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## Thinking Other People's Thoughts:

Brian Holton's Translations from Classical Chinese into Lowland Scots

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In his preface to *A Collection of Records on the Emanation of the Chinese Tripitaka*, the Chinese monk Seng You (445-518 CE), commenting on the translations of the Buddhist sutras, laments the absence of contextual and personal information about the translators:

The translations have been copied over and over again, but there is no knowing the dates of the translations. Those who preached the sutras succeeded one another in great numbers, but none knew the names of those who transmitted the truth. What is more, the line of tutelage is often obscured ... how can we, after a thousand years of many translations and versions, study Buddha's teachings without any knowledge of those who transmitted the sutra and without any understanding of their times? ... [The sutras] were much studied and much used in sermons. Yet there was scant attention paid to the authors, translators or dates of these works.<sup>1</sup>

Already in the fifth century, Seng You points to an all-too-recognizable marginalization of the figure of the translator, on whom historical and biographical information has not come down to us. A number of recent studies have called, in more academic language, for attention to translators' biographies and methods, encompassing issues of agency, subjectivity, style, and translation trends.<sup>2</sup> They contend that in order to gather sufficient material to understand

how translation operates as a profession, a creative act, a mission both private and public, with social, cultural, and historical ramifications, we need to do much more than we currently do.

In thinking about translation into a minority language, it has seemed to me that translators' biographies may be particularly informative where translation acquires a strong socio-political function, at the intersection of the personal and the collective. Two more recent studies by Jeremy Munday and Judy Wakabayashi respectively have taken this point further.<sup>3</sup> Munday's article outlines a method of research based on the concept of microhistory, revolving around 'very small-scale qualitative analysis' of individual records, such as interviews, manuscripts, and personal writings - all materials that evidence the everyday experience and choices of the translators under scrutiny. Munday refers to a 'new' type of history concerned with the 'lives of "ordinary" people or specific groups ... who have tended to be marginalized in traditional history' (p. 66). The history this enables is viewed as contrasting with a more conventional macrohistory, with a preference for generalizations over individual cases.

Judy Wakabayashi's still more recent essay of 2016 provides further encouragement to microhistorical accounts of the life and work of translators. She builds on a theoretical proposition outlined by Martha Cheung in a 2012 article, aiming at recuperating the concept of *histoire croisée* set out by Paris-based historians Werner and Zimmermann in a 2006 article.<sup>4</sup> After judiciously discussing the potentially subversive function of microhistories in dismantling the grand top-down narratives of macrohistories, Wakabayashi then goes a step further. Instead of simply placing microhistory in opposition to macrohistory, she combines *histoire croisée* with Cheung's concept of *tuishou* ('pushing-hands'),<sup>5</sup> and, echoing Werner and Zimmermann, argues that microhistory is in fact open to a meaningful interplay with macrohistory, by way of generating a discourse that encompasses both local and global, and

that strives for synthesis while contemplating analytical cases. This approach also stresses the retrieval of ‘buried reality’, with a view to diversifying narratives through ‘a multiplicity of possible viewpoints’ (Werner and Zimmermann, p. 33). The concept of *histoire croisée* points to the narration of ‘events that are capable of affecting to various degrees the elements present depending on their resistance, permeability or malleability, and on their environment’ (Werner and Zimmermann, p. 37).

My aim in what follows is to present the work of Brian Holton as an empirical case of *histoire croisée*. This is an interdisciplinary endeavour, embracing Translation Studies, social and cultural history, and comparative poetics. At its centre is Holton’s own archive of books, drafts, papers, annotations, and lectures, and my interviews with him, as well as the more general biographical materials that constitute the visual and aural objects so important for a nuanced report on a life and career. To some extent, at least, this material should produce an internal point of view, although my own point of view, as a positioned external observer, is also necessarily present. By taking in documentary material such as journal articles, contracts, briefings, prefaces, and correspondence, this account will move between private and public. The objective is to shed light on the circumstances, daily routines, and procedures of translating, as well as on how these interact with personal and public histories, with larger currents of literary translation, and with socio-political engagements. Thus, through Holton’s biography and his translations from pre-modern Chinese into Scots, I will investigate processes of translation and how they intersect with their environment. Because this is not an attempt at a biographical sketch, this discussion will not rehearse information on Holton’s life which is peripheral to his work as a translator, such as his full employment history.<sup>6</sup>

