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 <https://doi.org/10.1075/btl.122.01lun>

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Pages 1–26 of

New Insights in the History of Interpreting

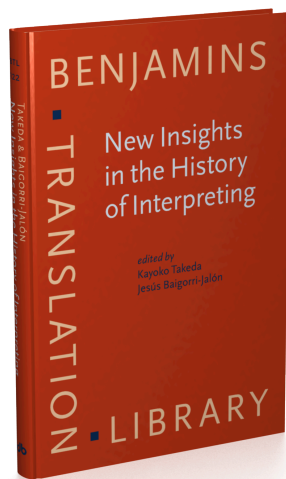
Edited by Kayoko Takeda and Jesús Baigorri-Jalón

[Benjamins Translation Library, 122] 2016. xvi, 278 pp.

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Defining Sillan interpreters in first-millennium East Asian exchanges

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Interpreting officials are rarely documented in standard histories of imperial China; civilian interpreters are even harder to trace. Surprisingly, however, Japanese monk Ennin's (794–864) diary of his China sojourn (838–847) contains thirty-eight references to Sillan interpreters. It is a significant firsthand archive that throws light on Sillan interpreters and interpreting in first-millennium East Asia. Based on a close reading of this diary, I attempt to clarify the idiosyncratic title of “Sillan interpreters.” Using quantitative and qualitative analyses, I outline finer categories of these interpreters, which in turn address questions pertaining to their identities and roles. This chapter demonstrates the value of textual analysis in empirically pursuing the definitions of “interpreter” at a particular place and time.

Keywords: East Asian interpreting, Sillan interpreters, Ennin's travelogue, Silla (ancient Korea), textual analysis

1. Introduction

While examining designations of interpreters in imperial China, I noticed a gradual shift from general to specific usage. Three millennia ago, numerous terms were used to refer to interpreters. The more generic terms were *sheren* (舌人) (literally, tongue man) and *xiangxu* (象胥) (literally, interpreting functionaries).¹ The emphasis on “tongue” understandably relates to the oratory skills of the practitioners in the

1. An ancient Chinese belief holds that the tongue of an interpreter could flip in order to switch to a foreign language during interpreting. 《大戴禮記·小辯》：“傳言以象，反舌皆至，可謂簡矣。” According to the chapter on “Minor Arts” in Elder Dai's Book of Rites, “... only use *Xiang* officials to transmit the words, and people who [flip their tongues (author's addition, missing in the translation)] speak other languages will all gather around you. That, indeed, is simple” (Cheung's translation 2006: 31).

trade.² Other designations of interpreters in the Chinese archive appear to be more region-specific. These are most systematically spelt out in one widely quoted reference, which survives as China's earliest discourse on translation, written around 1000 BC, as follows:

五方之民，言語不通，嗜欲不同。達其志，通其欲，東方曰寄，南方曰象，西方曰狄鞮，北方曰譯。（禮記·王制；禮記注疏）

The people of the five regions differ in words and languages, as well as in their predilections and desires. Trusted to make accessible their will and communicate their desires, those mediating in the east are called *ji*, in the south, *xiang*, in the west, *Didi*, [and] in the north, *yi*.

(Royal Institutions of the *Book of Rites*, [in the *Liji Zhushu*, commentaries and subcommentaries to the *Book of Rites*]; Lung's translation 2011:3)

Yet there is no consensus regarding the exact meaning of these four titles. Cheung (2006) and Chen (2010) claim that these were titles of interpreting officials serving in the four quarters or regions. Behr (2004) and Lung (2011) maintain that these titles might simply be the transliteration of respective indigenous terms being used to refer to interpreters.³ The former belief is essentially Sino-centric. It suggests that the four designations were titles "assigned" by the Chinese kingdom to interpreters serving in the four quarters. Yet, in reality, the four quarters were beyond the sovereignty realm of Zhou China, and it certainly had no mandate to assign these titles to foreign interpreters. Realistically, China's chroniclers might have simply recapped and recorded the designations of foreign interpreters by sound translation. In fact, it is not uncommon in China's archive that foreign objects and persons were being referred to, sometimes clumsily with multiple syllables, by transliteration of their alien-sounding names. These four designations might well have been how foreign peoples referred to interpreters, phonological representations of which were then archived by China's historians. Indisputably, this theory better explains the bi-syllabic features of *Didi*, since classical Chinese is characteristically monosyllabic for nouns.

Moving onto Han China (206 BC–220 AD), more uniform designations of interpreters, such as *yiguan* (譯官) (interpreting officials) or *yiling* (譯令) (interpreting

2. Incidentally, in medieval Spain, the use of "haber lengua" ("to have tongue") was used to signify the verbal contact with foreign people particularly in seafaring expeditions. The term "lengua" ("língua" in Portuguese) was used as an equivalent to "interpreter" (Baigorri, personal communication, February 1, 2015).

3. A Chinese translation historian, Ma (1998:2–3) remains cautious on this issue. He only maintains that Zhou China (1046–256 BC) used these four terms to refer to interpreters transmitting the languages of the four quarters.

officers),⁴ were adopted for imperial China's interpreting functionaries.⁵ In Tang China (618–907), more encompassing terms of *yiyu* (譯語) (literally, interpreting languages) or *yiyuren* (譯語人) (literally, interpreting language personnel) were used in general to denote interpreting or translation officials. Notably, these generic designations focus on interpreters' mediating job nature, not their ethnicity or their linguistic edge. This is the case in China's archival reference to most foreign interpreters, be they of Sogdian or Turkic ethnic origins.

Yet, this is not the case for Sillan interpreters.⁶ Is it simply because they were civilian interpreters? Civilian interpreters of Sillan origin were rarely shortened or generically labeled as *yiyu* (譯語),⁷ but more fully and specifically represented as *xinluo yiyu* (新羅譯語) (Silla interpreters). The growing specification of interpreters' designations might have suggested the increasing sophistication of the use of interpreters for more specific contexts in the socio-political milieu in the first millennium. What made Sillan interpreters so special to have warranted this specific title?

This chapter studies the definitions of "Sillan interpreters" and attempts to explore the implications underlying this somewhat unconventional usage. It also addresses the question of their identity based on quantitative and qualitative evidence from a close reading of monk Ennin's diary.⁸ Finally, this chapter examines duties of Sillan interpreters with textual evidence in an attempt to reconstruct

4. See Hung (2005: 77) for a table listing official interpreters' designations throughout imperial China.

5. It is understandable why only government, not civilian, interpreters were mentioned in the Chinese archives. The standard histories were commissioned by the imperial government to make a record of what mattered to the imperial clans.

6. The term "Korean Interpreter" is used instead of "Sillan Interpreter" (pronounced as "Shillan") in Reischauer's translation of Ennin's travelogue (1955a). The translator might have deliberately given up the proper term, Silla (新羅), used in Tang China, with international readers in mind. Yet, this usage is intrinsically problematic since Korea did not exist until 1897.

