

The M.A.K. Halliday Library Functional Linguistics Series

Zhuanglin Hu

# Halliday and Chinese Linguistics: The Full Circle



外语教学与研究出版社  
FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND RESEARCH PRESS



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# **The M.A.K. Halliday Library Functional Linguistics Series**

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This series focuses on studies concerning the theory and application of Systemic Functional Linguistics. It bears the name of Professor M.A.K. Halliday, as he is generally regarded as the founder of this school of linguistic thought. The series covers studies on language and context, functional grammar, semantic variation, discourse analysis, multimodality, register and genre analysis, educational linguistics and other areas. Systemic Functional Linguistics is a functional model of language inspired by the work of linguists such as Saussure, Hjelmslev, Whorf, and Firth. The theory was initially developed by Professor M.A.K. Halliday and his colleagues in London during the 1960s, and since 1974 it has held an international congress every year at various continents around the world. It is well-known for its application in a variety of fields, including education, translation, computational linguistics, multimodal studies, and healthcare, and scholars are always exploring new areas of application.

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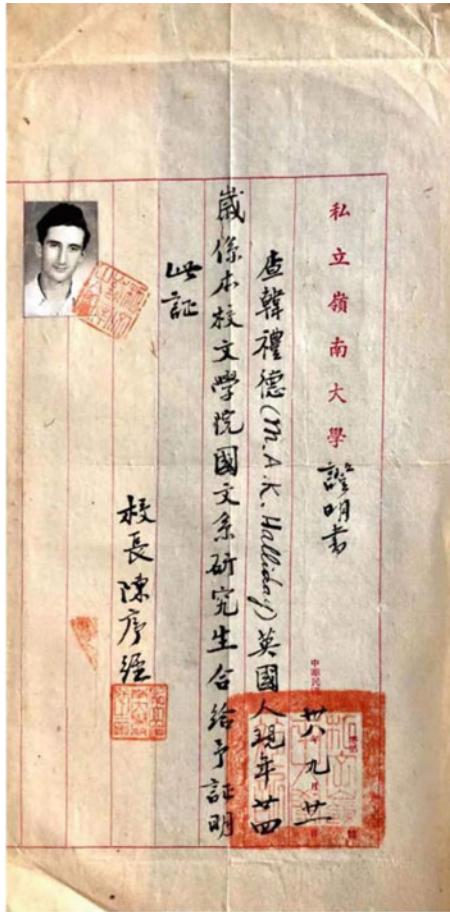
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*The second from the left is Prof. Wang Li. The second from the right is Prof. Halliday. The photo was taken in March, 1983*



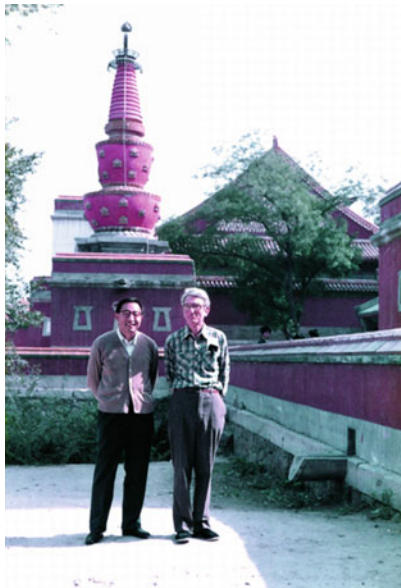
*Certificate of Lingnan University.*

*This is to certificate that M. A. K. Halliday is a Postgraduate of the Department of Chinese of this university.*

*President Chen Xuqing*



*The middle is Prof. Halliday. The right is Prof. Hu Zhuanglin, the author of this book. The photo was taken in May, 1981.*



*Prof. Halliday and Prof. Hu Zhuanglin. The photo was taken in March, 1983.*





*The left is Prof. Hu Zhuanglin. The second from the right is Prof. Halliday. Prof. Halliday was awarded Guest Professor by the vice-President of Peking University, Prof. Liang Zhu (the second from the left) in March, 1996.*



*The middle in the front row is Prof. Halliday. On his left is his wife, Prof. Hasan. On his right is Prof. Hu Zhuanglin and his wife. The second from the left in the back row is Prof. Yang Min, the translator of this book. This photo was taken in June in 2011 when Prof. Halliday and his wife were invited by Prof. Hu Zhuanglin to make lectures at Peking University.*



*Prof. Halliday at the establishment of the Halliday-Hasan International Foundation for Linguistics at Beijing Normal University in April, 2015.*



