

Christoph Harbsmeier

THE PRE-HISTORY OF CHINESE LINGUISTICS IN THE WEST

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After the remarkable William of Ruysbroek, who even pointed out the connection between Uighur and Turkish,³ contact and detailed knowledge of Far Eastern languages and writing systems declined considerably. Marco Polo, for all his perceptiveness, tells us disappointingly little of the languages current in the China of his day, although he was famous for knowing no less than four of them. (None of these, incidentally, would seem to have been Chinese.) Language, to Marco Polo, was a tool, not the focus of his attention.

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JOHN WEBB AND THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE STUDY OF THE CLASSICAL CHINESE LANGUAGE IN THE WEST

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WILLIAM OF RUYSBROEK (c. 1215-70) noted in the diary of his travels to Mongolia in 1253 to 1255:

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tions. And therefore we see in the commerce of barbarous people, that understand not one another's language, and in the practice of divers that are dumb and deaf, that men's minds are expressed in gestures, though not exactly, yet to serve the turn. And we understand further, that it is the use of China, and the kingdoms of the high Levant, to write in characters real, which express neither letters nor words in gross, but things or notions; insomuch as countries and provinces, which understand not one another's language, can nevertheless read one another's writings, because the characters are accepted more generally than the languages do extend; and therefore they have a vast multitude of characters, as many, I suppose, as radical words.⁴

More detailed Western knowledge about the Chinese language is almost entirely due to reports from the Jesuits.⁵ The first of the Jesuits in China to have made a serious effort at learning Chinese was Michele Ruggieri (1543–1607). He translated the Four Books (*Lun-yü, Meng-tzu, Ta-hsüeh, and Chung-yung*) into Latin. However, only the first lines of the *Ta-hsüeh* (Great Learning) were published under the title *Liber sinensium* in Antonio Possevino's huge *Bibliotheca selecta qui agit de ratione studiorum* (first published in 1593, 1603, and 1608).⁶ The general standard of Chinese studies among the Jesuits has remained very high ever since.⁷ But as orientalists in Europe were quick to complain, the Jesuits remained remarkably possessive about their knowledge for a long time. Given that there were a considerable number of Europeans who were superb connoisseurs of Chinese language and culture, it is surprising how little of this was transmitted competently to European public.⁸

Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) had a command of classical Chinese which was said to have been the envy even of some Chinese of his time. His report on the language of the Chinese in his *De christiane expeditione apud Sinas* (1515) as well as Juan Gonzales de Mendoza's remarkable bestseller *The historie of the Great and Mightie Kingdome of China, and the Situation thereof: Together with the Great Riches, Huge Cities, politike Government and other Inventions in the same, translated out of Spanish by R. Parke* (London 1588, first Spanish ed. 1586) included some remarks on the Chinese language without going into any detail about the matter.⁹ Ricci's enthusiasm for Chinese culture in general and for the Chinese language in particular, the other hand, had a considerable intellectual impact in Europe. In a letter to his rhetoric teacher Martino de Fornari written in 1582 when he had just arrived in China and still knew little of the language Ricci wrote:

I have recently given myself to the study of the Chinese language and I can promise you that it's something quite different from either

Greek or German. In speaking it, there is so much ambiguity that there are many words that can signify more than a thousand things, and at many times the only difference between one word and another is the way you pitch them high or low in four different tones. Thus when (the Chinese) are speaking to each other they write out the words they wish to say so that they can be sure to understand — for all the written letters are different from each other. As for these written letters you would not be able to believe them had you not both seen and used them, as I have done. They have as many letters as there are words and things, so that there are more than 70,000 of them, every one quite different and complex. If you would like to see examples I can send you one of their books with an explanation appended.¹⁰

The nature of the Chinese language demanded an explanation, and Athanasius Kircher (1602–80) provided such an explanation in his book *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* (1652).¹¹ Kircher claimed that the Chinese received their language from wise Egyptian priests. In 1667 Athanasius Kircher published his important *China Monumentis, qua sacris qua profanis ... illustrata* which contained the Nestorian Stele text in translation and also reproduced the original Chinese text. The French translation of this book (1670) contained in addition a Chinese-French vocabulary, the *Dictionnaire Chinois et François* on pages 324–67. Kircher claims that although the characters were originally pictographic they had partly lost this pictographic character since. Kircher considered Chinese as a suitable model for an artificial universal language built up according to rational principles.

The origins of the project for a universal artificial language go back at least to the mystic abbess Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179).¹² John Wilkins (1614–72), a leading exponent of the project, explained in his important theoretical essay *Mercury: or the Secret and Swift Messenger* (1641) p. 56 how the Chinese characters fitted into this scheme of things:

After the Fall of Adam, there were two General Curses inflicted on Mankind: The one upon their Labours, the other upon their Language.

Against the first of these we do naturally endeavour to provide, by all those common Arts and Professions about which the World is busied; seeking thereby to abate the Sweat of their Brows in the Earning of their Bread.

Against the other, the best Help that we can get boast of, is the Latin Tongue, and the other learned Languages, which by Reason of their

Generality, do somewhat restore us from the first Confusion. But now if there were such an Universal Character to express Things and Notions, as might be legible to all People and Countries, so that Men of several Nations might with the same ease both write and read it, this Invention would be a far greater Advantage to this Particular, and mightily conduce to the spreading and promoting of all Arts and Sciences: Because that great part of our Time which is now required to the Learning of Words, might then be employed in the Study of Things. Nay, the Confusion at Babel might this Way have been remedied, if every one could have expressed his own meaning by the same kind of Character. But perhaps the Art of Letters was not invented.

That such manner of Writing is already used in some Parts of the World, the Kingdoms of the high Levant, may evidently appear from divers credible Relations. Trigaultius affirms, that though those of China and Japan, do as much differ in their Language as the Hebrew and the Dutch; yet either of them can, by this Help of a common Character, as well understand the Books and Letters of the others, as if they were only their own.

Unfortunately, the Chinese characters proved difficult. This extraordinary difficulty demanded and found an explanation: it was said that this was because Chinese was an invention of the Evil One to prevent the spread of Christianity in the Eastern Asia: the protestant theologian Elias Grebnitz maintained some time before 1682 that the Chinese characters '*durch Gottes Verhängniss vom Teuffel eingeführet/ damit er die elende Leute in der Finsterniss der Abgötterei destomehr verstricket halte* (were introduced through God's fate by the Devil, so that he could better keep the miserable people in the darkness of superstition)'.¹³

Rumors about the Chinese tones inspired F. Godwin in his imaginary travelogue *The Man in the Moone: or a Discourse of a Voyage Thither by Domingo Gonsales, the Speedy Messenger* (London, 1638) where he explains that the strange language of the 'moone'

hath no affinity with any other that ever I heard. [...] it consisteth not so much of words and Letters, as of tunes and uncouth sounds, [...] you have few wordes but they signifie divers and severall things, and they are distinguished onely by their tunes.¹⁴

The difficulties of learning the Chinese language were reduced by dictionaries and word lists. Already Matteo Ricci was engaged in such a project, and one of the earliest important such lists was handwritten by the Dominican Francesco Diaz (d. 1646) in the 1640s. The copy of it kept in the Royal

Library of Berlin in the 18th century had 598 pages with three columns on each page. This dictionary comprised 7,169 characters. A copy of it is preserved in the Vatican library.¹⁵

JOHN WEBB'S BOOK ON THE CHINESE LANGUAGE

The first large-scale publication on the Chinese language to be published in the West is John Webb's (1611–72)

An
HISTORICAL ESSAY
Endeavouring a Probability
That the
LANGUAGE
Of the Empire of
CHINA
is the
Primitive
LANGUAGE.

By *John Webb* of Butleigh in the
County of *Somerset* Esquire.

London,

Printed for *Nath. Brook*, at the *Angel*
in *Gresham Colledge*. 1669. D. P.¹⁶

John Webb's book is 'Licenced By Authority' and dedicated 'TO THE MOST SACRED MAJESTY OF CHARLES The Second.'

This is the earliest monograph in English which is specifically concerned with the Chinese language. The book contains a comprehensive summary of what was known of the Chinese language in the mid-17th century. The book was republished in 1678 under the elaborate title: 'The Antiquity of China, or an Historical Essay, Endeavouring a probability that the Language of the Empire of *China* is the Primitive Language spoken through the whole World before the Confusion of *Babel* wherein the Customs and Manners of the *Chineans* are presented, and Ancient and Modern Authors consulted with. By *John Webb of Butleigh* in the County of *Somerset* Esquire. Printed for *Obadiab Blagrove*, at the Bear in *St Paul's Church-Yard*, near the Little North Door, 1678'.

John Webb was a very distinguished architect and designer, related both by birth and by marriage to Inigo Jones. He edited Inigo Jones's book *The Most Noble Antiquity called Stoneheng* and published his own *Vindication of Stoneheng Restored* (London, 1665). Webb hoped to obtain the distin-

ished position of Surveyor of Works but was beaten to the job by none other than Sir Christopher Wren.¹⁷ More importantly for his linguistic studies, he designed the frontispiece for Brian Walton's famous *Polyglot Bible* (London, 1657). Brian Walton (1600–61), Bishop of Chester, was the author of *Introductio ad Lectionem Linguarum Orientalium* (London, 1654) which must have inspired Webb's interest in oriental languages, although unlike his contemporary Thomas Hyde (1636–1673),¹⁸ the polyglot and Indian Professor of Arabic at Oxford, he never learnt any Chinese, and was perhaps the earliest lay sinologist who had a Chinese tutor and informant.¹⁹

John Webb never travelled to the Far East. On the other hand it is abundantly clear from his work that he was widely read in the European literature of his time on the language of China.²⁰ His interest was predominantly historical rather than linguistic.

Since John Webb's book is rare even in good sinological libraries, and since few sinologists will ever have a chance to see the original, I have found it useful to transcribe extensively important passages from the work.

THE PLACE OF CHINESE AMONG THE LANGUAGES OF THE WORLD

Webb's unpaginated *Epistle Dedicatory* sums up the overall argument of the work with admirable clarity. Webb's authorities are the Bible on the one hand, and secular historians on the other:

Scripture teacheth, that the whole Earth was of one Language until the Conspiracy at BABEL; History informs that CHINA was peopled, whilst the EARTH was so of one Language, and before that Conspiracy. Scripture teacheth that the Judgment of Confusion of Tongues, fell upon those only that were at BABEL: History informs that the CHINOIS being fully settled before, were not there; And moreover that the same LANGUAGE and CHARACTERS which long preceding that Confusion they used, are in use with them at this very DAY; whether the Hebrew, or Greek Chronology be consulted.

Webb does not question the authority of the Bible, and he insists that his authorities possess the dignity of priests:

The Scripture is infallible, my principal Authors, fide Sacerdotum datâ, profess Integrity, as having of very late Daies, by long study compiled the History of CHINA, from the Antient Records thereof, ever since the time of NOAH.

