A Note on a 16th Century Manuscript of the "Chinese Alphabet"[*]

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Introduction

History provides numerous instances of the Chinese language being rendered in scripts other than Chinese characters. In the later period, the most important was the Roman script, which was introduced to China by Europeans in the 16th century. The Jesuit method of transcribing Chinese into Roman script was refined gradually by Michele Ruggieri (1543-1607), Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), and others, and took final shape in *Xiru ermuzi* (1626), attributed to Nicolas Trigault (1577-1628)[1]. After that, this system alone was generally used by Catholic missionaries of all orders, with minor differences reflecting national characteristics (the use of '*-m*' in the manner of Portuguese or '*-ng*' in Spanish to transcribe the Chinese final nasal consonant [-ŋ], for example).

There are, however, sporadic samples of romanized Chinese materials that predate the standardization of *Xiru ermuzi*. As any document — although apparently of small significance — constitutes a source for linguistic research, it could be worthwhile to collect these earlier examples of transcription. In fact, in addition to their intrinsic value, they could also serve as data for comparison, in order to elucidate the phonological background of *Xiru ermuzi* in a historical perspective.

This paper will consider the text of a "Chinese alphabet" in the collection of the British Library (BL), first made public by Donald Lach (Plate 1)[2]. The text is found in fol. 279 of one of the Lansdowne Manuscripts (Lansdowne MS. 720), a volume entitled *Voyage d'Italie*, which, according to the catalogue, "contains an account of the travels in Italy of some very learned and intelligent Frenchmen between 1574 and 1578."[3]

"Chinese Alphabet"

As can be seen in Plate 1, the following explanation appears above the text itself:

Alphabetum Idiomatis de Cina Ex bibliotheca Vaticana Romae. In tertia aula conclusa. Ex

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[*]An earlier Japanese version of this study was published in Takata Tokio (ed.) Minshin jidai no on'ingaku , 2001, pp.123-136, as "*Seiju jimokushi* izen, Chūgoku no arufabetto" — .

[1]Among the many studies on *Xiru ermuzi* and related topics, I will refer here only to Luo Changpei , "Yesuhuishi zai yinyunxueshang de gongxian" , 1930.

[2]Donald Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe*, Vol.II: A Century of Wonder, Book 3,1977, p.511ff., illustration 97.

[3]*A Catalogue of the Lansdowne Manuscript in the British Museum*, 1819, p.163. In note 92, p.512, of his book Lach gives pp.275-276 instead of fol.279. As I could not have access to the original ms., it is impossible to ascertain which reference is accurate. Here I follow the *Catalogue*.

schedula manu Marcelli Papae scripta, ut aiunt. Sunt et illic libri hoc idiomate perscripti et manuscripti plures.

Marcellus II, who reigned as Pope for less than one month (from April 9th, 1555 until only May 1st of that year), is reputed to have made a copy of this text. Known as Cardinal Marcello Cervini before his election to the papacy, Marcellus was already a famous figure in intellectual circles at the time of his ascension. He became librarian at the Vatican Library in 1548, and had the distinguished scholar Ferdinando Ruano, among others, serving under him in the monumental task of cataloging the library's Latin manuscripts. Lach imagines that many examples of rare Asian script were available to him and that this text of the "Chinese alphabet" was in his hands before he was elected Pope in 1555[4].

Lach does not seem to have been able to make sense of what the text really is, as he says that the twenty-five characters in the "alphabet" make no literary sense and hence had not come from some readily available Chinese source. However, even a rudimentary examination reveals that these are the so-called *Shangdaren*, which was employed widely in pre-modern China as a manual for children to learn characters[5]. More precisely, the *Shangdaren* is a model text for *miaohong* the way in which children traced the characters in red ink and studied the correct strokes of the writing brush.

The question facing researchers is when and by which route this "Chinese alphabet" was brought to Rome. The oldest example of Chinese characters printed in Europe is a letter of October 29th, 1557, written by Gaspar Vilela (1526-1572), and recorded in *Cartas qve os Padres e Irmãos da Companhia de Iesus, que andão nos Reynos do Iapão escreuerão aos da mesma Companhia da India e Europa, desdo anno de 1549 até o de 66*, published 1570 in Coimbra. There a patent letter given by the daimyō Ōuchi Yoshinaga to the first Catholic church, Daidōji, in Yamaguchi ken, Yoshiki gun, Suō Province[6] is cited. If, therefore, as Lach supposes, the text of the "Chinese alphabet" had reached Cardinal Cervini before 1555, it would be the oldest sample of the Chinese script transmitted to Europe (although in manuscript — and not printed — form).

