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The Mandate of Heaven: Strategy, Revolution, and the First European Translation of Sunzi's Art of War (1772), by Adam Parr. vii + 323 pages. Jesuit Studies: Modernity through the Prism of Jesuit History, 26. Leiden: Brill, 2019. ISBN 978-90-04-41449-5 (hardback).

One should never judge by appearances – this common wisdom certainly applies to this book which was authored by someone whose Wikipedia entry states that he is “a British businessman known for his work in various fields including Formula 1 and investment in NGOs”.¹ Further reading of that entry reveals that in 2016 he completed a PhD dissertation at University College London, comparing the translations of two men both completed around the middle of the 18th century, one focusing on the Roman military author Vegetius and the other on early Chinese military texts.² So having overcome my initial hesitations in ordering this book for a review, I was pleasantly surprised to find a highly interesting case study focusing on an old translation of early Chinese military texts made by the Jesuit Joseph-Marie Amiot (1718–1793), discussing the impact it had on the academic readership of his time and the possible intentions that may have motivated Amiot to make this translation and send it to France at a time soon after the Seven Years' War and not long before the French Revolution.

Since today translations into English and other languages of these early Chinese military texts like the *Sunzi*, the *Liutao*, etc. abound,³ one will perhaps at first be surprised why an author would devote a whole book to an old, in some ways quite outdated translation, including the translator's notes and comments, and be inclined to think that the author's intent might be to take a critical look from a modern perspective and come to the conclusion that what Amiot had translated in his time and under the given circumstances is of little use to modern readers. But as we already learn from Parr's introduction, his intention is not to evaluate the quality of Amiot's translation – his main interest in Amiot's work is entirely different. He writes,

1 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam_Parr.

2 Parr 2016.

3 See, for example, Griffith 1971, Sawyer 1993, Klöpsch 2009; Nylan 2020, to name only a few.

[...] For us the point is not whether his translation is good or bad, but to see his choices and to use them to understand how he saw the original, the context in which he was writing, and his objectives. As we shall see, the impact of his work went far beyond what he could have conceived, contributing to two of the most significant ideas of his time: strategy and revolution. (p. 4)

The words “strategy” and “revolution”, combined with “Mandate of Heaven” – a central term denoting the legitimacy of a ruler’s government throughout Chinese imperial history – are included in the title of Parr’s book and may thus be taken as key words that will serve to provide us a better understanding of Parr’s approach to the material.

To begin with, some explanations may be useful of the circumstances surrounding the arrival of Amiot’s translations in Paris and how these texts were received and discussed.

Starting in 1766, Amiot established regular communication with Henri-Leonard Bertin (1720–1792),⁴ the then minister and Secretary of State who had, with the French king’s permission, started a project of collaboration with the members of the French Jesuit mission in Beijing, asking them to send all sorts of materials on China to France which might be of interest to the French crown, to himself, and to French academia. One year prior, two young Chinese, Louis Ko (Gao Leisi 高類思, 1732–1790) and Étienne Yang (Yang Dewang 楊德望, 1733–1798?), who had originally come to France in order to be ordained as Catholic priests, went back to China after they had learned much about the level of development of arts and crafts in France, including copper printing, weaving and porcelain, and they traveled back with a whole list of questions primarily on the basis of Chinese economics, provided by Anne Robert Jacques Turgot (1727–1781), a disciple of the physiologist François Quesnay (1694–1774).⁵ By the time Ko and Yang arrived in France, the Jesuits had already been expelled there, and in 1773 Pope Clement XIV abolished the Jesuit order, which means that the capacity in which Amiot communicated with Bertin was from the very beginning that of a “correspondant of the French crown”, and not that of a Jesuit priest.

The first materials that Amiot had sent to Bertin, in 1767 and 1768, were translations of works by early Chinese military specialists. These works are listed by Parr as follows:

[F]our of the seven Chinese military classics [...] together with two sections devoted to military exercises and weapons, military dress, and musical instruments. The book is prefaced with a translation of the Ten Precepts of the Yongzheng emperor, father of the then reigning emperor, Qianlong. The four military classics are the *Sunzi bingfa* (Sunzi’s mili-

4 For an in-depth study on Henri-Leonard Bertin and his special involvement regarding knowledge received from his correspondants in China, see Finlay 2019.

