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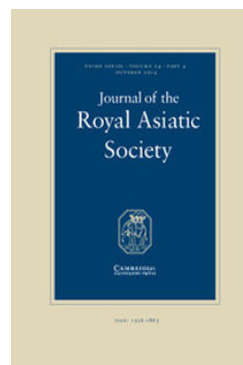
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## Translation and the British Colonial Mission: The Career of Samuel Turner Fearon and the Establishment of Chinese Studies at King's College, London

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*Translation and the British Colonial Mission: The  
Career of Samuel Turner Fearon and the Establishment  
of Chinese Studies at King's College, London\**

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UGANDA SZE PUI KWAN

**Abstract**

*The University of London was the first institution in the United Kingdom to establish a professorship in Chinese. Within a decade of the first half of the nineteenth century, two professorships in Chinese were created at its two colleges: the first at University College in 1837 and the second at King's College in 1847. Previous studies of British sinology have devoted sufficient attention to the establishment of the programme and the first Chinese professorship. However, despite the latter professorship being established by the same patron (Sir George Thomas Staunton; 1781–1859) during the same era as the former, the institutionalisation of the Chinese programme at King's College London seems to have been completely overlooked. If we consider British colonial policy and the mission of the Empire in the early nineteenth century, we are able to understand the strategic purpose served by the Chinese studies programme at King's and the special reason for its establishment at a crucial moment in the history of Sino-British relations. Examining it from this perspective, we reveal unresolved doubts concerning the selection and appointment of King's first Chinese professor. Unlike other inaugural Chinese professors appointed during the nineteenth century at other universities in the United Kingdom, the first Chinese professor at King's, Samuel Turner Fearon (1819–1854), was not a sinophile. He did not translate any Chinese classics or other works. His inaugural lecture has not even survived. This is why sinologists have failed to conduct an in-depth study on Fearon and the genealogy of the Chinese programme at King's. Nevertheless, Samuel Fearon did indeed play a very significant role in Sino-British relations due to his ability as an interpreter and his knowledge of China. He was not only an interpreter in the first Opium War (1839–1842) but was also a colonial civil servant and senior government official in British Hong Kong when the colonial government started to take shape after the war. This paper both re-examines his contribution during this “period of conflict and difficulty” in Sino-British relations and demonstrates the very nature of British sinology.*

\*The author owes many thanks to Prof. Theo Hermans and Prof. Bernard Fuehrer who gave invaluable comments on earlier drafts of this article. My gratitude also goes to Prof. Timothy Barrett who provided constant support when I was revising the article. The paper could not have been written without the benefit of the excellent preservation of the archival material at the university archives of King's College London. I wish to thank especially Ms Lianne Smith, the archive manager at King's College London for her help during different stages of research of this project.

## Introduction

Although King's College London (KCL) was not the first institution to set up a Chinese professorship in Britain, it occupies a special position in the history of British sinology. In the nineteenth century it was not just a centre for teaching Chinese and nurturing Chinese scholars, it was also the Empire's centre for training colonial officers in the Chinese language before they were sent to the Far East colonies to assume administrative duties. Pursuant to an invitation issued by the Foreign and Colonial Office, the principal of KCL would nominate its best students who had earned a good result in Chinese studies to apply for the post of colonial officer. It would also help to set examination questions and keep track of results throughout the recruitment exercise for candidates selected and nominated to take up duties in the Far East. The same function was later assumed by the School of Oriental and African Studies in the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> However, this function of KCL was never clearly announced, nor was it recorded in the College's archives. It only came to light following prolonged investigation of records on the training of Chinese interpreters kept in various archives at the Colonial Office and the Foreign Office.<sup>2</sup>

Anglo-Chinese relations entered a new phase after the first Opium War as the British Empire annexed Hong Kong and more Chinese ports were opened to trade. The Empire soon realised that its understanding of China and its people was inadequate. It did not have enough information about China, and especially lacked capable interpreters who could communicate directly with the Chinese people and help officials perform various administrative tasks. The programme at KCL was set up to meet this need. It was established by Sir George Thomas Staunton (1781–1859), one of the most renowned Chinese experts and sinologists of the time. He procured as many public subscriptions as were necessary for the chair in Chinese to be established. Everything was ready, other than a person qualified to lead the programme. Staunton ultimately approached Samuel Turner Fearon, an interpreter in the first Opium War and the first Registrar-General of the British Hong Kong government in 1845. Fearon was by no means Staunton's first choice. Although he had not dedicated himself to the study of Chinese, his long-term connection with China, his knowledge of Chinese culture and his interpreting and communication skills made him a suitable candidate. His acceptance of the position could help implement Staunton's idea

<sup>1</sup>P. J. Hartog, "The origins of the School of Oriental Studies", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, I (1917), pp. 12, 20; Benjamin Ifor Evans, "Papers of the Commission of Enquiry into the Facilities for Oriental, Slavonic, East European, and African studies 1945", SOAS Archive, MS 380612/2.

<sup>2</sup>Great Britain. Colonial Office Correspondence (hereafter CO) CO 129/83/ 110–117 [1861–06–13]; CO 129/191/393–405 [1880–11–03]; Foreign Office (hereafter FO) FO 17/233/ 55 [1854–10–15] etc. For the detailed account of the execution of the interpreter training programme for the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office at King's College London, see Uganda Sze Pui Kwan, "Fanyi zhengzhi ji Hanxue zhishi de shengchan: Weituo ma yu Yingguo waijiaobu de Zhongguo xuesheng yiyuan jihua 翻譯政治及漢學知識的生產：威妥瑪與英國外交部的中國學生譯員計畫(1843–1870)[The politics of translation and Chinese knowledge production: Sir Francis Thomas Wade and the student interpreter programme of China], in *Zhongyang yanjiu yuan jindaishi yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院近代史研究所集刊 [Bulletin of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica] 81 (09.2013), pp.1–52; and Uganda Sze Pui Kwan, *Daying diguo, hanxue, fanyi: Liyage yu Xianggang fanyiguan xuesheng jihua* 大英帝國、漢學、翻譯：理雅各與香港翻譯官學生計畫 [British Empire, sinology and translation: James Legge and the interpreter cadetship programme in Hong Kong (1860–1900)], *Fanyishi Yanjiu* 翻譯史研究 [Studies in translation history](Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe), Vol. 2 (2012), pp. 59–101.

of a Chinese programme at KCL. This paper looks into Fearon's background to understand why he was chosen for this special position at KCL.

If we review the genealogy of Chinese studies in the United Kingdom during the nineteenth century, we find that all inaugural professors of Chinese studies were renowned scholars in Chinese, except for the first professor appointed at KCL. The very first Chinese professorship in the United Kingdom was established at University College London. The inaugural professor, Rev. Samuel Kidd (1804–1843), was a student and close friend of the Rev. Robert Morrison, though he was not as well known. He was principal of the Anglo-Chinese College at Malacca in 1828 and wrote in great depth on Chinese culture and language. The second was established at KCL and will be discussed in more detail below. The third was established at the University of Oxford in 1876. It was a chair first occupied by the Rev. Dr James Legge (1815–1897), whose translations of Chinese classics such as *The Analects* and other well-known Chinese books laid the foundations of future scholarship. This fitted well with the ethos of a traditional university such as Oxford, which has its origins in medieval scholarship. The fourth was set up at the University of Cambridge in 1888, where the chair was held by Sir Thomas Francis Wade (1818–1895), to whom no further introduction is needed. Anyone who has come across the Wade–Giles romanisation system of transliterating Chinese characters, and understands the contribution he made to the learning of Chinese (Pekingese/Mandarin) as a foreign language among anglo-phones, would agree he was the ideal choice at the time, regardless of his status as an old boy of Cambridge and his donation of valuable collections to his Alma Mater. The fifth professorship in Chinese studies was established at the Victoria University of Manchester (now known as the University of Manchester) in 1901, and its first Chinese professor was Edward Harper Parker (1849–1926), whose work on the social and cultural history of China was so prolific that anyone who sought to keep abreast of his thinking could only complain that he wrote too quickly.

