Editor's Preface

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Translation and Cultural Change: Studies in history, norms and image-projection
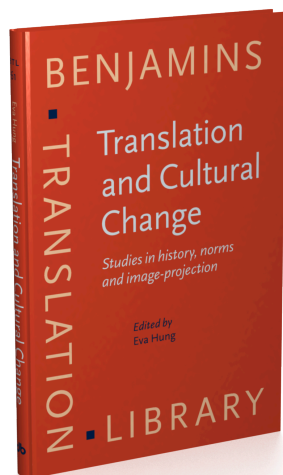Edited by Eva Hung
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Editor's preface

Translation and interpreting as human activities may be as old as human civilization, but these activities did not come under the purvey of intellectual investigation or systematic research until the second half of the 20th century. Granted, translation has always had an academic role in the teaching of languages: from the old Latin classes in European schools to the learning of English in present-day China. But this role only served to create the impression of translation as a rudimentary tool for the unpolished learner. It concentrated attention on fragments of texts as linear sequences of units which can be switched into another language without reference to contexts and purpose. At the other end of the scale, we have religious translation work which penetrated the lives of ordinary people and should have aroused more awareness of inter-lingual activities. But the nature of religious translation itself called for the downplaying or obliteration of the translators' existence to facilitate the illusion that the Almighty and the prophets speak directly to the faithful. Thus, despite the frequent contact people had with translation work through religion, they were not always aware it.

Given this background, it was only natural that translation was thought of, if at all, as a secondary and rather lowly pursuit. Nor does it surprise us that in the early days when translation aroused certain intellectual interest it was subsumed under applied linguistics, and that until the 1970s the theoretical explorations were all along the lines of linguistic theories. One of the main concerns was to establish the exact mechanism of linguistic transcoding/transference so that the task of translating could be both understood and carried out smoothly and flawlessly. The belief that understanding the process of translation would lead to the unveiling of the secrets of 'the translator's black box' (i.e. her mind) is still with us as part of the process-oriented approach in translation and interpreting research. This belief assumes that if the precise process and procedures can be mapped, analyzed and replicated, then trainees need only be taught how to replicate this *process* for them to become fully competent translators and interpreters. Even more importantly, perhaps, precisely replicable processes will facilitate the development of programmes for computer translation which will produce texts that are qualitatively comparable to those done by the best human translators, but at much quicker speed and less cost.

The research orientations described above are grounded in the practical needs of translation and interpreting as a job to be done, and the focus, perhaps naturally, is on how the job should be accomplished. But history tells us that translation played a part in the development of all cultures. In the cases where translated works had an impact on their host cultures, that impact was not dependent so much on how the work was *done* as on how they were *conceived* prior to the translation act and how they were *received* after it. Moreover, historical cases also show us repeatedly that the idealized concept of a 'good translation' (one that conveys the contents of the original without omission, addition, or deviation, and in a style which a bilingual person would find appropriately reminiscent of the original's) bears no direct relationship to the impact a translation has on its host culture. After all, translations which had such cultural impact were used by people who were not bilingual, and who were much more interested in how the work fit into their own agenda than how it functioned in its original culture. The awareness of such phenomena aroused our intellectual curiosity to explore and explain them, and in that lay the seed of the discipline now called Translation Studies.

In terms of the development of translation as an intellectual discipline, a demarcation line was drawn by James Holmes in 1972 with his mapping of the discipline and his proposal of its name.[1] This led to a rapid expansion of our lines of enquiry from the text-oriented (often source-text oriented) to a multitude of foci, and to the development of new theories based on socio-cultural, rather than linguistic, considerations. In the last quarter century, *skopos* theory, polysystems, and the descriptive investigation of translation norms have become standard points of reference for the translation researcher in many parts of the world. The new thinking drew inspiration from such disciplines as communication theory, comparative literature and literary theories, anthropology, history and, most recently, gender studies and cultural studies. The new emphasis is on context rather than text.