7. In early July 845, however, Ennin labels Yu Sinōn simply as "劉譯語" (literally, Yu, the interpreter) or "譯語" (the interpreter), rather than the full form of "新羅譯語" (Sillan interpreter) or "楚州譯語" (Chuzhou interpreter) (Ennin 2007: 149–150; Reischauer's translation 1955a: 374–5). By then, Ennin had known this interpreter for six years and might have been his friend, not just his interpreting patron. Besides, Yu Sinōn was frequently mentioned in these two pages. This may explain why Ennin started to simplify the term of address. Although, in principle, he was an interpreting clerk of the Chu prefecture, the nature of his work and service for Ennin was no different from that of a civilian interpreter, as we shall see.

8. The original of Ennin's diary was not punctuated. I refer to its punctuated and annotated version, also in classical Chinese, published in 2007 throughout this chapter.

their roles in East Asian communication. The chapter begins with the historical background of United Silla (668–935), followed by a brief introduction to Ennin and his travelogue. It then proceeds to presenting the quantitative and qualitative analyses of Sillan interpreters documented in Ennin's account, including their identities and duties. These empirical data serve to clarify, and inform us of, the definitions and the misleading title of "Sillan interpreters."

2. Historical background of the three kingdoms on the Korean peninsula

The kingdom of Silla (57 BC–668 AD), later known as United Silla, existed long before its unification of the peninsular kingdoms. Located in the southeastern part of the Korean peninsula, Silla was the last of the three kingdoms to have established diplomatic ties with, and learned from, China.⁹ Yet, Silla exercised astute statecraft and conquered Koguryō (37 BC–668 AD) and Paekche (18 BC–660 AD) with Tang China's aid, notwithstanding its smaller size and greater distance from China. Dreadful of being annexed by its neighboring kingdoms, Silla actively reported and exaggerated the unruliness of their moves to China. It played its part as a loyal vassal to China and gained sympathy for its predicament. By 668, Silla had united the entire peninsula and become a sovereign state recognized, albeit reluctantly, by China.¹⁰ Therefore, in this study, "Sillans" refers to nationals of United Silla, regardless of their ancestral origin, including Paekche and Koguryō. Given United Silla's position between Japan and China, it played a pivotal role in the thriving maritime transport and commerce of East Asia. The scale of the exchanges was no doubt advanced by the unification.

In many ways, Ennin's travelogue is testimony to the dynamic interaction of East Asian countries at the time. It gives graphic details of the Sillan assistance he received and Sillan residents or traders he encountered in China. One third of its contents relates to Sillans (Zhao 2003). This lopsided coverage powerfully speaks

9. In 521, Silla's envoys tagged along with Paekche's envoys to pay tribute to Liang China (502–557). Silla also relied on Paekche in the provision of a Chinese state letter for the diplomatic event, since it had little exposure to Chinese learning at the time (*Liangshu* 54: 806).

10. Upon defeating its two rival states, Silla had disputes with Tang China over the handling of old Koguryō boundaries (Kyung 2010). In China's political taxonomy, "Koguryō, right next to Northeast China, was considered a Chinese province" (Wang 2011: 57–58; my translation); China had thus wanted troops to be stationed there after crushing it in 688. Yet, Silla convinced China to leave its territories intact and respect Silla's sovereignty over the entire peninsula. China eventually budged because its strength was compromised after a series of military campaigns on the peninsula.

of their ubiquitous traces in East Asian exchanges.¹¹ One of the results of these active exchanges was the formation of Sillan enclaves or residential communities in villages or towns along eastern coastal China. Their formation was rooted in centuries of civilian and commercial exchanges with the peninsula. Under the reign of Qin China (221–206 BC), tens of thousands of people fled to the southern peninsula, hoping to escape from its notoriously harsh labor and brutal penalties. In Han China (206 BC–220 AD) when the government became less autocratic, many ethnic Chinese returned. Around 108 BC, after pacifying some tribal conflicts on the peninsula, Han China established four commanderies that governed parts of its territory and Northeast China (Zhang 2006; Kyung 2010). At these early times, therefore, China regarded the peninsula as its province. So the movement of the two peoples was taken as internal relocation. In time of peninsular calamities, such as drought, famine or political turmoil in the late eighth century,¹² China was naturally taken as a safe haven because of its “geographically convenient conditions” (Fletcher 2011: 15). Besides, smuggling of Sillan slaves was blatant in coastal China at the time (Zhao 2003). Sillan migrants from different sources were thus rooted in China for generations.

One of the demographic consequences of centuries of such inter-national relocation was the growth of bilinguals in coastal China (Wu 2004). Sillans’ mobility, by choice or otherwise, in East Asia prompted their acquisition of Chinese or Japanese vernacular. With the growing civilian and diplomatic exchanges of these East Asian neighbors, more polyglots were nurtured. Tōyama (1998, in Ma 2005) believes that one of the sources of interpreters in ancient Japan in the late 7th century was, as a result of Sillan unification, Paekche migrants. Around this time, families of educated and literary backgrounds in Chinese language and civilization moved to Japan and taught Chinese there to make a living. It is possible that some of these migrants and their offspring were hand-picked by the Japanese authorities to consciously acquire Japanese in preparation for their later interpreting careers (Ma 2005). Ma emphasizes, however, that Japan’s reliance on foreign interpreters to liaise with China was the case only in earlier times, before the training of its own interpreters was in place. “In the 9th century, all the six experts in Chinese [in Japan] were Japanese” (ibid.: 112; my translation).

11. Korean sources about the Sillan interpreters in the second half of the first millennium are flimsy, but traces of these interpreters can be found or inferred in Japanese histories (Ma 2005). However, it is important to note that Sillan interpreters in the Japanese sources might probably be ethnic Japanese, not necessarily Sillan as those mentioned in Ennin’s diary. This distinction has not been carefully identified in the literature dealing with Sillan interpreters to date.

12. The *Samguk Yusa* (Legends and History of the Three Kingdoms of Ancient Korea) records that earthquakes and famines were widespread in Gyeongju, Silla’s capital, from 787 through 790, and again in 796 and 797 (Zhao 2003).

Besides, some Sillans spoke Japanese because of years of staying or being stranded for work in Japan. Hence, it was not unusual to encounter Sillans comfortably conversant in Chinese and Japanese. In Ennin's account, there is a strong sense of linguistic transparency when he interacted with Sillans in China. The vibrant civilian and official trade in East Asia must have motivated Sillans to master these languages to make a better living. The same, however, cannot be said about his encounters with Chinese, with whom Ennin often had to resort to written Chinese for communication.¹³ For Japanese visitors, the Sillans' mastery of the Chinese vernacular and the local culture positioned them as apt mediators. That is why Sillan interpreters, although labeled as such, were quite capable of assisting the Japanese merchants for non-linguistic matters.