Lach lists several possibilities as to the intermediaries through whom Cervini or Ruano could have obtained the text: (1) between 1548 and 1555 Cervini received in Rome Syrian and Ethiopian prelates, who might have brought the Chinese material to him; (2) both Cervini and Ruano had friends in Iberia and in the Iberian community in Rome who might have forwarded the text; (3) it might have come through Paolo Giovio (1483-1552), to whom Joao de Barros sent "a book of the writing of the *chis*" (possibly Shiites or Chinese) while Giovio was working at the Vatican; (4) Ruano, working on the Chinese books the library already possessed, could have extracted from the Chinese writing what he thought were the root characters, copied them down, and added the romanization, perhaps with the help of a Portuguese; (5) most likely, the characters had been originally written by Bernard of Kagoshima, the young Japanese convert who visited Rome from early January to late October, 1555, i.e. during the election and brief pontificate of Marcellus II[7].

These conjectures lack strong foundations and are largely improbable. Only the case of Bernard of Kagoshima, which Lach considers to be the most likely, apparently deserves attention, because his stay in Rome coincides with the reign of Marcellus II. However, the very fact of the text's being the *Shangdaren* deeply undermines this possibility. There is little reason to assume that Bernard as a Japanese would have

[4]Lach, 1977, pp.512-2.

[5]In the context of a non-alphabetical writing system, the title "Chinese Alphabet" would texhnically be inapt as a description of the text. However, the term could be employed loosely to give a general sense of the function of this text in China.

[6]The original string of Chinese characters reads as follows: .

[7]Lach, 1997, pp.513-514.

turned to it instead of the *Iroha* when he was asked to write a sample of Japanese characters in a foreign country. Nobody has ever showed that the *Shangdaren* was used in 16th century Japan, and besides this the pronunciations of the Chinese characters that are given are not Japanese either.

The question remains, therefore: how did this text make its way to Rome? In the lack of direct evidence, it would not be unreasonable to suppose that it was carried back to Europe by a Spanish or Portuguese vessel, either commercial or official.

Having hoped for a propagation of Catholicism in the Chinese Empire, Francisco Xavier died on the island of Sancian off the coast of China on December 3, 1552, while Jesuits began to engage seriously in their activities in China only in the 1580's, when Ruggieri and Ricci were dispatched there. However, it is safe to assume that Portuguese seamen and merchants had come into contact with Chinese people in Malacca and along the Cantonese coast several decades earlier, after the conquest of Malacca by Affonso de Albuquerque in 1511 and the appearance of Fernão Peres de Andrade as the first ambassador of Portugal in the delta of Zhujiang in 1513-15. As will be discussed in greater detail in the following section, phonetic characteristics in the text reveal Cantonese elements in the pronunciation, and suggest the likelihood of a Portuguese intermediary rather than a Spanish one. Thus, the *Shangdaren* might well have been brought back to Lisbon by one of those earlier visitors and transferred to Rome from there.

The characteristics of the transcription

Next to each of the twenty-five Chinese characters that make up the text of the *Shangdaren* is a transcription in Roman letters. It may be assumed that this transcription remained faithful to the original, although the BL text was a copy made from the manuscript of Marcellus II, which had probably passed through the hands of other persons previously. Certain minor errors may have crept in, and in cases such as the use of *sin* for　, textitquin for　, and textitju for　, the confusion between the final *u* and *n* can be safely corrected. Also, the transcription *cam* for　could only have been caused by the omission of a *cedilha*.

The following table takes into account these corrections, for the sake of comparison also including the transcriptions in the *Xiru ermuzi* and the pronunciation of modern Cantonese [8].