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The first time I visited Brian Holton was in 2001, in Hong Kong, while carrying out doctoral research which took in his translations into English of Yang Lian’s poetry. Holton was at the

time teaching translation at Hong Kong Polytechnic University. I visited him again in September 2014, a few years after he had moved to the Scottish Borders, to view his notes on translating classical Chinese poetry and observe his work environment. I visited him for a third time in May 2016. Since 2014 we have been in regular contact, and I have complemented the material gathered during these visits by email interviews.

Brian Holton was born in Galashiels in 1949, but spent his early childhood in Lagos, Nigeria. His father was an Irishman who worked most of his life in Africa and who spoke Swahili, Hausa, Yoruba, and West African Pidgin. Back in the UK, Holton went to primary schools in Edinburgh and Falkirk, and then to Larbert High School and Galashiels Academy. He then attended the University of Edinburgh, enrolling in Chinese Studies, and obtaining a first degree there. He began, but did not complete, a doctoral programme at the University of Durham, researching aspects of Chinese cosmology.

In an interview dated 10 September 2014, Holton recalls one evening in Selkirk aged sixteen when a passing friend asked ‘Ir oo aa gaun soomin at the skerrs the morn’s morn?’ (‘Are we all going swimming at the cliffs tomorrow morning?’). He recounts the event as an epiphany, a sudden understanding that Scots, the vernacular of his mother’s family, was not the broken, defective, ‘bad English’ that schoolteachers said it was, but a language in its own right. That summer he began reading all he could find in Scots, listening to his grandmother and her friends, going to local folk clubs to hear Scots songs, and generally paying attention to the language which had been around him all his life, but which he hadn’t explored before. His efforts were not entirely private or unsupported: Holton’s English teacher at Galashiels Academy introduced his pupils to the literature of Scotland, and especially to literature in Scots, from the medieval makars up to the then still-living modernist Hugh MacDiarmid (a distant cousin of Holton’s grandfather Samuel MacDiarmid Young), and MacDiarmid’s contemporaries, whose work belonged to the mid-twentieth-century Scottish Renaissance.

In 1971 Holton married Monika Dunlop, a native of St Andrews, and a Scottish National Party supporter. Holton had grown up in a staunch Labour household – his grandfather had been a trade union official, and was a Fabian socialist. By the time Holton was an undergraduate student (1971-5), oil had been found in Scottish waters, and a cultural renaissance was under way in Scottish literature, art, theatre, and music. ‘I had long been aware’, he reported in an interview, ‘of Robert Burns’s childhood dream “That I some plan or book should make | For Scotland’s sake”’, and began to feel that I should do more for my country’s future.’<sup>7</sup> After graduation Holton spent the year 1975-6 in a cottage in the Yarrow Valley, where, as well as studying classical Chinese poetry, working on a farm, and playing in a folk-rock band, he read his way through all that Selkirk Library had of the Scottish Text Society’s editions of pre-eighteenth-century works in Scots. He even studied Gaelic for a couple of years, both through the BBC learner series *Can Seo*, and at evening classes. In 1976-8, Holton was in Durham, reading for a Ph.D, and two years later, he set out on an English version of the seventeenth-century Chinese novel *Shuihu zhuan* (水浒传 *Water Margin*). Holton recalls explaining to Monika, in 1981, the difficulties he was experiencing in making a translation that ‘worked’. She replied: ‘Well, if it doesn’t work in English, why not try Scots? You’ve been reading everything you can get hold of in Scots for years, after all. And aren’t these outlaws just like the Border Reivers in the ballads?’<sup>8</sup> He protested that he had never written in Scots, didn’t know how to, and had been educated in English, but the next morning he sat down with five Chinese dictionaries and the *Chambers Scots Dictionary*, and, to his own amazement, translated several pages into a plausible literary Scots. The project eventually became *Men o the Mossflow*.