5 Quesnay was the author of the influential work “Le Depotisme de la Chine” (1767), translated into English by Maverick 1767.

tary methods); the *Wuzi bingfa* (Wuzi's military methods); the *Sima fa* (The methods of Sima); and extracts from the *Liutao* (Six principles of strategy). (p. 43)

Regarding the nature of Amiot's translation, Parr emphasizes that Amiot himself had noted in the postscript of his first letter to Bertin from September 23, 1766, that his is a "free translation". (See p. 4, fn. 2a, and the original letter in app. 1, 223.) However, Parr writes, "The information we have on Amiot's sources is a bit contradictory". (pp. 44–47) He then quotes from Amiot's preface where Amiot writes that he had gained access to some military texts written in Manchu that were originally in the possession of some Manchu officials who had fallen into disgrace and whose books had been subsequently put up for sale. Someone who knew of Amiot's interest in military books bought them for him, and so he used them as a basis for learning the Manchu language together with a teacher. As Amiot informs his readers right on the title page of his translation of what he called "The Thirteen Chapters on Military Arts, a Work Composed in Chinese by Sunzi", his translation was based on a "Tartar-Manchu" edition ordered by the Kangxi Emperor in 1710. (p. 73) Parr notes that he tried to locate the Manchu manuscript used by Amiot as the basis of his translation in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, but without success. (p. 46) In spite of these difficulties in identifying Amiot's sources, Parr has tried to correlate Amiot's translation of the *Sunzi* with the Chinese original,⁶ although he admits it is "not a perfect science". (p. 59) Indeed, if one tries to read the original text of the *Sunzi* together with Amiot's translation, one gets the strong impression that either Amiot's translation is indeed very "free", probably even representing a mixture of the text with that of various different commentaries, or that he had used a commented edition that was very different from the text assigned to Amiot's translation in this book. (pp. 59ff)

Parr also informs us that Amiot's book was published twice during his lifetime. (p. 43) The close relation between the draft of Amiot's translation and the military world can immediately be perceived if one takes a look at the subtitles of these texts in the first edition, which was surprisingly not the one in volume 7 of the *Mémoires concernant l'histoire, les sciences, les arts, les mœurs, les usages, &c. des Chinois* [hereafter *MCC*], published in 1782,⁷ but that which was published ten years earlier, in 1772, at Didot, Paris. The title there is as follows: *Art militaire des Chinois, ou Recueil d'anciens Traités de la guerre, composés avant l'ère chrétienne, par différents généraux chinois* (Military Art of the Chinese, or Collection of Early

6 As Parr adds in a footnote (p. 59, n. 1), the correlation was conducted with the help of Dr. Liu Yangruxin from SOAS London, but he emphasizes that he "takes responsibility for the decisions."

7 In the same year, some supplementary notes by Amiot on the military arts of the Chinese were published in vol. 8 of the *MCC*.

Treatises on War, Written before the Christian era, by Various Chinese Generals). An additional subtitle reads: *Ouvrages sur lesquels les Aspirants aux Grades Militaires sont obligés de subir des examens* (Works on Which the Candidates for Military Ranks are Obligated to Undergo Examinations). The editor of both publications was Joseph de Guignes (1721–1800). The text of the first edition from 1772, including the table of contents, was reprinted identically in vol. 7 of the *MCC* in 1782, except for the addition of a preface in the latter, which was likewise composed by de Guignes and entitled “Remarques Critiques Sur L’Art Militaire des Chinois, tirées du Livre intitulé *Etat actuel de L’art et de la Science Militaire a la Chine*” (Critical Remarks on the Military Art of the Chinese, Drawn from the Book “Actual State of the Military Art and Science in China”). [*MCC*7, v–xii.] The title refers to a book coauthored by three high-ranking members of the French military, namely Saint-Maurice de Saint-Leu, François-Jacques de Chastenet de Puysegur (1656–1743), and Félix-François d’Espié (1708–1792). Prior to this, De Puysegur had himself written a book about the state of the military in France,⁸ and, as mentioned by Parr, his work was one of the military books in the Jesuit library in Beijing, and thus Amiot must have had it at his disposal. (p. 7)