"Chinese alphabet"	*Xiru ermuzi*	Cantonese
xam	xám, xàm	sœŋ
ta	tá, tái, t'ái etc.	tai
im	jîn	(j)iɐi
heu	k'iēu, k'iū	(j)iɐu
y	iě, iă	jyt
qui	kì, kí	kei
fa	hoá	fa
sam	sān	sam
zem	çi'ēn	ts'in
zi	ç'iě	ts'ɐt
xi	xě	sɐp

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[8]When in the *Xiru ermuzi* more than one pronunciation is given, the first one presents the most suitable from a semantic point of view. Modern Cantonese pronunciation folloow Zhan Bohui and Cheung Yat-shing, *A Study of Dialects in the Pearl River Delta*, Vol.1:"Comparative Morpheme-Syllabary", 1987.

su	sù, xí	si
ye	ùl	ji
siu	siào	siu
çam	sēm, sém, sím	sɐŋ
pa	pǎ	pat
quiu	kiēu, kièu	kɐu
zu	çù	tsi
qua	kiā, kiāi	kai
zo	çǒ, çú, chú	tsɔk
jn	jîn	(j)iɐn
co	k'ò	hɔ
chi	chī, chí	tsi
li	lì	lɐi
ey	iè, ì	(j)ia

An analysis of the table leads to meaningful conclusions regarding initials and finals in the transcriprion adopted.

Initials

(1) As we observe in the examples *xam* and *xi* , *x*- is used for the initial *sh*- of modern Peking dialect. These two characters are also transcribed with *x*- in the *Xiru ermuzi*. This is generally considered to reflect the Portuguese orthography of the time, and represents a sound close to [ʃ], or *sc(i)*- in Italian [9]

(2) The initial consonant of in Middle Chinese (hereafter cited as MC) was *k'-. Therefore, *k'iēu* (or *k'iū*) in the *Xiru ermuzi* shows a regular development, whereas a process of change of [k'-] into [h-] can be detected in Cantonese. Here some words with a labial medial even developed into [f-], as in the case of [fu][10]. Yet, for , modern Cantonese has an exceptional pronunciation [(j)iɐu], and, since the local rhyme-book *Fenyun cuoyao* [11] put it into the class of the 5th rhyme, it may then be assumed that such a pronunciation already existed during the Qianlong period. Further examination of other Yue dialects reveals that in Gɐmt'in (New Territories, Hong Kong), T'ɐumun , Sɐnwui , T'ɔisan , Hɔip'eng , (J)iɐnp'eng and Tongkun there is an initial that begins with [h-][12]. If the transcription of this text was based on some Yue dialect, this might have been one of those just cited. Worth noting is the fact that they are mostly concentrated in the coastal area which lies to the South of Macao.

(3) *c*- of *co* probably represents an aspirated [k'-]. As we have just seen, *k'- is in the process of changing into [h-] in Yue dialects. Since all of the Yue dialects as well as [hɔ] in modern Cantonese show a pronunciation with [textith-] for the character , we must conclude that this transcription in the "Chinese alphabet" reflects a Mandarin pronunciation instead.

(4) *fa* is treated differently in the *Xiru ermuzi*. The change of [h-] into [f-] occurs in almost all

[9]Matteo Ricci used the Italian *sc*-, in his manuscript *Portuguese-Chinese Dictionary* and the *Storia dell'introduzione del cristianesimo in Cina*, 1942-49. Later, when he punlished the *Xizi qiji* in 1605, he had already adopted the Portuguese system.

[10]Oi-kan Yue Hashimoto, *Phonology of Cantonese*, 1972, p.642.

[11]*Fenyun cuoyao* was compiled by Wen Qishan from Wuqi at a time predating Qianlong 47 (1782). Cf. Takata, "Kindai Etsugo no boin suii to hyōki" , 2000, p.753ff.

[12]Zhan Bohui and Cheung Yat-shing, *op.cit.*, p.166.

Yue dialects when the main vowel is a back vowel and is preceded by a labial medial. Therefore, this transcription is most likely based on Cantonese.

(5) *im* , jn (=in) and ye : the initials of these three words all belong to the category of *ńź-* ( ). The first two are homophonous, and the *Xiru ermuzi* renders them as *jîn*. In this case, *j-* is considered to represent [ʒ]. However, this is never the case with *j-* in the "Chinese Alphabet", where it should represent a syllable beginning with a vowel or a semivowel. In the orthography of 16th century Portuguese, *j* and *y* were used as an equivalent of the vowel *i*: *jn* was then the same as *in*[13]. These three transcriptions can also be better explained with Cantonese than with Mandarin. The character , which also belongs to the category of *ńź-* initials, does not show a retroflexed form *ùl* as in the *Xiru ermuzi*.