The nineteenth century was a time when British sinology entered a period of rapid progress, as described by Sir John Francis Davis (1795–1890), who was an interpreter for the East India Company, the Chief Superintendent of Trade in Canton in 1834–1835,<sup>3</sup> the second governor of Hong Kong from 1844 to 1848) and a well-known sinologist in England. In his book, he lamented the backwardness of the development of Chinese studies in Britain (as compared to Continental Europe) in previous centuries, but held out hope for a rapid escalation in the pace of future development.<sup>4</sup> No matter how one defines the rise and progress of British sinology, the establishment of Chinese studies at KCL was by far the most opaque event in its history, and may even appear somewhat mysterious. Sir George Thomas Staunton and Sir John Francis Davis, both of whom played a decisive role in setting up the professorship, did not detail in their own writings how the inaugural professor was selected, nominated and confirmed. The absence of such details hints at untold stories. Their long silence also left a blank in British sinology. Few of the limited number of accounts that touch upon KCL and its inaugural chair professor in Chinese even correctly recorded his name.

<sup>3</sup>Hosea Ballou Morse, *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire*. Vol. 1 (Shanghai, Kelly and Walsh, 1910–1918), p.150.

<sup>4</sup>John. F. Davis, *Chinese Miscellanies: A Collection of Essays and Notes* (London, John Murray, 1865), p. 50.

Some called him James,<sup>5</sup> some incorrectly stated that his surname was Fearson<sup>6</sup> and others referred to him as J. Fearon.<sup>7</sup> In some instances he is referred to as “a former interpreter named Fearon”,<sup>8</sup> or just “a” Chinese professor at KCL.<sup>9</sup> In a recently compiled collection of materials based on the original letters of William Jardine and James Matheson, famous nineteenth-century British traders, his deeds are confused with his father’s.<sup>10</sup> What is even more alarming is that no study to date has revealed any of his specific biographical details (not even basic information such as his dates of birth and death), nor cast light on his expertise in Chinese studies or his inaugural lecture.<sup>11</sup> Timothy H. Barrett described this candidate as “certainly not the College’s first choice for the job”.<sup>12</sup> But why would Staunton hasten to establish the Chinese professorship if the search process had not been particularly satisfactory? Indeed, there was no rush to begin the programme, as one had already been established at the same university, though at a different college (University College London (UCL), a programme that could also be seen as the brainchild of Sir George Thomas Staunton.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, if Staunton had already set up one programme at UCL, why did he bother to set up a similar, if not identical, one shortly afterwards at KCL?

To solve these mysteries left unexplored by previous studies, we have to delve into the following basic questions:

1. What role did King’s College London play in the British Empire during the nineteenth century?
2. Who was the first Chinese professor at King’s College London?
3. What qualifications and contributions landed him the position?
4. Why did the decision relate to translation or interpretation?

These questions together comprise a specific case study of early British sinology that enables us to probe into the very nature of British sinology, a topic that many studies have attempted to investigate but have done so only on the basis of a loose framework—that of orientalism—and without taking account of the details of this historical period.

<sup>5</sup>Hu Youjing 胡優靜, *Yingguo 19 shiji de Hanxueshi yanjiu* 英國19世紀的漢學史研究 [The history of sinology in the United Kingdom in the 19<sup>th</sup> century], (Beijing Shi, 2009), p. 63.

<sup>6</sup>Chen Yaosheng 陳堯聖, “Yingguo de Hanxueshi 英國的漢學研究” [Sinology in the United Kingdom] in Tao Zhenyu 陶振譽 (ed.), *Shijie geguo Hanxue yanjiu lunwenji* 世界各國漢學研究論文集 [The anthology of sinology studies in the world, vols. 1–2 (Taipei, 1962–1967), p. 186.

<sup>7</sup>David B. Honey, *Incense at the Altar: Pioneering Sinologists and the Development of Classical Chinese Philology* (New Haven, CT, 2001), p. 207 n5.

<sup>8</sup>Timothy Hugh Barrett, *Singular Listlessness: A Short History of Chinese Books and British Scholars* (London, 1989) p. 74.

<sup>9</sup>David Hawkes, John Minford, Wong Siu-Kit, *Classical, Modern, and Humane: Essays in Chinese Literature* (Hong Kong, 1989), p. 7.

<sup>10</sup>Alain Le Pichon, *China Trade and Empire: Jardine, Matheson & Co. and the Origins of British Rule in Hong Kong, 1827–1843* (Oxford and New York, 2006), p. 591.

<sup>11</sup>King’s College London Archive (Ref K/LEC1 1831–1878).

<sup>12</sup>Timothy Barrett, *Singular Listlessness*, p. 74.

<sup>13</sup>Uganda Sze Pui Kwan, “Lost in translation and diplomatic deception: Sir George Thomas Staunton and the birth of the Chinese programme at the University of London,” presented at the international conference “Sinologists as Translators in the 17–19th Centuries: Archives and Context”, Organised by SOAS (Department of the Languages and Cultures of China and inner Asia) and CUHK (Research Centre for Translation Studies), SOAS, 19–21 June 2013.

We will begin with certain historical materials unearthed from various archives, a body of evidence that unveils the obscure background of the first Chinese professor at KCL, whose full name is Samuel Turner Fearon. His unusual background opens up one of the most important episodes in Anglo–Chinese relations in the nineteenth century, a time historians usually label “a period of difficulty and conflict”. The experience and vision he gained while serving as an interpreter during the first Opium War, before going on to serve as the first Registrar-General of the new colony and then as the inaugural professor of Chinese studies at KCL, represented a new page in Anglo–Chinese relations. All the remarkable chapters of his life were made possible by his competence in Chinese and his interpretation and communication skills.

### The Fearon Family and the China Connection

Samuel Turner Fearon was born at Haringey in Middlesex (London) and was baptised on 13 January 1820.<sup>14</sup> His exact date of birth remains unknown. All surviving records pertaining to his background, which include the record of his marriage in 1846,<sup>15</sup> records of the England census conducted in 1851,<sup>16</sup> and the record of his burial in 1854,<sup>17</sup> merely state his date of birth as “abt. 1819”. He was the first son of Christopher Augustus Fearon (1788–1866) and Elizabeth Noad (1794–1838).<sup>18</sup> Although Samuel Fearon played a pivotal role at a turning point in Anglo–Chinese relations, historical studies do not give us much information about him. In contrast, much more attention has been paid to anecdotes about his parents’ lives in Macao and Canton.

Christopher Fearon was a midshipman at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805.<sup>19</sup> After the war, he joined the East India Company. With the network of contacts and maritime experience he had gained in the navy, his sea trade business flourished. He expanded his business from Calcutta to China in 1814.<sup>20</sup> According to the list of foreign residents in Macao published

<sup>14</sup>Great London, General Register Office, England. Births and Baptism Records (1813–1906). Baptism records indicate that he was born around 1819.

<sup>15</sup>General Public Record Office, Marriage record, Kensington, 1846, vol. 3 (Jan–Feb–Mar), p. 210.

<sup>16</sup>England Census Record 1851. Stanstead, Hertfordshire, England, no. 53. Family: family members include Samuel T. Fearon (head; age 32: medical practitioner), Caroline Fearon (housewife; age 31), Charles J. Fearon (son; age 2), Kate Fearon (daughter; age 1) with maids and medical pupil etc.

<sup>17</sup>General Register Office, England. Death certificate, 1854. Quarter of registration: (Jan–Feb–Mar), District, Pancras (1837–1901), County, London, Middlesex, vol.1b,p. 24.

<sup>18</sup>Sir Lindsay Ride mentioned that Samuel Fearon was the second son born to Christopher Fearon and Elisabeth Noad in a remark in “Journal of occurrences at Canton during the cessation of trade 1839”, written by William C. Hunter, in *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society*, IV (1964). Samuel Fearon should be the first child of the family, as Christopher and Elisabeth were married on 14 May 1818, at Saint Leonards Church, Streatham in England. See J. L. Cranmer-Byng and William Hunter, “Journal of Occurrences”, p. 39, n 30. See also the marriage record of Christopher Augustus Fearon and Elizabeth Noad, batch no. M1055191.