But what exactly did these high-ranking generals find in Amiot’s translation that inspired them to include knowledge from the Chinese military tradition in a book of their own? This question must be answered by reading Parr’s book in detail, but it seems that the term “science *militaire*” (military art), which de Saint-Leu and de Puysegur use in the title of their book (as compared with the term “Art de la guerre” (art of war), as used by de Puysegur in his earlier book), suggests that Amiot’s translations of the Chinese military texts had inspired them to redefine the military profession from a broadened and perhaps more sophisticated point of view. Besides, as suggested by the choice of title, Parr regards the terms “strategy” and “Mandate of Heaven” as key terms that Amiot provided for discussion within European academia. (p. 179) However, to what degree Manchu comments and interpretation by his Manchu teacher influenced Amiot’s interpretation of these terms is a question that Parr touches upon without getting very far. (p. 180)

One may add to these considerations that the very fact that Amiot had mentioned the authors of these military texts in the subtitle of his work as having been “various Chinese generals” was certainly not without intention, as this would have conveyed to the “high-ranking” members of the French military the impression that the authors of these texts were on equal footing with them, which probably increased their interest in these texts.⁹

8 De Puysegur 1749.

9 By contrast, in his (earlier) position as a Jesuit priest, Amiot himself was, of course, not regarded as being on equal footing with individuals such as de Saint-Leu or de Puysegur, and in fact, there is a clear word of criticism found in their preface, suggesting that some unclear passages in Amiot’s translation were proba-

On the whole, one may say that the texts that had arrived in Paris in 1666 and 1668 respectively, had fallen on fertile ground there. It was a time when the monarchy in France was in decline, and many new ideas were emerging and being discussed within academic circles. And there is another detail that Parr convincingly illustrates, namely that the movement that had become known as “military enlightenment”, which seems to have been inspired by the idea that a new kind of government would afford the French military strong participation in government decision making, was for its part strongly based on the new economic ideas of François Quesnay, which in turn derived much of their legitimization from what was known about the Chinese government, an absolutist system, which was, however, paternally oriented, with the monarch taking responsibility for his people, as he would otherwise lose his heavenly mandate to rule.

Remarkably, Parr offers not only one but two interpretations of Amiot’s role as translator and transmitter of Chinese ideas to Europeans. The results of the first interpretation are summarized by Parr at the end of the fifth section of the chapter entitled “Interpreting Amiot’s *Sunzi*” (chap. 4), where he writes,

This then is Amiot’s conclusion on the concept of virtue presented in the *Sunzi*. He fully exposes the way in which the original applies the traditional ethical values to warfare, creating a Chinese military culture that uses and extends the language and logic of Confucianism to define and justify a ruthless pragmatism [...] In addition, his sleight of hand allows him to preserve the image of Chinese ethics and religion that the Jesuits had promoted for two centuries and of course the Christian values with which his readers saw the world. Both were essential to his position in the world. (p. 195)

There is certainly nothing wrong with this conclusion. However, in the sixth and last section, entitled “A Second Reading”, Parr presents what he calls “a second reading”, and this reading suggests that the first time Amiot addressed Bertin in 1766 for and sent him his *Art Militaire*, he had a very personal agenda. This reading is already indicated in Parr’s introduction, where he writes,

Although he never says this, Amiot’s motivation for doing so was almost certainly the Jesuits’ expulsion from France by the Paris Parlement in 1762, a decision finally ratified by Louis XV [...] in 1764 in return for fiscal reforms that the king needed to balance his books. (p. 3f.)

bly the result of his near lack of involvement in the military sphere. See de Saint-Leu et al., 40, where Amiot is derogatorily referred to as “this obedient missionary” (cet obéissant Missionnaire).

In the sixth and last section of chap. 4, Parr picks up the thread of this interpretational approach that suggests a much more personal agenda on Amiot's part. He suggests that when Amiot sent the translations and comments of these texts on Chinese military strategies to Bertin in 1766, he had a very special date in his mind, namely the date 1766 BCE, when the Xia dynasty was overthrown by the Shang in an act of regicide, which was justified by the fact that the ruler of Xia was not a good ruler and had therefore lost his mandate to rule. Parr notes that, in his comments, Amiot refers to the date of that revolution four times, suggesting that what preoccupied Amiot at the time was a possibly impending revolution in France (although one of these times, Amiot renders the year as 1770, which Parr takes to be a misstatement of the correct date). In Parr's own words,

Amiot was aware that he was writing to Bertin and dispatching his book to Europe in 1766, and perhaps it occurred to him that it would likely be published around 1770. Was the millennial sense of these dates an accident? [...]