Indeed, the story of Noah and his ark is central to Webb's argument. The ultimate point to be made is that Noah spoke Chinese on the Ark, and that he settled in the East, in China. But first it is established that he was a speaker of the Primitive Language, the *lingua humana* of mankind:

Wherefore we may certainly conclude, that *Noah* carried the *Primitive Language* into the Ark with him, and that it continued pure and uncorrupted amongst his succeeding generations until the *Confusion of Tongues* at *Babel*, till when, *The whole Earth was of one Language and one Lip*, as Gen ii. v. 1 clearly manifesteth. [p. 17]

Webb's case for Chinese as the Primitive Language thus very logically comes to be a matter of biblical history:

Now whether this Language may be yet remaining in any part of the Universal World, is the main subject of our enquiry. In order to which, we are to consider, in what part of the World the Ark first rested; what Colonies were planted either before Nimrod and his Troops came into the Valley of Shinaar, or the *Confusion of Tongues* happened; And whether yea or no, those Colonies so planted were liable to the curse of Confounded Languages, being through their absence, not guilty of the Crime committed at *Babel*. [p. 17]

An important part is played by geographical factors, and the story of Nimrod, the descendant of Noah's son Ham who travelled to the West where he became a powerful king:

Therefore it is very probable that Noah, taking up his rest, not far from the place where the ark grounded, first inhabited *India*, and had well peopled all those parts, which lay nearest to him, before he sent *Nimrod*, and his followers forth upon new discoveries. [p. 21]

One of Webb's main historical authorities is the poet and traveller Sir Walter Raleigh, and particularly his vast first and only volume of *The History of the World*, London 1614:

Hence the same Author [Sir Walter Raleigh] telleth us also, that from the East came the first knowledge of all things, and that the East parts of the world were the first civilized, having *Noah* himself for an Instructor, whereby the farther East to this day, the more Civil the farther West the more Savage. [p. 21]

Sir Walter Raleigh's view on this was not uncommon in his time, and it made Chinese a very natural candidate for the supremely civilized Primitive Language before the building of the Tower of Babel.

It is essential for Webb's case that those who built the Tower of Babel were not all the speakers of the original single language of mankind. Some of these natural speakers of the Primitive Language did not go to Babel, but stayed behind in the East, and they certainly did not build the Tower. Webb quotes in Greek some Sibylline verses in support for his thesis, for which he then goes on to give a Latin and English rendering. It is interesting to listen to the wordiness as well as the philological rigour with which Webb proceeds in some detail:

Cum omnes homines ejusdem lingue usum haberent, quidam eorum turrim edificarunt altissimam, quasi per eam telum essent assensuri, when all men had the use of one same Tongue, some of them built a most high Tower, as if they had intended to have scaled Heaven thereby. When then Sibylla, as Sir W. Raleigh observes, making a limitation, saith, some of them [only some] built the Tower; and Moses witnesseth, that those that built it, came from the East into the West, it is plainly manifest, that all came not together with Nimrod unto Shinaar; but others remained behind in the Eastern parts. All therefore were not present at the building of the Tower, seeing that they went not All together; neither is it said in Scripture that they did, which as it doth positively say, They were All of one speech; so it doth not definitely say, They All went.

Moreover, the exceeding multitude of People, wherein the East parts of the world first abounded; and wherein none of those by whom the Earth was planted after the *Confusion of Tongues*, are yet reported to have settled any Colonies, doth likewise very much convince that the East Countries were peopled before the remove to *Babel*. [p. 24]

The question remains who the peoples that did not join the move to Shinar (Webb: Shinaar) were. Webb, very sensibly, considers various possibilities:

When then *India* beyond *Indus* was in the time of *Staurabates* [Indologists and students of Graeco-Indian relations know of no king by this Hellenized name. Webb's source is unclear to me at this point.] so fully peopled by those that remaining with *Noah* never came down to *Shinaar* [i.e. *Babel*]; we need not doubt, but that they had then passed farther also; and as their numbers increased, or desire of new seats invited them, made removes, and sent out Colonies to the more remote parts of *Asia*, till at length they settled in the remotest *CHINA*. Which country that it was originally peopled by some of the posterity of *Noah* before the enterprise at *Babel*, *Heylyn* [i.e. the controversial historian Peter Heylyn (1600–1662)] conceives may probably be concluded. But of this hereafter. [p. 26]

Webb does not rush to his conclusion about China, but follows a neat chain of reasoning:

So that I take it for a matter undeniable, that *the Plantation of India preceded that of Babel*, though by whom made, there is nothing to be said for certain. Yet, saith he [i.e. Peter Heylyn], if I might have liberty to express my own conceptions, I am inclinable to believe, that all the Eastern parts of *Persia* with *CHINA*, and both *the Indias*, were peopled by such of the *Sons of Sem*, as went not with the rest to the *Valley of Shinaar*. [p. 27]

According to Genesis 10.32 Sem was one of Noah's three sons. The three sons were Shem (Webb: Sem), Ham (Webb: Cham), and Japheth, and by these were the nations divided in the earth after the flood'. China had to be fitted into this scheme of things.

One of Ham's grandsons was Nimrod who 'began to be a mighty one in the earth' according to Genesis 10.8. The builders of the Tower of Babel were to be found amongst the descents of Ham.

The words of the holy Penman, Gen. II. v. 5, 6, 7, 8 arc. *And the Lord came down to see the City, and the Tower, which the Children of men builded. And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one Language, and this they begin to do; and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down and THERE confound THEIR Language, that THEY may not understand one anothers Speech. So the Lord scattered THEM abroad from THENCE upon the face of all the Earth, and they left off to build the City.*

Which can admit no other construction, than that the Language of *These*, that were *THERE*, that is at that place in *Babylonia*, not in *India* or elsewhere was confounded. So in like manner *THEIR* Language that were with *Nimrod*, and of this Western Colony; not the Language of *Noah*, and his Plantations in the East. Again also, That *THEY*, to wit, those *children of men*, that built the Tower; not those generations that had no hand in building of the same, might not understand one anothers speech.

Furthermore, the Lord scattered *THEM* abroad from *THENCE*, 'which, saith Sir W. Raleigh, hath no other sence, but that the Lord Scattered *THEM*, viz. those that built this Tower, for those were from *THENCE* (to wit, *Babel*) dispersed into all the regions of the North and South, and to the Westward. The East being inhabited before.' [p. 33 ff.]

One famous witness on the dating of the settlement of China that Webb was aware of was the linguist and polymath Athanasius Kircher (1601–80), who was reputed to have known over 40 languages, and whose magnificent three-volume work *Oedipus Aegyptiacus, Hoc est Universalis Hieroglyphicæ Veterum Doctrinæ Temporum Inuria Abolitiæ Instauratio*, Rome (1652–54) was Webb's source on Egyptian hieroglyphics. Volume two of the large work was reedited under the revealing title *Turris Babel sive Archontologia, qua primo priscorum post diluivum hominum vita, mores rerumque gestarum magnitudo, secundo turris fabrica civitatumque constructio, confusio linguarum, et inde gentium transmigrations, cum principalium inde enatorum idiomatum historia, multiplici eruditione, describuntur et explicantur*, Amstelodami, 1679. Webb argues vigorously against Kircher, who was also the author of a major work on China: *China, ... monumentis illustrata*:

But here I meet with an objection, that *Athanasius Kircherus* in his *China illustrata* asserts, *China* was peopled by the posterity of *Cham*, after he came out of *Agypt*, and therefore could not be planted by any of the Sons of *Sem*, or before the *Confusion at Babel*. In answer whereunto, I must take leave to give you *Kircherus* his own words; by which you will find so slender authority for his Assertion, that you will admire rather, how it was possible so learned a man could ever fancy such a conceit. For, his principal, yea verily in manner his only argument is, that because the *Aegyptians*, who were descended from *Cham*, used Hieroglyphicks; therefore the *Chinoes* did descend from *Cham*, because they used Hieroglyphicks also. Whereby you may observe, that if the *Mexicans* want their Ancestors they may repair to *Kircherus*, and he will presently inform them, that they came from some of the posterity of *Cham* because they in like manner as had the *Aegyptians*, have Hieroglyphicks in use. [p. 28]

Webb uses the authority of the poet and traveller Sir Walter Raleigh against that of Athanasius Kircher:

But Sir *W. Raleigh* will positively assure you, that the *Chinoes* had Letters in use long before either the *Aegyptians* or *Phoenicians*, *Semedo* [i.e. the Portuguese Jesuit missionary Alvaro Semedo (1586–1658) who was the first to come up with detailed information on the Chinese language in his *Imperio de la China ...* (Madrid, 1642)] will maintain, that they had the same Characters which they use at this day, and which were abstracted from those Hieroglyphicks, divers years before *Kircherus* brings *Cham's* Plantation into *China*: *Vossius* can assert, that they have had the use of Letters longer by far than any people that ever were: And *Martinius* [i.e. Martino Martini

(1614–61), author of the celebrated *Sinicae Historiae Decas Prima* (1658) and the *Novus Atlas Sinesis* (1655)] makes appear ere long, that for Antiquity in the use of Letters, *China* excells all other parts of *Asia*....

What is more to be said? *Kircherus* himself (allowing him his own computation) shall acknowledge that *China* was both planted, and these their characters invented some Centuries of years before the dispersion at *Babel*. [p. 29]

The Chinese settlement, Webb argued, was *de civitate dei* 'of the City of God', and never engaged in the hybris of Babel. The Chinese 'plantation' never suffered the confusion of tongues. The Chinese settlement did not belong to the line of Ham and his descendent, the powerful Nimrod.

For, such Principles of Theology, as amongst the *Chinois*, we shall shortly hear of, could not proceed from the wicked and idolatrous race of accursed *Cham*, but from those only that were, *de civitate Dei*, of the City of God. The most remote parts then of the Eastern World, being planted before the dispersion at *Babel*; and until the *Confusion of Tongues*, the whole Earth being of *one language and one lipp*, it must indisputably succeed, that *Noah* and whosever remained with him, which came not with the rest to the valley of *Shinaar*, and consequently by their absence thence, had not hand in that vain attempt, could not be concerned in the *Confusion* there, nor come within the curse of *confounded Languages*; but retained the PRIMITIVE Tongue, as having received it from *Noah*, and likewise carry the same with them to their several Plantations, in what part of the East soever they settled themselves. [p. 32]

Webb does not rush to his conclusion but considers possible alternatives for their plausibility:

And therefore we may warrantably conclude, That either the PRIMITIVE Language is to be found amongst those plantations that were made before the *Babylonian* Enterprize, by those that were absent thence, and had not offended therein; or else it cannot be appropriated to any Nation now extant in the World, or at this day known. For, as the people at *Babel*, that had solely offended, were therefore from *Shinaar* scattered throughout all the other parts of the uninhabited Earth; so only the Language which they brought with them thither, was there for their offence confounded; and, as is conceived, divided into several other Languages, passing at this day amongst us by the name of MOTHER-Tongues, which that they were seventy

two in number, he that hath a mind to please himself with believing it, shall not displease me. [p. 36]

Webb argues on general grounds that many languages are preserved over long stretches of time and he shows a certain interest in comparative linguistics:

And hence in *Iceland* [misprint for 'Iceland'], though about four hundred years since conquered by the *Norvegians*, in regard there is little access of strangers, but only as some part of the Maritime shores affordeth; as also because they suffer not their unexperienced youth to travail abroad into other Countries, the old *Runicque* or *Gothique* Tongue in manner yet continueth, and is by divers of the Inhabitants understood, when in all the Septentrional World besides, it is utterly forgotten and extinct ... What of the *Irish* Tongue? which Countrey, although we have kept under subjection by lawful conquest, near five hundred years, settled many Plantations therein, and permitted continually free *Commerce*, yet nevertheless the natural Language of the country continueth throughout most parts of that Kingdom pure and untainted at this day. And which is remarkable, if a child born of *English* Parents there, and as curiously overseen as possibly a child can be from hearing of the Native *Irish* speak, chance to hear but one word of that Language, he will sooner remember the same, and be apter to repeat it again, than he shall any one word of *English*, though twenty times spoken before him. [p. 40 ff.]