*Prof. Halliday's 90th birthday party in the evening of the Foundation establishment in April, 2015.*

## Translator's Preface

Professor Hu Zhuanglin is a senior professor at Peking University, one of the most famous and prestigious linguistic professors in China. He is one of the pioneers who lead Chinese linguistic research into the modern world. Professor Hu was selected to study further at Sydney University by the Chinese Government in 1980 and got his MA degree as an excellent graduate under the supervision of Professor Halliday. As a distinguished student of Prof. Halliday, Professor Hu has been committed to promoting Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) in China since he came back, such as establishing the National SFL Association, holding academic conferences, publishing papers and books, inviting Prof. Halliday to come to China giving lectures at different universities, training a large number of teachers to teach SFL, supervising Ph.D. and MA students focusing on SFL research, and so on. Due to Professor Hu's constant efforts, a large trend of studying and researching SFL was formed and has been lasting for tens of years, which has also stimulated the development of different linguistic disciplines in China including Cognitive linguistics, Pragmatics, Chinese linguistics, and so on. That is why Prof. Hu is respected so much in the Linguistic field in China.

Professor Hu is prolific with more than 200 academic papers, almost 100 monographs, co-authored and co-compiled books, textbooks, and more than 100 prefaces for different authors. He has been awarded different honors frequently for the high quality of his research by Peking University, Beijing City, and the Education Ministry. Besides, Prof. Hu is widely eye-sighted in his research. He is not limited to the exploration of the SFL theories but devotes to applying them in discourse analysis, language teaching research, and even Pragmatic and Cognitive linguistic research. We can often find high perspicacity, profound insights, and initiative understanding in his research.

It is my greatest honor to be supported by the National Social Science Fund of China to translate Prof. Hu's book *Halliday and Chinese Linguistics: The Full Circle*. The book is a progressive elaboration of Halliday's academic thoughts and origins with a time span of more than 30 years.

Part I of the book "Chinese origins" introduces Halliday's formal introduction to linguistics coming from Chinese scholars such as Wang Li, Luo Changpei, and Gao

Mingkai: they were key influences in his academic thinking. The other parts of the book focus on the “return” of Hallidayan linguistics, and then Halliday himself, to China.

Part II “Theoretical Explorations” is mainly concerned with what Prof. Hu has gained from studying Halliday’s theories as well as his further discussion of selected points. This part focuses on exploring the implications of the two theoretical concepts of “system” and “function”.

The main theme of Part III is “Discourse Analysis”, in which Prof. Hu explores one of the main differences between Systemic Functional Linguistics and traditional sentence grammar, and demonstrates Halliday’s emphasis on the study of discourse.

Part IV “Research on Chinese” better realizes the notion of “return” with chapters on the overall study of the Chinese language.

What’s more, the theme of “return” of Parts II, III, and IV also introduces Halliday’s lecturing in China and his training linguistic students in China. Applying SFL in Chinese research is Halliday’s wish to the development of SFL as well as his academic “return” and “reward” to China.

This book has its unique academic values. Firstly, it shows the integration, collaboration, and mutual complementation of traditional Chinese linguistic theories with Halliday’s SFL representing the linguistic communication between the East and the West. Secondly, this book opens a window for the Western linguists to know traditional Chinese linguistic research which has a 3000-year history with its own complete system and supplements general linguistic research. Thus, readers can not only get the knowledge of Halliday’s academic ideas’ relationship with Chinese researchers like Wang Li but also get a kaleidoscope to appreciate the language research of Chinese.

Living up to people’s expectations, this book was prized as one of the top ten “Best-sellers” of the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press in 2018 and its English version of this translation was planned to be published by Springer Nature as a special gift for Prof. Hu’s 90th birthday.

By this preface, I express my special gratitude to the translation team, my Ph.D. students and MA students, for their great help in the translation and resource provision, which builds a solid foundation for this English version. Their names are Associate Professor Xu Wenbin at China University of Petroleum (East China); Associate Professor Fu Xiaoli at Shanghai Normal University; Lecturer Shi Yijun at Beijing Wuzi University; Ph.D. candidates including Wang Min, Sun Juanjuan, Tong Tong, Wang Yawen, Xu Xiaofan, Yan Tianxin, and Wang Jing; and MA candidates including Yang Yankun, Tang Siwei, Shen Yibing, Lin Ye, Lv Lizhu, and Wei Min.