(6) *çam* , originally written *cam*, must represent the sound [*s-*]. Portuguese *ç-*, together with the corresponding voiced *z-*, seems to have lost its explosive element and became a fricative in the 16th century[14]. This made possible a transcription such as the one that appears here. has an initial consonant which comes from MC *ṣ, but it is difficult to tell whether this transcription was adopted to mark a difference with the sound of and (both with *textits- in MC, and rendered with *s-* in the "Chinese Alphabet"). The *Xiru ermuzi* uses *s-* for both initials without distinguishing between them.

(7) *zem* , *zu* and *zo* are all transcribed with *z-*. In MC had an initial *ts'-, whereas and had *ts-. There is, then, no distinction between aspirated and non-aspirated. We have noted the same about the transcription co , which shows no aspiration mark. Aspiration, a distinctive feature in Chinese, may have been difficult for Europeans to grasp. In *Xiru ermuzi*, words with aspiration are transcribed regularly with *ç-* instead of *z-*. As indicated above, the Portuguese *ç-* and *z-* had a tendency to become fricative, but, as far as we can see from these examples, the process seems not to have come to an end. Some affricate elements could probably still be detected[15].

Finals

(1) Generally speaking, European transcriptions of Chinese made little distinction among the final consonants. In this text, too, the three nasal finals -m, -n, -ŋ are all rendered by textit-m, as in *xam* , *im* , *sam* , *zem* , and *çam* [16]. This is a quite striking discrepancy with the *Xiru ermuzi*, which represents the Mandarin -n and -ŋ by *-n* and *-m* respectively. Another similar example of such a confusion is the transcription *tiem* for in the *Tractado* of the Portuguese Dominican friar Gaspar da Cruz[17]. Therefore, *sam* for cannot be taken as direct evidence that the transcription was based on a Cantonese dialect. The "Chinese Alphabet" does not sufficiently disinguish among nasal finals. However, the use of textit-m to transcribe [-ŋ] follows the typical Portuguese method. Later, when the system of *Xiru ermuzi* was widely adopted by European scholars, this *-m* often became a matter of discussion[18].

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[13]Dulce de Faria Paiva, *História da Lingua portuguesa, II. século XVe meados do século XVI*, 1988, p.38.

[14]Paul Teyssier, *Histoire de la langue portuguaise*, 1980, p.60ff.

[15]As the *Xiru ermuzi* was published in 1626, even though almost the same system could have already been used in the *Xizi qiji*, this cannot date back earlier than the beginning of the 17th century. For this reason, the use of *ç-* for Chinese [ts] can perhaps be interpreted as a kind of historical transcription.

[16]*jn (=in)* would be the only exception.

[17]Gaspar da Cruz, *Tractado em que se cõmtam muito por estêco as cousas da China*, Evora, 1569/70, p.162 (reference is made to the English translation by C.R.Boxer in his *South China in the Sixteenth Century*, 1953).

[18]For example, the following passage from an annotation added to the Chinese-Latin Dictionary in the British Library may be cited: "Comme il y a 2 sortes de *an* qui terminent les mots chinois, celui qui se prononce, comme l'on prononce en français *anne*, s'écrit *an*; et l'on écrit *ang* avec un *g* au bout, quand il faut prononcer comme en français on prononce l'*an* (annus), lent, dormant &c., ainsi prononcez *san* comme *sanne* ou *sann*; et quand vous verrez *sang*, dites *san* sans faire sonner l'*n*, et poit du tout le *g*. Ce *g* n'est placé là, que pour servir d'avis de prononcer comme je viens de dire. Ceux des autres, qui écrivent la prononciation chinoise selon la stricte manière portugaise car c'est aux espagnols qu'on attribue d'avoir ajouté le *g* au bout) écrivent *sam*, *xam*, *cam* &c., ce que je dit ici de *an* & *ang*. Cela revient au même: c'est la même manière de prononcer, tout dépend de s'éntendre" ("Annotationes quaedam gallicae circa usum dictionarii hujusce Duplicis, id est Sinico-latini, & mere Sinici", ms. Add.23620, p.978ff.

