4a.

his old life sometime later and went to Shanghai to make a living.<sup>48</sup> Throughout these parts of the autobiography, Jiang describes himself as somebody who, having carefully considered the dangers the West posed, kept warning the authorities about the ‘problems with the Foreigners’ 夷難 and the ‘harm the Island foreigners’<sup>49</sup> would ultimately cause China’ 島夷終為中國患,<sup>50</sup> but he remained unheard. About his move to Shanghai, Jiang Dunfu then wrote: ‘He hid himself in Shanghai (“above the sea”), where he sold his prose in order to provide for himself’ 伏處海上, 賣文自給.<sup>51</sup> As mentioned above, Jiang arrived in Shanghai in 1852 and seems to have joined the LMS soon afterwards. It therefore stands to reason that the missionaries were the clients to whom Jiang ‘sold his prose’ 賣文. However, in his autobiography, instead of mentioning this, he chose to vaguely state that he made a living from his writing, without telling his readers who he worked for.

The autobiography then swiftly turns to the Small Sword Society (*xiao dao hui* 小刀會), a group of Ming-loyalists that occupied the walled old city in the mid-1850s. Jiang Dunfu tells his readers how he attempted to advise officials on how to deal with them, but his suggestions once again fell on deaf ears.<sup>52</sup> It is only after the end of the Small Sword uprising in 1855 that he mentions Westerners again:

Thereupon the city of Shanghai overthrew the [Small Swords] and it became again the marketplace of the Westerners. The court discussed and allowed the Chinese to interact with them. The Man from the Mountains travelled with the English and longed to obtain the essential points of intel about their country. He enticed them to hand over histories of their country and translated them to complete a book.

及滬城克, 復西人通市。朝議許華人與相往還。山人與英吉利人遊, 思得彼國要領。誘之出國史, 繙譯成書。<sup>53</sup>

Jiang and William Muirhead had worked together on the latter’s *History of England*<sup>54</sup> as part of Jiang’s job, and Jiang used what he had learnt in the process as a point of departure for his own book. Yet, he chose to characterize this as ‘enticing them to hand over the histories of their country’ 誘之出國史, assuming the role of somebody who was gathering military intelligence to use against the English. Just how carefully Jiang selected his words here becomes apparent when we compare them to how Wang Tao described the same events in his above quoted biography for Jiang Dunfu: there, Wang claimed to have brought Jiang and Muirhead together, motivated by his desire to help Jiang escape his financial troubles.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 1b.

<sup>49</sup>The term *daoyi* 島夷 that Jiang here uses for the English is a traditional term for peoples living in the south.

<sup>50</sup>*Xiaogutang wenji*, juan 1, p. 2a.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 2b.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 3a.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>See Ching Su, ‘The printing presses’, p. 325.

This is all that Jiang tells his readers about his time in Shanghai. What we have is a carefully constructed explanation of his connection to the Westerners: Jiang frames his work for the missionaries purely as an intelligence gathering project, claiming that from the beginning his goal was to obtain material for his History of England (*Ying zhi*) and that through his personal experience, 'the order and chaos, rise and decline, mountains and rivers, territories, wealth, military punishments, and many other important elements of the two thousand years of the country of England were known to him like the back of his hand' 由是英國二千年來治亂，興衰，山川，疆域，財賦，兵刑，數大端瞭如指掌。<sup>55</sup> That he was working for missionaries is not mentioned and neither are any personal relationships with individual missionaries. It even remains unclear that the Westerners he interacted with were missionaries and not, for example, merchants.

This raises the question of why Jiang Dunfu chose to write his story in this particular way. We have seen that Jiang seems to have had stronger reservations about the missionaries than Wang Tao. But I would argue that this is only a part of the answer.