<sup>19</sup>The grandson of Samuel Fearon’s brother, Robert Inglis Fearon (1837–1897), Lieutenant Colonel Sheppard Percy Fearon once wrote a column entitled “Fearons and the China Connection” in the *South China Morning Post* in Hong Kong during the 1970s, which was later expanded into an unpublished article about the family’s history, “Pedigrees of the Fearon Family Trading into China and Notes On Collateral and Other Matters of Family Interest”. Unfortunately, the information it gave about Samuel Fearon and his family was not all accurate. See *South China Morning Post (Sunday Post Herald)*, 9 June 1974, p. 6, and the unpublished article housed in the library of the University of Hong Kong.

<sup>20</sup>Anthony Farrington, *A Biographical Index of East India Company Maritime Service Officers: 1600–1834* (London, 1999), p. 264; Anthony Farrington, *Catalogue of East India Company Ships’ Journals and Logs: 1600–1834* (London, 1999), pp. 166, 458, 530, 702.

in the *Chinese Repository*,<sup>21</sup> he was already established as an active ‘supercargo’ operator in the Canton trade by 1825, and his name was frequently mentioned in the same breath as other well-known businessmen such as James Matheson (1796–1878) and William Jardine (1784–1843), merchants whose businesses are still flourishing in Hong Kong today. During his time in Canton, Christopher Fearon was certainly seen as one of the leading figures in ‘trans-Asia’ enterprise as he went about establishing Fearon enterprises in the Far East. Anyone who studies the mercantile history of nineteenth-century China will know of names such as Fearon & Co., Fearon & Ilbery Co., Fearon & Heard Co. and Fearon & Low Co. These were companies he and his progenies set up across Shanghai, Macao, Hong Kong and Australia. He was also appointed as a British notary public by the Hong Kong government in 1841.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to excelling in speaking local Chinese dialects (presumably Cantonese) and qualifying as an English/Chinese verbal and written translator, Christopher Fearon’s son, Samuel, was also capable of Portuguese/English translation work.<sup>23</sup> This kind of language facility was not widely seen in those days. Since Emperor Qianlong (1736–1795) of the Qing Dynasty announced “The Decree Prohibiting Barbarians and Intercourse with Barbarians” in 1757, all trade activities had gravitated towards a single spot: Canton. Under such circumstances, trade could be carried out only during the winter trading season, and foreigners normally resided in Macao, a Portuguese settlement since 1557. Furthermore, foreign women were prohibited from following their husbands to Canton. It is therefore believed that Samuel Fearon travelled with his parents from England and grew up in Macao, where he acquired local languages when he was young. This conjecture is confirmed by a painting by the famous artist George Chinnery (1774–1852), who stayed with the Fearons from 1825 after first setting foot in Macao.<sup>24</sup> Chinnery was not only a close family friend of the Fearons, but was also a teacher and godfather to the second and third sons of the Fearon family. The only known portrait of Samuel Fearon was recently discovered. In this portrait, Samuel Fearon sits on a beautiful balcony with his second brother Charles Augustus Fearon (1821–?). Art historians believe that the picture captures the famous Cave of Camoens which is near the luxurious Casa House Garden (Casa da Horta) occupied by the Fearons when they stayed in Macao.<sup>25</sup> Their house and the garden were widely acclaimed by many of the Fearons’ contemporaries for its good taste and the elegant lifestyle it afforded.<sup>26</sup> The son of Robert Morrison, John Robert Morrison (1814–1843), has also described the “merry

<sup>21</sup> *Chinese Repository*, Jan. 1837, vol. 5, p. 426; Hosea Ballou Morse, *Chronicles of the East India Company Trading to China 1635–1834*, vol. IV (London, 2007), pp. 148, 163, 167, 187.

<sup>22</sup> *Chinese Repository*, Aug. 1841, vol. 10, p. 528.

<sup>23</sup> Great Britain, *Papers Relative to the Establishment of a Court of Judicature in China, for the Purpose of Enabling the British Superintendents of Trade to Exercise Control over the Proceedings of British Subjects in Their Intercourse with each other and with the Chinese* (London, J. Harrison & Son, 1838), p. 444; KCL (Ref KA/IC/C31) [date unknown] May 1847.

<sup>24</sup> Noel Croucher, “A little about George Chinnery and the Fearons”, in Vaudine England, *The Quest of Noel Croucher: Hong Kong’s Quiet Philanthropist* (Hong Kong, 1998), p.30; Manuel Teixeira, *George Chinnery: No Bicenenario do seu Nascimento, 1774–1974* (Macau, 1974), pp. 71–74.

<sup>25</sup> Patrick Conner, “George Chinnery rediscoveries and recent research”, in *Arts of Asia*, XXXIV, 5, 2004, p. 96.

<sup>26</sup> Harriet L. Hillard, *Lights and Shadows of a Macao Life: The Journal of Harriett Low, Travelling Spinster*, Part 1 (Woodinville, WA, History Bank, 1900[2002]), pp. 480, 505; Katharine Hillard (ed.), *My Mother’s Journal: A Young Lady’s Diary of Five Years Spent in Manila, Macao, and the Cape of Good Hope From 1829–1834* (Boston, George H. Ellis



(Colour online) Samuel T. Fearon (right) and Charles A. Fearon (left)  
 Courtesy private collector; photo, Martyn Gregory Gallery, London<sup>28</sup>

party” hosted by the Fearons where he first met Chinnery.<sup>27</sup> The portrait above by Chinnery depicts Samuel and Charles when they were still in their boyhood.

Though it is plausible that Samuel and his brothers returned to England for some time to receive a proper British education (from which he acquired his knowledge of Latin),<sup>29</sup> no historical record has been uncovered to date to indicate the exact duration of his time in the mother country. At the age of 18, he was already in Canton, having been hired as an interpreter by the General Chamber of Commerce of Canton.

Before he formally began working as an interpreter for the Chamber, Samuel Fearon’s mother must have told him of the strained nature of Anglo-Chinese relations. Elizabeth Fearon was among the first batch of foreign women who defied the decree issued by the Qing Court in 1830 that “no foreign woman may visit Canton”. The act had thrown Sino-Western relations into turmoil. The Chinese government issued a warrant and dispatched troops to “expel” foreign women from Canton. However, Elizabeth Fearon’s bravery was

printer, 1900), p.44; Rosmarie W. N. Lamas, *Everything in Style: Harriett Low’s Macau* (Macau: Instituto Cultural de Macau, 2006), p. 36.

<sup>27</sup>Wellcome Trust Library, MS.5827 Letter 17, “John Robert Morrison to His father, Robert Morrison”, 23 Oct 1830.

<sup>28</sup>The author wishes to thank Robin Markbreiter, the Director/Executive of *Arts of Asia* and Dr Patrick Conner of Martyn Gregory Gallery, London for their help in getting the reprint permission. And sincere thanks goes to the private collector who is in possession of this portrait.

<sup>29</sup>See above note 20.

widely admired, and her courage was acclaimed among traders.<sup>30</sup> The reputation and active involvement of Samuel Fearon's parents in Canton trade circles created a fertile multicultural and multilingual environment in which he could form a broad spectrum of views to fit the historical context.

