Decoding the Translations of Political Terms in the Nineteenth-Century Chinese–English Dictionaries – Lobscheid and his Chinese–English Dictionary

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ABSTRACT
German missionary Wilhelm Lobscheid (1822–1893) played a vital role in English–Chinese translations. His English–Chinese Dictionary (英华字典, 1866–1869) was the first comprehensive bilingual dictionary published in Hong Kong with both Cantonese and Mandarin pronunciations. Regarding his dictionary as the bridge between two languages, political terms previously nonexisting in the Chinese diction are shaped and shared during China’s crucial political transformation from the Qing Empire to the Republic of China. With selected examples, this paper emphasizes Lobschied’s contribution in sharing political knowledge through his dictionary.

German missionary Wilhelm Lobscheid (1822–1893) played an important role in English and Chinese translations. His English–Chinese dictionary (英华字典, 1866–1869) was the first comprehensive English–Chinese dictionary published in Hong Kong, which has provided both Cantonese and Mandarin pronunciations. His dictionary was also the main reference of the later Chinese–English dictionaries (by Inoue, 1884; Kingsell, 1899) – these dictionaries have founded the basis of political knowledge of many Chinese national revolutionists.

Hong Kong was an important crossroad between China and Europe during late nineteenth to early twentieth century; it was also an important meeting point for the anti-Qing revolutionists. This paper wishes to explore the significance of a German missionary in his effort of introducing European political knowledge to the Chinese-speaking world through a dictionary. Lobscheid’s dictionary may hence be regarded as an important source of modern political thoughts. By considering Lobsheid’s dictionary as one of the possible sources of such knowledge,
new political thoughts were shared among the Chinese readership, and consequently helped to develop political terms previously nonexistent in the Chinese diction. Through a selected examination of vocabulary translations and their possible origins, this thesis regards Lobscheid’s dictionary as an important bridge in the context of the political encounter between China and Europe.

1. Biography of Wilhelm Lobscheid

Wilhelm Lobscheid (罗存德, 1822–1893) was born in Gummersbach, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany. He joined the Rheinische Mission Gesellschaft (Rhenish Missionary Society, RMG) in 1844 and studied theology as well as medicine in the RMG Seminar. During his study, Lobscheid demonstrated great talent in learning foreign languages – namely Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. In 1847, Lobscheid received his doctorate degree and was appointed as a priest. Very soon, upon the request of Karl Friedrich August Gützlaff (郭实腊, 1803–1851), a German missionary in Hong Kong, Wilhelm Lobscheid was sent to reinforce the missionary work in the Far East (He, “A brief” 264).

Wilhelm Lobscheid arrived in Hong Kong on May 22, 1848, and like Gützlaff, Lobscheid was active in Hong Kong and in the Canton region, missionizing and at the same time providing medical care to the local residence. During his service in Canton, more than 20 people were baptized in 2 years. Although Lobscheid’s work was successful, his health worsened, and in 1851 he was sent back to Germany for treatment (He, “A brief” 265).

After years of work in Hong Kong, Lobscheid developed a substantial connection with the English authorities. In 1581, Lobscheid resigned from RMG, and joined the British Medical Mission the same year. He then headed to London to prepare his next mission in China. One year later, Lobscheid was appointed as the inspector of the British Government School in Hong Kong. At the same time, he was appointed as the Medical Agent of the Chinese Evangelization Society (CES), and he was the first missionary to be sent to China by the CES (He, “A brief” 266).

In 1853, Lobscheid returned to Hong Kong and continued his medical as well as missionary works. He also began editing Karl Gützlaff’s translation of the Old Testament and the New Testament; Gützlaff passed away in 1851. It is worth mentioning the importance of Gützlaff’s work in translation, for he was the first to translate “Christian” into “基督徒,” a term now commonly accepted in the Chinese glossary (He, “A brief” 266).

