

**Between Texts, Beyond Words**  
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## **Interdependencies Between Literature, Language and Translation in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century China**

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**Abstract** This paper focuses on specific concepts and modes of translation practised during late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century China. Its Author does not argue for the uniqueness of a ‘Chinese Translation Studies system’ but asks critically why European scholars of Translation Studies sometimes show a lack of ‘empathetic imagination’ in accepting the contributions of Chinese protagonists to the field of Translations Studies. The paper suggests that one reason for this kind of negative attitude might be the belated arrival of the ‘iconic turn’ in the West. The last part of the paper examines the relations between translators and the socio-political developments in China as well as their identity as world-citizens.

**Summary** 1 Concrete Modes of Translation in China During the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries. – 2 Some Observations on Chinese Translation Concepts’ Contribution to the Field of Translation Studies and their Reception by European Scholars of Translation Studies. – 3 Relations Between Socio-Political Developments in China, Translation and World Citizenship. – 4 Conclusion.

**Keywords** Modes of translation in China. Lu Xun. Qian Zhongshu. Modernity. Empathetic imagination. Iconic turn.

This paper is the result of a presentation delivered at a university in Germany several years ago. The audience consisted mainly of European experts in translation studies who were unfamiliar with the Chinese context.

The aim of the presentation had mainly been to identify concrete features of translation as practiced in China during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this period, Chinese writers and translators were confronted with western influences, but Chinese indigenous developments were still quite visible. The presentation offered the view that the translation concepts developed, and the translation modes practiced, in China during that period, such as the collective mode of translation, are valuable contributions to the international field of translation studies.

Observers have described the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the period of a ‘Third Wave’ of intensive translation activity in China. This followed the ‘First Wave’ during which translators undertook

the enormous collective project of translating Buddhist scripture from Sanskrit and other ancient Indian languages into Chinese. This helped to establish Buddhism as a religion in China shortly after the beginning of the Christian era in the West. It also followed the 'Second Wave', which saw many translations resulting from the encounters between Chinese scholars and European Jesuits in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Fan 1999, 27). In the first section of this paper, the discussion will focus on the 'Third Wave' of intensive translation activity in China.

In the second section, this paper will provide my reflections on the critical reactions to my presentation by German experts in translation studies. The mocking and arrogant reactions of these European academics might be partly explained by a lack of interest in translation beyond the Western tradition. This is something which has been observed by Eva Hung, Judy Wakabayashi and Douglas Robinson. They characterised the contemporary field of Translation Studies at the beginning of the 21st century as being still highly Eurocentric (Hung, Wakabayashi 2005; Robinson 2017). However, in my opinion, the failure of these European scholars of translation to accept Chinese traditions might be explained also by another factor: the belated arrival of an 'iconic turn' in western academic research.

I want to clarify, however, that I am not siding with those Chinese scholars of translation studies who are nowadays trying to "develop Translation Studies in China with its own theoretical system and methodology so as to claim to create the so-called Chinese characteristics". Sun Yifeng from Lingnan University in Hong Kong has spoken of a "new-found cultural confidence [in China], which calls for a sweeping revitalization of traditional Chinese translation theory" (Sun 2012, 35-6).

The third section of my paper examines the relations between translation and the socio-political context in China. Here my argument is that translation has been - and in fact still is - connected with issues of orthodoxy and dogmatism. In 1963 the writer and translator Qian Zhongshu, with his thoughts dwelling on translation, protested against the prescribed orthodoxy and dogmatism of his time. Today leading scholars of translation studies in the People's Republic of China (PRC) are still demanding that translators show a 'correct' attitude with regard to translation culture.

## **1 Concrete Modes of Translation in China During the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries**

In my opinion, two very interesting features of translation as practiced in China are the collective mode of translation and the habit of redacting texts. Eva Hung (2006, 152) has shown how this collaborative mode was established over many centuries. The tradition of 'translating in a team' was still alive and well in nineteenth-century China. The translator Lin

Shu 林紓 (1852-1924), for example, who introduced over 150 novels from Europe and America to China, actually knew no language but Chinese. He accomplished his translations with the help of assistants who were familiar with the languages from which he was translating. They conveyed to him the content of the text in question and Lin Shu then reformulated this content in classical Chinese. Lin's elegant style made him a much-loved translator whose works were highly in demand among literate Chinese at the end of the nineteenth century and start of the twentieth century. Lin's works had evidently found their 'target group'. As the twentieth century advanced, this respect for translation as teamwork gradually declined in China. It was sidelined by western influences and another notion arose to replace it, namely that translation should be accomplished by one person alone (Hung 2006, 157).