### Translation and Resolving Conflict (1838–1841)

Fearon might not have been a prolific writer on Chinese culture, but his communication skills and interpreting ability were certainly essential elements that filled the vacuum of the era when Anglo-Chinese contact started down a tortuous and winding path. Since the “Decree Prohibiting Barbarians and Intercourse with Barbarians” was issued, Chinese people had been prohibited from having any contact with foreigners. To regulate the activities of foreigners, all trade was subject to the mediation and supervision of a small group of agents in Canton called *Hong* (factories).<sup>31</sup> All traders' opinions and petitions had to be sent to the Hong merchants. On the other hand, the clamour for trustworthy interpreters had never ceased since the British tried to set up trade connections with China in the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, the problem had long been neglected by the British government, leading to a chronic lack of capable interpreters in Canton.<sup>32</sup>

Whether or not Fearon was determined to be an interpreter, as a young person who bore this valuable skill at the time and saw that it was much needed, it was natural for him to take up the role and duties of an interpreter. Together with John Robert Morrison, and Robert Thom (1807–1846), he became a regular interpreter in the Chamber of Commerce.<sup>33</sup> His interpreting services and translation activities are well recorded from November 1838. He translated edicts, proclamations and announcements Canton officials issued to traders.<sup>34</sup> Most of his works were first published in the *Canton Register*, which would then be reprinted in the *Chinese Repository* and other magazines specifically aimed at traders such as *Hunt's Merchant Magazine*.<sup>35</sup> His translations not only prove he was a competent linguist but also show that he was present during the historical events that were soon to unfold.

Anglo-Chinese relations had long been strained under the existing trading system: China used every means possible to prevent an excessive outflow of currency; traders always wanted to expand their trade and open up direct trade channels and communication platforms. However, the tension increased after imports—legal or illegal—of opium into China rose. In March 1839, when Commissioner Lin Zexu 林則徐 (1785–1850), the special superintendent

<sup>30</sup>An old resident [William C. Hunter], *The “Fan Kwae” at Canton Before Treaty Days 1825–1844* (London, Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1882), p. 120.

<sup>31</sup>For the historical development of Hong merchants and their role in the Canton trade, see Weng Eang Cheong, *Hong Merchants of Canton: Chinese Merchants in Sino-Western Trade, 1684–1798* (London, 1995).

<sup>32</sup>Uganda Sze Pui Kwan, “‘A requisite of such vital importance’: The want of Chinese interpreters in the First Anglo Chinese War 1839–1842”, in Lawrence Wang Chi Wong (ed.), *Towards a History of Translating: In Celebration of the Fortieth Anniversary of the Research Centre for Translation*. (Hong Kong: Research Centre for Translation, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2013), pp. 389–418.

<sup>33</sup>Anonymous, “Second Annual Report of the Canton General Commerce Committee, Presented at a General Meeting Held the 3rd of Nov. 1838”, *Canton Register* (1838.11.6), XI, 45, pp. 160–182; later reprinted in *Chinese Repository*, Nov. 1838, VIII, 8, pp. 386–389.

<sup>34</sup>*Canton Register* (1839.2.5) supplementary, pp. 1–3.

<sup>35</sup>*Hunt's Merchants' Magazine and Commercial Review*; 1839, I, p. 87.

of the emperor, arrived in Canton to eradicate the inflow of opium, all accumulated underlying problems erupted. Fearon's role as an interpreter subsequently expanded. His main contribution was to mediate the conflict.<sup>36</sup> His multifaceted skills and swift responses were further displayed in the 'hostage issue', in which all foreign traders were detained inside a factory after they refused to give up all their opium.

Being a traditional gentry-scholar, Lin Zexu was a man of strong will. His patriotism also made him determined to solve the problem in a high-handed manner. When he arrived at Canton on 10 March 1839, he immediately brought together all local officials to gather concrete information about the traders. He meticulously worked through a list of questions to ascertain facts such as, who smuggled the most opium? How much opium did smugglers hoard and where was it kept?<sup>37</sup> He strengthened existing measures and issued several edicts notifying the merchants that they had three days to hand over all their opium. Each merchant was also required to sign a bond indicating they would never sell opium in China again, under threat of severe punishment.<sup>38</sup>

On 18 March 1839, after the Chamber of Commerce received the notice, all the merchants gathered together to discuss how to respond to Lin Zexu's ultimatum. Some raised the modern legal point of view, saying that it was against a core principle of British law for the merchants to be adjudged guilty before a trial.<sup>39</sup> Others thought it would be impossible to hand over all the opium because the merchants were at best only the consignees of the goods. Others indicated that China had her own legal standards and that British law was irrelevant to China. While the merchants were arguing, Lin Zexu issued a new edict to blockade the port. Henceforth, no one would be allowed to leave or enter Canton. Fearon translated the edict.<sup>40</sup> Fortunately, one of the merchants was quickly able to send someone to notify the plenipotentiary and chief superintendent of trade, Sir Charles Elliot (1801–1875).

The deadline for the blockade to come into effect was 21 March. All the merchants again gathered at the Chamber of Commerce to discuss their response and possible outcomes. Once again, no unanimous view was reached. They sent Fearon along with another interpreter and other merchants to seek an extension of the deadline. Fearon played a significant role in the event as that of Morrison, who was supposed to be the head of the interpretation team, and was detained by the Chinese officials. Other interpreters who participated actively in the first Opium War, such as Rev. Karl Friedrich August Gützlaff (1803–1851) and Walter Henry Medhurst (1796–1857), played no part in the incident. A handful of interpreters were responsible for all communication. In parliamentary papers and records reporting on the event,<sup>41</sup> Fearon is depicted as providing an important bridge between officials and merchants in this particular meeting. His ability to interpret precisely and correctly under pressure was unsurpassed.

<sup>36</sup> Mona Baker, *Translation and Conflict* (London, 2006).

<sup>37</sup> Lin Zexu 林則徐, *Xinji lu* 信及錄 [Records of Xinji] (Shanghai, 1982), p. 12.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19–21, 22–24.

<sup>39</sup> John Slade, *Narrative of the Late Proceedings and Events In China* (hereafter, *Narrative*) (China, Canton Register Press, 1839), p. 31.

<sup>40</sup> *Narrative*, p. 42.

<sup>41</sup> Great Britain, *Report from the Select Committee on the Trade with China; Together with the Minutes of Evidence Taken Before Them, and an Appendix and Index. Communicated by the Commons to the Lords* (London, House of Commons, 1840).

The president of the Chamber of Commerce ultimately came up with a solution: ironically, it was to seek an extension of the deadline. However, this proposal was rejected by Lin, who perceived that the traders were treating his order with nonchalance. Lin's intelligence revealed that Lancelot Dent (1799–1853) was the largest smuggler of opium and Lin requested the handover of the merchant. The Chamber refused. They sent Fearon together with another interpreter, Robert Thom, and two representatives of the Chamber, to the Chinese Consoo House to explain their refusal to follow the order.<sup>42</sup> The atmosphere was tense at Consoo House, with the viceroy and magistrates lining up. Fearon and his colleagues were escorted into the house to be questioned. They were first detained in isolation from each other. When the real interrogation started, the interpreters were the first to answer. To pacify their interrogators, they replied in respectful, prudent and calm tones. When the merchants were later interrogated, they followed the instructions the interpreters had given them at the factory. Although the interrogation lasted for three hours, the hostile situation was finally resolved.<sup>43</sup> They were even allowed to leave with gifts given to them in gratitude.<sup>44</sup> The interpreters were asked to persuade the merchants at the factory to follow the orders of the commissioner. A degree of trust had clearly been built up. They were even supposed to engage in direct dialogue with Commissioner Lin three days later,<sup>45</sup> indicating that communication between the two parties had eased the political tension and divergence.<sup>46</sup> However, resolving the conflict through talks was a long road to take, whereas solving the problem with military might have offered an instant solution.

On 24 March 1839, Sir Charles Elliot was able to sneak into the factory, hoping to escort the British merchant Lancelot Dent to Macao. The plan was aborted, as it was discovered by Lin Zexu. Lin was angry with Elliot for his intervention. He ordered the factory to be sealed immediately and that all the Chinese helpers and runners who worked for the factory to be recalled. Needless to say, trade was subsequently banned. Foreign merchants were detained in the factory as hostages for more than 40 days without supplies. The captives reacted in horror as the factory was besieged by Chinese guards.<sup>47</sup> Interpreters were once again the only channel between the two parties, and the whole trader community of some 300 individuals counted on them. The pressure and duties the interpreters bore were heavy, especially for Fearon, the youngest one.

<sup>42</sup>Charles Elliot, *A Digest of the Despatches on China (including those received on the 27th of March): with a Connecting Narrative and Comments* (London, James Ridgway, 1840), p. 100.

