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# Research Centre for Translation: Building a Strong Academic Community in Translation Studies

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## 1 Overview

The Research Centre for Translation (RCT) is a research unit under the Faculty of Arts, The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK). The Centre was established in 1971, with Dr. Philip Sun as its first director. The directorship then passed to Mr. Stephen C. Soong (1973–1984), Professor John Minford (1984–1987), Dr. Eva Hung (1987–2005), and to the current director, Professor Lawrence Wang-chi Wong (2005– ). RCT is dedicated to the development of Translation and Translation Studies. It aims to promote Chinese literature internationally through high-quality translation works, foster pioneering research in Translation Studies, and nurture the finest young talents in this discipline. Noteworthy publications, successful academic events, and outreach efforts underscore RCT's role in building a strong translation studies community. With the collaborative efforts of its successive directors, RCT has now become one of the foremost research centres in Translation and Translation Studies in Asia.

## 2 History

RCT was founded as the Centre for Translation Projects at the Institute of Chinese Studies in 1971. The Centre was the brainchild of the late Mr. Stephen C. Soong (1919–1996), a prolific writer and translator. The Centre's initial efforts focused on establishing a quality publishing base for Chinese literature in English translation, which led to the successful launch of the Centre's flagship journal, *Renditions*, in 1973. The journal's success paved the way for more publications, including the launch of the hardcover *Renditions* Books series in 1976 and the *Renditions* Paperbacks series in 1986.

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From the late 1970s onwards, RCT went through two restructurings. The first happened in 1978. With its reputation and long-term viability ensured from its founding, the Centre turned its attention to research in Chinese literature, translation studies, and comparative literature. Subsequent restructuring efforts in 1983 strengthened RCT as a research centre for Chinese literature and translation studies. The present name, Research Centre for Translation, was adopted at this time.

Since the 1990s, the emphasis of the Centre's work has gradually shifted towards translation studies, especially in relation to the historical and cultural contexts of China. The initiation of the "Translation Studies Research" book series in 1999 and the inauguration of the "Young Researchers' Conference on Chinese Translation Studies" series in 2004 represents the Centre's early endeavours in this area.

In 2005, when Professor Lawrence Wang-chi Wong assumed the directorship, the Centre welcomed a new transformative phase, redirecting its focus towards the studies of Chinese translation history. Professor Wong believes in the importance of building a strong academic community that stimulates vigorous exchange of ideas. In 2009, the Centre began appointing Honorary Senior Research Fellows, Research Fellows, and Research Associates. They have all been eminent researchers from China, Singapore, Japan, Canada, the US, and UK. With a strong international team, RCT has embarked on various initiatives, including new conferences series, public lectures, and publication schemes, invigorating the scholarly exploration of key topics in Chinese translation history.

## 3 Major Activities

### 3.1 Translation of Chinese Literature

RCT endeavours to promote Chinese literature internationally through high quality translation works. *Renditions*, *Renditions Books*, and *Renditions Paperbacks* are committed to enhancing the global appreciation of Chinese literature. To facilitate academic research on *Renditions*, the Centre compiles an Authors/Translators Index. This index provides information about the authors and translators involved in the translation works published by *Renditions*, *Renditions Books*, and *Renditions Paperbacks*, which provides a valuable resource for scholars and researchers interested in exploring *Renditions'* translation activities. The index can be assessed on the Centre's official website (<https://rct.cuhk.edu.hk/renditions/resources/authors-translators-index/>).

### 3.1.1 Renditions

RCT's flagship journal, *Renditions*, has been published since 1973. The journal is a leading international journal of Chinese literature in English translation, covering over 2000 years of Chinese literature, from classical works of poetry, prose, and fiction to recently published works by writers representing the rich variety of contemporary Chinese literary expression. Beyond its literary scope, the journal frequently features insightful articles on art and Chinese studies, providing a comprehensive and immersive experience. Complementing the written content, each issue is adorned with paintings, calligraphy, and photographs, creating a visual synergy that enriches the reader's journey.

### 3.1.2 Renditions Books

*Renditions Books*, a hardback series published by the RCT, was launched in 1976 with a more academic focus. Older titles in the series include anthologies of works in various literary forms from individual periods in Chinese history, carefully translated and compiled by eminent scholars, such as Stephen C. Soong and George Kao, and are often sprinkled with insightful literary criticisms that inspire generations of researchers. The series also boasts some of the earliest translations of the most fundamental texts in Classical Chinese, the most representative of which being the *Records of the Grand Historian* (trans. Burton Watson), an influential work that formed the basis of much literary and historical discourse. In recent years, the series has embraced modern literature with a view to sparking academic interest on works by modern writers in the sinosphere. The publication of *Crystal Boys* (trans. Howard Goldblatt), Pai Hsien-yung's ground-breaking novel that explored taboo topics in Taiwan, showcases the series' commitment to bringing impactful modern Chinese works to a global audience.