We also encounter the practice of translation as a collective process in other contexts across the world. Maria Tymoczko (2007, 60) has described such a process of collective translation taking place in African society. She reports on the retelling of *Hamlet* by a circle of African tribal elders who collectively carried out its 'translation' in accordance with the locally applicable cultural rules. The elders, for example, interpreted the death of Ophelia as the inevitable consequence of a wicked magic spell. Tymoczko considers the oral sharing of tales and narratives, and the appropriation and integration of foreign stories into one's own cultural context, to be characterised by a performative aesthetic.

Returning to Lin Shu, we might ask: did his manner of proceeding not necessarily imply the taking of great liberties vis-à-vis the original texts? Many commentators on Lin's works have expressed this opinion. Lin himself, however, seemed aware of the need to limit such liberties. He wrote:

Translating is unlike writing. The writer can write about what he has seen or heard, either in vague expressions or in detailed descriptions, that is to say, he can write about whatever subject and in whatever manner he likes. However, when it comes to translation, the translator is confined to relating what has already been written about... When religious inculcations are found in the original text, he must translate them; how can he purge his translation of that discourse just for taboo's sake? (Fan 1999, 3)

Lin's self-perception, in other words, was characterised by a "loyalty to the author", to adopt a phrase that Christiane Nord has introduced into debates in this field (Nord 2011). Even so, Martha Cheung has pointed to the presence of certain traits in Lin Shu's translations which amount to a subtle censorship or 'redaction' of his source texts. Lin's translation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* appears to preserve the Christian message that is central to the source text. However, his translation of the book does not offer

narration of a religious conversion inspired by any specifically Christian behaviour. Instead, Lin chose to place the emphasis on a moral transformation of the protagonists which corresponded more closely to Chinese models of religion and morality (Cheung 1998, 138). In Cheung's view, this amounted to a shift of emphasis through which Lin intended, consciously or unconsciously, to lead his text's readers to the conclusion that "[t]here is nothing which Christianity can offer that traditional Chinese morality cannot" (139).

Dan Dexing has also conducted research on Lin Shu's mode of translation. As Dan shows, political motives were among the considerations driving Lin Shu's translation. Lin Shu took seriously what Liang Qichao and Yan Fu had said about the power of fiction to influence whether China undergoes 'renaissance' or 'ruin'. Chapter 7 of 'A Voyage to Brobdingnag' in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* contains the following sentence: "They have the Art of Printing, as well as the Chinese, Time out of mind" (1959, 136). Lin Shu translated and extended the phrase "time out of mind" as follows: "古今無分遂泥古不化墨守舊法至於老死" (*gu jin wu fen sui ni gu bu hua mo shou jiu fa zhi yu lao si*). In doing so, he made the phrase imply that people in China tended to be inflexible and to stick to the old ways even if this implicated their death. Dan (2009, 105-6) argues that Lin Shu argues that Lin Shu extended the phrase in this way because he was seeking to shake his compatriots into activity and make them engage in "saving their country from ruin" (救国 *jiuguo*).

However, we should be careful not to characterise this 'interpreting', 'redacting' and 'editing' approach to translation as being 'typically Chinese' (Zheng 2009, 75). James St. André's research has identified a case of spurious translation from this period. In 1900, Ernest Bramah Smith published a book entitled *The Wallet of Kai Lung*, which purported to be a 'genuinely Chinese' collection of tales by a Chinese storyteller. In fact, Smith could not read Chinese. His English work represented an attempt to recreate 'Chineseness' and it was essentially a pastiche. "Spurning the type of Pidgin-English commonly ascribed to Chinese in the popular press, Smith depends mainly on vocabulary choice for [t]his effect" (St. André 2006, 244).

To cite an example from more recent times, Karin Schindler has shown how a French translation made in the 1950s of the classic Swedish children's book *Pippi Longstocking* contains significant 'redactions'. One classic scene describes Pippi's experience at school. In the 1950s French translation, Pippi remains unable to make sense of the idea that eight and four make twelve, as she is in the original. However, the French translator's 'loyalty to the author' clearly has its limits. The paragraph in which Pippi impudently proposes that the teacher, instead of Pippi herself, should go and stand in the corner has been dropped from the French translation (Schindler 2004).