Webb goes on to the example of the '*Basquish* or antient Language of *Spain*', 'which notwithstanding all the Invasions of the *Carthaginians*, *Romans*, *Goths*, *Vandals*, *Moors* remaineth yet pure in *Biscay*, whatever *Commerce* and Intercourse soever that Countrey hath in all times enjoyed.' [p. 41] He proceeds to dismiss the assumption current throughout the 17th century and earlier that an early form of Hebrew was the *lingua humana*, the Primitive Language of Mankind, and, as was the custom, pours scorn on the Belgian scholar Johann Goropius Becanus who claimed that Dutch was the *lingua humana* in his *Joan. Goropii Becanii Origines Antwerpianae sive Cimmeriorum Becceslanae Novem Libros complexa*, Antwerpiae, Ex Officina Christophori Plantini, 1569:

When then it is reputed ridiculous to hear that *Adam* spake *Dutch* in Paradise: And when we consider, that the *Hebrews* have no surer foundation to erect their Language upon, than only a bare Tradition of their own, which we all know is so infamous an *Historian*; as *Wisemen* neither report after it, nor give credit to any thing they receive from it: ... Why may we not reflect upon the *CHINOIS*? For

we shall make appear, that *They* were primitively planted in *CHINA*, if not by *Noah* himself, by some of the Issue of *Sem* [son of *Noah*], before the remove of *Nimrod* to *Shinaar*, and the Confusion of Tongues at *Babel*; *Their* Language to be the self same at this day, as when they were first planted and began to be a people; *Their* Country never subject to any such conquest, as could prejudice, but rather dilate their language; *Their* Laws in all times to have prohibited foreign *Commerce* and *Intercourse*; and *Their* dominions ever shut up against strangers, never permitting any to set footing within *Their* Empire, unless by way of Embassy solely; nor suffering *Their* own Natives to travail abroad without especial licence from their Emperour: So jealous have they evermore been, lest *Their* Language and Customes should be corrupted. Considering which, together with their infinite multitudes of People, and perpetual flourishing in Peace, and all Arts and Sciences, whilst every Nation almost throughout the whole Universe besides, have more than once in time been over-run and conquered; it may with much probability be asserted, *That the Language of the Empire of CHINA, is, the PRIMITIVE Tongue which was common to the whole World before the Flood*; and that it could never be branched into several Languages, or *Dialects* of the same one Language, by the *Commerce* and *Intercourse* which they had with Nations of different speech; when they never had *Commerce* or *Intercourse* with any. Nor were ever known to these parts of the World (scarcely to their adjoining Neighbourhoods) till about an hundred and fifty years since, by the *Portugals* and *Spaniards* they were discovered. [p. 44]²¹

Webb viewed commerce as the last of a series of factors that cause incessant linguistic change. Absence of commerce will lead to linguistic stagnation:

... concerning *Intercourse* and *Commerce*, it is true, that in such a Nation, where a general Commerce is permitted, and free access granted to all Strangers to trade and inhabit, aswel in the Inland parts of the Country; as upon the Frontiers or Sea-coasts, there a change of Language may by degrees happen. And we need not go far for Example. For, with us our selves, by this means chiefly, the *Saxon* tongue, since the time of the *Normans* is utterly lost. Insomuch that what by Latinizing, Italianizing, Frenchizing, and [as we must have it called forsooth,] *Refinizing*, or rather *Non-senzing*, our old Language is so corrupted and changed, that we are so far from *Saxonizing*, as we have scarcely one significant word of our MOTHER speech left.

But on the contrary, where *Commerce* is made, and *Intercourse* allowed, upon the Seacoasts and Frontiers only, there we find the

Language of the Natives in the In-land parts, to remain without suffering any alteration. [p. 40]

course, the case for Hebrew as the Primitive Language needed special closer attention and special rebuttal:

But I find St Jerome [i.e. St Jerome, c. AD 340–420], and others that follow him, object, That the *Hebrew* was the PRIMITIVE Language, and in regard that all the proper names of men before the Deluge, and immediately after the same appear to be naturally *Hebrew*. And that it was necessary the Sacred Scripture should be delivered in that Language, which *Adam* and the rest used before the Flood. To which the answer is obvious, that the Names might be first imposed in the PRIMITIVE Language, and that it was an easie matter for the succeeding Ages, understanding by Tradition what they meant, to transfer them into the *Hebrew* Tongue; ... [p. 45]

the age of the Chinese empire seemed to place it before the Deluge, according to the chronologies of the world known in Webb's time:

From the beginning therefore of the *Serian* Empire unto the end of this present year one thousand six hundred fifty eight after the birth of CHRIST, are numbered the total four thousand five hundred five years. Whereby appears that according to the vulgar *Æra*, which *Martinius* [i.e. Martino Martini (1614–61)] follows, and which makes from the Creation to the Flood of *Noah* one thousand six hundred fifty six years; and from thence to the coming of CHRIST into the World two thousand two hundred ninety four years; the Historical time of the *Chinois* begins several Ages, to wit, five hundred fifty three years before the Universal Deluge, computing to the year one thousand six hundred fifty eight; as *Vossius* [i.e. Isaac Vossius (1618–89, author of *Dissertatio de vera ætate mundi* (1659))] doth. [p. 52]

Like many other authors both before and after him, Webb enthusiastically identified the Deluge of the Bible with the Flood of the time of Yao.

And therefore with our Authors, I am very much resolved to believe, that, that flood which happened in *China* in the time of *Jaus* [i.e. Yao 堯] their seventh Emperor, was the universal flood ... this Deluge that thus drowned *China* could certainly be no other, than that, that drowned the whole world besides. [p. 54]

Webb quotes Isaac Vossius:

Hear *Vossius* likewise confidently affirming, *Secundum enim nostrum calculum diluivium Sericum exacte cum Noachico convenit, for according to our calculation, saith he, the Serian Deluge agrees exactly with the flood of Noah.* [p. 59]

The chronological correspondence is defined exactly, though no reference is made to the all-important *Opus Novum De Emendatione Temporum* of 1583 by Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540–1609) who attempts to synchronize the chronologies of the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Jews as well as the Greeks and the Romans.

... the Deluge of *Noah* happened in the year before CHRIST two thousand two hundred ninety four; and the Deluge that destroyed *China* in the time of *Jaus* agrees perfectly therewith; for he began his reign there, in the year before CHRIST two thousand three hundred fifty seven. [p. 61]

Given, then, that there was this one flood the problem arises how the memory of earlier Chinese history could have been preserved. Unless Noah was in China, no one could ever have known about earlier Chinese history:

He [i.e. Martino Martini (1614–61)] farther telleth us, That this extreme part of *Asia*, whereof we treat, was for certain inhabited before the flood. But by what means the memory of things could be preserved there, when all mankind was wholly destroyed, if we have not recourse to the family of *Noah*, is to me, saith the same Author unknown. Hear him. *Hanc enim, qua [m] describo, extremam Asiam, ante Diluivium habitatam fuisse pro certo habeo, verum quo pacto fuerit discesseris, penitus deleto, mihi non liquet.* [p. 55]

Thus the very existence of records of very ancient Chinese history is clear evidence that Noah himself must have been the transmitter. There is a small step only to the claim that he must have spoken and even written Chinese.

Regarding the name Jehovah, Webb notes down a critical reflection which shows the spirit of his enterprise. He bases himself on the polyhistor Samuel Purchas (1575?–1625), whose *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes, Containing a History of the World in Sea Voyages and Land Travells by Englishmen and Others*, 4 vols. London, 1625 includes 'A Discourse on the diversity of Letters used by the Divers Nations in the World; the Antiquity, Manifold Use and Variety thereof, with exemplary Descriptions of above threescore severall Alphabets, with other strange Writings' [ed. Glasgow 1905aa, vol. I, pp. 485–505]:

And those are not wanting that suppose that name was derived from this *Janus*. However the *Samaritans*, as I find in *Purchas*, begin their Chronicle after this manner. In the name of *Jah*, the God of *Israel*, there is none like to *Jah* our God, one *Jehova*, God of Gods, Lord of Lords, a great God strong and terrible. *Jah* is my strength and song, saith Moses in praising God for the preservation of *Israel* from the danger of *Pharaoh*, *Exod. 15.v. 2*. Wherefore it is not un-observable that the very first utterance that an Infant at his birth yeeldeth is, *ya, ya*; as if the Lord had ordained, either that we should be born with his name *Jah* in our mouths, which name is generally ascribed to him, when some notable deliverance or benefit according to his former promise cometh to pass, because he is the beginning and *Being* of beings, and *giveth to all, life, and breath, and all things*, Act. 17. v. 25. or else, that in our swathing clothes we should have something of the PRIMITIVE Language, till afterwards confounded, as we are taught to speak. But by *ya* the *Chinois* intend *Excellens*. [p. 61]

But it turns out that there is an even more plausible explanation for the name. He quotes Martini:

Mibi vero religiosum non sit, Yaum hunc nostrum eundem cum Jano dicere; ita nominum & temporum affinitate suadente, qui Janus multis Noe fuisse creditur. But I may, saith he, without fear assert, that this our *Yaus*, was the same with *Janus*, the affinity of names and times so perswading, which *Janus* is by many conceived to be have been *Noah*. [p. 64]

Webb does not lightly accept the conclusion and very reasonably demands evidence:

Yet how clear soever this Testimony is, let us moreover examine what Authors have said of *Janus*, and by what Character they have found him to be *Noah*; setting aside their general consent, to which our *Janus* so absolutely corresponds, that they call him *Bifrons*, as seeing and knowing the Ages both before and after the flood.

However, he proceeds to a rhetorical question:

It being then thus, Why might not that other Region into which *Noah* withdrew, be *China*? And this *Janus*, or *Yaus* (for I find the word both by *Martinus*, *Kircherus*, and others indifferently used) be that *Janus* (the middle Letter N added only, gives us the very name, and to cut off the middle Letter, *ya*, the middle Syllable oftentimes in the proper names of men is and ever hath been usually in the Eastern

Languages Done) be that *Janus*, I say, whom most Authors maintain was *Noah*? [p. 60]

On the evidence of the historian *Josephus* (AD 37–c. 95), *Webb* points out the reasonableness of such a guess:

... it may very be much presumed, that *Noah* himself both before and after the Deluge lived in *China*. *Josephus* attesteth, that *Noah* having warning of the flood given him from God, seeing his perswasions to repentance and amendment of life, could work no effect upon the Corruption of the Age, and fearing by the violence of the times to perish for his zeal, departed from his native soil, and with his wife and children travelled into another Country. *Secundens cum suis in aliam regionem migravit*, saith *Josephus*. Now, why might not this other Region into which *Noah* retired be *China*? [p. 58]

Webb has an explanation for the recent explosion of knowledge about *China*:

For, since the *Tartarian* War, as if Divine Power had decreed, they should be conquered to this end; *Their* discovery is generally com-pleated; *Their* Antiquity certainly known; *Their* Language plainly understood, so far in present at least, as conduceth to our enquiry; *Time* being to make known the rest. [p. 69]

Having made this very promising remark, *Webb* embarks on a fascinating biblical disquisition concerning the geography of the ark, and he seems to lose sight of the problem of the nature of the Chinese language. He reverts to the subject more than seventy pages later, where he summarizes what he learnt from the authors of his time on the subject.