### 3.1.3 Renditions Paperbacks

*Renditions Paperbacks* series has been published since 1986 to satisfy readers with a more eclectic taste in literature. With its portable design, the series has attracted a wider readership among general readers. The 37 widely acclaimed titles by celebrated authors and translators in the series fall into five categories: Hong Kong Literature, Women Writers, Contemporary Fiction, Modern Poetry, and Classical Literature, allowing readers to discover important works sharing a similar theme. The three volumes by the Hong Kong writer Xi Xi, *Marvels of A Floating City*, *My City: A Hongkong Story*, and *A Girl Like Me and Other Stories* (trans. Eva Hung), have played a crucial part in introducing Hong Kong literature to the world. *Renditions*

Paperbacks has received orders from diverse countries, including China, France, Italy, Canada, Vietnam, the US, UK, and Singapore. This underscores the Centre's accomplishment in nurturing a readership that not only appreciates the scholarly depths of academic publications but also finds resonance in the aesthetic beauty of Chinese literature.

## 3.2 Academic Activities in Translation Studies

RCT has made significant strides in promoting translation studies through awards, conferences, publications, and public lectures, building a global network of scholarship and dialogue.

### 3.2.1 Awards

**Stephen C. Soong Translation Studies Memorial Awards:** Stephen C. Soong (1919–1996) was not only the founder of RCT but also a prolific writer and translator. To commemorate his contributions in this field, the “Stephen C. Soong Translation Studies Memorial Awards” were set up in 1997 by RCT. The awards are given each year to scholars who have made contributions to original research in Chinese Translation Studies, particularly in the use of first-hand sources for historical and cultural investigations. RCT remains committed to celebrating and recognizing noteworthy advancements in translation studies through this highly-regarded award.

### 3.2.2 Conferences

**Young Researchers' Conference on Chinese Translation Studies:** With the aim of encouraging young scholars to actively participate in Chinese translation studies and strengthen academic exchange, RCT has since 2004 organized a biennial “Young Researcher's Conference on Chinese Translation Studies”. The first conference of this series was held at CUHK in the same year. About 20 papers are accepted for each conference, and four to five established scholars in Chinese translation history are invited as discussants for selected papers.

**International Conferences on Chinese Translation History:** RCT launched the first “International Conference on Chinese Translation History” in 2015. This conference series aspires to explore Chinese translation history within the bigger framework of world civilization and human thought, and aims to lay groundwork for new models, methods, and perspectives in this innovative interdisciplinary branch of learning through detailed case studies. The conference series is held every two

years, with a different central theme for each conference. Since its inauguration, RCT has successfully organized four conferences in this series. The conferences have attracted scholars from different disciplines. Their interdisciplinary participation promotes insightful discussions and the exchange of research findings in the field of Chinese translation history.

### 3.2.3 Summer School

**Summer School on Chinese Translation History:** RCT launched its biennial “Summer School on Chinese Translation History” in 2009, possibly the first one of its kind in the world. About 60 young talents, mostly postgraduate students, are selected from all over the world for each summer school. The Summer School runs for seven days, during which participants engage in intensive lectures delivered by distinguished scholars as well as group discussions that facilitate meaningful exchanges of ideas among young scholars. It provides invaluable learning experiences for the attendees.

### 3.2.4 Publications

**Translation Studies Research (Book Series):** This is the first book series initiated by RCT. With a focus on cultural translation activities throughout Chinese history, this series published six titles between 1999 and 2005, among which *Translation and Creation: On Early Modern Chinese Translation of Foreign Fiction* and *Rewriting Chinese Translation History* are seminal works in the domain of Chinese translation history. With detailed analysis of case studies, fresh perspectives, and novel research methods, these two books provide foundational knowledge for researchers who are new to the field.

**Studies in Translation History (Journal):** This journal is an annual journal edited by RCT and published by Fudan University Press since 2011, making it the first journal in the world devoted solely to the study of Chinese translation history. In the eight issues published before its suspension in 2018, high-quality academic papers on Chinese Translation History and translated works on non-Chinese Translation History were published, winning strong acclaim from scholars in the field.

**Studies in Translation History (Book Series):** With the aim of actively promoting the study of Chinese translation history, RCT has been planning this book series in Chinese since 2010. The series is specifically focused on case studies of Chinese translation history. So far, three titles by distinguished scholars in the field have been published, and a few more are in the pipeline.

**Towards a History of Translating (Book Series):** To commemorate RCT’s 40th anniversary in 2011, the three-volume *Towards a History of Translating* was

compiled. The first two volumes consist of articles on translation and Chinese literature selected from past issues of *Renditions*, while the third volume is a collection of invited articles from distinguished scholars in the field of translation studies.