3. Data source: Monk Ennin's travelogue

Ennin's travelogue was written in classical Chinese in four scrolls,¹⁴ using about 80,000 characters, during his sojourn through seven provinces in China from 838–847.¹⁵ The original is not extant. The oldest surviving text, copied in 1291 by an old Japanese monk, was found in 1883 in the library of a Kyoto monastery, called Tōji. Its status was elevated to a national treasure in Japan. Various copies from this Tōji text were since in circulation, and the first printed version was published in Japan in 1907. It was not until 1936 that China first published Ennin's diary, and much later its annotated versions in 1986, 1992, and 2007. The journal has since been translated into Japanese, Korean, English, French, and German. Its English translator is Edwin O. Reischauer,¹⁶ a US ambassador to Japan and an acclaimed scholar in Japanese and Chinese studies. The travelogue is of immense value to first-millennium East Asian research on humanities and social sciences. Its value, in the words of Reischauer, is that

13. In the first scroll of Ennin's diary, I located twelve instances of his exchanges with non-Japanese through written Chinese.

14. Although Ennin had acquired a decent level of written Chinese competence, he could not converse in Chinese. After almost a decade's stay in China, it is possible that his spoken Chinese might have improved. The diary itself, however, has not given us any concrete hints in this regard.

15. Ennin's diary records his journey from western Japan to Yangzhou, Shandong, Wutaishan, Chang'an, the Huai valley and, finally, back to Shandong, before crossing the Yellow Sea, skirting the coast of the Korean peninsula, and eventually returning to Japan.

16. Wright (1955), in his review of Reischauer's translation, laments that the translator's literal approach fails to recap the charm and sophisticated details of Ennin's original.

[t]he lengthy record of his wanderings and of his tribulations and triumphs is not only the first great diary in Far Eastern history; it is also the first account of life in China by any foreign visitor... although medieval in time and Far Eastern in place, is a part of our common human heritage, with significance beyond these limits of time and space. It is the report of an important traveler in world history and an extraordinary, firsthand account of one of the way stations on man's long and tortuous journey from his lowly, savage beginnings to his present lofty but precarious position. (1955b: vii–viii)

Capitalizing on its significance, Dong (2000) published a synchronic linguistic survey by categories on its vocabularies and technical terms. In recent decades, a dozen articles were published in history journals in China, with a focus on the growth of Sillan communities (Chen 1996, which was translated into English by Fletcher in 2011) and Sillans' interpreting roles in East Asian communication (Li and Chen 2008; Chen 2009b). More elaborate studies on Sillans were also conducted by Zhao (2003) and Chen (2009a) in their master's theses.

Despite the more recent focus on Ennin in research on linguistic mediation in China, no effort has been made to examine the idiosyncrasies in the umbrella term of "Sillan interpreters." Indeed, Sillan interpreters have often been handled indiscriminately and impressionistically (Li and Chen 2008; Chen 2009a). Li and Chen (2009), for instance, mistook a Sillan official, Chang Yǒng (張詠), and other Sillan traders (Wang Chǒng [王請] and Ch'oe Un Sibirang [崔暈第十二郎]) in Ennin's account as interpreters.¹⁷ These casual assumptions undermine the validity of their discussions about the origins and features of Sillan interpreters.

It is a pity that six decades after the publication of Reischauer's translation in 1955, its potentials and impact on the history of interpreting have not been duly appreciated in literature published in English. Thus, the present study hopes to fill this void by alerting interpreting and translation scholars to its untapped value. It analyzes Ennin's textual references to these interpreters and their concrete tasks in East Asian exchanges. I also examine their identities based on the quantitative and qualitative data derived from Ennin's account. By means of textual and discourse analyses, I investigate the nature of their work and how exactly they assisted the Japanese embassy and Ennin. Hopefully, this would clarify the

17. Ch'oe Un Sibirang used to work "as the Commissioner of Troops of Ch'onghaejin"- (Reischauer's translation 1955a: 378) under Chang Pogo (張保臯) (787–846), a powerful maritime figure in control of seaborne trade and routes between Japan, Silla, and Shandong peninsula. When Chang Pogo was murdered because of his involvement in and influence over the inheritance of the Sillan throne, Ch'oe Un Sibirang hid his real identity and lived in Lianshui county as a trader (Qi 2009). His coming forward to assist Ennin was consistent with Chang Pogo's continued support of Ennin's pilgrimage in China. He was not referred to as a Sillan interpreter in Ennin's diary.

Japanese agenda behind the “mysterious” hiring of Sillan, instead of Chinese, interpreters for its diplomatic cause.

This journal contains meticulous details about the life, peoples, events, authorities, and languages in 9th-century China in a dynamic context that involves the Chinese, Sillan, and Japanese.¹⁸ Ennin was sensitive with languages and observant of people’s subtle demeanors. Notably, Ennin would make a note of who was warm and kind and who was not. Wright (1955: 124) characterizes this diary as “the record of a conscientious if pedestrian traveler to bring to life the people, the sights and sounds, the culture of a great age of China’s past.” In his critical review of Reischauer’s translation, he relates to Ennin’s sophisticated description of people around him.

These are not the taxable units which appear in the dynastic histories, nor the romanticized abstractions which appear in political theory as ‘the people’. These are believable human beings of their time and milieu. Some are pious and kind but short of grain and condiments; others are rude, inhospitable or greedy; still others combine Buddhist piety with prudence and are always prepared to serve a good meal to a wandering monk. (ibid.: 123)

Most crucially, it was an account written by a monk, not a commissioned work tainted with imperial influence, making this diary more independent and credible. Coming from interpreting studies, I am particularly drawn to its thirty-eight references to Sillan interpreters.¹⁹ Such prominent textual attention to interpreters is unusual, and certainly unconventional, in any extant historical records. The other anomaly in this text is that the interpreters were not placed at the back stage as “*kurogo*” (Torikai 2009), as commonly envisaged and perceived. Instead, they were highly efficient in coordinating the logistics arrangements. They also liaised actively with the Chinese authorities for Ennin. With the diary’s intricate description of Sillan interpreters, we can actually capture, even today, their human touch and emotions while working for the monk.

Having traveled with the embassy, Ennin faced problems with the Chinese authorities. His quasi embassy identity forbade him from pursuing pilgrimage and traveling in China. His inability to speak Chinese added to Ennin’s predicament.

18. Xian (2000) relates the value of Ennin’s diary as an authentic ethnographic account of people and life in late Tang China. Chinese historian Niu (1993) compliments the diary as an objective account, which fills gaps in the standard histories of the Tang dynasty.

19. Tallying results of references to Sillan interpreters in Ennin’s account can be controversial. I decided to give up the mechanical counting of occurrences of these interpreters and opt for the more indicative entries in which they engaged in specific events as either an active or passive agent.

In his decade of wanderings in China, he witnessed the horror of the imperial persecution of Buddhism from 842 to 846 in the Huichang reign period of emperor Wuzong (r. 841–846). To protect himself, he put on civilian clothes to conceal his stigmatized Buddhist identity. These eventful episodes are relevant to this study because several Sillan interpreters assisted him to pass these hurdles. These Sillan activities, however, were not captured in the standard Chinese records, despite China's pride over its voluminous historical collections. Yet, Ennin's record contains considerable firsthand textual references to these interpreters. This makes a detailed investigation of his travelogue all the more important for a historical inquiry of East Asian interpreters and mediation.