Holton sent copies of his drafts of the first half of Chapter 1 to his lecturers at Edinburgh University, John Scott and Bill Dolby. Scott, a charismatic and inspiring teacher, was very supportive, encouraging Holton to devote himself to literature and to translate.

Dolby was a scholar of Classical Chinese, a Welsh speaker, and a translator of Chinese literature into Welsh. Dolby was so excited by what Holton had done that he took the manuscript to Glen Murray, the editor of the literary, political, cultural quarterly *Cencrastus*, who immediately accepted it for publication, and commissioned further chapters to form a series of future publications. After three episodes published in 1981-4, Murray's successor as editor decided not to continue with it, but the project was soon taken up by Peter Kravitz, editor of the no less influential *Edinburgh Review*. In correspondence, Kravitz highlighted the politics he saw as implicit in Holton's work, 'the idea that the Borders are solid English or some queer bit of Scotland that the Central Belt and the two big parties in Scotland would prefer to forget'; 'the shards of political hope left after on the one hand the failure of the devolution bill, and then the onslaught of Toryism combined with the complacency of Scottish Labour MPs'.<sup>9</sup>

Holton's correspondence from the same period with Fernando Toda, an academic at the University of Seville, connects the poetics of translation with the medium of Scots. In a 1987 letter Toda argues that the contrast between Scots and English (and at times between varieties of Scots) has often been used 'as a way of expressing historical tensions between Scotland and England (or within Scotland), and not just for "colour" or "realism" '. In an interview dated 10 September 2014, Holton recalls having another motivation for his translations into Scots: to show that 'if Scots can represent Chinese, then what can it not do?' The *Edinburgh Review* published a further three chapters of Holton's *Men o the Mossflow* in the years 1986-93.

From then on, Holton was regularly invited to give readings and talks around central and southern Scotland, though he never found a publisher who would take on *Men o the Mossflow* in its entirety. Nor, despite not being regularly employed at this period, and despite annual applications, did he ever succeed in acquiring a bursary or grant from the Scottish

Arts Council. According to Holton, their literature officer at the time, Walter Cairns, didn't like prose in Scots, and didn't believe that translation was in any way creative. By the mid-80s Holton was freelancing for BBC Radio Tweed and BBC Radio Scotland, making cultural and language-related features including a multi-part series called *Life in Scots*, which explored the history and current state of Scots in the Borders. John Scott and Bill Dolby then sought to help him towards employment with the University of Edinburgh. John had recently come back from Beijing, reading Jin Shengtan's commentary on *Shuihu zhuan* with a local scholar, and had tapes of all their conversations. By that time, Holton had had a few years' experience of making funding applications, and it was decided he would apply to the Leverhulme Trust for a grant to cover editorial work on this material. The original idea was that he should use as much time as he could spare from collaborating with Scott and Dolby to carry on translating *Shuihu zhuan*, with the aim of having a volume ready for publication by 1988. The application was successful, but these plans were not realized and no volume appeared. Scott left the University, the head of his department was pushed into early retirement, no publisher could be found to take on *Men o the Mossflow*, and Holton eventually found himself working with the Chinese poet Yang Lian instead.