## 2 Some Observations on Chinese Translation Concepts' Contribution to the Field of Translation Studies and their Reception by European Scholars of Translation Studies

This second section of the paper will describe the specific conceptual deliberations made by prominent Chinese translators in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Presenting these deliberations, it will show the broad range of discussions that took place in China related to translation issues and the different lines of argumentation that emerged. The concepts developed by these Chinese translators do show some similarities with western concepts. However, in their discussions we can also discern quite unique conceptual developments, such as ideas about the importance of images in the Chinese language and translation context.

One important protagonist of translation and translation research in early twentieth-century China was Fu Lei 傅雷 (1908-1966). Fu Lei worked as a writer, art critic and translator. He was of the opinion that it was not important for a translation to resemble the source text in formal respects. For him it was essential that a translation conveyed the spirit (*shen* 神) of the source text (Luo, Xinzhang 2012, 8, and Liu, Miqing 1995, 89).

The term *shen* 神 is deeply embedded in Chinese aesthetics. In the Daoist classic *Zhuangzi* 庄子 (The Texts of Taoism 1962, 198), *shen* 神 stands for the outer effect of an inner truth (真在內者神動於外 *zhen zai nei zhe shen dong yu wai*). Wolfgang Kubin, in his translation of the *Zhuangzi*, has pointed out that at the time of its writing the term *shen* also carried the sense of "incredible", "extraordinary" (Kubin 2013, 168). The passage might, then, be rendered thus: 'the inner truth of a source text becomes visible through an inspired and remarkable translation'.

The well-known Chinese philologist Zhang Taiyan 章太炎 (1869-1936) called into question the very possibility of translation. All words, he argued, are merely substitutes (*yi ming wei dai* 以名为代) and resemble the ephemeral footprints left by passing birds (*niaoji* 鸟迹). He maintained that names cannot possibly succeed in re-evoking the scene originally evoked by a 'source text' and therefore meanings are often lost in conventional translations (Zhang 1986, 77). Admittedly, these highly sceptical views did not prevent Zhang from making many translations himself and starting a Translation Society (Murthy 2014, 71). He nevertheless preferred to describe his works as 'interpretative transpositions' of the originals.

A contemporary of Zhang Taiyan, the author, translator and scholar Zheng Zhenduo 郑振铎 (1898-1958) held a differing view on translation. He wrote:

I [...] hold to the opinion that literature is translatable. I think that if a book is well translated, it can have the same value as the original [...]  
If we compare thoughts to water, then expression is the container; no

matter how the container's form changes, the essence and amount of water remain the same [...] We have no reason to doubt that thoughts can be represented in more than one language. (Zheng 2014, 63)

In my opinion, reflections on translation such as those discussed above offer an enrichment of international research into translation. However, when I presented Zhang and Zheng's concepts to the audience of experts in the field of Translation Studies at a German university, several members of this audience responded with mocking smiles and asked whether such ideas could really be said to constitute valid contributions to international translation studies. This reaction made me reflect on why there is a reluctance to accept Chinese contributions to the field of translation studies as relevant.

Roger Sell (2000, 4), who defines literature as a form of communication, claims that during intercultural encounters "the human imagination must be sufficiently autonomous to empathize with modes of being and doing that are different from the ones valorized within its most immediate milieu". He argues that when we are confronted with a cultural landscape of difference it is necessary to have 'empathetic imagination'. Sell (15) calls for a careful "negotiation of differences". One reason for the attitude shown by the European scholars of Translation Studies in the above mentioned case might therefore be a lack of the kind of 'empathetic imagination' that Sell describes.

Another reason for these European scholars' over-critical stance might be that in Europe there is a tradition of viewing sense and meaning as things only brought to explicit expression through language itself. For Gadamer, "[b]eing that is comprehended is language". But in the view of many European scholars, the "edges" of language tend to bring forth certain irrationalities (Boehm 2007, 14). Because of this, some scholars ascribe to the Chinese language a non-logical character (Yuasa 2009, 71).