... our subject requires, to give you some account of the Language and Letters of the *Chinois*; which (even that little, that hitherto is arrived at our knowledge) in regard of their great Antiquity, & unalterable usage will be found sufficiently enough, to make our Essay probable at least. And about this I shall no longer detain you, that I may therewith bring my discourse conveniently to a period. Not that Language I mean of the Southern and other Colonies, which by nursing up the people in barbarity, through the ambitious negligence of the *Royales*, is differently pronounced, and from whence it comes to be said, that many Provinces in *China* have a different speech. But their true MOTHER and NATURAL Tongue, which from all Ages hath been used by them in their first plantations, and ancient Demesne of the Crown, and which by their Characters originally composed to the same, is spoken genuinely perfect unto this day.

Trigaitus and *Semedo* call it *Quongoa*, or the language of the *Mandarines* in regard of the Elegancy, and commodiousness thereof; *Martinius* the language of the *Literati*, not so much because the pronunciation of it is learned by the Natives from their Cradles, as is by some conceived; but for that it is spoken purely and elegantly over all *China* by their learned men, according to their written Characters.

Now considering, it appears from Bishop *Walton*, [i.e. Brian Walton (1600–61), theologian and man of letters] that nothing is more exposed to mutation than Languages, which are in perpetual floting, as all the commonly known languages of the East clearly demonstrate; and that the life of language dependeth upon Letters and Inscriptions: for not any thing can more assure us of the alteration and change of the *Hetrurian* and *Latine* Tongues, and that they differ at this day, from what they were in times of old, then their antient Epigraphs, as is thus delivered by him; *Quantum Hetrusca & Latina hodierna ab antiqua recesserunt, ex inscriptionibus & tabulis Eugubinis Hetruscis literis antiquis exaratis, & et ex columnis rostratis, quas nemo adhuc explicavit, cuius constat*. Therefore in regard written records are such certain evidence, it is my intention in this scrutiny to appeal for the uncorruptness of the language of *China* to their Characters, which have remained in writing on record, throughout all times since their beginning to be a people; and not oblige you to rely wholly upon their speech, whatever nevertheless hath or shall be said, to make good, that it continues the same at this day, as primitively it was. [p. 144 ff.]

Webb is evidently aware of attempts current in his time to construct a universal language, in the spirit of Bishop John Wilkins, *Essay Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language*, London, 1668:

And if we should say that the Author of the Philosophical Language lately published hath founded his *Nations* chiefly on the *Principles* of *This*, we should not happily say amiss; though for the form of his character, he hath followed rather the *Gothique* or *Runique* of old. [p. 146]

Wilkins was carried along on a wave of enthusiasm for the project of a universal language.²² Webb goes on to make some general observations on the origin of language:

THAT the World and Letters are eternal, *Pliny* is of opinion. Now, if thereby he meant, that Letters are as antient as the World, his meaning, perhaps, might not be far from Truth. But, that Language or

speech, was, before the World had form; the Scripture warrants. For, we read; *Dixit, & factum est*, not *factum est & dixit*: God said before he created, not, created before he said. Which sheweth, saith *Ainsworth*, how God created things by his *word*; saying, at it was; commanding, at it was created; *Psal.* 33.v. 6.9, and 148.v. 5. So that if we are to understand the text, *Gen. i.v.3* according to the Letter as he doth; Speech was before either things, or creatures were made; and consequently is, of more divine Antiquity, than either the world or men. [p. 146]

That the PRIMITIVE Language was not a studied or artificial speech, nor taught our *First Parents* by Art and by degrees as their Generations have been, but concreated with them, is certain. For, we read that God no sooner questioned *Adam*, then *Adam* answered him. *And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.* *Gen* 3.v.9.10. Whereby we are assured, that as the Creation of man himself was admirably perfect; so his language was originally plain and meek; nothing of that being found in either, which necessity afterwards compelled the posterity of the Conspirators at *Babel*, for their greater reputation to stile Art ... And seeing it is presumed that *Adam* by his creation knew whatever might be advantageous for mankind; I see no reason but we may conceive, that the first Characters, that were ever framed to language were of his invention; for that they were found out in the very infancy of the world, is, saith Sir *W. Raleigh* questionless, and the World was never more an Infant, than in the dates of *Adam*. He that gave names to all things, knew best how to invent Characters for all things, whereby in their proper natures, those names should be communicated and continued to his Off-spring. In like manner, having letters there is no doubt to be made, but that they had books also; ... And as little question there is to be made, but that the letters with which in stone and brick either *Seth* [son of *Adam*] or *Enoch* [descendant of *Seth*, seventh in descent of *Adam*, to whom are ascribed apocryphal arcane books including *The mysteries of Enoch*] or both engraved the *Secretiora* of their inventions, were significative and hieroglyphical; such we may say, as were invented by *Adam* for the benefit of them and their posterity.

In attributing to *Adam* the 'natural language', and in associating this 'natural language' with hieroglyphics like those of the Chinese, Webb was in accordance with a famous man of letters of his day, Sir Thomas Browne, author of *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, London 1646:

Doctor Brown ... having told us, that many conceive Hieroglyphicks were the *Primitive* way of writing, and of greater Antiquity than Letters, and that thereby the Language consisting of things they spake unto each other by common notions of Nature, he concludes saying, 'Thus indeed might *Adam* well have spoken, who understanding the nature of things, had the advantage of natural expressions'. [p. 148]

Webb refers to 'that famous inscription at *Perspolis* in *Persia*' which was much discussed in his day:

And should it be objected that this Inscription seems to exceed all Antiquity, that some suppose it may be written before the flood; it may be answered, that though the world then had but one *Common language*; nevertheless according to the divers humours, and capacities of the People, as hath been said, for they could not be all alike ingenious, then *Characters* might not be general but doubtless different. For, the *Language* was of God, who is not given to mutability; the *Characters* were of men, that are wholly inclined to variety. [p. 149]

Hieroglyphic writing has preserved for us the pristine stage of the Primitive Language, the *lingua humana*, the natural speech of Adam and Eve. An alphabetic language could never have preserved this language for us because alphabetic writing is something which changes with speech and is gradually refined by man:

In vain do we search for the PRIMITIVE Language to remain with those Nations whose Languages consist in Alphabets. For it cannot in reason be imagined, that Letters could be brought at first into such a studied order, and methodical way; but accidentally as it were at random invented after a plain and simple manner, conformable to the speech; as all other Arts from small beginnings and ruder notions have grown to perfection in time and by degrees; many Ages and long experience being required to perfect any invention of whatever kind. [p. 150]

Webb distinguishes carefully between other 'cryptic' hieroglyphics and the plain Chinese:

Thus, not to mention others, the *'Egyptians, Brachmanes,* and *Runians* of old, made use of Hieroglyphicks to keep their *Arcana Theologia et Imperii* [i.e. Secrets of theology and empire] scaled up, as it were, in the breasts of their Priests and Ministers of State only, And thus the *Chinois* invented their first Characters and formed them from all things that are obvious to sight; as Beasts, Birds, Wormes, Fishes, Herbs, Branches of Trees, Ropes, Threads, Points, Circles, and

the like; with this difference nevertheless, that whereas the *'Egyptians,* and the rest invented their Hieroglyphics to conceal their *Arcana* [secrets] from the people; the *Chinois* on the contrary framed their Characters to communicate their *Concepts* to the people.'

For reasons that Webb does not expound and that must be linked to the fact that Chinese was, in his time, well understood by many whereas Egyptian was not yet properly deciphered, though it had been studied by Athanasius Kircher, he considers Egyptian characters as linked to a certain kind of idealization, whereas he saw Chinese characters as standing quite naturally for words of the language:

For the characters of *These* [i.e. the Chinese] were invented for declaring precisely the conceptions of single words, and names only, no other mystery being included in them: So the Hieroglyphics of *These* did not express single words or names, but involved ænigmatically entire *Ideal* conceptions, Whereby the difference between the Hieroglyphicks of the *'Egyptians* and Characters of the *Chinois*, is evident; and that they are not in *omnibus æmuli* [comparable in every respect] as *Kircherus* would persuade. But with what other differences are between them, or whether in any manner they may seem to correspond, we intend not now either to trouble you, or our selves.

THE Inventor of the first Characters of *China*, was *Fohius* their first Emperour. [p. 151]

Webb does not hesitate to regard Chinese coeval with mankind:

... I ... shall conceive, that the Language of the Empire of *China* is of far higher Antiquity [than Hebrew C. H.], and as antient, as the World it self and Mankind. [p. 162]

JOHN WEBB ON CHINESE LINGUISTICS

Webb provides a concise survey of the grammatical peculiarities of Chinese as they emerge from the literature available to him:

But to proceed.

In the Language of the *Chinois* the Element [i.e. morpheme], Syllable, Word, are all one and the same; *Idemque est apud eos Dictio, Syllaba, Elementum*. Saith *Trigautius* [i.e. Nicolas Trigault, author of perhaps the most influential early work on China, the *De christiana Expeditione apud Sinas* (1615) which was translated into a wide variety of European languages during the 17th century].

Their Idiom is very succinct, insomuch that as in multitude of Letters they surpass all other Nations of the World; so likewise in paucity of words they yeeld to all. For the number of their words scarcely exceeds sixteen hundred. All of them also end in vowels, some few excepted which terminate in M, or N, and they are all Monosyllables and Indeclinables, as well Nouns, as Verbs; and so accommodated to their use, that many times the Verb serveth for a Noun, and a Noun for a Verb, and an Adverb likewise, if need require; whereby there is not much pains required to put them together in *Syntax*: And for the same reason we are assured by *Semedo* also, that their Language is more easy to be learned, than the *Latine*, the Grammar only whereof taketh up all our younger years... [p. 163]

Webb compares the legendary *Polyglot Dictionary* by the lexicographer extraordinary Ambrogio Calepino (1435–1511), which was expanded after his death into the best posthumous edition of 1590, and which comprised no less than eleven languages:

It [i.e. the Chinese language] depends not, moreover, on Letters dispersed into an Alphabetical form like ours, nor have they in their Language any words compounded of Letters and Syllables; but every single Character importeth a single word or name, whereby they had need of as many Characters, as there are things, by which they would deliver the conceptions of their minds. For example, if any should go about to render *Calepine* into their Idiom, so many and different Characters he ought to have, as there are different words therein. Neither do they use Declensions or Conjunctions, seeing all these are involved in the Characters themselves. So that it behoveth that man to be endued with a good memory, that intendeth to attain, but even unto an indifferent perfection in the *Chinique* Learning. Insomuch that he that by long study, throughout in manner his whole life time, arriveth to the highest perfection therein, as also amongst us whilst living we still learn, obtaineth deservedly the prime honours and dignities of the Empire. And as they are more or less learned, so are they less or more esteemed. From whence it proceeds, as *Mendoza* [i.e. Juan Goncales de Mendoza or Mendoza (1545–1614)] affirms, that none how miserably poor soever they be, but learn at least to read and write, it being infamous amongst them to be illiterate. [p. 164]

The paucity of syllables in the Chinese language is duly noted:

Their Language hath not in all, saith he [i.e. Father Alvarez Semedo, author of *Relatione della Grande Monarchia della Cina* (1643)], more than three hundred and twenty *vocaboli* [words, I suppose, unac-

cented and unasperated] and of *parole* [words which though really the same, differ in the aspiration and accent only] one thousand two hundred twenty eight. But as every of these words hath many and diverse significations, so, unless by the different accents they are not to be understood. For, one word signifies sometimes ten, & sometimes twenty several things, intelligible only by the different pronunciation of the Accent. Whereby in regard of the double sence, their Language to strangers is very difficult, and not without great labour, intensive study, and with a thousand reflexions to be learned by them. So that, it is one thing to know the *Chinique* Characters, another, to speak the *Chinique* Tongue. For any stranger that hath a good memory, and diligent care withal, may attain to the height of Learning by reading of the Books of *China*, although he can neither speak the Language, nor understand what the Natives speak to him. From whence may be collected, that as the *Frenchman* writeth, not as he speaketh, so the *Chinois* speaketh not, as he writeth. And we know, that even at this day, in all generally, as well antient, as modern Languages, there is between the reading and speaking a difference either more or less. However, as for that in *China*, *Trigauius* [i.e. Nicolas Trigault (1577–1628)] tells us, That all the difference between the speaking and writing consists in the connexion of the words only. [p. 165]

Webb relies on J. Nieuhof's *L'Ambassade de la Compagnie orientale des Provinces Unies vers l'Empereur de la Chine* (1665) and on the great Dutch orientalist Jakob Gohl (1596–1667), Professor of Arabic and Mathematics in Leiden, whose *Lexicon heptaglotton*, published posthumously in 1669, was one of the most remarkable achievements of 17th-century lexicography:

But hereof *Nieuhoff* will particularly inform you, There is no Language, saith he, that hath so many words of a double sence as the *Chinique*; which is apprehensible by the different cadency of the voice. The incommodity received thereby is very great; for one cannot write any thing, that is read to him in his Language, nor of himself understand a word, unless he have recourse to their Books, to know the double sence thereof by the Characters, whereby he may readily find it out; when in speaking, he cannot conceive what the Native meaneth. So that, one is not only obliged to have the words repeated, but likewise either with Ink to have them set down in writing, or if that be wanting, with water on the table, or some other thing expressed. This double sence may in some measure be apprehended by five different cadencies of principal Tones, which are hard to be distinguished nevertheless, in regard of their sweetness: One word oftentimes receives (among strangers especially) five several meanings

through this variety of Tones. And there is not one word also, which hath not one of them, and likewise twenty or thirty significations, according to the diversity of the Aspirations, which the Natives learn from their cradles, but is very difficult for a stranger to attain. And with the reason thereof *Trigautius* shall ere long acquaint you.

Jacobus Golius conceives the Language of *China* to have proceeded not so much from chance and necessity, as from meditation and Art. But being it is destitute of all those troublesome aides that are brought in to the assistance of Art; for they have not Rules either for Grammar, Logick, or Rhetorick, but what are dictated to them by the light of nature, though greater Eloquence, than amongst them hath scarcely been ever read. Therefore being it is so nakedly free from those superfluous guides which we are constrained to search after in learning whatever other Language; we may well conceive, that it was at first infused or inspired, as the PRIMITIVE Language was into our first Parents, and so from them received, rather than otherwise invented and taught the *Chinois*. And whereas some fancy, that it is in many respects very imperfect, and exceeding equivocal; yet in regard no Author of credit extant, hath given us so much as in general terms, any the least notice of any such imperfections, I may say, that if any such imperfections shall be found therein, they relate in regard of the high Antiquity unto Artificialness only. For, without all peradventure it is a perfectly natural speech, and was a Language before the World knew, as to this particular at least, what that, which we now call Art, meant. And as for the double sence of the words, those that have long lived in *China*, those that have diligently studied the same, and who are most concerned, and can best tell, shall give you full satisfaction in due place, that this æquivocableness makes it not only a sweet, but also a compendious, pleasant, and graceful Language, not naturally defective.

... The Characters of the *Chinois* are twofold, *Antient* and *more Antient*; or, the Originals and their Abstracts. The more Antient are those first or *primier* Characters of theirs, which we find to be of such great Antiquity, what Chronology soever is followed, and which upon especial occasions only, are now in use amongst them. And the Antient are those, which from the other were abstracted, and bearing the very same signification in their speech, are throughout their whole Empire in general use at this day. [p. 166 ff.]

Webb is already keenly aware of the Chinese fascination with calligraphy:

The *Chinois* give willingly great sums of money for a Copy of their antient Characters well formed, and they value a good writing of their now Letters far more than a good painting, whereby from being thus esteemed, they come to be revered. Insomuch that they cannot endure to see a written paper lying on the ground, but finding it immediately take it up, & carry the same to the Childrens Schools, where in an appointed place for keeping the like papers, they remain, till afterwards at certain times they burn them, not out of Religion as the Turks, but only out of the love they bear to Letters. [p. 176]

Webb notes the varieties of spoken dialects in some parts of China, but he continues, basing himself on Juan Goncales de Mendoza, *Historia de las cosas ... ritos y costumbres, del gran Reyno de la China* (Antwerp, 1596):

But let the Vulgar Idiom of the *Chinois* be as different as it will, they have not any one Book written therein, no more than we in our Northern or Western Dialects, but all their Books are written in their true ORIGINAL Language, and the Characters of them are, and ever have been one and the same throughout their whole Empire.

Mendoza makes mention of this difference also, and therewith somewhat acquaints us wherein it doth consist. He telleth us then, that it is admirably strange, that though in the Dominions of this Empire, they have several kinds of speech, nevertheless all generally understand it by the Letters, not Words. But the reason is, saith he, because one and the same figure, and one and the same Character, is common to all in the signification of one and the same thing, although it be diversly named in the speech; as for example, the Character for a City is universally known throughout their Empire, though in some places they call it *Leombi*, and in others *Fù*, the like happening in all other nouns. [p. 180]

Webb makes a highly sensible comparison with English linguistic conditions:

As in like manner with us, though in the North of *England* they call that a *Dove-cote*, which in the South is called a *Pigeon-house*, the names nevertheless are good *English*; So also *Ensis* is as true Latine for a *Sword* as *Gladius*; and *astrotès* as pure *Greek* for *Urbanitas* as *eutrapelia*. [p. 181]

Certain obvious dialect variations are noted in detail:

So likewise in *Fokien* where they speak clownishly they usually change N into L, as *Lankin* for *Nankin*, and the like. For thus *Martinus* also,

in his description of *Nankin*. The *Portugals*, saith he, vulgarly call it *Lankin* receiving the error from the *Fokiens*, with whom they chiefly trade, for these being very rude in speaking by a most common vice of their Country are wont to change every N into L. [p. 183]

On the varieties of the Chinese language, Webb consults his various sources:

The Language of *China* comes to be the only, which they call *Quonhoa*, or Language of the *Mandarins*; for with the same pace as they introduced their Government into those other Kingdoms, they brought in their Language also; and so it runs throughout the whole Country at this day, as the Latine throughout all *Europe*, but more universally, every one likewise keeping their natural, or clownish manner of speech, as *Nieubhoff* calls it, by which the Inhabitants of one place scarcely understand one another, as was instanced in the Province of *Fokien*, unless they have recourse to their Books and Characters which are all one and the same, whereby they readily comprehend the sence and meaning of him that speaketh. Hence it is, that we *Europeans* endeavour wholly to perfect our selves in the Language of the *Literati*, because it is more easie and more general; for thereby saith *Trigautius*, Strangers may converse with the Natives in any Province. Hence it is, that the style they write is far different from that they speak; although, saith *Semedo*, (and mark him I pray) the words are the same, so that when one goeth about to write, he had need to collect his wits, for he that will write according as commonly they speak, may worthily be laughed at.... [p. 186]

Apart from Trigault, Webb also quotes the Bishop John Wilkins, whose *Essay Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language* (London, 1668) only recently had begun to make its important impact on intellectual life in England:

From all memory of Ages, this people have endeavored to write elegantly rather than so to speak, insomuch that all their Eloquence even to these our dayes consists not in pronunciation but writing only. But although this way of writing, whereby we are, saith he, to set down a particular character for every thing, be extremely troublesome to the memory, yet it brings with it a certain famous and incredible advantage to us, in regard to the universality of the Letter. Which incredible advantage, that as well the whole World, as we *Europeans* may enjoy, our learned Dr. *John Wilkins* by the proposal of a *Real Character* hath made a fair overture lately, and if others would as willingly contribute their studies, as he hath ingeniously begun; for no humane invention but Divine creation can make any thing perfect on the sudden; we

might no longer complain of the unhappy consequences that succeeded the *Confusion at Babel*, nor *China* glory that she alone shall evermore triumph in the full fruition of those abundant felicities that attended mankind, whilst one common Language was spoken throughout the World. [p. 187]

Webb admires the unwobbling constancy of the Natural Language:

We may safely conclude that the MOTHER or NATURAL Language of the Empire of *China*, perdures in its Antient purity without any change or alteration. [p. 190]

At this point Webb enters the field of descriptive and interpretive linguistics:

Furthermore the *Chinois* are never put to that irksome vexation of searching out a *Radix* for the derivation of their words, as generally all other Nations are; but the *Radix* is the word, and the word the *Radix*, and the syllable the same also, as *Trigautius* [i.e. Nicolaus Trigault] hath long since affirmed; which perswades a facility in their speech not to be paralleld by any other Language, and that the true, genuine, and original sence of things seems to remain with them. Besides they are not troubled with variety of Declensions, Conjugations, Numbers, Genders, Moods, Tenses and the like Grammatical niceties, but are absolutely free from all such perplexing accidents having no other Rules in use, than what the light of Nature hath dictated unto them; whereby their Language is plain, easie, and simple, as a NATURAL speech ought to be. And it is worthy observation, that, whereas, in point of Theology, they of all other people have been least guided by the light of Nature; in point of Language, they of all other people have been most, yea, only guided by the light of Nature. But it was Nature that from God taught them their Language, and it was the God of Nature, that by *Noah* taught them their Theology.

Moreover, the Letters, then which nothing can be more certain, testifie, that it is *sine ulla vocum peregrinarum mixtura*, without any mixture of foreign words. [p. 192]

Webb nowhere pretends that he himself knows any Chinese, but he does permit himself the luxury of speculating on the basis of the Jesuits' and some traders' reports:

And if ever our *Europeans* shall become thoroughly studied in the *Chinique* tongue it will be found, that not only the *Chinois* want words to other Languages common, but also that they have very

many whereby they express themselves in such Elegancies, as neither by *Hebrew*, or *Greek*, or any other Language how elegant soever can be expressed. Besides, whereas the *Hebrew* is harsh and rugged, the *Chinque* appears the most sweet and smooth Language, of all others throughout the whole World at this day known.

And as if all things conspired to prove this the PRIMITIVE Tongue. We may observe, how forceably Nature struggles to demonstrate so much. The very first expression we make of life, at the very instant minute of our Births, is, as was touched on before, by uttering the *Chinique* word *Ya* ... Which is not only the first, but indeed the sole and only expression, that Mankind from Nature can justly lay claim unto.

