THE SI-HIA LANGUAGE,
A STUDY IN INDO-CHINESE PHILOLOGY.

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INTRODUCTORY.

"After you have travelled thirty days through the Desert, as I have described, you come to a city called Sachiu, lying between north-east and east; it belongs to the Great Kaan, and is in a province called Tangut. The people are for the most part Idolaters, but there are also some Nestorian Christians and some Saracens. The Idolaters have a peculiar language, and are no traders, but live by their agriculture." Thus MARCO POLO opens his chapter on the Great Province of Tangut. According to YULE, the "peculiar language," as Neumann supposes, may have been Tibetan; while, on the other hand, he was inclined to think that the language intended by Polo may have been a Chinese dialect. At present we might confidently say that Polo certainly visualized the Si-hia language, and, judging from the fragments of it now at our disposal, and to be discussed on the pages to follow, that he was quite right in styling the language "peculiar." It is in fact a peculiar language, not, however, plainly Tibetan, as believed by Neumann and several successors, but an independent and peculiar idiom within the great family of Tibeto-Burman languages, fundamentally evincing decided affinities with the Lo-lo and Mo-so group.

In designating the language as Si-hia I follow the established convention, although it is not logical to speak of a Si-hia language or people, as Si Hia 夏 is a purely Chinese term pertaining to the dynasty of the kingdom. The people were descendants of