Jiang's way of portraying himself as an author gathering military intelligence was presumably an attempt to blend in with similar works by previous authors. Jiang Dunfu was subscribing to an established discourse that considered intimate military intelligence of the West based on primary sources to be important. Consider, for example, how Wei Yuan 魏源, in his 'Original preface to the *Haiguo tuzhi*' 海國圖志原敘, completed in 1843,<sup>56</sup> described his endeavour. He first explained that his history was based not only on Chinese sources, but also on 'current foreign maps and explanations' 及近日夷圖、夷語.<sup>57</sup> Wei Yuan claims to have 'investigated and assembled them' 鉤稽貫串, to have 'cut down the thicket and torn away the weeds' 創榛闢莽,<sup>58</sup> and justifies this approach by claiming the need to gain insight into Western practices in order for the Qing dynasty to be able to defend itself against the threat they posed:

Why differ from the [approach of the] books about maritime geography [written by] by earlier authors? I say: Those offered explanations of the Western Oceans by Chinese people. This [work] now offers explanations of the Western Oceans by Western people. Why was this book written? I say: It was written so that we can use the foreigners to attack the foreigners. It was written so that we can use the foreigners to negotiate with the foreigners. It was written so that we can subdue the foreigners by learning the special skills of the foreigners.

何以異於昔人海圖之書？曰：彼皆以中土人譚西洋，此則以西洋人譚西洋也。是書何以作？曰：為以夷攻夷而作，為以夷款夷而作，為師夷長技以制夷而作。<sup>59</sup>

<sup>55</sup> *Xiaogutang wenji*, juan 1, p. 3a.

<sup>56</sup> J. K. Leonard, *Wei Yuan and China's rediscovery of the maritime world* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 92.

<sup>57</sup> Wei Yuan 魏源, *Haiguo tuzhi* 海國圖志 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1999), p. 67.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

Wei Yuan, therefore, explained that gaining intimate knowledge and military intelligence of the West and its sources was like the old strategy of ‘using the barbarians to fight the barbarians’ 以夷攻夷.<sup>60</sup> Written a decade earlier and under similar circumstances after the First Opium War, we see largely the same argument that Jiang made later. Following the precedent of works like the *Haiguo tuzhi*, Jiang Dunfu claims that collaborating with foreigners in Shanghai was simply a way to provide a source for his writings, as the enemy needed to be studied. And this is also the picture he chose to present in his autobiography. He claimed full agency and purposefully reduced his cosmopolitan experiences so as to appear like a traditional man of letters. Only his professional relationship with the missionaries is included, but in a distorted way. He does not talk about his financial motivation for working with the missionaries, denies personal relationships, pretends that it had no effect on his social status, and does not mention Christianity at all.

### Wang Tao's search for Western learning

Wang Tao's autobiography, the *Taoyuan Laomin zizhuan* 弢園老民自傳,<sup>61</sup> was first used as a preface to his poetry collection *Henghua guan shilu* 蘅華館詩錄, where it is dated to the sixth year of the Guangxu reign, that is, 1879.<sup>62</sup> Wang Tao later also included it in his prose collection *Taoyuan wenlu waibian* 弢園文錄外編 which was first published in 1882.<sup>63</sup> The autobiography thus appeared almost 20 years after Jiang's. It has been translated into English in full by Tsui Wai in her dissertation on the *Manyou suilu* 漫遊隨錄,<sup>64</sup> and Wendy Larson and Wolfgang Bauer considered it in their studies of autobiographies.<sup>65</sup> In the account, Wang Tao told his own story, in roughly 3,100 characters, referring to himself as ‘Old Man’ (*laomin* 老民).<sup>66</sup> As in the case of Jiang Dunfu, he claims that it was concern for how he would be remembered that led him to write his autobiography. He explained: ‘Writing a biography while being alive is not the way of antiquity. However, the Old Man is afraid of vanishing from the face of the earth without being heard of. Therefore, he made an exception and presented this synopsis himself’ 生而作傳, 非古也。老民蓋懼沒世無聞, 特自敘梗概如此。<sup>67</sup>

Albeit stylistically similar to the autobiography of Jiang Dunfu, Wang's was written under very different circumstances. Whereas Jiang compiled his piece in the immediate aftermath of the Second Opium War and during the Taiping uprising when tensions between the West and China were high, Wang Tao wrote his 20 years later during the Self-Strengthening Movement and after he had already made a name for himself

<sup>60</sup>For a detailed assessment of the preface and Wei Yuan's strategy, see Leonard, *Rediscovery of the maritime world*, pp. 184–185.

<sup>61</sup>Wang Tao, *Taoyuan wenlu waibian* 弢園文錄外編 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), pp. 326–332.