Holton's aspiration, he recalls, was to make the best version of *Shuihu zhuan* ever seen. He had Thomas Urquhart's remarkable Rabelais and Gawain Douglas's virtuosic *Aeneid* in mind, and he had found Jacques Dars' French rendering of *Shuihu zhuan*, *Au Bord de l'eau*, which uses terms from Gascon, Occitan, and so on. He was also reading the Montreal playwright and novelist Michel Tremblay, and found himself delighted by Tremblay's accomplished use of the many registers of Quebecois French. He knew his *Shuihu zhuan* would be at least as good as Dars', and hoped to make it as accessible as *Don Quixote* or Homer (if possible funnier than both, too). The 1990s saw new life breathed into vernacular theatre in Scotland, and a significant revival in the use of Scots in poetry. With

this encouragement, and with great passion, Holton determined to find or make the kind of Scots he wanted to use in his translation:

At first I used a pure *Scots Style Sheet* approach,<sup>10</sup> but as the years have gone on I seem to have settled into a modified and simplified version which reflects a balance I try to hold between my ear, my own idiolect, and a vaguely-defined idea of what the general reader might be comfortable with.

So, to translate a seventeenth-century text written in a close approximation of daily speech, which is not entirely colloquial (like Hugh MacDiarmid's 'Synthetic Scots' it is a literary imitation of a colloquial language), I tried to make a kind of Scots that could be spoken with ease, and which had enough elasticity to accommodate the shifting registers of the original.<sup>11</sup>

Like the sixteenth-century Makars, he set out by using 'a Lothian standard Scots with Border tinges', because he grew up in Edinburgh, Falkirk, and Selkirk.<sup>12</sup> That is what he defines as 'literary Scots', built on the basis of the spoken (or sung) word, although he is conscious of using as many registers as is necessary, even if he has to imitate older forms of language or invent new ones for his purpose.

His motivations, he reports, were creative enjoyment and love of the original, but the politics of language were never far away. Holton wanted then, as he wants now, to see Scotland independent, and Scottish culture flourishing in all its forms. He found it then, as he finds it now, distasteful that his language is 'downgraded' and worse:

The unfairness of it makes me angry: mostly through official ignorance and neglect, this Scots, that was once the language of kings, this still powerful, precise, and poetic



tongue, this language that Robert Louis Stevenson called ‘elegant and malleable’, this ancient voice seemed then in danger of imminent extinction ... It is altogether unacceptable that the biggest gift a child brings to school, his or her language, is downgraded, disregarded, insulted, ignored, and treated as the language of a lumpen underclass by semi-literate bureaucrats and wholly ignorant politicians.<sup>13</sup>

Scots is not dead yet, but Brian Holton will not be convinced it is healthy until he sees more of it in the newspapers, hears it on radio and TV and in the cinema, and sees it used by legislators in Edinburgh more than it now is. Holton’s work in Scots has always attempted to make some contribution to that cultural confidence without which independence is impossible. Considering that Scottish literature occupies only a very small niche in the UK book market and that much of the problem of wider acceptance is political, Holton also believes that an additional obstacle may lie in the unwillingness of some translators to create an idiom suitable for the translation of a historical novel without having recourse to ‘the sub-Shakespearian *patois* invented by Walter Scott’. Besides, as Holton explains, choosing Scots implies marginality, familiarity, antiquarianism, literariness. Some readers seeing a Scots text will automatically expect it to be comic, some will be puzzled by the spelling, some will see it as ‘Old Scots’.<sup>14</sup>

A further problem in making an accurate and convincing translation of *Shuihu zhuan*, according to Holton, is that it is itself written in a rich mixture of regional dialects and other non-standard forms. Several poems appear within the text, interrupting the narrative flow. In order to overcome or sidestep some of these difficulties, Holton used the Jing Shengtan version of the novel, which omits the poems, and experimented with various versions of Scots. In the interests of reaching a wider readership, at one time he also proposed a version which, while using Scots for lexical items such as place names and legal terms, would have

used a more accessible form of standard English, with Scottish overtones. Holton thus ‘pushes hands’ to recuperate Lowland Scots as the language of translation that reclaims its space given the dominant global position of English.