Moreover, I am deeply grateful for the high-quality revision from Prof. Edward McDonald and Dr. Zhou Xiaokang. Dr. Zhou is the first Ph.D. student of Prof. Hu. She did the 1st revision of the translation. Prof. Edward McDonald is an Australian and MA student of Professor Hu. He gave his knowledge of SFL and the good command of Chinese into full play, corrected each mistake from a punctuation to a term, and polished all inappropriate sentences. With Prof. McDonald’s contribution, English readers can enjoy the wonderful research of Prof. Hu.

Additionally, I will show my appreciation to the leaders and staff of Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press. Director Li Huiqin, Deputy Director Duan Changcheng, and Miss Bu Chen gave their deep concern and detailed instructions from the very beginning of my application for the Translation Fund to the accomplishment of the translation project. They are also the publisher of the Chinese version of this book.

Last but not least, I will express my greatest gratitude to respected Prof. Hu. It is his warm encouragement, wise suggestions and opinions, and enormous patience which support the accomplishment of this huge project. The translation of the book *Halliday and Chinese Linguistics: The Full Circle* intends to be a 90th birthday present to Prof. Hu. Let me use a Chinese folk adage to end my preface: May your happiness be as immense as the Eastern Sea, and may you live as long as the Zhongnan Mountains!

Beijing, China  
February 2023

Min Yang

# Preface<sup>1</sup>

The title of this collection, *Halliday and Chinese Linguistics: The Full Circle* is based on an article of the same title whose original Chinese title might be rendered “China in Halliday’s Academic Thinking: Starting Point and Return” (Chap. 4) in which I summarized my gradual understanding of the roots of the academic thought of my mentor, Professor Halliday, the founder and promoter of Systemic Functional Linguistics.

I knew that Prof. Halliday had studied in Beijing and Guangzhou in China in his early years, but for a long time and for various reasons, he was still deemed mainly a student of Firth, the founder of the London School, and an heir to Firthian system structure theory. According to many materials collected in recent years and through Halliday’s own greater clarity and openness on this topic, I realized that Halliday’s formal introduction to linguistics came from Chinese scholars such as Wang Li, Luo Changpei, and Gao Mingkai: they were key influences in his academic thinking. The four essays in Part I reflect different phases of my thinking about these Chinese starting points of Halliday’s academic thought. Because of the abundant quotations provided in Chap. 2, “Wang Li and M.A.K. Halliday”, although it has already been reprinted in two of my essay collections in 1993 and 2000, it appears again in this book: I trust readers will excuse the repetition.

The other parts of this collection focus on the “return” of Hallidayan linguistics, and then Halliday himself, to China. As shown in Chap. 4, this “return” was first demonstrated as follows: after the beginning of the Reform and Opening up period Halliday came back to China to present lectures and participate in academic conferences from time to time; from 1979 onwards he supervised a number of Chinese students at the University of Sydney; and over the last three decades, students and colleagues of his from Britain, Canada, Australia, and other countries have

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<sup>1</sup> Introductory Notes: The essays in this book are the author’s papers that have been published in different journals or collections of articles. The text is almost the same as the original, and the layout remains almost the same as well. For each article, publication details are provided including time of original publication, title of the journal or collection, and page numbers.

joined in supporting the development of linguistics in China. In this chapter, originally published in 2016, restrictions of time and length unfortunately precluded me from explaining in detail how Halliday's specific academic thinking and research "returned" to China. As I moved into my eighties, I began to feel it would be difficult to complete this project, but I am confident that there must be younger Chinese scholars exploring this issue. So what I have done here is simply to choose a few previously published pieces and present them as a kind of "report". Part II "Theoretical Explorations" is mainly concerned with what I have gained from studying Halliday's theories as well as further discussion of selected points. Overall, Part II focuses on exploring the implications of the two theoretical concepts of "system" and "function", and after an overview (5), includes Chapters on Mode (6), Metaphor (7, 10), Iconicity (8), Grammaticalization (9), Theme (11), Transdisciplinarity (12), and Cognition (13). The main theme of Part III is "Discourse Analysis", in which I explore one of the main differences between Systemic Functional Linguistics and traditional sentence grammar, and demonstrate Halliday's emphasis on the study of discourse, whereby sentences are simply the embodiment of discourse on a lower level (16, 17, 18), with additional chapters on the Phonological System of English (14) and Multimodality (18). Part IV "Research on Chinese" better realizes the notion of "return", with chapters on Word Order (21), Clause and Clause Complex (22), Rhetorical Functions (23), and Relationships (24); with other chapters on the overall study of the Chinese language (Parts 25, 26, 27, 28).