It may be that Amiot's thinking on this was not explicit – perhaps he had in mind not a future revolution but the very recent revolution that had brought about the demise of the Jesuit order in France. Or perhaps these events had given Amiot a sense that the French regime that had allowed this to happen – indeed, had played an active role in bringing it about – had, so to speak, lost the mandate of heaven, and was therefore putting itself at a risk. Perhaps he had intended a warning rather than a prediction. But, whatever his motivation, Amiot's repetition of these dates in the context of the subject of regicide and revolution is open to such interpretation. (p. 200)

Even though the idea of an inner connection between the year 1766 or 1770 in the common era and that before the common era, in the earliest stages of the history of China, may seem magic to some, in my view, this is not only a mere coincidence but would have scarcely been considered anything more than a historical accident to a serious translator and scholar such as Amiot, who with all the materials he provided European academia displayed an unwaveringly careful and even meticulous attitude. Imputing to him an intention to point to “millenarian” coincidences is not only, in my view, a misrepresentation of Amiot himself but also a dangerous attempt to revive exactly those rumors about tendencies of the Jesuits to justify regicide in times when an unworthy monarch was on the throne. A rival religious group, the Jansenists, had reproached the Jesuits with such rumors, ultimately leading to the expulsion of the Jesuits from France a few years prior. Parr mentions – certainly not without intention – in the first sentence of his introduction the first letter from September 23, 1766, that Amiot sent to Bertin and includes its full text in the book as the only document that is left untranslated (see app. 1, pp. 221–223), but if one takes a closer look at its contents, one will see that Amiot put all his hopes – four years after the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1762 – on a fruitful

communication with Bertin, whose motivation to establish relations with Amiot and other “correspondants” in Beijing, as I have discussed elsewhere, was primarily to collect materials from China so that the French nation might be “inoculated with the Chinese spirit”.¹⁰

While it is intriguing to follow Parr’s line of argumentation from the arrival of Amiot’s *Art Militaire* to their reception by Quesnay and military specialists, such as de Puységur and de Saint-Leu, who propagated an image of China as a positive example of governance and presented its military strategies as something that should be followed in France, and who discuss the possibility of a revolution in their book, in my view the “second reading” Parr offers here, which is discussed above, goes a step too far and is quite speculative.

That said, a further critical remark might be in order here, regarding the conspicuously high degree of third-party contributions to this book. Although Parr writes in his acknowledgements that he “would like to thank three wonderful contributors, Gillian Pink, Michel Hermans, S.J., and Alison Oliver”, the portrayals of these three individuals on the following page do not reveal to readers what exactly their contributions to this volume were. Only on the last page of the respective texts for which they were responsible are their names mentioned. This reveals that the whole translation of Amiot’s text from French to English (pp. 60–164) was provided by Gillian Pink, and the English translation given in the appendix (pp. 224–274) of Amiot’s biography originally written in French by Michel Hermans, which was already published in 2005 in a collection of articles focusing on Amiot’s translation of texts relating to ritual dances in ancient and modern China,¹¹ was provided by Alison Oliver. Parr, however, writes in his introduction (p. 1, fn. 2), “Unless otherwise noted, all quotations given in English from French sources are my own translations.” But if one adds up all the pages of text that are noted as having been translated by others, this amounts to a total of 154, which is more than half of the book. Since the title page identifies Parr as the sole author of this book, one gains the impression that in this regard he might be taking credit for other people’s work. And one may also ask oneself in this context, was it really necessary to render all these texts originally written in French in English, apart from Amiot’s first letter to Bertin?

Despite these detracting factors, Parr’s book is, as discussed in the beginning of this review, an interesting case example, which reads fluently. However, further study would be recommended to explore this intriguing episode of the early exchange of ideas between the Chinese and French.

10 Schaab-Hanke 2021, 163.

11 Hermans 2005.

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