With his fluency in the Chinese language and some knowledge of Japanese, Lobscheid served as an interpreter on USS Powhattan’s voyage to Japan in 1855 on a mission to ratify an American–Japanese commercial treaty. Before the outbreak of the second Opium War, Lobscheid joined the London Missionary Society and shortly after returning to Canton, he was then forced to flee from the angry Chinese after the British fleet attacked Canton. After the war, the missionaries were able to return again, and in 1857, Lobscheid reported 54 new converts in Canton Ho-an and Palowai regions (Mason).
Lobscheid had a good personal friendship with George Smith, the Bishop of Victoria (Hong Kong), who recommended him to the CES. The Bishop described him as “high character and efficiency.” However, after unjust criticism from the CES, Lobscheid was forced to resign in 1857 (Mason). He then returned to Hong Kong and continued his work as Government School Supervisor. In 1859, he published a paper titled “A few notices on the extent of Chinese education and the government schools of Hong Kong; with remarks on the history and religious notions of the inhabitants of this island.” In his book, Lobscheid provided critical insights to the education system in Hong Kong (He, “Lobscheid” 133–138). In 1870, Lobscheid moved to San Francisco, where he pastored in St. Mark’s Lutheran Church. He then settled in Youngstown, Ohio, and continued his work as a medical doctor and pastor in the 1880s until his death in 1893 (Mason).

2. Chinese–English dictionaries in the nineteenth-century China

The first Chinese–English dictionary (华英字典) was finalized by Scottish missionary Robert Morrison (马礼逊, 1782–1834) in 1823. Due to the very limited number of copies, US missionary Samuel Wells Williams (卫三畏, 1812–1884) produced another glossary – English and Chinese vocabulary (英华韵府历阶) in 1844. Almost at the same time, British missionary Walter Henry Medhurst (麦都思, 1796–1857) edited a two-volume Lobscheid’s dictionary, (英华字典) during 1847–1848.

Lobscheid’s Dictionary, commissioned by the German Akademie der Wissenschaft (Xiong 47), bears the author’s vision in modernizing the bilingual glossaries. Lobscheid wrote, in his introduction to Part I of the four volumes:

It needs but to be pointed out that the progress above partially described has given rise to the necessity of the introduction of a great number of words in the Chinese vocabulary, previously unknown to this people, and as in this age of advancement it is impossible to predict where the forward movement in China may end the author has deemed it imperative to translate and explain in this work, all those scientific words which have been added to the English language during the present century for the purpose of denoting terms for those discoveries in the arts and sciences in which the present age has been so prolific.

At the same time, the author takes this opportunity of recording the great assistance which he has derived from the Works of his predecessors. These he has perused and compared with great care – selecting from all, such information as after mature deliberation and discussion was deemed the most correct, succinct, and intelligible.

The rapid extension of foreign intercourse with China has resulted in the establishment of native institutions for the acquisition of the English language and of foreign sciences. Hence English scientific works will be read, and each year will bring new subjects before the native student for which he will require the equivalent terms in his own language. Seeing then that the last few years have been so prolific in the introduction of new branches of knowledge and industry, to denote which the Chinese had not even a name, we should be prepared for great and sudden changes, and any work having for its Object the diffusion of general knowledge, and the
promotion of civilization, will certainly be appreciated, notwithstanding the defects which so great an undertaking as this must necessarily contain. (Lobscheid 1–2)

Lobscheid’s English–Chinese dictionary was one of the most comprehensive versions of its kind in the nineteenth century. With great perseverance and diligence, some four volumes of lexicons were revised during the years 1866–1869. Lobscheid’s dictionary collected some fifty-thousand English terms and their equivalent translations in six hundred thousand Chinese characters. Unfortunately, due to Lobscheid’s uneasy relationship with the CSE, Lobscheid was forced to leave China before seeing his dictionary published. To add insult to injury, his introduction to the last three volumes were erased upon the order of William Frederick Mayers (1831–1878), the British Ambassador to China, mainly due to his personal bias to Lobscheid’s German origin.1

3. Translating democracy

In order to bring Lobscheid’s dictionary to the discourse of the Chinese nationalist revolution, Lobscheid’s dictionary, despite its limited circulation in China, was reedited and published in Japan by Kingsell (1899). Fung Kingsell was a businessman, owner of the print and stationary shop Kingsell & Co. in Yamashitacho, Yokohoma. While the ground floor of the shop was used for business, the second floor of the shop was in fact the regional office of the Revive China Society (兴中会, RCS), the first revolutionists’ organization established against the Qing regime. Fung himself was the head of the Yokohoma office, and was a key supporter of Sun Yat-sen (孙中山, 1866–1925). The RCS was later merged with the Revive the Light Society and the China Revival Society, renamed as the Chinese United League—the predecessor of the Chinese Nationalist Party (中国国民党).