<sup>62</sup>Wang Tao, *Henghua guan shilu* (Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University, 1881), juan 1, p. 7.

<sup>63</sup>Wang Tao, *Taoyuan wenlu waibian*, preface, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup>Tsui Wai, ‘A study of Wang Tao's (1828–1897) *Manyou suilu* and *Fusang youji* with reference to Late Qing Chinese foreign travels’, PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2010, appendix, pp. 409–431.

<sup>65</sup>W. Larson, *Literary authority and the modern Chinese writer: Ambivalence and autobiography* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), pp. 51–55. Bauer, *Das Antlitz Chinas*, pp. 549–552.

<sup>66</sup>As he himself explains the name: ‘After the age of fifty, he called himself the Old Man of Taoyuan’ (translation Tsui Wai). See Tsui, ‘A study of the *Manyou suilu*’, p. 432.

<sup>67</sup>Wang Tao, *Taoyuan wenlu waibian*, p. 332.

through his travels to Europe and his histories of France and the Franco-Prussian War. His travels happened contemporaneously with the first government officials of the Qing dynasty going to Europe and the United States.<sup>68</sup> As Natascha Vittinghoff and Elisabeth Sinn have pointed out, this led to an increase in his prestige.<sup>69</sup> In the long run, therefore, Wang Tao had profited from his cosmopolitan experiences and, taking into account also that his relationship with the missionaries was a more intimate one than Jiang's, one could be led to assume that he treated his Shanghai years differently from Jiang Dunfu. This is, however, only partially the case.

The expected differences between the accounts are immediately visible. In particular, Wang Tao used a friendlier tone to describe the Westerners. He referred to them not as foreigners (yì) but as 'Westerners' (xī rén) or 'Western scholars' (xī ru) and described them as experts in the sciences. The enmity in Jiang's account is entirely missing. But when examined closely, a number of similarities between how he and Jiang described their involvement with the missionaries becomes apparent. Wang Tao, too, refrained from describing himself as an assistant to the missionaries. He dispassionately referred to the Inkstone Press as a 'western office' (xī guān 西館) without any reference to the missionary work carried out there, and what he did there is not a subject of his autobiography. Individual missionaries are not mentioned. The fact that his father had already worked for the missionaries is entirely glossed over. Another similarity is the fact that he dressed up his story as a quest for knowledge, though this time not of the military kind:

After the death of his father, his family became even poorer so he was forced to find a job in Shanghai. By this time, Westerners had long been trading in China and literati had gradually befriended them. As the Old Man was interested in learning meteorology and geography from them, he went to their school (London Mission Press) to teach.<sup>70</sup>

既孤，家益落，以衣食計，不得已橐筆滬上。時西人久通市我國，文士漸與往還。老民欲窺其象緯輿圖諸學，遂往適館授書焉。<sup>71</sup>

This passage contains several notable points. First, Wang Tao claimed he was doing nothing new by working for Westerners. After all, 'scholars had gradually started to interact with them' 文士漸與往還<sup>72</sup> after Shanghai was opened up for trade. The way Wang Tao framed it, going to them when in need of work was a common thing to do. Ultimately, this is a justification for his interactions, much like Jiang Dunfu pointing out that the government had authorized interactions with Westerners. Wang

<sup>68</sup>For a summary of the embassies visiting the United States and Europe contemporaneously with Wang Tao, see J. H. Day, *Qing travelers to the Far West: Diplomacy and the information order in late Imperial China* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

<sup>69</sup>See N. Vittinghoff, *Die Anfänge des Journalismus in China (1860–1911)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002), pp. 87–88; E. Sinn, 'Wang Tao in Hong Kong and the Chinese "other"', in *Meeting place: Encounters across cultures in Hong Kong, 1841–1984*, (eds) E. Sinn and C. Munn (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2017), pp. 1–22, p. 8.

<sup>70</sup>Translation Tsui Wai. Tsui, 'A study of Wang Tao's Manyou suilu', p. 433.