4. Sillan interpreters in Ennin's diary

Sillan interpreters were common in the early history of East Asian exchanges. Their ubiquity, as evidenced in Ennin's diary, legitimately raises the questions of their identities and work nature. One way of defining these interpreters is to quantify and categorize their occurrences in his diary, before generating a broad picture of their contextual identities, functions, and roles. To avoid any presumptuous bias, I conducted a tally of their occurrences, as shown in Table 1. Each count is an independent event or action, but it does not align simply, if mechanically, to textual reference of Sillan interpreters. In my analyses, a count may involve one or more references to interpreters in a specific text. My method is therefore not a straightforward numerical count of their occurrences. This approach would ensure that each count concretely informs us of their actions and identities. In line with this principle, I then created a second table (Table 2) profiling their job duties as depicted in the diary. Based on the primary counts, Table 1 below shows the names of four interpreters documented and the frequency of their references in Ennin's account.²⁰

20. Li and Chen (2009: 69) both claim that Chang Yǒng was "a Sillan interpreter." Yet, they contradict themselves by suggesting, with certainty, that I Sinhye (李信惠) (Ennin 2007: 154; Reischauer's translation 1955a: 387) was Chang Yǒng's interpreter (Li and Chen 2009: 71). They must have confused "Commissioner (Chang Bogo)" (Wang 1999: 370), a Sillan maritime tycoon, with "Commissioner Chang Yǒng," both abbreviated as "張大使" (Commissioner Chang) by Ennin. In short, if Chang Yǒng was indeed a Sillan interpreter, logically he would not have required an interpreter for himself, as Li and Chen claimed he did. Chen (2009a: 23) again mistakenly categorizes Chang Yǒng as "Sillan interpreters like Kim Chǒngnam and Yu Sinǒn" (my translation). These mistaken claims might have originated from Ennin's first reference to Chang Yǒng as "當今新羅通事、押衙張咏" (2007: 52). Reischauer's translation is "At present the Korean Interpreter Guard Officer, Chang Yǒng" (1955a: 131). Historically, however, *tongshi*

Table 1. Sillan interpreters in Ennin’s travelogue and the nature of their employment

Name	Kim Chǒngnam 金正南	Pak Chǒngjang 朴正長	Yu Sinǒn 劉慎言	Tohyǒn 道玄
Occurrences	6	1	23	8
Nature of employment	Hired in Japan for embassy visit	Hired in Japan for embassy visit	Staff interpreter in a Sillan enclave in Chu prefecture (present-day Jiangsu province), China	Sillan monk, might have volunteered in East China to stay with the embassy ships

Kim Chǒngnam and Pak Chǒngjang were freelance interpreters hired in Japan to be stationed with the first and the second ships of the nine-ship embassy for China in 838.²¹ They were probably hired because of their proficiency in Sillan, Japanese, and Chinese, as well as their seaborne expertise. They were referred to by name at the beginning of Ennin’s journal, suggesting that their employment was crucial and of high profile. Somehow, deploying Sillans for such diplomatic expeditions seems commonplace, judging from how matter-of-factly Ennin relates the details.

[八月] 十日，辰時……即聞：第二舶著海州。第二舶新羅譯語朴正長書送金正南房。
(Ennin 2007: 12)

[Aug] 10th: At 8am... We then heard that the Korean interpreter of the second ship, Pak Chǒngjang, had sent a letter to Kim Chǒngnam.
(Reischauer’s translation 1955a: 29)

Once the embassy ships reached China, I notice similar descriptions of Sillans and Sillan interpreters in the monk’s diary.

(通事) in the mid-9th century, at the time of Ennin’s usage, does not refer to interpreters. Yao, a Liao historian, (1981: 13) maintains that “*sheren* (舌人) (tongue man) were retitled as *tongshi* around the final years of Tang China, if not early Liao China (907–1125) or early Song China (960–1127)” (my translation). In 9th-century Tang times, *tongshi* merely refers to a general officer. Chen (1996: 163) is careful not to have confused Chang Yǒng as an interpreter. Fletcher aptly renders Chang’s concurrent post of *tongshi* as a “Silla diplomat” (2011: 12).

21. Wang (2011: 172) maintains that “a total of 19 Japanese embassies were sent to Tang China from 630 to 894. At first, there were only one or two ships, each taking about 120 persons. On average, there were four ships taking around 600 passengers” in each embassy visit (my translation). Wang (1975) says, however, that of these 19 attempts, two never completed, one was to take the previous Japanese envoys back and three were to chaperone the Chinese envoys back to China. The number of completed Japanese embassies sent to Tang China, in total, was therefore thirteen.

十七日〔.....〕押領本國水手之外，更雇新羅人諳海路者六十餘人，每船或七或六或五人。亦令新羅譯語正南商可留之方便，未定得否。

(Ennin 2007: 34)

17th Day [...] Besides the Japanese sailors under their command, they [the officials] have also hired over sixty Koreans who are familiar with the sea routes... The Korean Interpreter Chôngnam has been ordered to devise some scheme whereby I can stay [in China], but it is not yet certain whether or not anything can be done.

(Reischauer's translation 1955a: 93–94)

We may find it strange, from a modern-day perspective, to use interpreters of the Sillan ethnicity, not Japanese alone,²² for an embassy mission in the name of Japan. Or perhaps should Chinese interpreters have been deployed instead, since it was a China-bound embassy? Surprisingly, though, in the 839 embassy mission at least, there was no trace of Japanese skepticism of the use of ethnic Sillan interpreters. In fact, the government's contingent deployment of Sillan interpreters was twice documented in earlier Japanese records, as follows:

《日本後紀》記載：（812）大宰府報告，西海出現三艘新羅船，因語言不通，消息難以了解，差新羅譯語..... (Oyung 2001: 169)

The *Nihon Kōki* recorded that, (in 812), the Dazaifu, [a regional government in Southern Japan] reported seeing three Sillan boats appearing on the west sea [of Japan]. Since linguistic communication could not be bridged and information hard to make sense of, a Sillan interpreter was assigned [...]. (my translation)

《日本後紀》記載：（815）春正月壬寅，是日停對馬使生一員置新羅譯語。 (ibid.)

The *Nihon Kōki* recorded that, (in 815), in lunar January, spring, [the Japanese officials] stopped by the Tsushima Island and assigned someone to be the Sillan interpreter. (my translation)

The above historical records were commonly quoted in discussions about Sillan interpreters (Oyung 2001; Ma 2005; Yuzawa 2010; Jin 2012). However, the term “Sillan interpreter” could have been more critically examined in the literature. For example, none of the authors discusses the ethnicity of the Sillan interpreter in the two contexts. Was he an ethnic Sillan conversant in Japanese?²³ Was he ethnic

22. Wang (1975: 69) observes that the usual interpreting personnel in the China-bound Japanese embassies include the categories of “譯語” (interpreters) and “新羅譯語” (Sillan interpreters). The former category might have referred to Japanese interpreters with Chinese competence.