Due to the popular demands of Lobscheid’s and Inoue’s Chinese–English dictionaries in Japan, Fung signed a contract with a Japanese publisher to reedit and publish a new edition. For this enormous task, Fung asked his revolutionist friend, Chan Siu-bak (陈少白) for help. Chan, born in a Chinese Christian family, studied with Sun in the Hong Kong College of Medicine for Chinese, and he also worked with US missionary Roswell H. Graves (纪好弼, 1833–1913); Chan worked as an English teacher in a Baptist school, and helped Graves with translation—an experience that has proven to be crucial to Chan’s editing of Fung Kingsell’s dictionary. As a close friend of Sun, Chan was one of the Four Bandits (四大寇). After the failed Guangzhou Uprising in 1895 (乙未广州之役), Chan fled to Yokohama from Hong Kong. In 1897, Sun arrived in Yokohama from London, and Chan then introduced pro-Revolutionist Japanese allies such as Tōten Miyazaki (宫崎滔天, 1871–1922) and Tsuyoshi Inukai (犬养毅, 1855–1932) to Sun. Meanwhile, Chan stayed with Fung for editing the new dictionary, and in 1899, it was published (Lee 86).

Fung’s (F. Kingsell) dictionary was largely based on Lobscheid’s and Inoue’s Chinese–English dictionaries. The dictionaries are first-hand evidence of
transferring vocabularies concerning European political thoughts to China during late-Qing time. The later reeditions also reflected the importance of Lobscheid’s dictionary in influencing the Chinese understanding of “western” political realms, where Lobscheid’s text was largely recited. This article studies several examples of representative political terms introduced to the Chinese diction in the late nineteenth century, and observes how their translations and definitions have evolved throughout time. By comparing Lobscheid’s dictionary with its counterparts, the table below offers some selected cases of political terms referenced with equivalent translations in other English-Chinese dictionaries of the nineteenth century:

(1) The word “Democracy”

| Dictionary | Page | Citizen |
|------------|------|---------|
| Morrison (1822) | – | – |
| Medhurst (1847–48) | 236 | 1 邑人、城里住民 |
| | | 2 A freeman 自由之人 |
| Lobschied (1866–69) | 391 | 1 A native of a city 邑人 |
| | | 2 An inhabitant who enjoys the freedom and privileges of the city in which he resides 赤子、入籍客、自由之人 |
| | | 3 A man of trade 商人 |
| | | 4 An inhabitant 居民 |
| | | 5 A native 土人、本处人 |
| | | 6 A fellow citizen 同邑者 |
| Inoue (1884) | 250 | 1 An inhabitant who enjoys the freedom and privileges of the city in which he resides 邑人、赤子、入籍客 |
| | | 2 A man of trade 自由之人 |
| | | 3 An inhabitant 商人 |
| | | 4 A native 居民、土人 |
| | | 5 A fellow Citizen 本处人 |
| Kingsell (1899) | 216 | 1 A native of a city 邑人 |
| | | 2 An inhabitant who enjoys the freedom and privileges of the city in which he resides 入籍客、自由之人 |
| | | 3 A man of trade 商人 |
| | | 4 An inhabitant 居民 |
| | | 5 A native 土人 |
| | | 6 A fellow Citizen 同邑者 |

Lobscheid translates “People’s Politics” (民政, Government by the people), or “Managed by the People” (众人管辖) (Lobschied 589), which compared to Morrison’s “Democracy is improper; since it is improper to be without a leader (既不可无人统率亦不可多人乱管)” (Morrison 113), Lobscheid’s definition gives a positive recognition to the “People’s governance.” This translation is further elaborated in F. Kingsell’s version with the additional explanation: “A form of government established by promoting People’s own governance” (Lobscheid 910); in short, the modern Chinese term “民主.” Lobscheid also attempts to separate the term “Democracy” from “Government” – “民政” refers also to “a democratic Government” (Lobscheid 910).
A crucial part of exercising Democracy is Election. Lobscheid was the first to give a detailed explanation of the rather new political concept to China in the nineteenth century. Lobscheid defines as follows: “the act of choosing (选者、选择者、挑选者)” and “free will (自主).” In the subentry “the election of members of the parliament (选民委官者),” one observes that the term “members of the parliament” was translated into “民委官,” which literally means “Publicly appointed Officials.”