<sup>71</sup>Wang Tao, *Taoyuan wenlu waibian*, p. 327.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

Tao's wording even echoes that of Jiang, who had used *yu xiang wang huan* 與相往還. Secondly, very much like Jiang 'selling his prose', Wang Tao vaguely refers to his work in Shanghai as *tuo bi* 橐筆, translatable as 'making a living by writing'. Thirdly, Wang Tao maintains that he went to them not merely for the sake of money, but also in order to follow his scholarly interests. He deliberately sought out the missionaries because he 'wanted to get a glimpse of their studies in meteorology and geography, therefore he went to their office to teach them' 老民欲窺其象緯輿圖諸學，遂往適館授書焉。<sup>73</sup> Wang Tao essentially described the exchange as one between equals. He wanted to learn Western sciences from the missionaries and in exchange instructed *them*. He was not working for them but following his own scholarly interests. The religious dimension of his work is missing, for example, the fact that he spent the first four years of his time in Shanghai assisting in translating the Bible. As noted above, his overall tone is much friendlier than in Jiang's account, but his motive is ultimately the same: contact with the 'other' was purposefully established in order to gain strategically valuable knowledge.

In his descriptions of his time in Hong Kong (where he had fled in 1862 after a letter that he had sent to the Taiping was discovered by government officials),<sup>74</sup> Wang Tao remained entirely silent about his involvement with the missionaries. In reality, they had helped him escape to Hong Kong and shortly after arrival he had begun working for James Legge. But in his autobiography, Wang Tao tells us that once he arrived in Hong Kong, he withdrew from the world and devoted himself to studying, with a keen interest in the *Book of Songs* (*Shijing* 詩經) and the Mao Commentary.<sup>75</sup> Legge only appears a full six years later, when he, seemingly spontaneously, invites Wang Tao to go abroad and help him with his translations of the Confucian classics:

In the winter of the sixth year of Emperor Tongzhi (1867), after James Legge invited him to the West to assist in the translation of the Chinese Classics, he was able to travel to foreign countries. He saw strange and exotic scenery, assessed the relative sincerity of the folk culture, came to know the vicissitudes of Western countries, and become familiar with their military strengths.<sup>76</sup>

六年冬，西儒理君雅各招往泰西佐譯經籍，遂得遍游域外諸國，覽其山川之詭異，察其民俗之醇漓，識其國勢之盛衰，稔其兵力之強弱。<sup>77</sup>

Again, we find the motive of scholarly exchange at the centre of Wang Tao's narrative. Legge is described as a 'Western scholar' (*xi ru* 西儒) who invited Wang Tao to assist him in translations. His connections to missionary work are not mentioned.<sup>78</sup> In an even stronger parallel to Jiang Dunfu—and somewhat unexpectedly in the context of the biography—the journey abroad is further justified as a way to learn about

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Cohen, *Between tradition and modernity*, pp. 44–47.

<sup>75</sup>See Wang Tao, *Taoyuan wenlu waibian*, p. 328.

<sup>76</sup>Translation Tsui Wai. Tsui, 'A study of Wang Tao's Manyou suilu', p. 436.

<sup>77</sup>Wang Tao, *Taoyuan wenlu waibian*, p. 329.

<sup>78</sup>Bauer, *Das Antlitz Chinas*, p. 549.



the ‘rise and decline of [England’s] national power’ 國勢之盛衰 and the ‘strength and weaknesses of its military’ 兵力之強弱.

Wang Tao’s autobiography therefore also provides a carefully constructed legitimation of his dealings with the Westerners. The extent to which Wang Tao reveals his cosmopolitan experiences is purposefully reduced. The picture we obtain is very similar to the one we encountered in Jiang Dunfu’s account: the initial motivation to establish ties with the Westerners is distorted, the extent of the personal relationships is not revealed, and the resulting initial deterioration of social status is glossed over. The religious component of the work is also not addressed.

### Other ways to tell the story

In Wang Tao’s case we can see clearly that the choice to tell his story in this way was a conscious one, as he also left a pictorial autobiography, the *Manyou suilu tuji* 漫游隨錄圖記,<sup>79</sup> written about a decade after his autobiography. This much more detailed and very different work was published after Wang returned to Shanghai from his exile in Hong Kong—Tsui Wai argues for a date between 1887 and 1889<sup>80</sup>—and it offers a collection of summaries of the journeys Wang Tao took throughout his life in chronological order. It begins with his hometown Fuli and his explorations of its vicinity in his youth, to him taking the imperial examinations in Nanjing, then travelling to Shanghai and Hong Kong and—most famously—to Europe and Japan.<sup>81</sup> It therefore presents the life story of Wang Tao organized by the places he visited<sup>82</sup> and, befitting the theme, in it Wang Tao emphasizes his identity as a traveller. A handful of chapters in the collection cover Wang Tao’s years with the missionaries in Shanghai and Hong Kong, and it is insightful to compare the accounts, as there are big differences.