23. According to the *Shoku Nihongi* (續日本紀, Chapter 36, 455), in 780, a Sillan envoy [visiting Japan] related the Sillan king's words, saying “as usual, Sillan students are sent [to Japan] to learn the language” “又依常例，進學語生” (in Ma 2005).

Japanese having acquired the Sillan vernacular (Old Korean)?²⁴ Both are possible, although the existing information cannot ascertain either way. As Yuzawa (2010) suggests, although Chinese was supposed to be the language for diplomatic exchanges between Japan and Silla,²⁵ their civilian exchanges might have been conducted in Japanese or Sillan. From the above records, it seems that deploying Sillan interpreters was indeed a viable measure in a time of linguistic barriers in Japan. Locating Sillan interpreters for impromptu tasks did not seem particularly challenging either, although Yuzawa (*ibid.*) points out that there were no records of regular posts of Sillan interpreters in either Nara or Kyoto. This suggests that some such interpreters might have been regularly stationed in Tsushima, an outlying island located between the southern tip of United Silla and the west of Japan, after 815. The above discussion about the possible ethnicities of Sillan interpreters is relevant to my purpose. It serves to delineate that “新羅譯語” in the Japanese records refers possibly to ethnic Japanese with knowledge of the Sillan vernacular. The “新羅譯語” in Ennin’s diary, although identically worded in Chinese characters as those in the Japanese records, absolutely refers to ethnic Sillans, with conventional Sillan surnames. It is essential that this distinction is made. My discussion in this chapter, therefore, will not deal with the kind of Sillan interpreters mentioned in the Japanese records.

In 9th-century East Asia, many Sillans in all likelihood might have settled in coastal Japan or China in order to take up any such mediating odd jobs. Was there an affinity, close and yet distinctly foreign, between Japan and Silla to have nurtured such cultural serenity? Whatever the nature of their bonding, Sillan interpreters’ linguistic versatility positioned them as astute mediators in East Asia.²⁶ This linguistic void represented a huge opportunity for the multilingual Sillans, especially when imperial China was comfortable of its nationals being largely monolingual until the mid-19th century. As Hung (2005) observes,

24. According to the *Shoku Nihongi* (續日本紀, Chapter 23, 276), in 761, 太政官“令美濃武藏二國少年，每國廿人習新羅語，為征新羅也。” (in Ma 2005). This text reveals that twenty teenagers from each of the Mino and Musashi provinces were officially assigned to learn the Sillan vernacular, in order to conquer Silla.

25. Diplomatically, it seems that neither the Japanese nor the Sillan vernacular was used in Japanese-Silla exchanges, because either Japanese official interpreters for Silla (新羅通事) or Sillan interpreters for Japan (新羅訳語) are found in the Japanese list of diplomatic personnel for [Silla’s] mission visiting Japan (“Engi-Shiki,” 延喜式) (Yuzawa 2010).

26. Before Japan managed to train its Chinese interpreters, earlier migrants or their descendants from Paekche and Silla were deployed to meet the court’s needs for diplomatic interpreters well versed in Chinese. In 730, the government issued an order to establish an academy for officials (大学寮) with the intent to train ethnic Japanese to serve as Chinese interpreters (Ma 2005).

[s]ince a main characteristic of Huaxia (Chinese) culture was a strong sense of superiority, there was little interest among mainstream intellectuals in acquiring foreign knowledge or foreign languages... That many governments had to rely substantially on the linguistic ability of new migrants or foreigners for such work was probably considered a fact of life, if not a matter of course. It was right and proper for foreigners to learn Chinese, but the Chinese had better things to do than to learn foreign languages. (ibid.: 72–73)

This translation tradition in imperial China partly gave rise to the entrepreneurial Sillan interpreters in East Asia. Ennin's diary contains numerous anecdotes about circumstances in which some Sillans in diaspora acquired spoken Japanese and Chinese. These additional linguistic skills enabled them to interpret to make a living. At a time of thriving East Asian exchanges, being Japanese interpreters seemed to be a popular way of earning an extra income for versatile Sillans. However, one should not presume that these language assets would necessarily overshadow the niche of their native Sillan competence, a vernacular of currency in East Asia.²⁷ In short, the Sillan vernacular was no less significant than spoken Chinese or Japanese in first-millennium exchanges. Yet, most researchers of Sillan interpreters underrate the value of the Sillan vernacular (Li and Chen 2009; Chen 2009b). In coastal Sillan enclaves, the ability to speak Sillan indeed greatly eased the communication and logistics needs of visitors to eastern coastal China. The Sillan tongue, so to speak, was the *lingua franca* in that part of China. Most notably, even the local authorities there were staffed by Sillans in the spirit of loose rein or autonomous administrative style (Chen 1996), often practiced among non-Chinese population within the Chinese empire (Li 1996).²⁸

5. Tasks of Sillan interpreters

Ennin's travelogue includes sophisticated descriptions about activities of Sillan interpreters. With these elaborate details documented throughout his sojourn, we can then categorize the nature of their concrete duties. I classified their tasks based on contextual information from the thirty-eight references identified earlier.

27. According to Lee and Ramsey (2011: 4), the Sillan language "effected a linguistic unification of Korea" since it became the peninsular *lingua franca* after the unification. "It gave rise also to Middle Korean, which is the direct ancestor of Korean spoken today" (ibid.).

28. Ennin (2007: 61–62) recorded that the Sillan vernacular was used in Buddhist lectures in the Sillan monasteries in Shandong.

Table 2. Work categories of Sillan interpreters in Ennin's account

Categories	Frequency (%)
A. Liaising, networking, and transferring messages	24 (63%)
B. Logistics (transport, manpower, room, storage, etc.)	10 (26%)
C. Trading brokers	4 (11%)
Total:	38

Table 2 shows a breakdown of the types of work Sillan interpreters undertook, as described in Ennin's diary. Surprisingly, interpreters did not interpret. Textual references to their jobs contain no trace of interpreting-mediated encounters. Instead, they were mostly (63%) deployed to liaise independently with other Sillans or Chinese, often without their Japanese patrons being present. The interpreters were also frequently dispatched to deliver messages or to seek clarification for the Japanese. Such delegation of duties often required the interpreters to be independent agents to get things done for their patrons. Besides, about a quarter (26%) of their tasks involved handling the logistics problems for their patrons. These included arranging for boats, technical maintenance, sailors, food, supplies, and seeking accommodation and storage fixers. Lastly, there were four counts of interpreters, amounting to 11% of tasks, acting as trading brokers for the Japanese monks. This brokerage function of Sillan interpreters was unique and warrants further discussion, with concrete examples, in the following section. For now, it suffices to suggest that, unlike our stereotypical perception of interpreters, Sillan interpreters were unusually proactive, taking a forefront position in the mediation. Their edge was to run errands to approach other Sillan residents and local authorities, using the Sillan and Chinese vernacular, while reporting the updates to the embassy members and Ennin in Japanese. The East Asian context at the time required these interpreters to remain mobile and dynamic rather than static or passive.