(3) The word “Impeachment”

Lobscheid’s translation reflects the difference in judicial processes between China and Europe. Since the conventional judicial process in China requires the plaintiff to personally file a case directly to the court, in Chinese – “告状”; in court, the judge and the law enforcement are usually conducted by appointed officials; “告状” in this sense is not entirely equivalent to “Impeachment.” Yet, one cannot simply transfer the European judicial tradition into the Chinese context. To give a detailed description, in an effort to identify the nature of “Impeachment,” Lobscheid created a compound word “公告” – “public” “prosecution” – “Impeachment” as a legal right to ordinary people.
Later dictionaries include “参本” in the translation, referring to the judicial process against suspected officials or politicians in China.

(4) The word “Liberty”

| Dictionary     | Page | Liberty                                           |
|----------------|------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Morrison (1822)| 254  | 1 Liberty not under the control of any one 自主之理 |
|                |      | 2 Liberty or a mild government that gives repose to the people 行宽政乃以民主安 |
| Medhurst (1847–48)| 788 | 1 自主                                             |
|                |      | 2 The principles of Liberty 自主之理               |
|                |      | 3 To be left to one’s own will 任意擅专、自由得意、由得自己、自主之事 |
| Lobschied (1866–69)| 1107–1108 | 1 Freedom from restraint 自主、自由、治己之权、自操之权、自主之理 |
|                |      | 2 Natural Liberty 任从心意、任从性而行          |
|                |      | 3 Civil Liberty 法中任行                           |
|                |      | 4 Political Liberty 国治己之权                      |
|                |      | 5 Religious Liberty 任意择教、从某教在人            |
|                |      | 6 To be at Liberty 任其意、听其便、自把自为、自己头自己口挨、听听自由、由得自己、为自主、无阻无碍 |
|                |      | 7 Not at Liberty 不能任意                             |
|                |      | 8 To leave one to one’s self 任纵人、听听自己主意、任意擅专 |
|                |      | 9 To set at Liberty 释放                             |
|                |      | 10 Liberty of will 自主之权、自操之权               |
|                |      | 11 Liberty of rejecting and choosing 弃择之权         |
|                |      | 12 Liberty of the press 任意写印                     |
|                |      | 13 To grant liberties 赐权、赐自主                   |
| Inoue (1884)   | 677  | 1 Freedom from restraint 自主、自由、治己之权、自操之权、自主之理、无别人拘束 |
|                |      | 2 Natural Liberty 任从心意、任从性而行              |
|                |      | 3 Civil Liberty 法中任行                             |
|                |      | 4 Political Liberty 国治己之权                        |
|                |      | 5 Religious Liberty 任意择教、从某教在人              |
|                |      | 6 To be at Liberty 任其意、听其便、自把自为、自己头自己、听听自由、由得自己、为自主、无阻无碍 |
|                |      | 7 Not at Liberty 不能任意                             |
|                |      | 8 To leave one to one’s self 任纵人、听听自己主意、任意擅专 |
|                |      | 9 To set at Liberty 释放                              |
|                |      | 10 Liberty of will 自主之权、自操之权                 |
|                |      | 11 Liberty of rejecting and choosing 弃择之权          |
|                |      | 12 Liberty of the press 任意写印                      |
|                |      | 13 To grant liberties 赐权、赐自主                     |
| Kingssell (1899)| 588 | 1 Freedom from restraint 自主、自由、治己之权、自操之权、无别人拘束 |
|                |      | 2 Natural Liberty 任从心意、任从性而行              |
|                |      | 3 Civil Liberty 法中任行                              |
|                |      | 4 Political Liberty 政治之权                          |
|                |      | 5 Religious Liberty 任意择教、自主人                   |
|                |      | 6 To be at Liberty 任其意、听其便、随他自主          |
|                |      | 7 Not at Liberty 不能任意                              |
|                |      | 8 To leave one to one’s self 听听自己主意、听意擅专    |
|                |      | 9 To set at Liberty 释放                               |
|                |      | 10 Liberty of will 自主之权、自操之权                 |
|                |      | 11 Liberty of rejecting and choosing 弃择之权          |
|                |      | 12 Liberty of the press 任意写印                      |
|                |      | 13 To grant liberties 赐权、赐自主                     |

