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## Translation Conventions

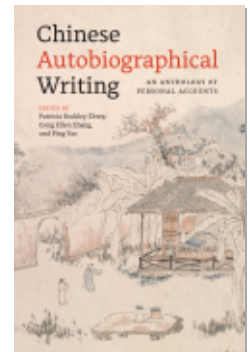
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## TRANSLATION CONVENTIONS

Translators always aim for a balance between conveying the meaning and capturing the style, between achieving fluency and minimizing inaccuracies. Here are some of the principles we tried to follow in seeking such a balance.

In Chinese, it is not necessary to supply the subject for a sentence, especially when it is obvious from context, but subjects are needed in English, so we routinely supply them. In addition, in Chinese it is not odd to refer to oneself in the third person, and in some cases would be considered respectful (referring to oneself as “your subject” when addressing the ruler, for instance). In Chinese, repeated use of “I” can seem egotistic or self-centered. In English, by contrast, referring to oneself in the third person can come across as pretentious or evidence of mental illness. This creates a tricky situation for the translator, as authors wrote about themselves in the third person for a variety of reasons, sometimes to make fun of themselves, sometimes simply because it suggested to them greater objectivity: they were giving not just opinions but facts. Here we have often switched to the first person in keeping with English style but have kept some in the third person so that readers can get a better sense of the flavor of the original, especially in cases where gentle self-mockery was involved.

Since our primary goal was to prepare translations that people would enjoy reading, we made an effort to translate as much as possible, rather than supply Chinese terms in romanization, with just four exceptions:

*jinsbi*, the highest rank conferred in the civil service examinations,  
literally “presented scholar”

*li*, a unit of distance, approximately one-third of a mile or half a  
kilometer

*mu*, a unit of area about a sixth of an acre

*qi*, a now widely recognized philosophical term that refers to energy,  
including energy that courses through the body

In the case of other common units of measurement, we supply conventional translations, but it should be kept in mind that these are only roughly equivalent and there was, moreover, considerable change over time and regional variation. Thus we translate *chi* as foot, *cun* as inch, *jin* as catty, *dou* as peck, *bu* as bushel, and *shi* as picul. For units of currency, we translate *qian* as cash and *liang* as tael.

We normally supply the name of the modern province in brackets after place names. We translate *xian* as county in all periods. When office titles are listed in Charles Hucker's *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (1985), we use his translation. We give dates and reign periods in their original form, putting in brackets the Western year with which it overlaps the most, but we do not convert to the Western calendar. We similarly do not convert people's ages, simply giving their age in *sui*, which on average will make them seem a year older than if the count followed Western convention, but can be almost two years, as *sui* counts people as one at their birth and two on the next New Year's Day.