<sup>43</sup>Narrative, p. 49.

<sup>44</sup>Narrative, p. 51; Wenqing 文慶, Jia Zhen 賈楨, Baoyun deng 寶鏗(eds), *Chouban yiyu shimo 籌辦夷務始末* [The accounts of organising foreign affairs], Vol. 6 (Shanghai, 1995), p.13.

<sup>45</sup>Great Britain, *Report from the Select Committee on the Trade with China; Together with the Minutes of Evidence Taken Before Them, and an Appendix and Index. Communicated by the Commons to the Lords* (London, House of Commons, 1840), p. 14.

<sup>46</sup>Gideon Nye, *Peking the Goal,—The Sole Hope of Peace: Comprising An Inquiry into the Origin of the Pretension of Universal Supremacy by China and into the Causes of the First War* (Canton: [s.n.], 1873), p.62; James Bromley Eames, *The English in China: Being an Account of the Intercourse and Relations Between England and China From the Year 1600 to the Year 1843 and a Summary of Later Developments* (London, Pitman and Sons, 1909), p. 347; *Chinese Repository* from May 1838 to April 1839, vol. VII, April, pp. 623–624; Office of the Chinese Repository, *Crisis in the Opium Traffic: Being an Account of the Proceedings of the Chinese Government to Suppress that Trade with the Notices, Edicts, & relating thereto* (China, printed by the office of the Chinese repository, 1839), p. 16.

<sup>47</sup>Robert Bennet Forbes, *Personal Reminiscences* (Boston, Little, Brown, & Co.), pp. 347–349.

Fearon proved his tremendous value in easing the tension. This was largely due to his ability to comprehend the situation as a whole and his deep knowledge of the Chinese mind and culture. The reminiscence of one American merchant shows that during the period that the traders were detained, Fearon played a major part in releasing the psychological tension.

There was also Mr. Samuel Fearon—since Professor of Chinese in the University of London,—who not only spoke with fluency the language of the people, but sang their songs in admirably-characteristic *falsetto* and with as characteristic a toss of the head.

Among other humorous conceits, we had a rehearsal of an imaginary debate in Parliament upon the question of our imprisonment; each of the leading celebrities of the House of Commons coming to the front with his pro or con, — Mr. Fearon with admirable aplomb, making speeches very attractive in form, if not profound in matter ; and the debate ending with applause: — to be succeeded by a conundrum that was accepted as foreshadowing the displeasure of the Emperor at the excesses of Lin, which afterward led to his public disgrace.

The conundrum being propounded thus:

“When valiant Mars from the West arrives on the shores of China, what will be the Emperor’s first question?”

He will inquire his birth and lineage.

Between Mr. Fearon and the Messrs Tiers a somewhat ambitious musical effort resulted in the composition of a Song, that we may characterise as international or fraternal in motive, if not classical in diction; and which being set to the air of “Here’s a health to thee Tom Breeze”.<sup>48</sup>

Fearon had spent his adolescence in southern China, where he was brought up with a deep understanding of the local people. The pre-war conflict just described gave him an opportunity to demonstrate his mediation skills. After the war, he had a further opportunity to put these skills into practice.

### Translation and Colonial Rule (1841–1846)

After the first Opium War broke out in 1839, Fearon was sent on the naval fleet *Blenheim* and accompanied the naval commander during the battles of Canton Heights.<sup>49</sup> He must have given a good account of himself for after the war he was awarded an honorable China medal which was dedicated to his service as an interpreter.<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately, Fearon did not have much chance to contribute his services during the war. No sooner had the war broken out than a severe bout of dysentery afflicted the army, causing serious casualties in many regiments. Fearon himself caught the illness, which almost claimed his life and had a deleterious effect on his later health. He was sent back to Macao to receive medical attention, frustrating his participation in an important historical event: the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing. In his absence, the need for interpreters became even more desperate.

Despite the fact that Fearon was unable to witness the signing of the Treaty, which had the ceding of Hong Kong Island as one of its terms, his fate was closely tied with that of Hong Kong. He was the man who officially declared the British possession of Hong Kong after

<sup>48</sup>Gideon Nye, *Peking the Goal* (Canton: [s.n.], 1873), pp. 21–22.

<sup>49</sup>CO 129 / 12/ 300 [1845–07–23].

<sup>50</sup>Great Britain, Public Record Office, Admiralty (ADM) 171/12/24.

the signing of the Chunpee Convention on 26 January 1841. Although neither China nor Britain ultimately recognised this convention, Sir Charles Elliot sent Fearon and the Deputy Superintendent of trade to sail on the warship *Madagascar* on 2 February 1841 to announce to the local people (mostly fishermen) around the island that Hong Kong would henceforth be ruled by Britain.<sup>51</sup> Fearon was assigned this important duty because he was well versed in the local dialects. Indeed, the role of almost all the interpreters who participated in the war changed once the war was over. They all became government officials at the British crown colony and the various treaty ports that emerged as a direct consequence of the war. John Robert Morrison was appointed Chinese Secretary and Colonial Secretary of Hong Kong. Gützlaff succeeded John Robert Morrison after the latter's untimely death in August 1843. Robert Thom served as the magistrate at Ningpo, as he was fluent in the Ningpo dialect. Fearon was stationed in Hong Kong to help establish the colonial government.

Fearon joined the government on 4 May 1841 as interpreter and clerk at the Chief Magistrate's Court.<sup>52</sup> His duties as part of the Hong Kong government were multifaceted. He was soon promoted to notary public, coroner and assistant magistrate.<sup>53</sup> Apart from his interpreting and translation work, which were necessary elements of routine administration in the colonial regime, his duties mainly involved communicating with the local people. The communicative spectrum of the offices of notary public and assistant magistrate was perhaps evident, but was not so obvious as regards that of coroner. In those days, colonial physicians and coroners had to be accompanied by an interpreter in carrying out their everyday duties to reduce cultural conflict during what was a sensitive time.

There was an endless list of policies for the new-born government to implement. This was perhaps nothing special for the British rulers, as the Empire was already used to setting up new regimes under its rule. However, this time the challenge was different as they had to deal with the Chinese people, about whom the British had insufficient information and knowledge. Not only did they have no proper channel to comprehend the nature and culture of the Chinese but there was also a lack of capable advisors and consultants back in England who could offer an overarching perspective upon which a blueprint for the colony could be based. Local officials enacted each new policy by trial and error. The infant government of British Hong Kong was beset by various problems for its first five years. The most troubling one was social unrest, a problem that arose because the rulers did not have a clear understanding of the potential threat to their power. A riot that broke out on 31 October 1844 is especially worthy of mention, for it was triggered by the mistranslation of a new ordinance.

Hong Kong society had suffered from attacks by thieves and pirates for many years. Given its island profile, there was no effective means to check the inflow and outflow of the population. Hong Kong did not have enough police at that time, and the judicial system was not yet fully established. It was a hotbed of crime. The newly appointed governor, Sir John Francis Davis (1795–1890), issued a new ordinance to deal with the problem. It required that all male citizens above the age of 21 had to register their personal details at the Registry

<sup>51</sup>Peter Ward Fay, *The Opium War 1840–42, Barbarians in the Celestial Empire in the Early Part of the Nineteenth Century and the War by Which they Forced her Gates Ajar* (Chapel Hill, 1975), p. 277.

<sup>52</sup>CO 129/10/11–12 [1841-05–17]; *Chinese Repository* Aug. 1841, vol. 10, p. 479.

<sup>53</sup>CO 129/10/25 [1841-07–31].

Office once a year. Westerners were required to pay a five dollar registration fee, and locals were to pay one dollar. All registrations had to be completed at the Registry Office, and the Registrar-General had the right to expel any unqualified person.<sup>54</sup>

The ordinance was passed by the Legislative Council on 21 August 1844. However, it was not announced in the Government's Gazette until 19 October 1844. More importantly, a technical fault almost shook the entire foundations of colonial power. When the ordinance was announced to the Chinese population, the yearly registration fee for Chinese males was wrongly translated as a monthly fee, meaning Chinese men were told they had to pay 12 dollars per annum, double the amount of foreigners.<sup>55</sup> The Chinese were furious about their different treatment, and the incident provoked a general strike.