**Asian Translation Traditions Series (Book Series):** With the aim of enhancing high-quality research in the translation traditions of Asian countries and filling the vacancy in English publications on translation history, RCT launched its “Asian Translation Traditions” book series in 2014. This series, in English, brings together scholars working on various topics in Asian translation history. Up to date, five titles have already been published.

**Young Researchers’ Studies in Translation History (Book Series):** In line with RCT’s commitment to fostering a new generation of scholars, the Centre recently launched its “Young Researchers’ Studies in Translation History” book series. The objective of this book series is to offer young scholars in the field of Chinese translation history the opportunity to publish their Master’s thesis or Ph.D. dissertation. By offering a dedicated platform, RCT aims to showcase the valuable contributions made by these emerging scholars, thereby contributing to the overall advancement of translation history as a discipline.

## 4 Public Lectures

### 4.1 *Renditions* Distinguished Lectures

As part of the celebrations commemorating the 40th anniversary of *Renditions*, the Centre launched its *Renditions* Distinguished Lectures series to foster a dynamic exchange between renowned literary translators and the wider audience. The Centre invited five prominent figures in the realm of literary translation, including Howard Goldblatt, David Pollard, Stephen H. West, Brian Holton, and Sylvia Li-chun Lin, to share their invaluable experiences in the field. Their insightful lectures can be accessed through the Centre’s official website (<https://rct.cuhk.edu.hk/renditions/public-lectures/>).

### 4.2 RCT 50th Anniversary Lecture Series

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of RCT, in 2021, the Centre hosted a series of monthly online lectures featuring experts from different parts of the world speaking on a wide range of topics in Chinese translation history, including literature, diplomacy, religion, and science, providing fresh perspectives for scholars and

students dedicated to this field. Detailed records of these public lectures are available on the Centre's official website (<https://rct.cuhk.edu.hk/translation-studies/public-lectures/>).

## 5 Outreach

To build a strong community in the domain of translation studies, RCT not only undertakes independent activities, but also actively engages in outreach efforts. These include fostering collaborative endeavours with other institutions and promoting their research outputs through digital platforms, thereby generating a wide range of diverse and impactful activities.

### 5.1 Collaborative Endeavours

**International Conferences:** RCT co-organizes diverse international conferences with famous academic institutions in various countries, including China, the UK, Singapore, Spain, Italy, and Germany. In celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Research Centre for Translation, the Centre launched its sinology conference series in 2011. The latest two conferences in this series were co-organized with the University of Rome, in Italy, and University of Wurzburg, in Germany. In addition, RCT works closely with the Institute of Translation History and Transcultural Studies, Hunan University of Science and Technology, to co-host the “Translation and Knowledge Production in Modern China” conference series, the first conference of which was held in 2022.

**Manuscript Exhibition:** In 2023, RCT organized a public exhibition in collaboration with CUHK Library on the British sinologist David Hawkes's translation of *The Story of the Stone*. The exhibition featured the manuscript of Hawkes's translation, acquired by RCT in 2013. The exhibition lasted five months, from October to March of the following year. Through holding this public exhibition, RCT provided an opportunity for the public to learn about the pivotal role of translation in Chinese literary history.

### 5.2 Digital Platforms and Research Promotion

The Centre has embraced digital transformation, capitalizing on the rise of the Internet, mobile technology, and social networking to revolutionize peer interaction.

Recognizing digital marketing's significance, we have established a strong online presence.

**Social media accounts:** RTC's WeChat public account, "Studies on Translation History" (*Fanyishi yanjiu*), was launched in March 2019. The Centre not only promotes its own events and outputs via this account, but also introduces high-quality academic activities and pioneering research in translation history to subscribers. The account has amassed 10,000 followers so far, becoming one of WeChat's most-followed academic platforms. To engage a broader audience, the Centre expanded its digital footprint with a Facebook public page and a Twitter (now X) account in 2021.

**Official website:** RCT launched its official website in 1996. To provide a more contemporary and user-friendly interface, the Centre rebranded and redesigned the website in 2021. More information on RCT's history, past and upcoming events, and publications is available on the new site (<https://rct.cuhk.edu.hk/>). Visitors can explore the Centre's journey over the years and gain insights into its contributions to translation studies.

**Online bookstore:** To facilitate a smoother buying cycle for customers, RCT launched its new online bookstore in 2022. This online platform has enabled the Centre to expand its reach and make its published works accessible to a wider audience across various countries, including China, the US, UK, Belgium, Norway, Spain, and Turkey. More information on payment methods and delivery services as well as the publication catalogue is available on the online bookstore (<https://cuhkrctbookstore.com/>).

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