However, a powerful sense of images has traditionally characterised Chinese culture and thought, and continues to do so. The Japanese philosopher Yuasa Yasuo (1925-2005) argues that the foundation of linguistic expression in a 'written language' such as Chinese is the image, which appeals to visual perception (2009,76). In the Chinese cultural context, "the world is grasped as a momentary image of which the eternal movement of the cosmos allows us to have a glimpse in the midst of time" (2009, 80). In works as early as the *Yijing* 易经, or *Book of Changes* - one of the most important among the canon of ancient texts revered by Chinese scholars - we read that the sages of ancient times attempted to picture the essential phenomena of the cosmos by means of 'primal images'. Examples of such 'primal images' were the trigrams and hexagrams of the *Yijing*. Images can also be a means of understanding the cosmos and the events occurring within it. The Chinese point of view did not regard these images

as ‘unscientific’. The notion that images were ‘unscientific’ emerged only when western scholars, in the course and context of imperialist expansion, entered China with their entirely different forms of knowledge and set their own standards for the culture they found there. In recent years, with what has become known as the ‘iconic turn’, western academics have been rediscovering the significance of visual images. The art historian Gottfried Boehm (2007, 9) speaks of the “notable reality of the visual image”. Still, as Boehm points out, “*homo pictor*” has only very recently and rudimentarily gained the attention of Western academic research and thought, and the spectrum of visual representations in the Western world has been surprisingly restricted.

This restricted spectrum of visual representations might explain why the above-mentioned experts of Translation Studies were hesitant to recognize Chinese conceptual contributions, such as those made by Zhang Taiyan and Zheng Zhenduo, to the international field of translation studies.

### **3 Relations Between Socio-Political Developments in China, Translation and World Citizenship**

In the third section of this paper my aim is firstly to relate Chinese reflections on translation with the societal and political background from which they evolved. The literary scholars Pascale Casanova (2004) and Wolfgang Klein (1999) have also advocated placing increased focus on the historical and societal context of literature. In addition to this, the third section of the paper also asks whether Chinese translators and writers have seen themselves as part of a larger community and as world citizens.

In the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century China, many Chinese intellectuals, including Yan Fu 严复, Liang Qichao 梁启超, Kang Youwei 康有为 and Lu Xun 鲁迅, translated works by foreign authors into Chinese, particularly writings of political and sociological import. Liang Qichao described literature in translation as the “sharp sword” of culture, which could shake people out of their slumbers (Luo Xuanmin 2009, 125).

The writer Lu Xun (1881-1936) and his brother Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885-1967) were among those who shaped the debates on translation at the beginning of the twentieth century. Lu Xun chose to abandon his profession as a doctor in favour of being an author and a translator, moved by his conviction that it was in these latter areas of activity that the appropriate resources for the reconstruction of Chinese civilisation were to be found. He was of the opinion that the translation of works from foreign languages and the introduction of new linguistic patterns would enrich Chinese literature and culture and would lead to a change in Chinese thought and societal patterns. In a similar way, proponents of German Romanticism hoped for an enrichment of their own culture, language and

literature through translation. During the Romantic period, many classical works were translated from Greek and Latin into the German language in order to accumulate literary capital, as Pierre Bourdieu would have put it, and to strengthen the position of the German-speaking world as a literary space equalling France in importance (Casanova 2009).

For some time Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren translated as a team. In fact, it was Zhou Zuoren, whose accomplishments in the academic field have been somewhat neglected in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the West, who inspired Lu Xun to enter the field of translation (Zhao 2012). Yu Xiaozhi (2014, 10) has recently pointed out that Zhou Zuoren translated no fewer than 326 literary works. For Zhou, translation became a particular mode of self-expression. He professed to have been influenced by Lin Shu's mode of translation at the outset of his work (Zheng 2013, 89). Yu asserts that Zhou lost his interest in 'isms' of all kinds after 1924 (2014, 58). For Zhou, one of the most important roles of literature was the liberation of the individual (个人的解放 *geren de jiefang*).

In his approach to making translations, Lu Xun (Gao 1983) advocated the principle of taking whatever is useful (拿来主义 *nalazhuyi*). He believed that people in China lacked knowledge of the literatures and languages of the world, and he was in favour of integrating new terms and grammar into Chinese culture and literature. Shih Shu-mei (2001) describes Lu Xun as having the self-confidence of an individual writer who perceived himself as a citizen of the world. Lu Xun (Guo 2005b, 8) questioned the possibility of completely contextualising a foreign text in one's own language (完全归化 *wanquan guihua*). Therefore, he adopted a strategy of literal translation, bound by strict accuracy, which often resulted in texts that were hard to understand. This method of translation was called *yingyi* 硬译 (Zhang Sijie 2012, 121). Lu Xun required considerable patience from his readership, arguing that after a while they would become accustomed to reading these somewhat grammatically strange translations that appeared difficult to read (Yu 2014, 44).