The riot was the first major upheaval in the colony. It demonstrated that without enough capable translators, the government did not have proper means to communicate with Chinese citizens. The disturbance was concluded in a peaceful manner through the efforts of Fearon and his colleagues. Fearon went into the crowd and pacified them by giving a detailed explanation of the policy the ordinance was actually aimed at introducing. He told the strikers that the government would listen to them only when they returned to work.<sup>56</sup> Resolving conflicts and mediating between parties with divergent views were two of Fearon's strengths. Colonial records written by Davis to the colonial secretary at the Colonial Office reveal the following:

One riotous demonstration in the Bazaar occupied on the 31th October but it was promptly suppressed by the police under the assistant magistrate Mr Fearon, and the superintendent Captain Bruce, whose prudent and vigorous conduct on the occasion I have much pleasure in noticing to your Lordship.<sup>57</sup>

After the riot, Fearon was promoted to first Registrar-General in charge of the Registry Office. His ability was recognized by the governor, Sir John Francis Davis:

Mr. Fearon has evinced much zeal and intelligence, and I have every reason to be satisfied with the manner in which he has performed the arduous duties of his office.<sup>58</sup>

Mr. Fearon, the assistant Magistrate was pointed out by his knowledge of the Chinese language, and intimate acquaintance with the people of this colony, as the fittest person to undertake the duties of Registrar-General and collector of revenue, and he will commence his functions from the 1<sup>st</sup> January next.<sup>59</sup>

Mr. Fearon's complete acquaintance with the native language of this place will enable him, better than any other person, to collect the Chinese land tax within the island, arising from many hundreds of cultivated areas on the south side.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>54</sup> *Bluebook*, 21 August 1844, p. 45, no. 16, "An Ordinance for Establishing a Registry of the Inhabitants of the Island of Hong Kong and its Dependencies".

<sup>55</sup> FO 233/185/ 19-20, Ordinance 24-25.

<sup>56</sup> CO 129/7/198-217 [1844-11-06]

<sup>57</sup> CO 129/7/200 [1844-11-06]

<sup>58</sup> CO 129/12/293-5 [1845-07-15]

<sup>59</sup> CO 129/7/322-328 [1844-12-28]

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

Fearon held office for only a very short time. He was promoted in January 1845, and in July 1845 he urgently requested one year of sick leave to be spent back in England. The colonial surgeon suggested to him that a change of climate would be beneficial to his health, which had been weakened by the dysentery from which he suffered.<sup>61</sup> Before he left, he implemented a crucial policy by arranging the census held in 1845.<sup>62</sup> It was the first full-scale census taken in the colony, and achieved its object of collecting an extensive body of information about its subjects. In the report, based on his Chinese expertise and his knowledge of the people, Fearon made suggestions for maintaining the balance of power between the coloniser and the colonised. He especially analysed the traits of the Triad Society (or the Heaven and Earth society), which was aimed at expelling the Manchu rulers in early Qing but had gradually evolved into overthrowing all foreign rulers:

That reverential awe of their rulers, so sedulously inculcated by the Chinese moral code, blunted by early education, has been completely destroyed by foreign intercourse. It is again their interest which restrains them. So long as the strength of the *rulers and the ruled* is duly proportioned, the latter may remain passive; but remove our physical superiority and it will be only by working upon their interests that we shall, preserve our rule. [My emphasis in italics]

I venture to assume that a system of Registration properly enforced will be the most powerful and economical instrument to work with.

Under such a system Government would be so intimately acquainted with the popular mind, that political combination could not exist unmarked, organised, resistance could never be mature, the popular leaders would be too well known. The fear of exposure to a scrutiny sufficiently searching has already driven many worthless characters from the community, and crime has consequently decreased, with every step to improvement in the public morals the necessity of maintaining an expensive police, establishment becomes less urgent.<sup>63</sup>

The Registrar-General was not only a bridge between the government and the people. He was also responsible for monitoring the Chinese population, collecting intelligence about them and preventing any attempt to undermine the colonial power.

### **Translation and Dissemination of Knowledge (1847–1852)**

No sooner had Fearon submitted his report on the 1845 census than he applied for sick leave. After a long and complicated process, his leave was approved in July 1845 with the support of the governor, the colonial secretary and the colonial surgeon. He arrived in London on 6 January 1846.

At the same time, KCL was establishing its first Chinese professorship. On 13 February 1846, Staunton, being the council member of King's College London since the College was founded, proposed the idea to the council meeting of the management board:

The important political and commercial relations now established between Great Britain and China, and the increased opportunities thereby afforded for the introduction and diffusion

<sup>61</sup>CO 129/12/302 [1845-06-21]; CO 129/12/303 [1845-06-18].

<sup>62</sup>CO 129/12/304-310 [1845-06-24]

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*

amongst the population of that vast Empire of the blessings of a purer Christianity, render it highly desirable that the acquisition of a knowledge of the language and literature of China in this Metropolis should be assisted by the creation and endowment of a Chinese Professorship attached to the establishment of King's College; and that an invitation should be addressed to the British Public to contribute to the good work.

In the event of the Funds contributed being found to exceed what may be required for the adequate endowment of the Professorship, the surplus may most advantageously be appropriated to the purchase of Books, the creation of Scholarship, Exhibition and Prizes for the encouragement of Students; and lastly, to the publication of a convenient and portable Chinese and English Dictionary, a work which is extremely wanting, and which a moderate knowledge of the Chinese Language would enable any person to prepare, by bridging the highly valuable, but expensive and cumbrous work of the late truly eminent and meritorious Chinese Scholar, the Reverend Dr. Morrison.<sup>64</sup> [My emphasis in italics]

Staunton's suggestion was welcomed by the committee.<sup>65</sup> He then formally submitted the "Proposals for the Endowment of a Chinese Professorship in King's College, London" to the Council of King's College London in June.<sup>66</sup> The only requirement was that the professorship had to be funded by public subscription, which should be managed by the College.<sup>67</sup> Staunton was confident that he could raise sufficient funds. In less than three months, from March to June 1846, he received £822 for the purpose.<sup>68</sup> He suggested that the funds should be called the Chinese Professorship Fund. The College, which held Staunton's opinion in high esteem, invited him to join the education committee,<sup>69</sup> meaning he could play a part in the nomination and selection process for the professorship. Staunton also wrote the prospectus for the programme.<sup>70</sup> If we compare the respective responses of the management committees of UCL and KCL to Staunton's idea of setting up a Chinese professorship in these two institutions, we can understand why Staunton hastened to establish another programme in the same university. His suggestion was almost turned down (eight for versus five against) at the UCL council meeting on 22 April 1837,<sup>71</sup> when he proposed to donate the astounding collection of valuable books belonging to his lifelong friend, the Rev. Dr Robert Morrison (1782–1834) to UCL as the founding library for the position.

The public subscription at King's College London had climbed to £2,066 by 11 December 1846, meeting the minimum requirement of £2,000.<sup>72</sup> The recruitment process began right away. The College placed advertisements in several classified newspapers, stating that the term of the professorship was five years and the annual payment was £100. Students were required to pay a course fee of £5.5 shillings.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>64</sup>King's College London Council Minutes (Ref KA/C/M 1846–1852; 1/ 162) 13 Feb. 1846.

<sup>65</sup>KCL Council Minutes (Ref KA/C/M 1846–1852; 3/166) 13 Mar. 1846.

<sup>66</sup>George Thomas Staunton, *Memoirs of the Chief Incidents of the Public Life of Sir George Thomas Staunton*, (London, L. Booth, 1856), pp. 206–207; KCL Council Minutes (Ref KA/C/M 1846–1852; 5/175) 12 Jun. 1846.

<sup>67</sup>KCL Council Minutes (Ref KA/C/M 1846–1852; 3/166) 13 Mar. 1846.