Lobscheid carefully denotes the term. Notable are his translations of “civil Liberty (法中任行)” and “Liberty of will (自主之权、自操之权)” (Lobscheid 1107–1108). The previous definition gives a clear account of how “Liberty” shall be restrained, which is, within the law – “法中.” The Chinese translation of “Liberty of will” gives a clear
explanation that “Liberty” is a right – “权,” and “will” means “self-control” (自主, 自操). Both translations are inherited in F. Kingsell’s verion (588).

(5) The word “Parliament”

| Dictionary    | Page | Parliament                  |
|---------------|------|-----------------------------|
| Morrison (1822) | –    | –                           |
| Medhurst (1847–48) | 926  | 商量国事大会                 |
| Lobschied (1866–69) | 1281 | 议士会、民委员会、国大公会 |
| Inoue (1884)   | 781  | 议士会、民委员会、国大公会、议事亭、商量国事之大会 |
| Kingsell (1899) | 681  | 议士会、民委员会、国大公会、议事亭、商量国事之大会 |

Another new term to the nineteenth-century China that Lobscheid defines is given as follows: “议士会” (Assembly of the Representatives) “民委员会” (People’s Committee), “议士会、民委员会、国大公会” (Grand National Assembly). Similar to Parliament, the term “Panhelenium” was translated as the “Greek National Assembly” (希腊国民会) – where “国民” – equivalent “citizen” in modern Chinese, was seen in a Chinese bilingual dictionary for the first time.

F. Kingsell’s translation of ‘Parliament’ is identical to Lobscheid’s, with a bit more elaboration. Worth noticing is that under “Election” in F. Kingsell’s dictionary, “the Election of members of the parliament (选择议会人员)” (F. Kingsell 380), where “Parliament” was translated as “议会,” a term commonly used nowadays in the Chinese-speaking world, so are the “members of the parliament” as “议会人员,” very similar to the modern Chinese equivalent term “议员.”

(6) The word “Senate”

| Dictionary    | Page | Senate                  |
|---------------|------|-------------------------|
| Morrison (1822) | –    | –                       |
| Medhurst (1847–48) | 1145 | 部院齐集、诸官会议 |
| Lobschied (1866–69) | 1571 | 民委员会总会、花旗国法院、花旗议士会会、花旗国征法会 |
| Inoue (1884)   | 953  | The Senate of the United States民委员会总会、花旗国法院、花旗议士会、花旗国征法会 |
| Kingsell (1899) | 836  | The Senate of the United States民委员会总会、美国法院、美国下议院、花旗国征法会 |

While Lobschied’s translation focuses mainly on the Senate of the United States, he also addresses the difference between “Parliament” and “Senate” – “民委员会” and “民委员总会.” However, the translation became indistinct in Fung’s version, where “The Senate of the United States” also refers to “美国法院” (United States Court) and “美国下议院” (United States Congress).
The concept of ‘voting’ was not new to Chinese society, but it was scarcely seen as a defining decision-making means in real politics before the Republican Period. Again, Lobscheid was the first to acknowledge the decision-making nature of voting in a bilingual dictionary: “to put to the Vote (投名决事),” or “vote to decide.” Inoue and Fung later endorsed Lobscheid’s definition (Inoue 1167; Fung 1027).

4. From Lobscheid to the three principles of the people

To draw attention from Lobscheid’s dictionary to the Chinese nationalist revolution, the nationalists’ core political philosophy is the Three Principles of the People (三民主义), the Three Principles refer to “Minzu” (民族), “Minquan” (民权), and “Minsheng” (民生). As an attempt to discover the corresponding terms in Lobscheid’s (and in F. Kingsell’s) dictionary, scattered pieces of information are found.