A publication that should be mentioned here because of its place in the reception of Holton’s *Men o the Mossflow* is a 1995 anthology of writing which appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s.<sup>15</sup> This reprints Holton’s version of Chapter 4 of the Chinese poem which had appeared in *The Edinburgh Review* in 1987. Holton’s work immediately follows contributions by James Kelman and Janice Galloway, and precedes several distinguished poems by Robert Alan Jamieson.<sup>16</sup> Holton’s place here, among figures of the stature of R. D. Laing, Alasdair Gray, and A. L. Kennedy, lends his contribution cultural legitimacy. More incidentally, a number of the items in this *Edinburgh Review* anthology throw into sharper relief vexed issues of voices, cultural in/visibility, languages, the endemic versus the exotic, centres and margins, and so on.

Holton’s discovery of the Scots language goes side by side with his interest in the music of Scotland. As a youth he joined an amateur recorder consort in Melrose, then a brass band, playing the trombone with local town bands and trombone quartets. In the summer of 1973 he attended a concert of the Chieftains, the well-known traditional Irish music band, at the Edinburgh Festival: ‘Then on came a bunch of scruffy middle-aged Irishmen carrying musical instruments, two of them with a crate of Guinness. They sat down and started opening and handing round the Guinness, then after a few minutes, nodded to the audience, picked up their instruments, and started playing. I have never known a moment like it. The music was heart-stoppingly beautiful, the arrangements fluid and witty, the playing virtuosic. I never knew folk music could sound like this’ (interview dated May 2016). Soon after this concert his chosen instruments changed. He had long wanted to play one of the bellows-blown bagpipes, and in 2004 he bought a set of Scottish small pipes. He now plays regularly

at local sessions.

After abandoning attempts at a single-volume publication of *Men o the Mossflow*, Holton turned to other translations from Chinese into Scots. Of course, this one work had never been his sole interest as a translator. In the early 1980s he had translated Lu Xun's short story 'Yi jian xiao shi' ('Yin Wee Thing'); 'Zheng zhong ji' ('The Cod'), by the Tang dynasty writer Chen Jiji; and the poem 'Fan ye shu hen' ('Written Frae the Hert on a Nicht o Traivlin') by Du Fu. Poetry translations continued in subsequent decades. In 1997 he was commissioned by Alec Finlay to make Scots versions of some ancient poems from the *Shi jing* for a project called *Carmichael's Book*, involving collaboration with well-established writers and artists, including Sorley Maclean, Valerie Gillies, Iain Crichton Smith, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Aonghas MacNeacail, and Robert Alan Jamieson.<sup>17</sup> In a letter dating from the same year to the editor of *Edinburgh Review* (15 April 1997), after briefly introducing the Yuan dynasty poet Qiao Jifu (c. 1280-1345) as the author of his chosen source text, Holton points out the absence of any previous translation in English, let alone Scots, and gives indications of his localizing translation strategy: 'In the final poem I have substituted Scottish allusions for two Chinese ones.'

From the late 1980s to the early 2000s Holton corresponded occasionally with the renowned translator of classical Chinese, David Hawkes.<sup>18</sup> In 2003, four of his translated poems from the *Nine Songs* (九歌), the collection of poems traditionally attributed to Qu Yuan (343-278 BC), were included in an anthology celebrating Hawkes' eightieth birthday. In the introductory note to these translations Holton writes:

I choose to use Scots because it is one of my mother tongues and a flexible and powerful literary language. I do not write medieval Scots or Older Scots, nor am I attempting some antiqued pastiche of the great writers of the past, but I do aim to use

a living modern idiom, which can be enriched with borrowings and coinages, like any other living tongue. I do not and would not suggest Scots is ‘better’ than English, and while I accept that language choice in a multi-lingual environment like Scotland is an act which can have profound political implications, I have no political axe to grind. I merely hope to show that this is a tool which is fit for the job in hand.<sup>19</sup>

Two points might be underlined here: Holton explicitly disconnects his use of Scots from any political axe he may (or may not) have to grind; and the variety of Scots he aims to use, although ‘a living modern idiom’, does not consist of that idiom alone.