The Language of *China* as hath been shewed also consisteth all of Monosyllables, & in our Infancy the first Notions of speech we have are all Monosyllables; as *Ta*, for Father; *Ma*, for Mother; *Pa*, for Brother; the like happening in all other terms, until by hearing and observing what others in our *confused Language* say, we alter accordingly, adding now and then a letter or syllable by degrees; whereby in the end we are brought to plain words. For, it is not by natural instinct, but by imitation, and as we are instructed that we arrive at speech, that is, in simple terms and words to express the open notions of things, which the second act of Reason compoundeth into propositions, and the last into forms of Ratiocination. [p. 196]

Beyond grammar and logic, Webb takes a strong interest in phonetics and language learning. The mechanisms of language learning are, to him, a source of insight in the primitiveness or otherwise of a language:

The *Chinois* have not the Letter R, nor can ever by any possible means be brought to express or pronounce the same, whatever labour or diligence is used by them. And when our Children attain to riper Age; as if Nature abhorred the *Confusion*, what care and pains do we take, what opportunities not lay hold of, by practising and repeating to make them pronounce this Letter, till education after long contest prevailing they arrive therat? Thus from our *Births* to our *Infancy*, and from our *Infancy* to *Riper Age*, till Nature is compelled to yeeld by the enforced power of instruction, unto corrupt speech, we generally throughout the Universe appear in our Language direct *Chinois*.

But peradventure here likewise some will be ready to suggest, that the Language of *China* is not plain and easy, but difficult, not to strangers only, but the Natives also, in regard of the divers Accents and great

Equivocations of the words proceeding from them. To which is answered, that let the difficulty be supposed as great as thought may think, or Art can make, it relates unto strangers solely; and therefore cannot in the least degree reflect upon the Primitiveness of the speech; because when the whole World had one common Language; throughout the whole World none were strangers to that Language; but all people universally understood and spake the same, being born Natives thereof, and learning it from their Mothers breasts, as the natural *Chinois* now do, or as any other Nation ever did theirs. It was the *Confusion of Tongues*, that first made strange Languages, and Strangers to them, whereby they became difficult to be attained. But afterward, when either curiosity invited, or necessity compelled men to learn them, Art entered to act her part therein, and by methodical ways, and orderly Rules sweetned difficulty, and induced her to submit to diligence, which after much study nevertheless prevailed; and finally got the upper hand. [p. 195]

Webb pays special attention to the tones of Chinese:

And this China it self shall witness, for *Pr. Jacobus Pantoya* finding it absolutely necessary for propagating of the Gospel, to know the true Idiom of the Language, framed our *European* musical notes UT, RE, MI, FA, SOL, LA, to answer in pronuntiation unto the elevations and cadencies observable in the *Chinique* Acents which are these,

^ — \ / U O

The first Accent ^ answers to the Musical Note UT; but the *Chinique* sound or pronuntiation, denotes the same, and it is the first producing an equal voice.

The second, — answers to RE, and amongst the *Chinois*, it is as much to say, as a clear equal voice; or as *Golius* hath it a word directly and equally cast forth.

The third \ answers to MI; expressing with them of *China*, a lofty voice: more strongly delivered, but more flat in the pronuntiation than the former.

The fourth / answers to FA, and *Chiniquely* signifies, the lofty voice of one who is going forth; that speaks, in contrary to \, more freely and in an higher Tone; or as if it proceeded from one that puts a question.

The fifth U answers to SOL, and thereby in the Language of *China*, the quick or hasty voice of one that is comming in, is intended.

The last, O, as also I) denote a plain voice. [p. 197]

Commenting on the claim that Hebrew has some *verba parum honesta* (*quarum in omnibus linguis aliqua*) 'rather less than decent words (of which here are some in all languages)' Webb objects:

...had he been acquainted with the *Chinique* Tongue, [he] might have spared his *Parentthesis*. For *Semedo* will assure you, that the *Chinois* with great advantage exceed this, for they are most modest in whatever they write, and very rarely in their Verses (which in all other Languages are more or less lascivious) is a loose word to be found; and what is more, they have not any Character whereby to write the privy parts, neither are they found written in any, or in any part of any of all their Books. [p. 203]

The absence of obscenities is paralleled by the presence of natural notions of God:

The Language of *China* affordeth us, the Acknowledgment of one only true God; Theology taught by *Noah*; Predictions of CHRIST in exotic Regions many Centuries of years before his Incarnation: devout Ejaculations, such, as cannot (Oh the shame!) among Christians without difficulty be found.... [p. 206]

Another advantage of the Chinese language, according to Webb, is its conciseness:

The Brevity of the *Chinique* Language makes it æquivocal, but for the same reason compendious, saith *Semedo*. Whereby we may observe, that the Æquivocableness which is said to be so difficult and troublesome to strangers, is even by strangers themselves celebrated.

But if the *Brevity* of a Language be a remarque of the PRIMITIVE Tongue, as it is asserted to be; the *Chinique* seemeth to surpass all other Nations of the World therein.... [p. 207]

Webb goes on to extol the virtues of the Chinese language and then proceeds to draw his own conclusions, after some extremely sound methodological reflections:

Now to give a Language the first or *premier* rank, as to succinct *Sweetness*, and graceful *Brevity* is a great step towards the granting of it to be, the PRIMITIVE Language; Considering which, together with the exemplary *Utility*; remarkable *Modesty*; admirable *Generality*; great *Simplicity*, and high *Antiquity*; we may from these Arguments almost dare to affirm, that the Language of the Empire of China is the

PRIMITIVE Language. But, having moreover found *Noah* to have lived both before and after the flood in *China*, and that *Their* speech hath from all Antiquity been in one and the same Character preserved in books to this day; which is such a *plea*, as can be drawn up and entered, for no other Nation under Heaven, since the Creation of the World besides; we may more than almost dare to affirm, that the *Chinois* have obtained a full and final *deces*, for the settlement of this *Their* claim to the FIRST of Languages without all farther dispute.

Now, as for consent of Authors to strengthen our Assertion. It may be demanded, what consent of Authors *He* had, that first found out there were *Antipodes*: or *He* that first discovered the *Circulation* of the blood? Those that so absolutely pin their beliefs upon the shoulders of such consent; are, we may say, like sheep; whither *one* leads, the rest *all* run, without weighing whether the right or wrong way be taken; so that many times they bring not only themselves, but also their followers into errors, who by their prevarication the more increase them. [p. 209]

Here, finally, is the very last passage in the book which insists that there is no language with a stronger claim to being the *lingua humana* than Chinese:

... we may well conclude, until as full consent, as great certainty be produced for any other, the Language of the Empire of *CHINA* is the PRIMITIVE Language.

Webb's contribution to sinology is so important because he summarized what could be gleaned on the Chinese language from the published Western literature, and because he was the first to make a systematic book-length attempt to define the place of Chinese among the languages of the world. His originality was limited to constructing out of these reports a case that Chinese was the original language of mankind before the building of the tower of Babel.²³

It appears that most early Jesuits believed that the Chinese were descendants of Shem, whose children were said to have been shrewd and wise — as the Chinese remained, according to the Jesuit view. The identification, of course, of the first emperor Yao Thang with Joktan, the great grand-son of Shem, was perhaps problematic, though plausible, but the general picture was clear enough: the Chinese, according to many Jesuits, preserved the speech of one branch of Noah's family.²⁴

John Webb's conclusions were taken up as a plausible possibility e.g. in Thomas Browne *Of Languages and Particularly of the Saxon Tongue* (London, 1683), but by and large it was either dismissed or forgotten.²⁵

THE PRE-HISTORY OF CHINESE LINGUISTICS AFTER WEBB

Leibniz

The Dutch mathematician and linguist Jakob Gohl (1596–1667) had placed the Chinese language in a systematic and philosophical as well as a religious context:

The artificiality of their language means that it was invented at one point in time by a skillful person in order to establish verbal communication between the number of different nations who live in that large country which we call China, although it has to be said that this language might be changed now through long usage.²⁶

The German mathematician and polymath philosopher Leibniz was thoroughly fascinated by accounts such as these. His feelings are summarized by his dictum 'If God had taught man a language, that language would have been like Chinese.'²⁷ But what particularly aroused his philosophical interest was the nature of the Chinese characters.

Leibniz' enthusiasm is clear, as when he writes to La Croze in 1707:

This enquiry seems to me to be all the more important since I imagine that if we were able to discover the key to the Chinese characters, we would have found something which could serve for the analysis of thought.

Leibniz does believe he would have something to contribute:

It does appear that if we Europeans were well enough informed about Chinese literature, then the aid of logic, critical thinking, mathematics, and our way of expressing ourselves which is more explicit than theirs, would make us discover in these Chinese monuments of such remote antiquity many things unknown to the modern Chinese and even to their later interpreters no matter how classical one takes them to be.²⁸

Leibniz expresses here a feeling of European *Besserwiserei*, a persistent feeling of Western analytical superiority which has remained important in Western attitudes to the Chinese language.

Leibniz's intensive analytical efforts did lead to a clear conclusion. The Chinese characters, for all their intrinsic interest, did not after all supply a

suitable model for his philosophical alphabet of human thought *alphabetum cogitationum humanarum* or *characteristica universalis*:

If we understood the characters of the Chinese I think we would find some more connections (with a *characteristica universalis*), but at bottom these characters are undoubtedly far removed from such an analysis of thought which is the essence of my plan.²⁹

What he missed in the Chinese characters was a unified underlying rational principle of their construction or what he called a '*filum Ariadnae*' in the labyrinth of Chinese writing.³⁰ John Wilkins (1614–72) had arrived at similar conclusions already in 1668 when he published his ambitious *Essay Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language*.³¹

Varo and Bayer

Seventeenth century concern with the Chinese language was dominated by speculation and hampered by lack of specific information.³² But in 1703 the missionary Francisco Varo's (1627–87) *Arie de la lengua mandarina* was published in Canton. This pioneering grammar avoided the use of characters and introduced the Chinese language entirely on the basis of transliterations.³³ Unfortunately, it remained inaccessible to most scholars in Europe and is excessively rare. S. Fourmont, to whom we shall turn in a moment, was one of the few to have used it.³⁴

On the 18 June 1700 Peter the Great of Russia issued a *ukaz* which recommended the finding of 'two or three good and learned men, not too old, that would be able to teach Chinese and Mongolian language and grammar'.³⁵ T. S. Bayer (1694–1738) was called to St Petersburg to fill one of these posts, and he apparently had no access to Varo's grammar when he published his *Museum sinicum, in quo sinicae linguae et literaturae ratio explicatur* (1730) which was the first grammatical account of the Chinese language published in Europe.³⁶ This grammar was the beginning of a great tradition of Chinese linguistics in Russia, a tradition which was to have a very profound influence on modern linguistic developments in the People's Republic of China, and to which we shall return in due course.³⁷ Bayer's introduction to his *Museum sinicum* contains a most remarkable document: a detailed history of sinology from its beginnings to 1730.³⁸

T. S. Bayer died in profound distress after a negative review from S. Fourmont (1683–1745) of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres in Paris. S. Fourmont's *Meditationes Sinicae* (1737) and his *Linguae Sinarum mandarinicae hieroglyphicae grammatica duplex* (1742) began an important French tradition in Chinese linguistics which thrives to this day.³⁹

'Seramporean' grammars were, however, eclipsed by Abel-Rémusat's elegant and influential *Eléments de la grammaire chinoise* published in 1822 in Paris. Abel-Rémusat was a most remarkable orientalist and comparative linguist. His grammar, which owes more than it acknowledges, and more than generally recognized, to de Prémare's *Notitia*,⁴⁷ established France as the European centre of Chinese linguistics throughout most of the 19th century.⁴⁸

Abel-Rémusat's *Eléments* inspired one of the greatest general linguists of his time, Wilhelm von Humboldt, to write his long *Lettre à M. Abel-Rémusat sur la nature des formes grammaticales en général, et sur le génie de la langue chinoise en particulier* (1827) which remains to this day perhaps the finest introduction to the philosophical and general linguistic questions raised by Chinese language.⁴⁹ Humboldt recognized Chinese as structurally the symmetrical opposite of languages like Sanskrit and Greek, but as a perfect language in its own way. In the wake of Humboldt, a number of traditional German philosophers of language such as H. Steinthal (1823–99) continued to speculate on the significance of Chinese for a properly general philosophy of language in the latter part of the 19th century. Steinthal finds the contrast between the means the Chinese language employs and the effects it achieves a phenomenon quite unique in the history of language.⁵⁰

The careful reader of Abel-Rémusat was the German idealist philosopher Friedrich Schelling (1775–1854) who summarized an emotional as well as philosophical response to the strangeness of the Chinese language which was to remain prevalent for a long time to come when he wrote:

The Chinese language is for us like a language from another world. And if one were to give a definition of language according to which all the other idioms are called languages, then one would have to admit that the Chinese language is not a language at all, just as the Chinese people are not a people.