Typical Sillan interpreters in Ennin's account seemed to be trilingual polyglots, conversing in Japanese and Chinese with ease. It is entirely legitimate to assume that they must have been hired to interpret in the exchanges of Chinese and Japanese. Yet, one should not neglect the importance, and in fact, the greater frequency, of their liaison between the Japanese and the Sillans in China. For the Japanese embassy, it is only natural to expect frequent and direct exchanges with the Chinese. However, Ennin's account proves otherwise. The truth is we notice more textual references to Sillan interpreters acting as go-betweens, passing on messages. It then leads to the question: whether the designation of "Sillan interpreters" might have meant something else other than sheer language mediation at the time? Did Sillan interpreters in my data undertake other occupations as well?

If so, was interpreting a main job or a sideline practice? Li and Chen (2009) give two reasons for the freelance and adjunct nature of Sillan interpreters. First, they stress that the Sillans' multilingual competence was often acquired through their initial or primary jobs relating to seaborne trade, before attempting to interpret to generate more income. Naturally, it was only much later that they could speak, and interpret, using Chinese and Japanese. Second, the interpreting jobs were too unsteady to sustain full-time interpreters, given the limited technology and scale of marine transport in East Asia. That explains why Sillan interpreters often took other non-interpreting jobs.

6. Sillan interpreters as trade brokers

One of the non-interpreting jobs Sillan interpreters might have undertaken was trading agents. According to the Tang code of law, tributary embassies could only travel in China with permits and conduct trade through official channels under close supervision.²⁹ While foreigners faced numerous trading restrictions in China, Sillan interpreters, as Chinese residents in principle, gained greater freedom in terms of inland mobility and commodity transactions. In other words, the interpreting title might possibly have endorsed their mandate to travel and facilitate their mainland access and trading freedom in China, which foreigners would not otherwise enjoy. This was indeed possible because Ennin's beginning scroll reported the arrest of several Japanese embassy members for their illegal private transactions in town. Similar events happened often in Ennin's travelogue. His diary entries from the 20th through the 22nd of February 839, as quoted below, recorded the arrests of the Japanese simply for shopping in town.

〔二月〕廿日……緣上都不得賣買，便差前件人等為買雜物來……勾當軍將王友真相隨向楚州去。不許永藏等賣……即打鼓發去……不久之間，第上四船監國信並通事緣買敕斷色，相公交人來喚，隨相入州去……晚際，第四船通事、知乘等被免趨來。長〔判〕官……等四人為買香藥等下船到市，為所由勘追，舍二百餘貫錢逃走，但三人來。 (Ennin 2007: 30)

[Feb.] 20th Day: ... because they had not been able to buy or sell at the capital, the men mentioned above had been sent here to buy various things... Wang Yu-chen, the Manager and Military Officer, accompanied them to Chu-chou

29. Officials in the court of diplomatic receptions (*Honglusi* 鴻臚寺) in Tang China would assess and record the value of the tributary gifts in order that gifts from China of equivalent or approximately equal value would be "bestowed" in return to the embassy concerned. This is called tributary trade, a form of international trade in disguise.

and would not allow Nagakura and the others to sell [things and, when they were about to trade,] would strike the drums and start forth... At 2pm... men came from the Minister of State to summon the Supervisor of the National Tribute Articles and the Interpreter of the fourth ship,³⁰ because they had bought some items under Imperial prohibition, and they went off with the officers to the prefectural [offices].... At dawn the Interpreter and Ship's Master of the fourth ship were released and hastened back. The attendants... these four, debarked from the boats and went to the market place to buy incense and medicines, but because local officials questioned them, they fled, abandoning over two hundred strings of cash, and only three of them got back...

(Reischauer's translation 1955a: 84)

〔二月〕廿一日，早朝，發去。大使〔謙從〕粟田家繼先日為買物下船往市，所由捉縛，州裡留著，今日被免來。又第四船射手被免放來。

(Ennin 2007: 31)

[Feb.] 21st Day: The Ambassador's [attendant]... had gone to the market place to buy things, and the local officials had arrested him and had detained him at the prefectural [offices]. Today he was released and came back. An archer of the fourth ship also was released and came back. (Reischauer's translation 1955a: 84)

〔二月〕廿二日，辰時，發。射手身人部貞淨於市買物，先日被捉，開縛州裡，今日被放來，又不失物。不久之會，第四船射手、水〔手〕二人被免卻來。史〔生〕越智貞原先日往市買物，所由報州，請處分，今日趨來。

(Ennin 2007: 31)

22nd Day: At 8am, we started. An archer... who had bought things in the market place and had been arrested the other day and locked up in the prefectural [offices], was released today and came back. He did not lose the things [he had bought]. Before long an archer and sailor of the fourth ship were released and came back. The Scribe... had gone the other day to the market place and bought things, and the local officials had informed the prefectural [government] and had asked for a judgment. Today he hastened back.

(Reischauer's translation 1955a: 84–85)

Over a matter of three days, there were already six counts of Japanese trading violations and associated detentions (Lung 2015). Ennin's apprehension of the detention risk from private purchases must have convinced him to resort instead to

30. Reischauer rendered *tongshi* 通事 as "interpreter" several times in his translation. Although it is true that *tongshi* denotes interpreters from Song (960–1279) through Qing (1664–1911) dynastic China, the term does not bear this connotation until the final years of Tang China at the earliest. Besides, in the present context, this title refers to a Japanese member of the embassy. Yet, in Ennin's account, this person displayed no Chinese competence; it is therefore questionable if the *tongshi* in this example indeed meant an interpreter.

interpreters' brokerage service. Exactly a month after the reported arrests, Ennin implicitly engaged a Sillan interpreter concerning the purchase of some goods using his gold dust.³¹ Entries from two consecutive days in the monk's account bear the description of him "giving" two tales of gold dust and an Osaka sash to Yu Sinŏn and "receiving" from the interpreter some powdered tea and pine nuts in return.

卷一(三月)廿二日。早朝。沙金大二兩。大阪腰帶一。送與新羅譯語劉慎言。(Ennin 2007: 34)

First Scroll (March) 22nd: Early in the morning I sent two large ounces of gold dust and an Osaka girdle (sic. sash) to the Korean Interpreter, Yu Sinŏn.

(Reischauer's translation 1955a: 94)

The first entry (dated March 22) was rather mysteriously worded, with no contextual clue justifying such expensive gifts to a newly-acquainted interpreter whose name was first mentioned at this point in his diary. The mystery, however, was solved in the monk's diary entry the next day when Yu Sinŏn came and gave Ennin "ten pounds of powdered tea and some pine nuts," again unusually generous gifts for a new acquaintance.