The corpus of poetry translations into Scots which Holton developed over the years, in the items I have mentioned and elsewhere, grew to a sufficient size for a selection, *Staurin Ma Lane*, to be published by Shearsman Books in 2016.<sup>20</sup> As far as I know, this collection contains the first ever direct translations of ancient Chinese *shī* (‘songs’ or ‘lyrics’) into Scots, with the exception of a couple of rather poor specimens the Scottish sinologist James Legge rather apologetically included in his *The She King*, 1871. *Staurin Ma Lane* is designed as a trilingual (Chinese, Scots, and English) anthology, including a selection of major styles and subgenres of classical Chinese poetry, and two adaptations of folksongs from the *Shi jing*, the oldest surviving collection of Chinese verse. There we find poems from the *Nine Songs*, from the Tang Dynasty poets Wang Wei (699–759), Du Fu (712–770), and Li Bai (701–762), by dramatist and poet Qiao Jifu (c. 1280–1345), and, finally, poems by the virtuoso Ma Zhiyuan (c. 1250–1321).

In a substantial review of *Staurin Ma Lane*,<sup>21</sup> Andrew Radford praises Holton’s translation of Du Fu’s ‘Jiang cun’ (‘Spring Sun on the Watterside Clachan’), a work also praised by the judges of the Stephen Spender Prize. The judges of this national competition for poetry translation from any language into English commended it in 2012 as an

‘innovative’ and ‘creative’ translation. Radford also recognizes in Holton’s Scots version of Li Bai’s poems a ‘carousing Burnsian brio’, rich in ‘droll and vivid colloquialism’. Radford finds Holton’s idiom less suitable for the translation of the *Nine Songs*

But how does the shamanistic and ceremonial gravitas synonymous with the *Nine Songs* survive the transition into Holton’s spry, playful Scots? The difficulty for Holton here is that the vernacular revival associated with Burns, Allan Ramsay, and Robert Fergusson in the eighteenth century – which he exploits to inject some demotic vigour into Li Bai’s poems – did not trigger a corresponding resolve to perfect an elevated rhetoric for Scots, one that is both affectively resonant and geared towards the numinous and oracular topoi found in the *Nine Songs*.

(pp. 391-2)

Radford has concerns about Holton’s strategy of translating names of plants in the *Nine Songs* with ‘botanical specificities’, because ‘instead of conveying sheer awe at cosmological phenomena or teeming organic life, [they] tend to distract the non-Scots speaker’ (p. 392). Throughout his review, Radford supports his insights by contrasting versions of the same poems made by translators such as Ezra Pound, Arthur Waley, Robert Payne, William Acker, Keith Holyoak, Stephen Owen, and David Hinton. But these are all in English, and therefore cannot be directly compared with Holton’s translation. Indeed, there are very few precedents with which we may compare Holton’s work.<sup>22</sup>

As Even-Zohar and Toury observe,<sup>23</sup> translated works adopt specific norms, characteristics, and policies typical of the target culture, or ‘receiving polystem’. Thus, significant differences in the norms governing translations in dominant and subordinate literatures respectively might be anticipated. Moreover, norms of domestication and

foreignization may themselves differ depending on the receiving culture and cultural context. Michael Cronin remarks that ‘for a minority language, fluent strategies (i.e. domesticating translation) may represent the progressive key to their very survival’.<sup>24</sup> *Men o the Mossflow*, though retaining fluency and colloquialism, may nevertheless embody a foreignizing effect. Although many of Brian Holton’s solutions in these translations could be characterized as ‘domesticating’ the Chinese text by locating it within the Scottish literary tradition, such a description is somewhat reductive. In fact, the decision to translate into a minority language such as Scots itself has an ‘othering’ effect. Given the cultural and political tension such a decision brings with it, Du Fu’s verse in Scots will always carry a foreignizing force. As Radford also points out, ‘Holton’s return to the “native” helps us see the foreignness of these classical Chinese source texts anew.’ I think there is ample evidence here of competing pressures at work between domesticating and foreignizing tendencies.