(2) Consonant endings in entering tones are not represented in the "Chinese Alphabet". As is well known, preservation of the *-p, -t, -k* endings constitutes a distinctive feature of the Yue dialects, but no trace of their existence can be detected here. All the five examples found end with a vowel: *y*   , *zi*   , *xi*   , *pa*   and *zo*   . Moreover, the vowels in the first three do not agree with most modern Cantonese forms[19], although there are in fact also dialects which pronounce   as [jit] instead of [jyt][20]. As for   and   , again it would not be entirely impossible to consider their transcriptions as based on a Yue dialect, provided that we suppose the change of *-ip* (*t, k*) into *-iɐp* (*t, k*), a feature of modern Cantonese, as not to have yet taken place at the time of the text's compilation[21]. Most likely, the hardly distinguishable ending sounds of the entering tone were neglected in European transcriptions.

(3) The vowel of the *ciyin*   category, which the *Xiru ermuzi* renders with u̇, is considered to represent an apical sound [ɿ]. Although *su*   and *zu*   are transcribed in the "Chinese Alphabet" without a dot, they might represent the same sound. To the category of *ciyin* belong MC *kaikou*   sounds of the rhyme category *zhishe*   with the initial groups *jing*   (*ts, *ts'-, *dz-, *s-, *z-) and *zhuang*   (*tʂ-, *tʂ'-, *dʐ-, *ʂ-). As these sounds also form the independent 16th rime   in the *Fenyun cuoyao*, the transcriptions may be based on Cantonese as well[22].

(4) Li   corresponds to *lì* of the *Xiru ermuzi*, while the sound in Yue dialects is [lɐi]. Although examples in the *xie*   rhyme category read with a vowel [-i] are not unknown, it would be safer to regard this transcription as Mandarin rather than Cantonese.

(5) The transcription *xam*   shows a closer correspondance with Mandarin, because it is [sœŋ] in modern Cantonese. In some dialects, however, there are also examples of a prononciation [siaŋ][23].

(6) The transcription *siu*   is quite different from *siào* of the *Xiru ermuzi*, being extremely close to the Cantonese form instead.

(7) *Qua*   perhaps can be corrected into *quia*. In this case, the transcription would be close to Mandarin *kiā* (as in the *Xiru ermuzi*). In the Yue dialects the sound is something like *kai*, preserving the final *-i*[24]. Therefore, if we accept this as a transcription from a Yue form, we should assume that the final was not transcribed. It is difficult to reach a definitive conclusion on what of these two hypotheses is more likely.

These brief considerations on the phonetic characteristics of the text leave us with the impression of a heavy influence from Yue dialects, although some transcriptions may be more easily explained with Mandarin forms. The transcription itself was certainly based on the Portuguese usage. Then, we can assume a scenario in which the Portuguese obtained the original of the "Chinese Alphabet" on the Cantonese coast in the middle of the 16th century, the pronunciation of each character being added there. The Cantonese source, however, must not have been completely familiar with Mandarin Chinese, and that is why Cantonese pronunciations of the characters appear at many points.

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[19]Modern Cantonese: [jyt],   [ts'ɐt],   [sɐt].

[20]Cf. Zhan Bohui and Cheung Yat-shing, *op.cit.*, p.262.

[21]As a matter of fact, the forms [-ip][-it] appear in various dialects which are found commonly in the area around T'ɔisan and neighboring areas. Here too the character   of the MC initial *k'- has an initial consonant [h-].

[22]Although these characters are read with a vowel [i] in modern Cantonese, this is the result of a phonetic change which took place in the 19th century. Cf. Takata, "Kindai etsugo no boin suii to hyōki", 2000, pp.754-740.

[23]T'ɔisan   and Hɔip'eng   . Cf. Zhan Bohui and Cheung Yat-shing, *op.cit.*, p.300.

[24]According to Zhan Bohui and Cheung Yat-shing, *op.cit.*, p.63-68, only the Nanhai   dialect systematically omits the final *-i* in the case of characters with unround vowels of the second degree in the *xie* rhyme category (   ). There is no such a phenomenon in other Yue dialects.

Transmission of the text of the Shangdaren

As far as we know, the *Shangdaren* began to be used approximately from the early Song period. The oldest examples are a few manuscripts found at Dunhuang, but many citations from its text appear in later literature. From these, it is clear that a certain number of textual variations took place in the process of transmission.