Only ten years after Abel-Rémusat's *Eléments* the Russian missionary Nikita Kojalévitch Bichurin published his *Kitaiskaya grammatika* (Peking, 1832), which he develops the characteristic idea of *umstvennoe slovoizmenenie* or 'mental inflection'. This work deserves careful comparison with its Western European contemporaries and has been sadly neglected by Western sinologists.

Abel-Rémusat's *Eléments* (as well as Prémare's *Notitia*) included a survey not only of literary Chinese but also of the colloquial language. In our present account we disregard the study of colloquial Chinese.

In France Stanislas Julien provided an immensely practical handbook in his *Syntaxe nouvelle de la langue chinoise* (1869–70). Classical Chinese was now a language which, given patience, one could go ahead and learn on the basis of published Western books. Nineteenth-century French scholarship in Classical Chinese was the inspiration and the essential background to Georg von der Gabelentz's *Chinesische Grammatik* (1881) which openly acknowledged its debts to de Prémare and to Stanislas Julien. Georg von der Gabelentz was a distinguished general linguist. His *Grammatik* remains until today recognized as probably the finest overall grammatical survey of the language to date. Interestingly enough, those who disagree with this assessment do not feel that any of the newer grammars is superior, but they tend to feel that Stanislas Julien is perhaps to be preferred, though he was not as great a linguist as Georg von der Gabelentz.

In spite of the achievements of 19th-century grammarians there remained a wide-spread conviction, even among scholars of the Chinese language, that Classical Chinese does not have a grammar to speak of. H. A. Giles, in the introduction to the first edition of his quite outstanding work *A Chinese-English Dictionary*, advocated this view.⁵¹ Gustav Schlegel (1840–1903) of Leiden University became famous for his slogan: *Lisez, lisez; jetez la grammaire*, and Achilles Fang sympathizes with him when he writes in 1953: 'Gustave Schlegel was not the best of sinologists; yet he had a modicum of sound sense when he advised his students to forget their grammar... The sooner we forget grammar, the speedier will we recover our sanity.'⁵²

It might seem that Schlegel's advice has been heeded, at least as far as the second half about throwing out grammars is concerned. Even as recently as 1974, Henry Rosemont, who specializes in Chinese philosophy, has echoed Jakob Gohl in claiming that Classical Chinese is an artificial language without natural language syntax.⁵³ Chad Hansen, another specialist in Chinese philosophy, argued in 1985 that Chinese has neither the semantically all-important concept of truth nor the syntactically all-important concept of a sentence.⁵⁴ The sinologist Roger T. Ames together with the philosopher David L. Hall, following Hansen, claim that Chinese sentences are simply strings of names without a sentential syntax and that 'classical Chinese is not, as are most Western languages, grounded in the propositional utterance'.⁵⁵ It would seem that much basic work on classical Chinese grammar still needs to be done.

- Wiesbaden, 1983; and Knud Lundbæk, *T. S. Bayer (1694-1738) Pioneer Sinologist*, London, 1986, which give a wealth of biographical as well as bibliographical references for early studies of the Chinese language in Europe.
- 6 Cf. Lundbæk, 'The First Translation from a Confucian Classic in Europe', in *China Mission Studies* (1550-1800) Bulletin, no. 1 (1979) pp. 1-11.
- 7 Compare the high sinological standards maintained even today by such Jesuit publications as the *Bibliotheca Instituti Historici Societatis Jesu Roma*.
- 8 This is not exclusively the Jesuits' fault. For example, Father Joseph Henry-Marie de Prémare (1666-1736) submitted a very remarkable grammar of Chinese to Etienne Fourmont (1683-1745) of the French Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres in 1730, but Fourmont perhaps failed to realize and certainly failed properly to acknowledge the excellent quality of this work.
- 9 There were 46 editions and reprints of this book in seven languages between the years 1585 and 1600 alone.
- 10 I quote the English translation in J. D. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*, Penguin, 1987, p. 136 ff.
- 11 For a bibliography of this early orientalist see Conor Reilly, *Athanasius Kircher: Master of a Hundred Arts*, Rome and Wiesbaden, 1974, and Jocelyn Godwin, *Athanasius Kircher: A Renaissance Man in Quest for Lost Knowledge*, London, 1979.
- 12 Cf. M Schrader and A. Fürkötter, *Die Echtheit des Schrifttums der Heiligen von Bingen*, Köln/Graz, 1956, and John Wilkins, *Mercury: or the Secret and Swift Messenger* (published as *Foundations of Semiotics*, vol. 6) Amsterdam, 1984, pp. 57 ff.
- Risch, F., *Wilhelm von Rubruk, Reise zu den Mongolen 1253-1255*, übersetzt und erläutert von Dr. Friedrich Risch, Leipzig, 1934, p. 171.
- Risch, F., *ibid.*, pp. 231-32. The earlier reference to Uighur writing will be found in chapter 27, F. Risch, p. 158.
- For early accounts of China generally see the classic Henry Yule, *China and the Way Thither: Being a Collection of Mediaeval Notices of China*, ed. and rev. by Henri Cordier.
- Risch, F., *ibid.*, p. 163.
- Bacon, Francis, *Advancement of Learning*, XI.1, London: Everyman's Library, 1962, p. 136 ff.
- 13 The standard reference works on the early history of sinology remain Henri Cordier, *Bibliotheca Sinica*, with its supplement published in 1922 and Henri Cordier, 'Fragments d'une histoire des études chinoises au XVIIIe siècle' in *Centenaire de l'Ecole des Langues orientales vivantes 1775-1875*, Paris, 1895. For the general cultural background see A. Reichwein, *China und Europa, geistige und künstlerische Beziehungen im 18. Jahrhundert*, Berlin, 1923, (English translation, London, 1925), and from a Chinese point of view Chu Ch'ien-chih, *Chung-kuo che-hsüeh tui-yü Ou-chou ti ying-hsiang* (The influence of Chinese philosophy on Europe, Fu-chou, 1983). More specifically see J. J. L. Duyvendak, *Holland's Contribution to Chinese Studies*, London, 1950; Eva Kraft, 'Frühe chinesische Studien in Berlin' in *Medizin-historisches Journal*, 11 (1976) pp. 92-128. In addition we now have David E. Mungello, *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology*, Stuttgart, 1985; Rita Widmaier, *Die Rolle der chinesischen Schrift in Leibniz' Zeichentheorie*,
- 18 Apart from European languages, Hyde demonstrated a good command of Turkish, Arabic, Syriac, Persian, Hebrew and Malay in his writings. His accomplishments are comparable to Jakob Gohl from Leiden, who may have been the first layman in Europe to have taken a serious interest in learning Chinese. See J. J. L. Duyvendak, 'Chinese studies in Holland', *op. cit.*, p. 57.
- 19 Cf. J. D. Frodsham, *op. cit.*, p. 404 ff.
- 20 Ch'ien Chung-shu, 'China in the English Literature of the Seventeenth Century', *Quarterly Bulletin of Chinese Bibliography* (English Edition), New Series, 1.4 (Dec. 1940) pp. 351-84; Earl. H. Pritchard, *Anglo-Chinese Relations during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, University of Illinois, 1929; William W. Appleton, *A Cycle of Cathay: The Chinese Vogue in England during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, New York, 1951; Diego Collado, *Ars grammaticae Japonicae linguae*, Romae, 1632 translated as *Diego Collado's Grammar of the Japanese Language*, by Richard Spear Laurence, University of Arkansas, 1975; Paul Cornélius, *Languages in Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-Century Imaginary Voyages*, Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1965; Madeleine V.-David, *Le débat sur les écritures et l'héroglyphe aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles et l'application de la notion de déchiffrement aux écritures mortes*, Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1965.
- 21 Cf. also Adrianus Schrieckius, *Originum Celticarum Libri XXIII*, Ypris Flandriae, 1614. Incidentally, the Danish linguist Ole Worm, wrote a book on the Danish Runes, *RUNICA, Seu Danica Literatura Antiquissima, Vulgo gothica dicta luci reddita Opera Olai Wormii D. Medicinae in Academia Hafniensi Profess. Cui accessit De Prisca Danorum Poesi*
- 13 This account is contained in Andreas Müller's book, *Andreas Müllers Besser Unterricht von der Sineser Schrift und Druck, als etwa in Hrn. D. Elias Grebenitzen Unterrichts von der Reformirten und Lutherischen Kirchen enthalten ist*, Berlin, 1682, p. 5.
- 14 Cf. J. Wilkins, *op. cit.*, p. xvii.
- 15 Borgia Cinese, 412. For the earliest German word list by Florian Bahr see W. Fuchs, 'Das erste deutsch-chinesische Vokabular vom P. Florian Bahr', in *Sinica*, 1 (Forke-Festschrift, 1937) pp. 68-72.
- 16 Cf. Ch'ien Shou-yi, 'John Webb: A Forgotten Page in the Early History of Sinology in Europe', in *Chinese Social and Political Science Review*, XIX (1935) pp. 295-330 and J. D. Frodsham, 'Chinese and the primitive language: John Webb's contribution to 17th century sinology', in *Asian Studies* (Quezon City, Philippines) II3 (Dec. 1964) pp. 389-408. The latter useful article was brought to my attention by Christer von der Burg.
- 17 On John Webb's role in the history of architecture, see John Bold, *John Webb: architectural theory and practice in the 17th century*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989; John Orrell, *The Theatres of Inigo Jones and John Webb*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985; John Harris and A. A. Tait, *Catalogue of the drawings of Inigo Jones, John Webb, and Isaac de Caus at Worcester College, Oxford*, Oxford: Worcester College, 1979. Cf. also, incidentally, *John Webb and Seventeenth Century Architecture: a selected bibliography*, comp. by the staff of the Bibliographic Research Library, Monticello Illinois, in the series *Vance Bibliographies*, 1985 which is held by University of California, Berkeley, University Library.

Dissertatio, Hafniae 1636, and suggested that these Runes were the first letters of mankind.