<sup>68</sup>KCL Council Minutes (Ref KA/C/M 1846–1852; 5/175) 12 Jun. 1846.

<sup>69</sup>KCL Council Minutes (Ref KA/C/M 1846–1852; 5/175) 12 Jun. 1846.

<sup>70</sup>KCL Secretary's Out Letter Books (Ref KA/OLB/103), Cunningham to Staunton, 13 May 1846; KCL Secretary's In–Correspondence (Ref KA/IC/29), Staunton to Cunningham [date unknown] Jun. 1846.

<sup>71</sup>University College London, Council minutes, 22 Apr. 1837.

<sup>72</sup>KCL Council Minutes (Ref KA/C/M 1846–1852; 4/192) 11 Dec. 1846.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*

Staunton actively looked for capable candidates to take up the position. While he was on the continent, he approached Stanislaus Julien (1797–1873) and Johann Joseph Hoffman (1805–1878).<sup>74</sup> Staunton reported on these meetings to the College on 11 December 1846 after he came back from his business trip. Both indicated their interest in the position, especially Julien, who was the Chinese professor at Collège de France and had a keen interest in Morrison's collection of books back in 1841.<sup>75</sup> Hoffman was a renowned sinologist and japanologist in Europe. He would accept the position only if the salary was increased to £300 a year. Together with the committee, Staunton agreed that they should write a petition to Lord John Russell (1792–1878) to ask for more financial support. They believed that Hoffman's expertise in Chinese, along with the extra credential of his knowledge of the Japanese language, would benefit the country. However, the attempt to make the appointment was not successful. Hoffman declined to take up the post and stayed at Leiden University, even though the University of Petersburg was willing to pay £400 per year to recruit him.<sup>76</sup>

By 19 February 1847, the committee had received two applications: one from a Mr Cox (of Portland Cottage, Kent Road, Hatcham) and the other from a Mr S. Rootsey (of Ranelagh Street, Pimlico). While Staunton invited both candidates to submit references, testimonials and proof of their knowledge of Chinese, he reiterated that their ability to speak the language was of primary importance. Staunton also suggested another candidate to the committee, the Rev. Mr. Jacob Tomlin (1793–1880).<sup>77</sup>

Jacob Tomlin was a missionary for the London Missionary Society, a Cambridge graduate and once president of the Anglo-Chinese College at Malacca, who wrote extensively about Asia, especially China, Siam and Singapore etc. KCL expressed its interest in him as a candidate. However, Staunton later reported with regret that Tomlin was unable to take up the position as he had other long-term commitments. KCL then contacted the Rev. George Smith (1815–1871), the Anglican bishop of the Diocese of Victoria in Hong Kong and a prolific writer about China. However, the Rev. Smith declined the offer as he did not think he was capable of doing the job. Staunton continued to explore his network of contacts – from missionaries to civilians – in Continental Europe and England.

Although Fearon had been in London to recuperate since January 1846, he took no notice of the position until Staunton approached him. On 26 March 1847, Staunton submitted Fearon's application, résumé and reference letters to the committee.<sup>78</sup> KCL appointed Fearon as the inaugural chair professor of Chinese on the same day.<sup>79</sup> This rapid confirmation indicated Fearon's nomination was Staunton's idea, and his alone. His inaugural lecture was scheduled for the afternoon of 20 April 1847. The whole process took less than a month. Indeed, Fearon was only on sick leave in London. If he wanted to take up the position, he should have written to Davis, his current employer, to seek his approval for his sudden resignation. Not only did Davis not mention this in his majestic work about British sinology,

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> University College London, Council minutes, 7 Aug. 1841.

<sup>76</sup> KCL Council Minutes (Ref KA/C/M 1846–1852;3 and 4/195) 8 Jan. 1847.

<sup>77</sup> KCL Council Minutes (Ref KA/C/M 1846–1852;4/200) 19 Feb. 1847.

<sup>78</sup> KCL Council Minutes (Ref KA/C/M 1846–1852; 1/208) 13 Feb. 1846.

<sup>79</sup> KCL Council Minutes (Ref KA/C/M 1846–1852; 5/210) 16 Apr. 1847.

but neither did Staunton devote a single word to the subject in his autobiographical work, a chapter of which was dedicated to the establishment of a Chinese professorship at KCL. Davis, like Staunton, did not have a bad opinion of Fearon, and indeed spoke highly of him. Staunton must have been confident about Fearon's competence and personality before arranging for his nomination. On the other hand, the position of Registrar-General in Hong Kong commanded remuneration of £625 per annum,<sup>80</sup> six times that of the position at KCL. Why then would Fearon be interested?

It is possible that Fearon, Staunton and Davis reached an understanding not to disclose the details of the circumstances surrounding the whole nomination procedure. If the details of the nomination and selection procedure were revealed, it would only undermine the academic and political standing of the programme. In addition to being renowned sinologists themselves, Staunton and Davis both played an active political role in Anglo-Chinese relations in the early nineteenth century. As discussed earlier, Davis was the second colonial governor of British Hong Kong. It was Staunton who had nominated his former subordinate at the East India Company to take up the governorship. Both Davis and Staunton well understood the lack of Chinese experts and interpreters in the Far East, and they both shared the view that the development of British sinology already lagged behind that of other European powers. The rapid development of Anglo-Chinese relations after the first Opium War would require the British Empire to catch up with its rivals more quickly. If KCL were set to bear such an important role in Chinese policy and Anglo-Chinese relations, the establishment of the professorship should not be delayed any further. Fearon did not aspire to be a professor of Chinese. Once again, his competence in Chinese and language skills changed the path of his life. He was probably willing to take up the professorship because Staunton and Davis had persuaded him of the importance and significance of the role of KCL in the overall development of British sinology and the British Empire. Also, his health issue might have also persuaded him to seek another career in Britain so that he could return for good.

After he assumed the office, he immediately laid the foundation of the programme by securing a valuable collection of reference books supported by the Chinese Professorship Fund, a fund named by Staunton. The reference books he suggested to the college are:<sup>81</sup>

Robert Morrison, *A Dictionary of the Chinese Language*, (Serampore, printed at the Mission Press, 1815–1822).

Robert Morrison, *Chinese Miscellany: Consisting of Original Extracts from Chinese Authors in the Native Character with Translations and Philological Remarks by Robert Morrison* (London, London Missionary Society, 1825).

Robert Morrison, *China, A Dialogue for the Use of Schools: Being Ten Conversations, Between a Father and his Two Children, Concerning History and Present State of that Country* (London: J. Nisbet, 1824).

Joshua Marshman, *Elements of Chinese Grammar: with a Preliminary Dissertation on the Characters and the Colloquial Medium of the Chinese; and an Appendix Containing the Ta-hyoh of Confucius, with a Translation* (Serampore: Mission Press, 1814).

<sup>80</sup>CO 133/2/76 (Bluebook 1845).

<sup>81</sup>KCL (Ref KA/IC/C31) [date unknown] May 1847. Fearon wrote the booklist in abbreviation, for instance, "Marshman's Grammar £4.4"; "Premare's Notita Lingua Sinica £1.1."

Joaquim Affonso Gonçalves, *Arte China constante de alphabeto e grammatica: comprehendendo modelos das diferentes composições* (Macao, Jose, 1829).

Joseph Henri de Prémare, *Notitia linguæ sinicæ* (Malaccæ: cura Academiae anglo-sinensis, 1831).

Samuel Wells Williams, *Easy Lessons in Chinese: or Progressive Exercises to Facilitate the Study of that Language, especially adapted to the Canton Dialect* (Macao, printed at the Office of the Chinese Repository, 1842).

