

Henrietta Harrison. *The Perils of Interpreting: The Extraordinary Lives of Two Translators between Qing China and the British Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021.
Pp. 312. Hardcover \$32.00

The Perils of Interpreting is a fascinating account by Harvard historian Henrietta Harrison, who explores a unique and overlooked history between the Qianlong Emperor and British Ambassador to China Lord George Macartney during their 1793 meeting. This encounter between imperial China and Britain was a turning point in global history. Working on behalf of the British monarchy, Macartney's embassy was tasked with establishing and developing favorable commercial ties with imperial China and submitted a list of demands that which the Qianlong Emperor rejected. In the decades following, China's trajectory in the aftermath of this diplomatic encounter resulted in diplomatic disagreements, leading to eventual war with Britain. Harrison argues that many people in imperial China knew much about European political developments, but accurate assessments of Britain's military capabilities were missing from the imperial court's records. Imperial China's understanding of Britain's military strength was misinformed due to poor record keeping that did not know the scale and strength of British naval power. Additionally, a lack of archives in the imperial court regarding recent British occupations in the eastern hemisphere contributed to imperial China being unaware of the threat Britain posed. This, in turn, led to the imperial court underestimating British power and European military might resulting in their defeat in the Opium War. Previous scholarship focused on Lord Macartney and the Qianlong Emperor's diplomatic, political, and economic relationships. Harrison provides new insight into how historians and students analyze the complicated diplomatic relationship between the Qianlong Emperor and Britain through their personal interpreters.

Harrison shows that interpreting is invaluable when done accurately and orderly. Those who could interpret held political power and could act as negotiators rather than translators. In some cases, interpreting in the early modern world led to political turmoil or skilled interpreters who would exploit their talents to cultivate personal riches or gains. On the other end, serving as a translator inherently carried risks if mistranslations led to mis-

understandings or perceived offenses, death would result if not imprisonment or torture. Harrison focuses on two figures who were central to the discussions between Britain and China due to their knowledge of East-West history and culture: Li Zibiao and George Thomas Staunton. Li Zibiao was a native-born Chinese who became a Catholic priest, whilst George Thomas Staunton was the son of George Leonard Staunton who was working under Lord Macartney. Li Zibiao was educated in Naples, learned Latin and Italian, and was ordained with the blessing of the Pope. George Thomas Staunton was educated in London, learned Chinese, Latin, and Greek, and followed in his father's footsteps in the world of trade and interpreting under the employment of the British East India Company. Li and Staunton's unique upbringing enabled each to learn various languages, experience different cultures, and participate in "the increasing global interconnections of the early modern world" (4). In 1792, Staunton was in Naples seeking to hire a Mandarin-speaking interpreter for the British embassy in Beijing. Additionally, Staunton sought to have this translator instruct Macartney's embassy on Chinese customs, traditions, and mannerisms to better prepare for their meeting with the Qianlong Emperor. Li's ability to speak Mandarin and eagerness to return to his home country led him to accept the job. As time progressed and Li's relationship with Macartney and Staunton developed, Li would become a trusted member of the British embassy's inner circle. Notably, Li was tasked with translating the demands of the British embassy but secretly added another demand that sought to protect the Chinese Christians from persecution of the Qianlong Emperor. This instance shows that translators wielded considerable power and acted as political negotiators to further their own ambitions if they chose to.

The first half of this book is focused on the family history and upbringing of Li Zibiao and George Thomas Staunton and Zibiao's role as interpreter for Lord Macartney's embassy. The second half concentrates on Staunton's involvement in the Canton trade, and role as interpreter for Macartney, and the Opium War. Harrison's sources for this research included analyzing the archives of three institutions that played essential roles in the lives and development of Li and Staunton: the imperial Chinese state, the Roman Catholic Church, and the British East India Company. Using letters, personal books, archival records, and imperi-

al correspondence Harrison illustrated the lives of Li Zibiao and George Thomas Staunton and their impact on discussions with the Qianlong Emperor. *The Perils of Interpreting* highlights the contributions of two very different men from unique cultural backgrounds and emphasizes the importance and effectiveness of interpreters. It is an excellent contribution to understanding colonial relationships between imperial states that would most benefit a college student audience. It serves of great use to expert historians and graduate students studying the early modern world, imperial Chinese history, and British colonial expansion. Microhistories such as this book help readers discover the many challenges and difficulties within translating and interpreting.

George Claude Macias

Kelly Lytle Hernández. *Bad Mexicans: Race, Empire & Revolution in the Borderlands*. New York, W.W. Norton and Company, 2022. Pp. 372. Paper \$19.95.

In *Bad Mexicans*, Kelly Lytle Hernandez, Professor of History at UCLA, focuses on the role of the Magonistas, a group of migrant rebels who built their social movement against Mexican President Porfirio Diaz, largely while they lived in the U.S. Led by Ricardo Flores Magón, they were the first to envision change for Mexico's lower classes, which is often overlooked by scholars. The Magonistas are intertwined with U.S. history as their movement inspired the Mexican Revolution of 1910 resulting in the displacement and migration of more than a million Mexicans to the United States altering race dynamics in the U.S. forever. The Magonistas's determination to create change despite being hunted by a Mexican dictator and fighting the newest U.S. governmental agency at the time, the Bureau of Investigation, which later became the FBI. *Bad Mexicans* argues that we cannot consider the U.S. as a global power without Mexico and Mexicans as their labor. It was the resource-rich land south of the U.S. border that propelled the American West as a global economic powerhouse. The book begins with Porfirio Diaz's rise to power that would later ignite the Magonista movement.

Lytle Hernández found references to the Magonista movement two decades earlier while researching her dissertation.