The first relevant entry narrates Wang Tao’s first visit to Shanghai in 1848 and how he found employment there in 1849. The reason he gives for getting in touch with Medhurst in the first place was his scholarly interest in the movable-type press:

At that time, Medhurst, a Western intellectual who was in charge of the Mohai shuguan (London Mission Press) used movable-type print machines to print books. People thought this was an innovative idea. When I paid a special visit

<sup>79</sup>Wang Tao, *Manyou suilu tuji* 漫游隨錄圖記 (Jinan: Dongshan huabao chubanshe, 2004). The work has been treated in depth by Tsui Wai. See Tsui, ‘A study of Wang Tao’s *Manyou suilu*’.

<sup>80</sup>Tsui, ‘A study of Wang Tao’s *Manyou suilu*’, p. 155. The preface to the modern edition assumes it was first published sometime after 1887. See Wang Tao, *Manyou suilu tuji*, p. 6. It should be noted, though, that the individual pieces are a few years older than the collection, as they had already been published in the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* (*Dianshizhai huabao* 點石齋畫報). See Wang Shengyun, ‘Chinese enchantment: Reinventing Pu Songling’s classical tales in the realm of world literature, 1880–1920’, PhD thesis, University of Chicago, 2017, p. 92 and p. 97.

<sup>81</sup>For a translation of this and most other episodes covered in the *Manyou suilu*, see Tsui, ‘A study of Wang Tao’s (1828–1897) *Manyou suilu*’, appendix.

<sup>82</sup>The length of the individual chapters is standardized, and they all contain an illustration of the place described. The resulting account is far from equally balanced. As Tsui Wai pointed out, ‘two-thirds of the book deal with his journey to Europe which only counted for two years of his life’, because ‘Wang regarded his trips to the West and Japan as the most important events of his life through which he was able to feel most proud of himself.’ See Tsui, ‘A study of Wang Tao’s *Manyou suilu*’, p. 166.

there, I saw bamboo fences, pergolas, a chrysanthemum garden and a field of orchids: the place has a very pastoral atmosphere.<sup>83</sup>

Wang Tao, therefore, ascribes the agency of initially making contact with Medhurst to himself and explains his travelling to Shanghai as motivated by his interest in the printing press.<sup>84</sup> He then gives many details about the Westerners he interacted with and about his relationship with them. He describes meeting Medhurst and his daughters and how he was offered wine while Medhurst played the piano for him. He tells us about meeting William Charles Milne, William Lockart, William Muirhead, and Joseph Edkins, and describes himself as being impressed by them, not least because all of them knew Chinese.<sup>85</sup> The account proudly describes Wang Tao's relationships with the missionaries and therefore provides a much richer description of his cosmopolitan experiences in Shanghai. Wang Tao writes in a similar fashion about his exile in Hong Kong. As in the autobiography, he tells us about James Legge inviting him to Europe. This time, however, he also acknowledges their lengthy collaboration that preceded the invitation:

I worked with James Legge (1815–1897) in Hong Kong, translating the thirteen *Classics*. Later, when Legge went back to Britain, he invited me to travel to the West and help him compile books. In the winter of 1867, I embarked on my journey after he wrote me another letter of invitation.<sup>86</sup>

The extent to which Wang Tao described his personal relationships with the missionaries in Shanghai and in Hong Kong in the *Manyou suilu* therefore comes much closer to historical reality than the autobiography did. He proudly expounds on his cosmopolitan experiences; presumably this is owing to the fact that he wanted to present himself as a traveller and mediator between East and West in this work.