However, one context which rarely comes under investigation is how the academic enquiries now called Translation Studies are themselves subject to the cultural environment and social structures that govern them in different countries and regions of the world. For example, a country with a strong tradition of written literature would be naturally predisposed to place literary translation in a central position, this despite the fact the most influential contemporary translation activities in that country may not fall under the category of literature at all. Similarly, a country where history is written according to rules stipulated by

a dominant ideology would not see much new thinking coming out of translation historiography. The differences that exist between countries and regions suggest that such trends in "pure translation studies" as "descriptive study" and "the cultural turn" may not be feasible in some countries, or may only be adapted in a form that is acceptable to the dominant ideology of these countries. Like a translator faced with culturally sensitive material, the majority of academics who are used to a highly regulated education system may choose to stay on the safe path when faced with ideologically sensitive approaches of enquiry. For the great majority, that path is "applied translation studies" — particularly the training and assessment of students who will become professional translators or language workers. Hence, a study of the national discourse among translation studies circles tells us more than the discipline's state of development; it also reveals cultural and ideological preferences and taboos.

For this reason, though most of the chapters in this volume fall under the category of "pure translation studies", we have not entirely excluded case studies which seem to be pedagogical or prescriptive in approach. Instead we have selected a small number of papers to illustrate how the concerns of the field is communicated in one country at one specific period in time — China in the late 20th century. The People's Republic of China (PRC) is a country which emerged in the early 1980s from decades of isolation, with many of the characteristics and practices of an ideologically authoritarian government still intact. On the other hand, the state has put 'modernization' on the agenda and academics in many disciplines are dazzled by the brave new world of western theories. Translation as a tool that enables communication between cultures has gained endorsement from the state, but intellectual investigations which challenge the concept of translation as a neutral tool are not as welcome. These objective factors mean that Translation Studies in China is developing in a culture conspicuously different from those in many other parts of the world.

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The first section of this book deals with translations as agents of change. Gideon Toury is a prominent figure in effecting the shift of focus from the translated text to the relationship between translations and the cultures that generate them. One of the ways he highlights translations as products of the host culture is through the study of psuedo-translations (or fictitious translations). More recently, he has also become interested in the role of translation in cultural planning. In showing how various fictitious translations were invented to serve new

needs specific to their cultural and historical contexts, his chapter "Enhancing Cultural Changes by Means of Fictitious Translations" brings these cases into the province of cultural planning.

Drawing from the experience of another continent and other eras, Jacobus Naude's comprehensive study of different Afrikaans translations of the Bible gives us a clear picture of the interaction between the production of significant cultural texts and their immediate social and cultural environment. His detailed contrastive analysis of specific lines of the Bible in successive translations, in one case to justify apartheid and in another to enhance a new social consciousness of racial and gender equality, is one of the best illustrations of how translations and their cultural environment shape and are shaped by each other.

In "Cultural Borderlands and China's Translation History", Eva Hung attempts to define the various types of cultural borderlands which generated translation activities in historical China (2nd to 19th century), and to trace their relationship with the cultural centre. This chapter gives us a panoramic view of the translation movements that had the greatest impact on the development of Chinese culture over some 2,000 years, and also draws attention to the fact that much of the cultural translation work was initiated and done by non-Chinese translators.

The second section of this volume contains studies of how translations are done and perceived in specific cultural contexts. Ray Granade and Tom Greer, who have conducted in depth studies of Baptist missionaries in China, deal here with the issues of translation as representation. Nineteenth century missionaries had to tell their constituents in the U.S. about the China missions, not just for the sake of cross-cultural communication, but to justify the effectiveness of their work and seek funding for its continuation. Against this background, "Translating China to the American South" tells us what the missionaries concentrated on in their portrayal of China, and why.

The chapter by Eva Richter and Bailin Song has its roots in personal experience: the concepts of 'identity' and 'self' as culturally specific and therefore incomprehensible concepts to students in the PRC. Using representative texts in American culture, and with the help of bilingual Chinese people as well as translations, they explore the concept of identity and the obstacles anyone faces in trying to bring it into Chinese culture.

Alain Piette's chapter "Translation and National Cultures: the Case of Theatrical Translation" is another example of how concepts and styles are sometimes perceived as native to one culture and alien to another, thus affecting the translation selection process. Here the case is whether the farcical genius of the French

playwright Crommelynck is indeed too foreign to be appreciated by an Anglo-American audience. The author's use of theatrical reviews and contextualization against theatrical traditions give the chapter an added edge.