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In this discussion I have tried to construct a narrative with multiple points of view. I have thought primarily in terms of Brian Holton’s personal experience, but also, from time to time, highlighted his interactions with publishers, reviewers, Scots speakers, language policy makers, and so on. Following Werner’s and Zimmermann’s idea of *histoire croisée* as an investigative approach, I have tried to deal with Holton’s biography not as a case of microhistory that can simply supplement macrohistory, or as a mere change of focus from macro to micro, but as the locus of ‘inextricable interconnections’ of various spaces (Werner and Zimmermann, p. 47).

Within the context of Lowland Scotland – a diglossic community in which one medium (English) is considered of higher value, and the other (Scots), regarded as inferior, dialectal, or colloquial (largely spoken and not written) - Holton’s translations from Chinese into Scots illustrate tangents and criss-crossings. One is an asymmetry in cultural spheres that

may be interpreted in terms of centre-periphery power relationships. The differing reception of *Men o the Mossflow* and *Staurin Ma Lane* can be interpreted as making a positive change, and showing that the principles governing the polysystem are not as set as they may seem, but may be modified from individual practices. These translations should be considered at least in part experimental, since they do not have any immediate precedent; one thing they suggest is that Scots can be used to represent any non-standard language in the source text. A further point is that the view of Scotland and its languages they present is not unitary, but multiple.

Through Holton's work I have been able to document social and linguistic imbalances, and a claim of recognition, within a community of readers, publishers, translators, and institutions. The acceptance of Scots as the translating language on the part of this community is fraught with cultural and political tension. The decision to use Scots instead of English also relates to the source texts and to aesthetics. Many of Holton's translations into Scots intend to contribute, conceptually and practically, to the establishment of a translational genre that captures something of the revolutionary impetus of the original. For example, the *Shuihu zhuan*, as well as portraying thirteenth-century China, also raises political and social issues (loyalty, alienation, institutionalization, the purpose of rebellion) and asks readers: What can a good citizen do about bad government? This adds yet another crossing to this narrative. But as well as political and aesthetic motivations, it should finally be stressed, Scots is for Holton the repository of his personal and family history, and the collective identity of the Scottish people.

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Biographical information in this article is based by kind permission on interviews and unpublished materials belonging to Brian Holton.

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<sup>1</sup> *An Anthology of Chinese Discourse on Translation*, edited by Martha P. Y. Cheung, Vol. 1 (Manchester, 2006), pp. 116-17.

<sup>2</sup> See for example Anthony Pym, *Methods in Translation History* (Manchester 1998); Douglas Robinson, *Who Translates? Translator Subjectivities Beyond Reason* (Albany, NY, 2001); Outi Paloposki, 'Limits of Freedom: Agency, Choice and Constraints in the Work of the Translator', in *Agents of Translation*, edited by John Milton and Paul Fabio Bandia (Amsterdam, 2009), pp. 189-208.

<sup>3</sup> Jeremy Munday, 'Using primary sources to produce a microhistory of translation and translators: theoretical and methodological concerns', *The Translator*, 20 (2014), 64-80; Judy Wakabayashi, 'Applying the 'Pushing-hands' Approach to a Dialogue among Microhistory, Macrohistory and *Histoire Croisée*', in *The Pushing-hands of Translation and Its Theory*, edited by Douglas Robinson (London, 2016), pp. 153-66.

<sup>4</sup> Martha P. Y. Cheung, 'The Mediated Nature of Knowledge and the Pushing-hands Approach to Research on Translation History', *Translation Studies*, 5 (2012), 156-71; Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, 'Beyond Comparison: "*Histoire Croisée*" and the Challenge of Reflexivity', *History and Theory*, 45 (2006), 30-50 (hereafter 'Werner and Zimmermann').

<sup>5</sup> Cheung's article advocates the use of the *taijiquan* ('shadow-boxing') concept of the *tuishou* ('pushing-hands') to represent translation's continuous unsettling of the stability of the source text, and to elaborate a view of translation (and linguistic and cultural encounters in general) as a dynamic force.