There is, however, one area in which Wang Tao stuck to the previous version of his story: he still did not write about Christianity. Muirhead and his colleagues are described as intellectuals—men of learning, not faith. No information is given about Wang Tao's actual work with them. The lengths to which Wang Tao went to delete all ties to missionary work become visible in the description of a trip to Lake Tai 太湖 in 1854 during which Wang Tao accompanied the missionaries Medhurst and Muirhead. In reality the trip was a missionary journey to the inland that enabled the missionaries to distribute scriptures and preach. In his related diary entries, Wang Tao openly writes

<sup>83</sup>Translation Tsui Wai. *Ibid.*, p. 474.

<sup>84</sup>Zhang Hailin interpreted this passage as a sign of Wang Tao's interest in the West. See Zhang, *Wang Tao pingzhuan*, p. 26. Wang Liqun also argues that Wang Tao took the job out of interest in the West, as he was not able to gain experience with them in his time in Fuli. See Wang Liqun 王立群, *Zhongguo caoqi kou'an zhishifenzi xingcheng de wenhua tezheng: Wang Tao yanjiu* 中国早期口岸知识分子形成的文化特征:王韬研究 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2009), pp. 30–31. Lawrence Wong argues much more critically that this is Wang Tao's attempt to justify his actions and is 'not believable' 这并不可信. See Wang Hongzhi 王宏志, "'Mai shen shi yi' de Wang Tao: dang chuantong wenshi dang shangle yizhe" 卖身事夷的王韬:当传统文士当上了译者, *Fudan xuebao* 复旦学报(社会科学版), vol. 2, 2011, pp. 25–40, p. 29.

<sup>85</sup>Tsui, 'A study of Wang Tao's *Manyou suilu*', pp. 473–477.

<sup>86</sup>Translation Tsui Wai. *Ibid.*, p. 488.

about these mission-related tasks and describes in a lot of detail how they preached and handed out scriptures.<sup>87</sup> But in the relevant chapter of the *Manyou suilu*, he entirely secularized the expedition and glossed over the fact that he was an employee of the missionaries. Instead, he turned Lake Tai into a destination that he had long desired to visit and the missionaries into travel companions:

I have always thought of visiting there but had not had the opportunity. On the twenty sixth of the eighth month of 1862,<sup>88</sup> the weather had just turned cool. Two Westerners, Medhurst and Muirhead asked me to travel to Lake Dongting with them.<sup>89</sup>

余屢思往游，未得其便。咸豐甲寅八月二十六日。天氣新涼。西士麥，暮二君約同作洞庭之行。<sup>90</sup>

There follows simply a description of the lake and the surrounding scenery. That he was working for and with the missionaries is glossed over; instead we read about a man of letters who accompanies Western scholars on a journey meant for leisure.

What we see in the *Manyou suilu* is therefore a different lens through which Wang Tao looked at his own life. Instead of the author and man of classical learning, we have Wang Tao the traveller at the centre of the narrative. And in this context, he talks proudly about his meetings and intellectual exchanges with foreigners, as well as about his role as a mediator between cultures, thereby illuminating both personal and professional relationships. He still, however, only gives a partial picture of his cosmopolitan experiences. The change in social status, his motives for engaging in exchange, and his participation in missionary work remain unrevealed.

### Conclusion: New wine in old skins

Wang Tao and Jiang Dunfu each had intimate contact with the West. This was made possible through the treaty port city of Shanghai and the arrival of the London Missionary Society. Wang and Jiang initially joined the Society for economic reasons, but their work soon awakened their interest in Western history and sciences. Wang Tao also established intimate personal relationships with the missionaries. In Jiang Dunfu's case, the extent of his personal relationships with the missionaries is less clear. Throughout his life he remained very critical of Christianity and in his collected writings we find no mention of the LMS missionaries. We know, however, that he collaborated with the missionaries for a long time.

This article has tried to answer the question of how these cosmopolitan experiences were accommodated in Wang's and Jiang's prose autobiographies. It has been shown that they both chose a similar strategy to explain their treaty port years. Their

<sup>87</sup>See Eicher, 'Beyond Shanghai', pp. 441–443.

<sup>88</sup>The converted date provided by Tsui Wai is an error. Wang Tao gives the Jiayin year 甲寅 during the Xianfeng reign 咸豐, which corresponds to the year 1854. This is also the year during which Wang Tao describes the journey in his diaries.