卷一(三月)廿三日。未時。劉慎言細茶十斤。松脯贈來。與請益僧。(Ennin 2007: 34)

First Scroll (March) 23rd: At 2pm Yu Sinŏn came and gave me ten pounds of powdered tea and some pine nuts.

(Reischauer's translation 1955a: 95)

Yu Sinŏn was an interpreter affiliated with the Sillan enclave office of the Chu prefecture.³² He assisted his superior, the chief in this office, in managing the residents in the enclave and helping Sillan or Japanese visitors there. Being a Chinese resident and a civil servant, Yu Sinŏn was free to purchase in town. In theory, however, it might be controversial for him to accept gold dust from Ennin, which could easily be considered a bribe for an illegal dealing. What was the nature of their commodity exchange? At a time when barter trade was the dominant form of transaction, the exchange was in effect a business deal. In the first scroll, Ennin was accustomed to presenting powdered tea and pine nuts to newly-acquainted

31. Examining Ennin's diary from historical economics, Zhang and Zou (1998: 49) confirm that gold dust could be valued through either official or private agents, but "usually at a discounted rate," in Tang times. They claim that "three small taels of gold dust were equivalent to one big tael of gold dust" in 9th-century China (my translation).

32. Chuzhou was in the north of Nanjing at the intersection of the Grand Canal and the Huai River, which at that time flowed into the Yellow Sea.

monks and officials. The two entries above were probably subtle references to a market purchase in disguise through the Sillan interpreter. Not confined by the restrictions, Yu Sinŏn might have traded on Ennin's behalf possibly for a brokerage reward. He understood why Ennin approached him in this context. Yu was fully aware of the legal loopholes, through which he had not only done Ennin a favor but also possibly managed to profit in the transaction. A Chinese interpreter might not have been so bold as to risk breaking the law. Yet, a Chinese interpreter might not have access to the Sillan social network to conduct such secret transactions within the enclave either.

7. Discussion and implications

7.1 What is in the title of "Sillan interpreters"?

The construction of the term "Sillan interpreter" is idiosyncratic and somewhat arbitrary. Now, if a Chinese person is proficient in French and could interpret using both French and Chinese, this person is called a French interpreter, not a Chinese interpreter, although he would be called a Chinese interpreter in France. The same idiosyncrasy, however, does not apply to the Sogdian (ancient Iranian) interpreters, who were more typically called *yiuren*, or interpreters, in Tang China. Their ethnicity was not often mentioned in the interpreter's title. In Tang times, the niche of Sogdian interpreters was not Sogdian, but their command of Turkic and Chinese. However, they were never addressed as Turkic or Chinese interpreters. In the Tang historical documents, interpreters were generically labeled as *yi* (literally, interpret languages) or *yiuren* (literally, interpret languages person), emphasizing the work nature, rather than the languages they work with or, least likely, their ethnicities.

The designation of "Sillan interpreters," however, is unorthodox, since apparently the interpreters' ethnicity was highlighted, not the linguistic expertise specified. Or is it really the case? Does "Sillan" in "Sillan interpreters" refer to the Sillan ethnicity or the Sillan vernacular? This distinction is crucial and yet often overlooked (Li and Chen 2009; Chen 2009a). Modern scholarship rarely pays attention to the Sillan vernacular, the predecessor of Middle and Modern Korean (Lee and Ramsey 2011). Most Chinese studies (Zhao 2005; Li and Chen 2008), except Oyung (2001) and Chen (1996), on ancient Korean communities monolithically assume that the word "Sillan" in "Sillan interpreters" refers only to their ethnic origin. Yet, researchers might have inadvertently dismissed the currency factor of the Sillan vernacular. With this blind spot, their analyses will be limited when

they fail to appreciate the vernacular's diplomatic and commercial value in the interpreting tradition of East Asia.

Now that the importance of the Sillan vernacular is acknowledged, how do we explain the idiosyncratic coinage of "Sillan interpreters"? One may argue that "Sillan interpreter" was coined to accentuate Sillans who could interpret using Japanese and Chinese. This argument, however, is weak, since realistically not *all* Sillans were polyglot. It is possible also that "Sillan interpreters" were at the time perceived to be the Sillans in China who were not simply interpreters, but who had broad networks among the regional Chinese authorities and the Sillan migrant enclaves. This conceptual association would be harder to rebut. It fits well into the image of Sillan interpreters in Ennin's description: they engaged mostly in tasks beyond the linguistic realm and they bonded closely with the subcontracted Sillan sailors and carpenters from other enclaves.

7.2 The misleading title of "Sillan interpreters"

If the title of "Sillan interpreters" was indeed commonly associated with multi-tasking Sillans at the time, then, no doubt, the label is intrinsically misleading. In my data, neither Kim Chǒngnam nor Pak Chǒngjang was simply an interpreter, although they were labeled as such in Ennin's account. As effective marine transport coordinators, they obtained the contract to mobilize seaborne manpower and technical resources for the Japanese cause. In Ennin's depiction, these Sillan interpreters were professionals in the China-Japan voyage in charge of logistics arrangements and sailing expertise in rough waters. Clearly, Kim Chǒngnam independently coordinated the nine ships and sixty Sillan sailors in Japan for the trip. Kim's alacrity in preparing for the marine support was impressive. Once he landed in Yangzhou or the Yang prefecture, he instantly traveled to the Chu prefecture to commence preparing for the embassy's return journey. His brisk coordination attests his maritime connections in East Asia. His specialized network explains why Kim was hired to take this high-profile job, a job practically comparable to the captain of this voyage.

四日,依金正南請,令修理所買船。令都匠、番匠、船工、鍛工等卅六人向
楚州去。(Ennin 2007: 28)

4th [Intercalary January, 839]: In response to a request from Kim Chǒngnam, they are having thirty-six master carpenters, general carpenters, ship's carpenters, and founders go to Chu-chou to repair the ships he has bought.

(Reischauer's translation 1955a: 76)

All such logistics preparations seemed routine procedures to Kim, easily accomplished with a wave of his hand. Notably, he showcased his maritime expertise by promptly responding to the ambassador's query about color change of the sea water towards the Chinese coast,³³

新羅譯語金正南申云：聞道揚州掘港難過，今既逾白水，疑逾掘港歟。

(Ennin 2007:4)

The Korean Interpreter, Kim Chǒngnam, stated that he had heard it said that it was difficult to pass through the dug channel of Yang-chou and that, since we had already passed the whitish water, he suspected that we may have passed by the dug channel.

(Reischauer's translation 1955a:5)

So far, I have established that Sillan interpreters' tasks were not exclusive to language mediation, but in fact included multifarious duties of liaison, networking, coordination, and marine travel consultancy. The most legitimate question to ask is then: why were these marine experts, trading agents and middlemen categorically labeled as "Sillan interpreters"? Or alternatively, how come Sillan interpreters were regularly entrusted with a range of tasks not immediately related to interpreting? Interestingly, such incongruences are not exclusively found in relation to Sillan interpreters. For instance, a multiplicity of interpreters' roles was identified also in the Roman empire. Mairs (2011) observes that the Latin (*interpretes*) and Greek (*hermēneus*) terms for "interpreters" in the Roman empire may be understood as multi-faceted "commercial go-betweens," "negotiators," "mediators," or simply someone who "explains." Although these two foreign terms are regularly, and narrowly, anglicized as "interpreters," their scope of references went beyond sheer linguistic mediation. In some cases, the so-called interpreters or negotiators were purely trading brokers in the Roman military services (Mairs 2012).