The third section in this book is on the Japanese translation experience. Japan provides fertile ground for investigation in terms of translation studies if just for two reasons: (1) its long tradition of modelling itself culturally first on China and since the mid-19th century on the West means that it has always been culturally open to new and foreign ideas and had used translation work to facilitate its cultural development; (2) Japanese translation norms are very different from those current in the cultures after which it modelled itself, and has traditionally shown not just tolerance of but often actual preference for source-oriented translations.

Japan's early adoption of Chinese texts for the education of the elite produced a special way of marking Chinese texts in accordance with Japanese syntax so that Japanese people who did not know Chinese could nevertheless read such texts. Whether this method of notation and reading called *Kambun kundoku* can be classified as a form of translation is a subject still under debate. Whether it had an influence on Japanese translation norms is perhaps even more worthy of investigation. Judy Wakabayashi's chapter on "The Reconceptualization of Translation from Chinese in 18th Century Japan" explains in detail the method of *Kambun kundoku*, investigates its status and traces its conflict with the budding paradigmatic shift towards what we tend to think of as 'normal' translation. This is an extremely illuminating study that throws light on the factors which may influence translation norms.

Traditionally the issue of 'translationese' was not an important one in Japan, for it was the accepted norm that translations should read differently from works written originally in Japanese. This situation, however, has been changing, and a debate about the acceptability of translationese emerged in the last two decades of the 20th century. In "Translationese in Japan", Yuri Furuno traces the arguments pertaining to this debate. She then presents results from her own survey on this issue in order to identify the key elements which indicate to a reader whether a text is a translated one or an original.

Noriko Matsunaga-Watson's chapter "The Selection of Texts for Translation in Post-war Japan" is based on a survey of how translated titles perform in sales terms. While her analysis is grounded in the polysystem theory, through an examination of her data she also challenges some of the hypotheses of that theory. As the author points out, the literary polysystem is not isolated from other systems, and her survey results again illustrates that the factors — cultural,

economic and political — which influence the selection and reception of translations vary from country to country and from period to period.

The last section of this volume presents two case studies which illustrate the primary concerns of translation academics in China at the end of the 20th century. Their desire to keep up with the theoretical discourse in the Western world is shown in the many brief introductions and critical introductions to Western translation theories that make up a substantial part of the translation studies discourse in the PRC. However, while text-linguistics and semiotics have made considerable headway in Chinese translation research, the historical-descriptive approach still faces a considerable number of obstacles, one of which is the ideological taboos that govern humanities research in China even now. Since translation is still regarded as a tool for modernization, both practitioners and teachers are under tremendous pressure to establish modes of operation conducive to enhancing the quantitative and qualitative performance of actual translation work. The two case studies below illustrate such mainstream concerns in the PRC.

Lin Wusun's position in his chapter "Translation in Transition: Variables and Invariables" represents that of the experienced practitioner knowledgeable about the role translation is expected to play. Lin's own background as a veteran translator and translation administrator at the national level means that his concerns — like the government's — is primarily in meeting quantitative and qualitative challenges. Given the fact that the PRC changed in twenty years from a completely closed society to one of the economic engines of Asia, such challenges are indeed enormous. It is these challenges — rather than intellectual investigations which may unsettle the established perception of 'Chinese' and "other" — which will generate possible financial and structural support for translation as a field of study. Lin's analysis of the current trends in the translation and interpreting professions in China and the application of new translation aids and tools in terms for future training is aimed at this direction.

Han Jianming's approach to his chapter on annotation is influenced by the problems he faces as a teacher of English language and literature for whom the translation course is a small part of the curriculum. Its prescriptive orientation is rooted in the basic needs of undergraduates who are trying to master translation as a skill. This situation is in fact very representative, and is one of the main reasons why many conference papers presented in China show a similar orientation. Han draws on his experience as translator in different contexts to reinvestigate the use of annotation in various types of literary texts. The examples he cites not only reveal scholarly and readership considerations, but also how con-

tractual and legal obligations now play a role in translation work. The latter is a relatively new element that Chinese translation scholars have yet to investigate.

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Acknowledgements

Note

1. "The Name and Nature of Translation Studies", *Translated! Papers on Literary Translation and Translation Studies*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988, pp.66–80.