In order to exemplify Lu Xun's style, I would like to mention his translation of the work *Little Johannes* by the Dutch writer Frederik van Eeden. Lu Xun translate this work into Chinese, taking, as it seems, a detour via German. He describes how in the process of translation he encountered a bird's name: *Rohrdrossel* in German, 'Great Reed Warbler' in English, *Acrocephalus turdoides* in Latin. Since he could not find an equivalent in Chinese, he decided to create a neologism: *wei que* 苇雀, literally meaning 'Reed Sparrow' (Wang Hongzhi 2007b, 240). Today's equivalent of the bird's name in Chinese is 苇莺 *weiying*.

In the long run, Lu Xun's translations were not well received by his readers, who tended to regard them as inaccessible and hard to understand. Interestingly, the Italian-American translator Lawrence Venuti, born in 1953, appears to prefer a strategy similar to Lu Xun's. Instead of produc-

ing a domesticating translation and “preempting the illusion of transparency” under the “regime of fluency”, Venuti (2002) favours a foreignising translation that highlights the differences of the foreign text and can be seen as “a dissident cultural practice” (125).

The writer and translator Liang Shiqiu 梁實秋 (1903-1987), who had rendered the complete works of Shakespeare into Chinese, took a different view. He criticised his contemporary Lu Xun’s translations as ‘dead translations (*siyi* 死译)’ (Wang Hongzi 2007a, 258). He found fault with the strange grammatical constructions in Lu Xun’s translations and wrote: “Dead translations are characterized by the fact that after having read them it is as if you have never read these translated works” (264; Author’s translation). In Liang’s rejoinder to an article on the ‘class character’ of literature written by Lu Xun, Liang wholeheartedly rejected the notion that literature possessed any class character. In his view, literature was an expression of human nature (267).

Let us take a look at the dispute that formed the backdrop to these differences of opinion. Lu Xun had translated into Chinese a resolution on cultural policy issued by the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party. He labelled the Communist cultural policy ‘scientific’ and gave expression to his conviction that literature’s purpose was to benefit society.<sup>1</sup> Opposed as he was to an overly close relationship between Chinese authors and Russian cultural policy, Liang accused Lu Xun of using translation for propaganda purposes (Wang Hongzhi 2007a, 276-77). In Liang’s view, the cultural policy of the Russian Communist Party aimed at depriving authors of their freedom of expression.

The language reformer and writer Hu Shi 胡适 (1891-1962) belonged, like Lu Xun, to the group of Chinese writers who advocated the use of the vernacular *baihua* 白话 in writing modern literature. The authors who wrote in *baihua* were somewhat alone in their endeavours in the early years, as Martha Cheung (2014, 150) has stressed. Few authors dared to approach this new hybrid form. Hu Shi differed from Lu Xun in his preference for a non-literal mode of translation. He was also in the habit of simplifying and shortening passages of text (Zhao 2012). In his view, translation was a more difficult task than writing, and a translator was called upon to thoroughly understand or incorporate (吃透 *chitou*) the source text and carry out extensive research on its context (Guo 2005a, 49).

What is striking about the statements being made by early twentieth-century Chinese writers is the fact that they are often informed by a range of different cultural contexts and reveal a knowledge of several foreign languages. In the first half of the twentieth century, authors were often

1 The author Mao Dun 茅盾 was of the opinion that besides perfecting their skills in matters of language and literature, translators should also undergo training in political theory. See Guo 2005c, 167.

also translators. Lu Xun, for example, translated more than 200 works by about 100 authors from 14 different countries in the course of his literary activity. Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 (1879-1942), another protagonist of this time, translated authors such as Zola, Flaubert and Maupassant. Chen, one of the co-founders of the Communist Party of China, also rendered poems by the Indian author Tagore into Chinese in his early years, a little-known facet of his work. However, in a way that was similar to the way in which Lin Shu gave *Uncle Tom's Cabin* a Confucian colouring, Chen Duxiu added new elements to these translations. For example, he added evolutionary ideas to a religious poem by Tagore in his translation for issue 2 of the magazine *Xin Qingnian* 新青年 in 1915. He rendered the line "Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure" into Chinese as follows: '我生无终极造化乐其功 *wo sheng wu zhong ji zaohua le qi gong* (My life is endless. Nature takes delight in my succeeding life)'.<sup>2</sup>

It was certainly the case that the Chinese authors of that time were curious about the outside world. Chen Duxiu (2000, 281) called in 1915 for young people to "[b]e cosmopolitan, not isolationist". However, due to a lack of knowledge of foreign languages and to political self-isolation, this tradition of a dual identity of authors and translators came to an end in the second half of the twentieth century. Today, few authors in China are also translators, and the number of Chinese contemporary authors who have mastered foreign languages is small (Kubin 2006).