This inconsistency is particularly problematic in regard to which occurrence in the archive is counted as an interpreting case and which is not. If this is not

33. Ennin never mentioned any problems conversing with Sillan interpreters. I am therefore more inclined to believe that, as far as this record is concerned, they simply conversed with the monk and other embassy members in Japanese. One notable exception is when the village elder Wang Liang (王良), of Sillan ethnicity, spotted Ennin hiding in the mountain, obviously a foreigner unable to speak either Chinese or Sillan. Unlike the Sillan interpreters in the travelogue, Wang Liang spoke no Japanese, so he could only write Chinese to communicate with Ennin. "卷一(四月五日)爰村老王良書云:和尚到此處,自稱新羅人。見其言語,非新羅語,亦非大唐語。見道日本國朝貢使船泊山東候風,恐和尚是官客。"(Ennin 2007:38) "(April 5): The village elder, Wang Liang, wrote, saying: You monks have come here and call yourselves Koreans, but I see that your language is not Korean, nor is it Chinese. I have been told that the ships of the Japanese tributary embassy stopped east of the mountains to wait for [favorable] winds, and I fear that you monks are official visitors [to China]..." (Reischauer's translation 1955a: 104).

immediately clarified, the methodological implication is huge. Possibly, textual references to *interpretes* or *hermèneus* so collated in archival searches might *not* be all about interpreting, but were unfortunately mistaken as such. The data thus collected would have been misleading to, and possibly misread by, researchers. Given the range of possible semantic references to the term “interpreters,” textual references to interpreters cannot be taken for granted, but should be finely analyzed, giving due consideration to their historical contexts of usage.

Ennin’s travelogue is an ideal source for a textual investigation of interpreters, as exemplified in this study. Ultimately, the results could throw light on parallel situations in the European context. As such, the present study adds not only one more example of interpreters with myriad tasks and talents to the database, but also informs us of the contexts in which they functioned. Table 1 is certainly a first step towards a better understanding of Sillan interpreters. Nevertheless, the quantitative data collected raise yet another question. How come there was a total absence of face-to-face mediated exchanges in the diary, despite the frequent references to interpreters? Admittedly, task multiplicity appears to be a major distinction between official interpreters and civilian interpreters. For interpreting officials, the work was often confined to diplomatic or ethnographic interpreting.³⁴ For civilian interpreters, versatility might have been the precise niche of their marketability. Understandably, interpreting alone did not seem sufficient to achieve the goal of survival in those days. Without a stable income, these dynamic interpreters had to be proficient in several trades to ensure that they could cope financially.

8. Conclusions

Ennin’s depiction of these civilian interpreters represents a vivid, individualized, and in-depth, if subjective, account of East Asian go-betweens. In China’s standard histories, interpreters are mostly anonymous and textually transparent, as if they were obsolete in mediated exchanges. Taking note of a similar feature in Spanish records, Alonso and Baigorri (2004: 129) consider it a case of “fiction of intercommunicability.” Ennin’s travelogue, however, gives a radically diverse impression of interpreters. We can see them in action; we can hear them talking to Ennin. They are anything but invisible or inaudible. In fact, their words, actions, ideas, and sometimes emotions intimately intertwined with the monk’s

34. As a Tang imperial practice, visiting envoys would be interviewed in the court of diplomatic receptions with the active probing of the court interpreters. The information collected was mostly about the geography, customs, culture, and climate of the foreign countries in question.

sojourn and fortune. The personal touches and interactions between the patrons and interpreters stand in stark contrast to the flat and flimsy references to interpreters in standard historical records.

It is perhaps not a coincidence that both Sillan interpreters and the interpreters in the Roman empire were found to have regularly engaged in tasks not confined to interpreting. Lung (2011) identified the multilingual Tuyuhun people being equally versatile and entrepreneurial in making their living across national boundaries of 6th-century Asia. Yet, why were these astute polyglots, coincidentally all from first-millennium records, persistently labeled as interpreters? It is possible that the interpreting title might have been used to conveniently overshadow non-linguistic tasks undertaken by interpreters. Undeniably, what came with the interpreting designation was one's mobility, at home and in foreign countries, to trade, travel, and enlist manpower support. I am not clear about policies in the Roman empire, but this was certainly true in Tang China, in which an individual's rights to travel across provinces required permits from regional authorities. In this light, the designation of "Sillan interpreters" might have carried non-linguistic associations tacitly acknowledged at the time. As Wakabayashi (2012: 182) observes in her review of various conceptualizations of translation historiography, "multiple interpretations of a particular terminological concept can coexist in a given period, and the meaning often changes over time." Conjecturally, for instance, "Sillan interpreters" were perceived to be not *simply* interpreters, but multilingual contractors or sub-contractors of various odd jobs related to seaborne trade and transport. The blending of these jobs, nevertheless, was not random. Note that they shared one similarity: the need to be mobile. In this perspective, the unusual emphasis on "Sillan" in the interpreters' designation might have been a way to accentuate their Sillan competence and Sillan connection in East Asia, which were conducive to their versatility as the middle-men.

Ennin's record is an unusually intricate archive pertaining to East Asian interpreting. Its recurrent references to Sillan interpreters, one may conclude, are simply a result of the monk's reliance on their advice and services. Yet, it might also be a clue to a broader picture of East Asian exchanges. The diverse Sillan interpreters in his diary, taken together, sketch an outline of the interpreting tradition in first-millennium East Asia. It should be recalled that these interpreters were organic entities of a social reality at the time. Ennin's frequent references to these polyglots convincingly attest to the ubiquity of Sillans and Sillan interpreters. This argument strikes a chord with Reischauer's observation (1955b: xv) that Ennin's diary is valuable "in the over-all picture it gives of life in ninth-century China." Baigorri (2006: 102) argues that examining the profiles and situations of a group of interpreters counts far more than the mere "gleanings of information" of an individual interpreter.

The current study is in tune with Baigorri's call. Here, we are presented with a social context in which many multilingual Sillans thrived, some bearing the title of interpreters but, in practice, being far more versatile, dynamic, and resourceful than purely interpreters. It was a time and place in which they shrewdly capitalized on their niche in the diplomatic, commercial, and civilian exchanges in East Asia.

Acknowledgements

Research for this chapter was supported by a General Research Fund (LU 341512) from the Research Grants Council of Hong Kong. I am thankful for the comments of two anonymous reviewers and I am grateful to Mr. Takahisa Ichihara for his kind assistance in my use of the Japanese sources.

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