I need to point out three things. Firstly, the essays included in the first three parts only partly reflect my study of Halliday's linguistic theories. As many of my papers on Systemic Functional Linguistics have been published in my other collections—including *Language System and Function* (Peking University Press, 1990), *Contemporary Linguistic Theories and Applications* (Peking University Press, 1995), *Discussions on Functionalism* (Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2000), *Language, Semiotics, and Education* (The Commercial Press, 2015)—they are mostly not reprinted here except for selected papers, but readers may find many relevant papers in these earlier collections. Secondly, this book only shows the Chinese starting point and return of Halliday's academic thinking from my own individual perspective. There are many senior Chinese scholars who have dedicated themselves to working on this project, they are the major force behind the "return", so please excuse me for being unable to mention them all here. Lastly, I have to admit that Halliday himself thought my research into the Chinese language was insufficient and criticized me several times face to face on that score. Indeed, I must confess to laboring under some difficulties. Firstly, I majored in English, and researching Chinese language is not my strength; secondly, the authorities at Peking University asked me to head up the Department of English. So, between teaching, researching, and administration, I could not use work on Chinese as an excuse for dodging any of my responsibilities. Therefore, my hope was that the publication of this collection might to some extent come as a relief to Halliday<sup>2</sup>; after all, Part IV contains the

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<sup>2</sup> The original Chinese edition of the collection came out in January 2018, just a couple of months before Halliday's death [Translator's Note].

fruits of my research into the Chinese language. I am not saying that these papers are of great academic significance, but what is true is that certain academic authorities in the field of Chinese language valued my papers presented at the academic conferences on Chinese studies enough to include them in edited collections or conference proceedings. In this book, the chapters “Speech Types in Modern Chinese and Their Rhetorical Functions” (23), “Relations” (24), and “Developing Linguistic Research with Chinese Characteristics” (27) were all specifically solicited by Chinese language scholars.

In this collection, for papers that were previously published in journals all abstracts and keywords are omitted to keep the layout clear.

Finally, I want to express my gratitude to all the support I received from the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, especially Deputy Director Duan Changcheng at its branch institution Higher English Education Publishing, for their assistance in the successful publication of this book.

Beijing, China  
August 2017

Zhuanglin Hu



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**Part I**  
**Chinese Origins**

# Chapter 1

## Remembering Halliday



*A Master of Linguistics Carrying Forward the Cause and  
Forging Ahead into the Future*  
—Remembering my Teacher, M. A. K. Halliday

Professor M. A. K. Halliday passed away at 8 pm, April 15, 2018, at the age of 93. My teacher, my supervisor left us forever. I can't overcome my sorrow at hearing the sad news. Various feelings poured into my mind.

In the spring of 2015 at the advanced age of 90, Michael had flown to Beijing to attend a symposium to launch the foundation of "The Halliday-Hasan International Fund for Linguistics" and China's 14th National Conference of Functional Linguistics. The conference organizers also held an evening party to celebrate his 90th birthday. All the participants were reassured to witness his good health and high spirits when attending all these activities.



Halliday and Hu Zhuanglin at the 2015 foundation of The Halliday-Hasan International Fund for Linguistics

Last October, Annabelle Lukin very kindly passed on my email to Michael after he had moved to an old people's home just up the road from his former residence in Fairlight on Sydney's Northern Beaches. In this email, I reported to Michael the progress of his biography being written by Professor Dai Fan of Sun Yat-sen University; and also mentioned that a 1951 paper by Professor Wang Li entitled "The Dialect of Dongguan" in *The Journal of Lingnan University* had been photocopied by Professor Dai, who had noticed the following note added by Wang Li: "The description of the tones was mainly carried by a postgraduate of this university, Han Lide (Mr. Halliday) by name". I also told him that I had come to a new understanding of the development of his academic thinking and had written an article entitled "Halliday and Chinese Linguistics: the full circle".

In the same email, I also reported to him on the progress of systemic functional linguistics in China. The place of SFL in Chinese academia can now be seen through its presence in teaching and research in many universities and disciplines throughout the country, across a range of areas including language policy and language strategy, applied linguistics, pedagogical linguistics, linguistic semiotics, ecolinguistics, applicable linguistics, text linguistics, discourse analysis, functional stylistics, contextual linguistics, multimodal linguistics, and computational linguistics. Even scholars of cognitive linguistics enjoy good relations with SFL researchers and engage in friendly academic discussions and close cooperation with them.