<sup>89</sup>Translation Tsui Wai. Tsui, 'A study of Wang Tao's *Manyou suilu*', p. 477.

<sup>90</sup>Wang Tao, *Manyou suilu tuji*, p. 26.

accounts are by no means identical: one difference was that they positioned themselves somewhat differently towards the West. Wang's depiction of the Westerners was more positive, and while they were treated like enemies in Jiang's version, they were depicted as a source of knowledge in Wang's. We also observed that Jiang and Wang assumed somewhat different roles in their accounts. Jiang Dunfu described himself as a historian of the West, initially for military purposes, whereas Wang Tao chose to emphasize his traditional scholarship. These differences presumably arise from the fact that, on the one hand, Jiang was more reserved towards the missionaries and that, on the other hand, the perception of the West (and in particular of the usefulness of its knowledge) underwent considerable changes in the decades after the Opium wars. Jiang Dunfu wrote his account in the immediate aftermath of the Second Opium War and during the Taiping rebellion, for which Westerners were held partially responsible. A few decades later, during the Self-Strengthening Movement, Wang Tao was somewhat freer to write about his associations with the West and about his interests.

But despite these differences, the traditional autobiographical accounts do show many similarities with regard to the authors' accommodation of their cosmopolitan experiences. The most apparent one is the fact that both authors carefully and selectively explained and legitimized their dealings with the West. Both refrained from openly talking about the financial problems that drove them to seek work in Shanghai or the lowering of their social status that was a consequence of this. Instead they carefully justified that it was personal interest that had driven them and that it was allowed or common practice among literati to interact with the foreigners. Their personal relationships with the missionaries were similarly glossed over. The prose autobiographies only reveal their professional relationships with the missionaries. Even Wang Tao, who in his diaries wrote very fondly about some of them, does not reveal this intimacy in his prose autobiography. And lastly, both authors remained entirely silent about the fact that they were working in a religious context, pretending throughout to have interacted with Western men of science.

The prose autobiographies therefore do not depict the actual events that took place in Shanghai nor do they showcase the full extent and nature of the relationships between their authors and the missionaries. Jens Brockmeier has pointed out that the narratives of their lives tend to be simplified and stereotypical:

It seems that a life told in the context of real life first of all has to make sense, that is, conventional sense, and it has to do so even in its failures, defeats, and coincidences. And it makes sense, if, for example, it is told within one of the traditional plot genres, the established patterns of narration that are so ubiquitous in every culture.<sup>91</sup>

Both Jiang and Wang apparently felt the need to tell their entirely unconventional stories using the more conventional templates of knowledge-seeking scholars. In the

<sup>91</sup> See J. Brockmeier, 'From the end to the beginning', in *Narrative and identity: Studies in autobiography, self and culture*, (eds) J. Brockmeier and D. Carbaugh (Philadelphia, PA: Benjamin, 2001), pp. 247–282, p. 249.

process of accommodating the cosmopolitanizing forces within their life writings, they consciously reduced their cosmopolitan experiences to the bare minimum. That this was a choice they made becomes visible when we compare the accounts to the pictorial autobiography Wang Tao published late in his life and about 30 years after the events depicted. There he wrote in detail about his meetings with the Westerners and—befitting the travel theme of the work—presented himself as a man who confidently walked in both worlds. But despite this, we still see that Wang Tao was selective when he talked about his cosmopolitan experiences and remained silent on the religious dimension of his work.

The comparison of Wang's and Jiang's autobiographies thus demonstrates that cosmopolitanism is complicated to grasp even in written sources. Wang Tao and Jiang Dunfu were very careful when they revealed their experiences to their readerships. The variances we saw in the depiction of the treaty port years tell us less about the extent to which Jiang Dunfu and Wang Tao were 'cosmopolitans' or about their true thoughts and feelings about the 'other' and more about the importance of external factors like genre conventions, readership, and political circumstances during the time of writing.

**Competing interests.** The author declares none.

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**Cite this article:** Eicher, Sebastian. 2024. 'Accommodating cosmopolitan experiences: Jiang Dunfu's 蔣敦復 and Wang Tao's 王韜 autobiographical processing of their treaty port years'. *Modern Asian Studies* 58(4), pp. 1181–1200. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X23000446>