<sup>6</sup> The basics for this history are available in Holton's *Wikipedia* entry.

<sup>7</sup> Interview conducted on 25 May 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Quotation based on Brian Holton's recollection in an interview conducted by email on 29 June 2014.



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<sup>9</sup> Letter dated 25 February 1988.

<sup>10</sup> Holton's own note explains: 'The *Scots Style Sheet* was drawn up in 1947 by a group of writers concerned to standardize the spelling of Scots.'

<sup>11</sup> Brian Holton, 'Wale A Leid an Wale A World', in *Frae Ither Tongues*, edited by Bill Findlay (Clevedon, 2004), pp. 15-37 (p. 16). For a non-specialist introduction to the varieties of Scots, see <<https://www.scotslanguage.com/pages/view/id/10>> (accessed 22 May 2018); for a more technical, authoritative, detailed, but somewhat dated reference, see <<http://www.dsl.ac.uk/about-scots/the-scots-language/>> (accessed 22 May 2018). Of similar interest for the reader may be the Introduction to the *Concise Scots Dictionary* (2nd edn, Edinburgh, 2017), pp. ix-xxii.

<sup>12</sup> Holton, 'Wale a Leid', p. 16.

<sup>13</sup> Email interview conducted on 29 June 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Holton, 'Wale a Leid', p. 15.

<sup>15</sup> *Nothing is Altogether Trivial: An Anthology of Writing from Edinburgh Review*, edited by Murdo Macdonald (Edinburgh, 1995).

<sup>16</sup> The title of the present essay is an adaptation from a passage of Jamieson's poem 'Gadderin Ler', translated from Shetlandic by Holton as 'Gathering Knowledge': 'We had the look of ghosts, | We two friends, one Saturday night. | The words of shadows were on our minds. | The names of power were on our lips. | In our heads were squatters: | Other people's thoughts.' Original version in *Nothing is Altogether Trivial: An Anthology of Writing from Edinburgh Review*, edited by Murdo Macdonald (Edinburgh, 1995), p. 184.

<sup>17</sup> *Carmichael's Book: A Homage to Alexander Carmichael's Carmina Gadelica*, edited by Alec Finlay (Inverness and Edinburgh, 1997).

<sup>18</sup> Hawkes (1923-2009) was a British sinologist and translator, famous for his translation of the great eighteenth-century classical novel 红楼梦 (*The Story of the Stone*). For a

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retrospective on his career see Tao Tao Liu, ‘“Style, Wit and Word-Play” – Remembering David Hawkes (1923-2009)’, in *Style, Wit and Word-Play: Essays in Translation Studies in Memory of David Hawkes*, edited by Tao Tao Liu, Laurence K. P. Wong, and Chan Sin-wai (Cambridge, 2012), pp. ix-xvi.

<sup>19</sup> Brian Holton, ‘Frae the *Nine Sangs*: A Wee Pendicle ti “Suddron Sangs” bi Dauvit Hawkes’, in *A Birthday Book for Brother Stone*, edited by R. May and John Minford (Hong Kong, 2003), pp. 283-94 (pp. 289-90).

<sup>20</sup> Brian Holton, *Staurin Ma Lane: Chinese Verse in Scots and English* (Bristol, 2016).

<sup>21</sup> *T&L*, 25 (2016), 390-5.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Crawford’s *Chinese Makars* (Easel Press, 2016), a 72-page booklet of Scots versions of Tang dynasty poets accompanied by English prose translations, should be mentioned, but not as a precedent, since it appeared in the same year as *Staurin Ma Lane*.

<sup>23</sup> Itamar Even-Zohar, *Polysystem Studies = Poetics Today*, 11 (1990); Gideon Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* (Amsterdam, 1995).

<sup>24</sup> Michael Cronin, ‘The Cracked Looking Glass of Servants: Translation and Minority Languages in a Global Age’, *The Translator*, 4 (1998), 145-62.