- 22 Earlier attempts to construct a universal language include Herman Hugo, *De Prima Scribendi Origine et Universa Rei Litterariae Antiquitate, ad Reverendum Patrem Carolum Scribani Soc. Jesu Pruencos. Provinc. in Provincia Flandro — Belgica, Antverpiae, Apud Balthasarem et Johannem Moretos*, 1617; Gerhard Vossius, *De Arte Grammatica Libri Septem*, Amsterdam 1635; Francis Lodowick, *A Common Writing: Where by Two, although not Understanding One the Others Language, yet by the Helpe Thereof, May Communicate Their Minds; on to Another*, London, 1657; Cave Beck, *The Universal Character by Which All the Nations In The World May Understand One Another's Conceptions, Reading out of One Common Writing Their Own Mother Tongues. An Invention of General Use, the Practice whereof may be Attained in Two Hours space, Observing the Grammatical Directions, Which Character is so Contrived, that it may be spoken as well as Written*, London, 1657; Henry Edmundson, *Lingua Linguarum: The Natural Language of Languages in a Vocabulary Contrived and Built upon Analogy*, London, 1658; George Dalgarno, *Ars Signorum: Vulgo Character Universalis et Lingua Philosophica*, London, 1661; J. H. Becher, *Character Pro Notitia Linguarum Universalis*, Frankfurt, 1661; Athanasius Kircher, *Polygraphia Nova Et Universalis Et Combinatoria Arte Detecta*, Rome, 1663; Joh. Amos Comenius, *Via Lucis: Vestigata et Vestiganda*, London 1668 [r. E. T. Campagnac, John Amos Comenius, *The Way of Light*, Liverpool, 1938]. Most if not all of these books on a universal lan-

guage were inspired by reports on the Chinese language.

- 23 For a survey of the doxography on the Chinese language during the 17th century see David E. Mungello, op. cit. p. 36.
- 24 Joseph de Guignes (1721–1800) became famous for a *Mémoire dans lequel on prouve, que les chinois sont une colonie égyptienne* (published in 1759). The case is made in glorious graphic detail in an anonymous book [by Pierre Martial Cibot (1727–80)] which I have at hand: *Lettre de Peking, sur le génie de la langue chinoise, et la nature de leur écriture symbolique, comparée avec celle des anciens égyptiens* (published 'avec approbation et permission' Bruxelles, 1773). In a certificate printed on page v of this book no less than ten distinguished citizens of Rome are listed by name and said to have confirmed the authenticity of part of the material presented. The book continues with a detailed anonymous *Lettre sur les caractères chinois, par le reverend père *** de la Compagnie de Jesus* (in fact by a certain John Turberville Needham) followed by 27 exquisite plates demonstrating the close connection between Egyptian and Chinese characters.
- 25 *The Works of Sir Thomas Browne*, edited by Geoffrey Keynes, 6 vols., (London, 1928–31) vol. V, p. 86.
- 26 Cf. K. Lundbæk, *T. S. Bayer*, pp. 97, 83, and 103.
- 27 Letter by Leibniz to Christian Menzel, dated 15 Oct. 1698. *Leibniz Briefe*, 641, 1 verso.
- 28 'Lettre sur la philosophie chinoise à Nicolas de Remond', dated 1715/6, ed. Loosen and Vonessen, p. 126 ff.
- 29 Letter to Herzog Johann Friedrich dated April (?) 1679, cf. Widmaier, op. cit. p. 36.
- 30 Letter to Johan Christian Mentzel dated January 21, 1699, cf. Widmaier, op. cit. p. 36.
- 31 The nature of the Chinese language is discussed on pp. 450–52 of that work.
- 32 See particularly Paul Cornelius, *Languages in Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth-Century Imaginary Voyages*, Genève 1965, which includes a fine bibliography on pp. 159–72, and Madeleine V. David, *Le débat sur les écritures et l'hieroglyphe aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles*, Paris 1965).
- 33 On the manuscript *Arte de la lengua chio chiu* [Art of Chaozhou grammar] see Piet van der Loon, 'The Manila Incunabula and early Hokkien studies', in *Asia Major*, 13.1–2 (1967) pp. 95–186.
- 34 Abel-Rémusat, *Mélanges asiatiques*, Paris, 1826, vol. 2, p. 107.
- 35 Cf. V. V. Bartold's monograph *Istoriya isucheniya Vostoka v Evrope i Rossii*, Leningrad, 1925, p. 197.
- 36 The sinological tradition in St Petersburg did not die with Bayer. In 1832 the exceedingly colourful sinologist N. J. Bichurin (1770–1853) [alias monachus Hyacinthus (Iakinf)] published his *Kitaiskaya grammatika, sochineniuya monakhom Iakinfom*. In his preface, N. J. Bichurin surveys a number of earlier grammars by Varo, Bayer, Fourmont, Prémare, Marshman, Morrison, Abel-Rémusat and Goncalves. Bichurin's effort was continued by an exceptional line of Russian Chinese linguists including such outstanding linguists as A. A. Dragunov, and S. E. Jakhontov in our century.
- 37 One special strength of the Russian linguists was lexicography. In 1867 the first dictionary of colloquial Chinese was published in Peking, the *Russko-kitaiskii*

slavar' razgovornogo yazyka, Pekinskogo narechija by Isaiya (Polikin) with a supplement (*Pribavlenie I*) published in Tientsin, 1868. This began a distinguished tradition of Russian lexicography culminating first with P. P. Popov's *Kitaisko-Russkii slovar'*, 2 vols., Peking, 1888. For an exhaustive account of early Chinese lexicography in Russia see N. A. Petrov 'Towards the history of the study of the Chinese language in Russia' (in Russian), in *Dal'nii Vostok. Sbornik statei, Isdat'elstvo Vostochnoi Literaturii*, Moskva, 1961 pp. 65–90. In modern times we have V. M. Oshanin's important *Kitaisko-Russkii slovar'* (Moskva, 1952) and the best Chinese dictionary in any Western language, the four-volume *Bol'shoi Kitaisko-Russkii slovar'* completed in 1984. This dictionary attempts to give a detailed description of stress phenomena within Chinese words.

- 38 This history has now been presented in a masterly and memorable annotated translation in K. Lundbæk, op. cit., pp. 39–101.
- 39 See the work of the French linguists Alexis Rygaloff, Marie-Claude Paris and Viviane Alleton on modern Chinese grammar, and of Alain Peyraube on historical grammar.
- 40 I have only the unchanged reprint, Hong Kong, 1898, available.
- 41 'Far be it for me to wish to reduce the Chinese language to our kinds of languages.' Cf. K. Lundbæk, 'Une grammaire espagnole de la langue chinoise au XVIIIe siècle' in *Actes du II^e colloque de Sinologie*, Paris, 1989, p. 269.
- 42 For the un-latinate, it may be tempting to consult the translation of the *Notitia* by the Americal missionary J. G. Bridgman, Canton, 1847. But for some reason this translation consistently

EUROPEAN STUDIES ON CHINESE PHONOLOGY: THE FIRST PHASE

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AN EXHAUSTIVE TREATMENT of European studies on the sounds of the Chinese language would begin with the first attempts of Christian missionaries to romanize the forms of Chinese with which they came into contact for the practical purposes of their proselytizing enterprise. These are of much interest for the light they can throw not only on early Mandarin, as in the case of the *Hsi-ju erh-mu tzu* 西儒耳目資 of Nicholas Trigault, but also on earlier forms of other dialects, as in the case of the works in Hokkien dialect discussed by van der Loon (1966–67). In the present paper, however, I shall not be concerned with studies directed to such immediate practical ends but rather with the efforts that began in the 19th century to incorporate Chinese into the subject matter of the new science of linguistics that came into being in Europe with the discovery of the intimate relationship between Sanskrit and the majority of European languages. As the preconceptions and aims of European Comparative Philology developed and matured, studies on Chinese inspired by them also became more sophisticated culminating in the early 20th century in the thoroughly professional work of such scholars as Paul Pelliot and Henri Maspero in France and, above all, in the achievements of Bernhard Karlgren in Sweden. Indeed, the importance of Karlgren in everything to do with Chinese linguistics has been such that one can really divide the subject into two periods, BK and AK. Nevertheless, in spite of his great originality, Karlgren had antecedents, both in terms of the European background of his linguistic theory and in terms of his sources and methods for reconstructing older forms of Chinese, that need to be recalled if one is to come to a proper understanding, not only of his personal genius but also of the inevitable limitations on his work that have led to more recent attempts to revise it and advance beyond it.

In the early 19th century when interest in Sanskrit as the key to the history of European languages became intense, especially in Germany, the academic study of Chinese was also beginning in European universities. In this case, however, the main centre was Paris and while the first professor there, Abel-Rémusat, wrote on Chinese grammar and on the script, he does not seem to

throughout his detailed account, but he does have his point.

⁴⁸ Curiously, Varo and Rodriguez had no significant successors in their own country: Spain never again became a centre for Chinese linguistic studies.

⁴⁹ Cf. C. Harbsmeier, *Wilhelm von Humboldt's Brief an Abel-Rémusat und die philologische Grammatik des Altchinesischen* (published as *Grammatica Universalis*, vol. 17), Stuttgart, 1979.

⁵⁰ H. Steinthal, *Charakteristik der hauptsächlichsten Typen des menschlichen Sprachbaues*, Berlin, 1860, p. 137, in Watters, *Essays on the Chinese Language*, Shanghai, 1889, p. 17.

⁵¹ H. A. Giles, *A Chinese-English Dictionary*, London, 1892, pp. X–XII.

⁵² A. Fang, 'Some reflections on the difficulty of translation' in A. F. Wright, ed., *Studies in Chinese Thought*, Chicago, 1953, p. 282.

⁵³ Rosemont Jr., Henry, 'On representing abstractions in Archaic Chinese', *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 24.1 (1974).

⁵⁴ Hansen, Chad, 'Chinese language, Chinese philosophy and "Truth"', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 44 (1985) pp. 491–517.

⁵⁵ Hall, David L. and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking through Confucius*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1987, p. 298 ff. Contrast the plea for the philologically and grammatically based study of the general features of the Chinese language by the late Angus C. Graham in *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical argument in ancient China*, LaSalle: Open Court, 1989, appendix 2, pp. 389–406.

perverts the meaning of the Latin original in most surprising ways. It often manages to say the plain opposite of what Prémare's original means, and it almost systematically cuts out the more interesting asides which make Prémare such exquisite reading in the Latin. J. G. Bridgman, who died at the age of about thirty in 1850, is one of the more puzzling figures in the history of sinology.

⁴³ *China Factory Records*, vol. 20, India Office Records, Commonwealth Office, London, 55 pages, manuscript. Cf. Lundbæk, 'Une grammaire espagnole...', op. cit., p. 265.

⁴⁴ A 198-page carefully copied manuscript of the latest version of Rodriguez' grammar, revised by José Villanueva, may be found in Bibl. Nacional, Madrid, Sigla: 2511 (H. 303).

⁴⁵ For another eloquent pamphlet attacking British sinology, dating from 1918, see E. Erkes and B. Schindler 'Zur Geschichte der europäischen Sinologie', in *Orientalistische Zeitschrift*, 6 (1916–18), pp. 105–15, which includes a delightfully biased overview of the history of European sinology from a thoroughly Germanic point of view.

⁴⁶ Robert Morrison (1782–1834) also published a dictionary of Chinese in six volumes (1815–23) which is remarkable not only for its high quality, but also the exquisite printing.

⁴⁷ Cf. Carl Friederich Neumann (1793–1870), *Bayerische Annalen, Abtheilung für Literatur*, 1834, 2. Hälfte, pp. 1042–52 and pp. 1061–63. Neumann does seem to go too far when he refers to Abel-Rémusat's grammar as an excerpt from Prémare's *Notitia*