The term of “民族,” broadly translated as “nation” or “nationalism,” could also refer to “Tribe,” or “Ethnicity” in Chinese. Despite the ambiguity of its meaning, it was not strange to the Chinese readers. The first known use of this term could date back to 537 AD, in Xiao Zixian’s (萧子显, 489–537) Book of Qi (南齐书), where the term refers to
the Chinese ethnicity. In Sun’s proposed Three Principles, Sun was not consistent with his idea of “Minzu” all the way – from discontent towards the Manchurian Qing regime during his younger times, to the anti-Manchurian manifesto during his revolutionary campaign, after the revolution, the idea of “Minzu” was changed to call for a national unity – Five Races Under One Union (五族共和), and later on, Sun proposed the First United Front (联俄容共) policy; finally, Sun’s “Minzu” embraces a Chinese Nation (中华民族) (Chu 325–356).

Although no “民族” is found in Lobscheid’s dictionary, Lobscheid did try to bring the two concepts of “民” and “国”, namely the “People” and “the Country”, together in his translation of “Nation”: “民、国、国、邦、邦国; all Nations 万民、万邦、万国” (Lobscheid 1211), where in previous translations “Nation” refers only to the geographical space of a country. Another example is seen in Lobscheid’s version, under “Bow,” where in “to bow the nation (克民、克服人民)” (Lobscheid 232–233), here I note that the term “Nation” is translated also as “People,” an unprecedented translation in the nineteenth-century Chinese–English dictionaries.

“民权” is another modern term. Again, Lobscheid was the first to translate “Right” into the modern Chinese term “权,” where “the Right of citizens” was translated into “百姓眾民、民之权” (Lobscheid 1499), giving “Right” to the “People”; this corresponds to the national revolutionists’ concept of “民权” – equivalent to the present-day understanding of “Civil Right.”

The term “民生” is not unfamiliar in the Chinese glossaries either. Yuen (元) literati Xu Heng (许衡, 1209–1281) wrote the following: “Food and clothing to enrich people’s livelihood; civility to cultivate their hearts” (衣食以厚民生，礼义以养其心). Lobscheid is again the first to adopt “民生” in a bilingual dictionary, where under the entry “Benefit,” “to Benefit the people,” he translates: “泽润生民、益于民生 (Lobscheid 170),” “People” refers also to the “People’s Livelihood.”

On a side note, the term “Three Principles of the People” was first stipulated by Feng Zi-you (冯自由, 1882–1958) (Chow 192), son of F. Kingsell. Despite the exciting discoveries discussed in this paper, I have no intension to arbitrarily conclude that Lobscheid’s dictionary was the sole source of transmitting European political knowledge to China. Yet, a dictionary does function as a bridge between different languages and cultures, and Lobscheid’s dictionary certainly has its historical significance in the dawn of the Chinese nationalist revolution. Instead of a conclusion, I wish to invite further research and discussion to this “bridge” between China and Europe – a Chinese–English dictionary developed by a German missionary and later published in Hong Kong, which demonstrates substantial importance to the political modernization of China during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Notes

1. For a detailed discussion of Lobscheid and Meyer’s conflict, see Xiong, Ying (熊英). On W. Lobscheid and his English and Chinese dictionary (羅存德及其《英華字典》研究). PhD diss., Beijing Foreign Studies University, 2014, pp. 52–55.

2. The Four Bandits (四大寇) are Sun Yat-sen (孫中山, 1866–1925), Chan Siu-bak (陳少白, 1869–1934), Yau Lit (尢列, 1866–1936), and Yeung Hok-ling (楊鶴齡, 1868–1934). They are regarded as some earliest representatives of the anti-Qing nationalists.
3. My translation.
4. My translation.
5. My translation.
6. My translation.
7. My translation.
8. My translation.
9. My translation.
10. My translation.
11. My translation.
12. My translation.
13. Original text: “今諸華士女，民族弗革，而露首偏踞，濫用夷禮，雲於翦落之徒，全是胡人，國有舊風，法不可變。” from Chapter 54.
14. The contemporary understanding of nation-state is not observed in China until early twentieth century. For a detailed discussion, see Wang, Hui.
15. My translation.
16. My translation.
17. My translation.

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