After assumption of the job, Fearon satisfactorily fulfilled all duties required by the position. He taught Chinese regularly, three or four times per week, from 1847 to 1852.<sup>82</sup> Although Fearon was not Staunton's first choice for the job, Staunton could not but admit that Fearon was the only capable and available candidate during the search process. However, his view on Fearon changed abruptly in 1850, when Staunton found out that Fearon was not a member of the Anglican Church. On 4 March 1850, Staunton wrote to the committee of Education:

Although the council have every reason to be satisfied with Professor Fearon's conduct and character, and with his zeal and ability with which he has applied himself to the discharge of the duties of his appointment, they cannot but feel that the circumstance of his not being a member of the church, and by law, to a certain degree impair his efficiency; and it might have been held to be a bar to his appointment, if he had not been at the time, the sole [sic.] grateful candidate.<sup>83</sup>

To Staunton, Fearon's not being a member of the Church of England would greatly undermine the political mission of the programme, which, as Staunton indicates in the letter, was set up to liberate China. Therefore, although Fearon was recommended by himself, and a person's ability should not be judged by his religious belief, a professor who did not share the same belief would greatly impair the efficiency.<sup>84</sup> Right before Staunton wrote to the committee, in February 1850, he once again contacted Jacob Tomlin,<sup>85</sup> the candidate he recommended to the committee of education at KCL in 1847. After gaining Tomlin's reassurance of his interest in the professorship, Staunton wrote to the committee of education on 8 March 1850, suggesting that they should start approaching Tomlin. Staunton even submitted a reference letter for Tomlin written by a reputable figure in Newbury.<sup>86</sup>

However, the religious background of Fearon does not seem to have bothered the College as much as Staunton. When Staunton wrote to the secretary of the College to ask about the performance of Fearon in February 1850, the secretary of the College replied that "Prof. Fearon has regularly attended to all duties which have been required from him." The small number of students was an ongoing major concern.<sup>87</sup> We do not know whether Staunton

<sup>82</sup>*The Calendar of King's College London for 1847-8* (London, John W. Parker, 1847), p.41; *The Calendar of King's College London for 1848-9*; pp. 70-71; *The Calendar of King's College London For 1850-51*, pp. 70-71; *The Calendar of King's College London for 1851-52*, pp.71-72.

<sup>83</sup>KCL (Ref KA/IC/S49) Staunton to Cunningham, 4 Mar. 1850; KCL (Ref KA/C/M 1846-1852; 2/95) 8 Mar. 1850.

<sup>84</sup>KCL (Ref KA/IC/S49) Staunton to Cunningham, 4 Mar. 1850.

<sup>85</sup>KCL (Ref KA/IC/S50) Staunton to Cunningham, including the extracts of the letters from the Rev Jacob Tomlin written on 20, 21, 26 Feb. 1850.

<sup>86</sup>KCL Council Minutes (Ref KA/C/M 1846-1852; 1/95). 8 Mar. 1850.

<sup>87</sup>KCL (Ref KA/OLB 3-4/ 238) Cunningham to Staunton, 23Feb. 1850. Back in 1849, the College wrote a letter to Fearon notifying him that "No student had yet entered for him, Mr. Cunningham (college secretary) will

had ever enquired about the religious background of Fearon when he first approached him. After all, it was a hasty decision. Fearon's mother was buried in a Protestant cemetery in Macao<sup>88</sup> and the contemporaries of Fearon's family at Canton, Hong Kong and Macao must have been well acquainted with the religious background of the Fearon family. To Staunton, Samuel Fearon's religious background would certainly undermine the purpose of the programme to the extent that Staunton had seriously considered abolishing the professorship, or transferring it to Hong Kong.<sup>89</sup>

In any case, Fearon himself might have considered putting an end to his service at KCL as he had had an exit plan in mind. Fearon did not write a single representative work on China, on interpreting skills or on learning Chinese in his five years at KCL. Instead, he spent the time in acquiring first his medical practitioner's license (MRCS) at the Middlesex Hospital University in London and later the degree of Doctor of Medicine (MD) from the University of St Andrews. The news that Fearon was awarded the medical degree on 9 May 1851 was announced in a medical journal published in the United Kingdom,<sup>90</sup> and recorded in the census carried out in 1851.

To Staunton's dismay, Tomlin did not take up the position because Staunton failed to secure the increase of his emolument to £300.<sup>91</sup> The second Chinese professorship, also for five-year term, started in 1853. The advertisement, apart from laying out the duties and the emolument of the position, also requires the candidates to reveal their religious background:

Members of the Church of England will, *ceteris paribus*, have the preference. All candidates are required to state of what religion they are, and also their age.<sup>92</sup>

Someone with a similar trajectory to that of Samuel Fearon took up the position. His name was James Summers (1828–1891). James Summers stayed in Hong Kong as the assistant to the Rev. Vincent Stanton,<sup>93</sup> the Colonial chaplain of Victoria (Hong Kong) and the founder of St. Paul's College in Hong Kong. At the time James Summers was appointed to the post at KCL, he had not written much about Chinese culture. However, later in his life as an academic he wrote extensively about the culture and language of China. In contrast, Fearon sadly did not have the opportunity to utilise his newly acquired medical knowledge and expertise due to his sudden death in January 1854. His death certificate clearly indicates that the disease he caught in China had done irrevocable damage to his health: "Acute dysentery having had previous attacks in China enlarged liver and spleen".<sup>94</sup> He was survived by his wife, Caroline Illbery, the daughter of a British trader James Illbery, and their young children,

not fail to endeavor to make the arrangement he wishes in case any pupils come forward". KCL (KA/OLB 3-4/188). Cunningham to Fearon, 8 Oct. 1849.

<sup>88</sup>Sir Ride Lindsay, *An East India Company Cemetery: Protestant Burials in Macao* (Hong Kong, 1996), pp. 46–47, 163–164.

<sup>89</sup>KCL (KA/IC/S49) "Extract letter from Rev. Jacob Tomlin dated 20 Feb 1850", Staunton to Cunningham, 4 Mar. 1850.

<sup>90</sup>*Medical Times*, XXIII, 1851, p. 550; *The Lancet*, I, 1848, p. 513. Part of the information was provided by Mr. Wong Ho To, to whom I am indebted.

<sup>91</sup>KCL (KA/IC/S50) Staunton to Cunningham, 23 Nov. 1852.

<sup>92</sup>KCL (Ref KA/C/M 1846–1852) 23 Dec 1852.

<sup>93</sup>KCL (KA/IC/S50) Vincent Stanton to Cunningham, 25 Nov 1852.

<sup>94</sup>General Register Office, England, Death certificate, 1854. Quarter of registration, Jan–Feb–Mar; Pancras District (1837–1901), County London, Middlesex, vol. 1b, p. 24.

one aged 5 and another aged 4. Fearon was buried in the most historic (now unfortunately the most decrepit) part of Highgate cemetery in London in 1854.

### Conclusion

Timothy Barrett said that Fearon was not the “first choice for the job”.<sup>95</sup> His observation was accurate, but perhaps we can add more information to his comment.

If we focus solely on one aspect of the nature of British sinology – its status as a purely scholastic and academic pursuit – we are bound to agree that Fearon was barely qualified to hold the post. However, if we expand our horizons and consider all Chinese professorships in British institutions in the nineteenth century after Fearon, we will gain another perspective. James Legge established the Hong Kong interpreter cadetship programme which was headed by the colonial office.<sup>96</sup> His aim was to improve the competence of young government officials in Chinese. Sir Thomas Francis Wade was a colonel in the first Opium War and served as an interpreter for the Hong Kong government until 1846.<sup>97</sup> During his term as Chinese secretary of the British legation in Peking, he contributed tremendously in reforming the student interpreter programme in China, a programme under the supervision of Foreign Office. Wade’s duties did not differ much from those of Fearon. Edward Harper Parker, himself a student of the interpreter programme in China, also trained Chinese interpreters in Liverpool and Manchester when he returned to England. From its inception British sinology included a very pragmatic element, which was to fulfill the needs of Britain’s colonial mission in the nineteenth century. Interpreting and communication skills were essential to this mission. <[ugandakwan@ntu.edu.sg](mailto:ugandakwan@ntu.edu.sg)>

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<sup>95</sup> Timothy Barrett, *Singular Listlessness*, pp. 72–73.

<sup>96</sup> CO 129/97/41–47 [1864–01–12]; see above note 2.

<sup>97</sup> CO 133/3/98 (*Bluebook* 1846); see above note 2.