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“All the aids which a beginner needs”: James Summers’ (1828-1891) research on Chinese grammar

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Propositions

1. For James Summers (1828-1891), colloquial Chinese is not a monosyllabic language at the level of the word.
2. James Summers' research is based on various influences rather than one individual's work or one particular tradition.
3. James Summers' two monographs on Chinese grammar, i.e., *The handbook of the Chinese language* (1863) and *Rudiments* (1864), are essentially textbooks.
4. James Summers used both syntactic position and lexical meaning as criteria to classify words.
5. Teaching vernacular Chinese was institutionalised at British universities relatively early—no later than 1854 when James Summers started training interpreters for the Foreign Office—compared to other European countries, such as the Netherlands (1877) and Germany (1887).
6. The introduction of “exotic” languages, such as Chinese, changed European linguistics fundamentally.
7. The Chinese linguistic tradition did not play an essential role in the research on Chinese conducted by early missionaries.
8. When encountering an unfamiliar concept in Chinese, early sinologists generally tried to find an analogy in European languages as their point of departure, for example, claiming that Chinese classifiers are a type of measure expression.
9. Theoretical linguistic rules typically give way to practical purposes in language learning, teaching and textbook compiling.