As I see it, all these academic activities are in fact a reflection of the joint efforts of Chinese scholars who have closely followed the development of SFL and its research trajectory around the world. From another angle, it was Michael Halliday who argued

for the relevance of his theoretical findings and guiding principles across a number of different academic fields, and so we need to acknowledge Halliday's contribution to international linguistic scholarship. Frankly speaking, it has always seemed to me that the notion of "Applicable Linguistics" he put forward was not merely a new research direction in SFL alone. Michael's real goal was to tell the academic world that applicable linguistics should be the guiding principle for all linguistic theories in setting up their research objectives and evaluating their work. This is the reason why I think that his name should be recorded forever in the annals of the academic world.

I touched upon Wang Li's paper as well as my own in my email, my intention being to show the strong relations between Halliday and Chinese linguistic scholars, and Michael's realistic assessment of his own achievements. As we all know, Michael got his doctoral degree with Firth as his supervisor. Because of this, he had always been seen as a successor of the London School and called a "(neo-)Firthian". However, in many interviews after his retirement, he always reminded the interviewers that his earliest formal introduction to linguistic theory and research came from two Chinese scholars, Luo Changpei and Wang Li.<sup>1</sup> In a 2010 interview, he commented on this situation as follows: "I was called a Firthian by my friends. I took an enormous number of his ideas and developed them... But it was not just him; I was also influenced by one professor in China in particular. His name was Wang Li".

I myself once took the opportunity to ask Michael the following question: "If you had continued to do research on Chinese not English after gaining your Ph.D., would it have been more difficult for you to develop systemic functional linguistics? Would you have failed to become a world-renowned scholar?" In his reply, he stressed two main points. One is that he himself would have chosen to go on with his study of Chinese, but the university at which he was based could not provide him with resources for research on Chinese. Another point is more important. He said, although his corpus changed from Chinese to English, the basic theoretical framework, the guiding principles, and most of his research methods were already clear in his mind when he was carrying out research on Chinese. This confirms the key influence of his Chinese supervisors.

Therefore, it was natural for him to have been warmly received by Chinese universities and Chinese scholars when he visited China numerous times after 1980. For instance, in Beijing, he was warmly welcomed by Profs. Wang Li, Lü Shuxiang, and Xu Guozhang. In 1996, Halliday was awarded a guest professorship by Peking University; in 2006, The Halliday Centre for Intelligent Applications of Language Studies was set up at Hong Kong City University; in 2011, Halliday was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by Beijing Normal University; and in 2015, as mentioned above, The Halliday-Hasan International Fund for Linguistics was founded. Meanwhile, in 2013, "The M. A. K. Halliday Library" had been opened at Sun Yat-sen University, a development that is even more meaningful if one realizes that Sun Yat-sen University is now located on the former campus of his alma mater, Lingnan University.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin, J. R. 2013. *Interviews with M. A. K. Halliday: Language Turned back on Himself*. London/ New York: Bloomsbury.



Halliday receiving his guest professorship at Peking University in 1996

It should also be mentioned that Halliday was deeply influenced by the then Chinese revolution and Marxist thinking around 1950. After he returned to England, he joined the Marxist Linguistics Group of the British Communist Party. When interviewed by Hasan, Kress, and Martin in 1986, he said, “I always wanted to see what I was going toward as, in the long run, a Marxist linguistics—toward working on language in the political context”. “What we shared was a Marxist view of language. We were trying to understand and build up a theory of language which would be .....giving value”. As a result, many of his views about system and function, word and grammar, clause and text, instantiation and realization, theory and practice, etc., are actually guided by the Marxist principles of “One divides into two”. In this regard, Halliday should also be highly praised for his views on “Two combine into one”. His views on “continuum” and “system” description suggest that he had a good command of the law of the unity of opposites underlying historical materialism and dialectic materialism. Moreover, his “probabilistic” approach predicted the arrival of the contemporary notion “Big Data”.

Halliday held a positive view of China’s university education. In January 1979, I was one of a group of 9 Chinese teachers—later to be known as the famous “Gang of Nine”—who were accepted by Sydney University for advanced study. The Department of English was not sure about the academic level of six members who chose to study in that department and decided they should take courses offered to third or fourth year undergraduates. In contrast, I and the two other members of the “Gang” decided to study in the Department of Linguistics. It was Halliday, the then Head of Department, who encouraged us to do an MA degree, and also recommended that we take two more courses each term than the local students.