The following four versions have been transmitted in Dunhuang manuscripts [25]:

P.3145 *verso*: a sequence of characters before miscellaneous texts copied on the back of a *she* association-tion circular (*shesi zhuantie*   ) dating at a year *wuzi*   (988?).

(?) (Plate 2)

P. 3797 verso: among the miscellaneous texts on the verso side of the "House Instructions of the Grandfather" (*Taigong jiajiao*   ) and the "Instructions of the Stern Father, Newly Collected" (*Xinji yanfujiao*   ). On the same side of the manuscript is visible a date: the year *bingzi*, 9th year of the Kaibao   period, Song dynasty.

[26]. (Plate 3)

P.tib.2219: in this fragment only the part [27]

. (Plate 4) P.3806 *verso*: copied on the *verso* of the "Collected Explanations to Commentaries on the *Chunqiu*" (*Chunqiu jingzhuan jijie*   ) by Du Yu   .

. (Plate 5)

At a first glance we notice here — without exception — *shangdafu*   in the place of *shangdaren*   . Another feature of the former three texts is their curious ending with the words *niu yang*   . By contrast, the last one (P.3806 *verso*) looks similar to later versions of the text, although the three characters   are missing, probably due to a copyist's mistake. Confusion can also be noted among the characters   *źi,   *^{n}dźy, and   *ṣi: their pronunciation sounded very similar in the Dunhuang dialect of the time, as it is clear from other examples in a number of manuscripts from the tenth century or the latter half of the ninth [28].

As a further sign of its popularity, the *Shangdaren* also frequently appears in texts of Chan Buddhism dating from the Song period. Among many possible examples, the following passage from the *Wudeng huiyuan*   quotes it in full:

Guo Xiangzheng   , with the zi of Gongfu   and the hao of Jingkong Layman

[25]heng Acai   "Dunhuang tongmeng duwu de fenlei yu zongshuo"   , 2001 (pp.194, 208) cites in addition P.4990, though in fact there is no trace of the text there.

[26]It is not clear whether the last character   has to be included in the text. Most probably it is superfluous.

[27]This is a fragmentary piece detached from P.2415. Cf. *Catalogue des manuscrits chinois de Touen-houang*, Vol.I, p.263, and Vol.VI, p.115.

[28]Cf. Takata Tokio, *Tonkō shiryō ni yoru Chūgokugo shi no kenkyū*   , 1988.

, in dislike of superficial glory sought to lead a purified life; therefore he decided to pay a visit to [Master] Baiyun. Once he had taken his seat in the hall, Baiyun said: "I composed a 'mountain eulogy' (*shansong*) in bed last night. I cordially thank the Great Master Gongfu. Now that a friend of twenty years' standing in Lushan came all his way to see me today, I have to ask you all to tell it clearly to everybody. This eulogy is not just for Great Master Gongfu. To monks still training can strip off the baby shirt pasted to their skin. You don't skip a word!" Then Baiyun said in one breath: *shang da ren qiu yi ji, hua san qian qi shi shi, er xiao sheng ba jiu zi, jia zuo ren ke zhi li ye*. That gentleman remained alltogether dumbfounded, but later, on hearing a little boy reciting the same phrase, all of a sudden he attained enlightenment[29].

Unlike the Dunhuang manuscripts, here the text begins with *Shangdaren*. This is identical with the version cited in *biji* literature from the Ming period, in works such as the *Shuidong riji*   by Ye Sheng   (1420-1474) and the *Weitan*   by Zhu Yunming   (1461-1527)[30]. The text seems then to have maintained relative stability in the later transmission through the Qing dynasty, as the following table of comparison shows:

P. 3145

P. 3797

P. tib. 2219

P. 3806

Chan texts

BL

Qing period

The manuscript in the British Library matches the later version exactly, apart from minor variants. Only the second three characters   appear as   in the text commonly used in China until recen times. This change apparently took place in the early Qing period[31], since compilations like the *Eryan*

[32] by Qian Dazhao   (1744-1813) and the Langji xutan   [33] by Liang Zhangju

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[29] *Wudeng huiyuan*, *juan* 19, p.1249. The same dialogue between *Baiyun* and *Zheng Gongfu* continued to be handed down in later literature. Cf. for example, the following passage from *Guzunsu yulu*   , *juan* 27:

Master Baiyun said: "When lately we received the visit of Great Master [Yang] Cigong, I told you you that already once in the hall, but now that [Guo] Gongfu has come, I cannot keepit secret and I will tell you all once again, because this phrase is quite excellent indeed". And as soon as he finished reciting the passage *shang da ren qiu yi ji, hua san qian qi shi shi, er xiao sheng ba jiu zi, jia zuo ren ke zhi li ye*, he left his seat. The diciples said to each other: "Even though this phrase seems easy, the inner meaning is profound. Without understanding the *Shangdaren*, how can one climb up to the gate of Vonfusius and become well versed in the Six Classics and other literature? Without knowledge of the *Shangdaren*, though successful in official life, how can one assist the state and retire with distinguished services? (p.527)

[30] We find the following passage in the "xueshu"   chapter of Guichaogao   (*juan* 14) by Xie Yingfang   (1296-1392), Yuan dynasty: "The majority of teachers begin with the twenty-five characters of *Shangdaren* when they instuct children to write, because their strokes are simple ad easy to practice." Though the full text is not cited, we can imagine that in the *incipit* the phrase *shangdaren* instead of *shangdafu* was already established.

[31] In 1725 the Emperor Yongzheng issued a decree prescribing that the character *qiu*   must be written as   to avoid the name of Confusius. The change from   to   in this text of the *Shangdaren* should have something to do with this decree.

[32] *Juan* 5, "shangdaren", 1959, Shangwu yinshuguan   , p.63.

[33] *Juan* 7, "shangdaren", p.367. *Shangdaren* is quoted here as a citation from *Weitan*, and so it is not impossible that the text of *Weitan* in the hand of Zhang Liangju read   too. Rather, it is more likely that it is a mistake made with reference to the text that was in daily use at that time.

(1775-1849) already contain   .

Conclusion

The "Chinese Alphabet" from the British Library whose transcriptions' phonetic characteristics I have analyzed, then, corresponds to the text of the *Shangdaren*, a sort of manual used by children to learn characters. It is a very interesting early sample of the Chinese script transmitted to Europe, as other early documents — brought to Europe by mere chance — contain only fragments. Unfortunately, this text remained in manuscript form and did not exert any influence on the development of knowledge about China. Nonetheless, it certainly deserves a place on the first page of the history of Sinological studies in Europe.

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Alphabetum Idiomatis

DE CINA

Ex bibliotheca Vaticana Romæ. In tertia aula
conclusa. Ex schedula manu Marcelli
Papæ scripta, ut aiunt. Sunt &
illic libri hoc idiomate perscri-
pti et manuscripti plures.

土	xam	儿	pa
大	tu	凡	quin
人	im	子	zu
쇼	heu	佳	cua
乙	y	作	zo
巳	qui	仁	ju
屮	fu	凸	Co
三	Sam	口	Chi
千	Zem	乳	li
壬	Zi	己	ey
十	xi		
土	Su		
丁	ye		
小	Sin		
主	Cam		

In eadem Bibliotheca videntur
Liber manuscriptus manu Henrici 8i
Anglorum Regis contra Lutherum ad
Leonem X. missus ab eodem. cum
disticho antecedente manu eius Regis
perscripto. Titulus libri hic est.
Assertio septem sacramentorū contra Lutherū
Anglorum Rex Henricus Leo decimæ mittit.
distichon: Hoc opus et fidei testem, et amicitiæ.

Plate 1: Lansdowne Ms. 720

Plate 2: P. 3145V°

維
樊宗開寶九己丙子歲三司十三日蜀子文書了
維王家宮興兵頭上一升
開寶九年丁丑年四月八日王會
長自毛畫託四冬閏大司本社
四三年甲季德臺敕子香
太石家老一草
上大夫位一巳化三千七十二林生大九
子午羊午口宅子

Plate 3: P. 3797V°

13

Plate 4: P. tib. 2219

遠郍道之財誡過度之循傲傳莫起於心境

倭勿宣於口尊必近羞慶義憚收晉肉

貧者莫踈他門雖官勿厚常思已過之非

每慮未来之各免已儉約為先憂眾辣

奉身自蕙食祿而禾切勤農力而赤

有

上火夫丘乙巳化三十七十士二小生八九子可

知其禮也

Plate 5: P. 3806V°