## 4 Conclusion

I would like to conclude by taking a brief look into the second half of the twentieth century and the situation today. In an essay on translation from the year 1963 (Qian 2012), the writer and renowned scholar Qian Zhongshu 钱钟书 (1910-1998) cites the authority of the scholar Xu Shen 许慎 (ca. 58-ca.147), who compiled the dictionary *Shuowen jiezi*. Qian draws the reader's attention to an entry in the *Shuowen jiezi* – the character 囿 *é* – that elucidates the concept 译 *yì* (translation) and is rich in interpretive significance (Cheung 2011). The character 囿 *é* is pronounced as 訛 *é* (errors, misrepresentations), as *é* is a common variant of 譌 *é*. This being the case, the characters 譌 *é*, 訛 *é*, 囿 *é* and 化 *hua* are all interconnected. 化 (transformation) is phonophoric (the sound-bearing component). Qian sees a metaphorical connection between the term 译 *yì* (translation) and that for 鸟媒 *niǎomēi* (decoy). When the bird-catcher uses a live bird as a decoy, it is called 囿 *é*. The bird-decoy entices (诱 *yòu*) birds. Qian writes: "译 *yì* can be explicated as transmitting the words of the tribes in the four

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2 See: <http://www.reedscom.cn/forum.php?mod=viewthread&tid=750> (2018-12-13).

quarters and those of the birds and beasts” (translation by Martha Cheung, 2011, 5) The transmission of words functions in much the same way that the bird-decoy functions to entice birds.

Martha Cheung summarises the argument in this way: to Qian, *hùà* 化 (transformation) is the highest state to be attained by literary translation,<sup>3</sup> and is correspondingly difficult to achieve. In Qian’s view, 訛 *é* (misrepresentation) is inevitable. A translation serves as 媒 the *měi* (medium) of transmission, enticing (誘 *yòu*) the reader to become attached to a foreign work (Cheung 2011, 4).

In my view, this text by Qian Zhongshu contains important insights into matters of literature, language and translation. At first sight, the text may seem apolitical. However, at the time of its publication, its political component was unmistakable. In 1957, Qian’s father was branded as a rightist. Qian himself came in for severe criticism one year later,<sup>4</sup> only escaping his father’s fate with the help of influential friends. In 1993, Chen Sihe recorded the fact that just like other authors, such as Shen Congwen 沈從文 and Zhou Zuoren, Qian Zhongshu had “disappeared from the face of literary history in the PRC without leaving the faintest trace” (Wong 2013, 11).

Let us take a closer look at the time in which Qian Zhongshu composed his reflections on translation. The 1950s were marked by a highly specific discourse on translation. This was a discourse controlled by the Chinese Communist Party and one which emphasised the necessity of a ‘correct’ stance on translation, the accuracy of translation, and the primacy of translations from Russian. From 1949 to 1966, over 3,500 translations of Soviet Russian literature were published in total, constituting approximately 65 percent of all publications of translated foreign literature (Qi 2012, 124). Lin Shu’s method of editorial translation was subject to harsh criticism during this period.

Qian Zhongshu did not fit into this framework. He spoke of the inevitable fallibility of translations and of translators’ role as mediators whose task was to transmit “the words of the tribes in the four quarters” (Cheung 2011, 3) and not to limit themselves to one dominant source language. This was the implicit message of the text discussed above. This meant that Qian’s thoughts on translation constituted a potentially dangerous political act of protest against the prescribed orthodoxy and dogmatism of the time. In my opinion, Qian’s text retains its relevance today. This is a relevance we may recognise when looking at Chinese teaching materials on translation studies from 2009 (Xu Jun, Mu Lei 2009, 16). The authors of these

3 On the concept of transformation (*hùà* 化), see also Liu Miqing 1995, 96-7.

4 The translator Fu Lei was also heavily criticised during the Anti-Rightist campaign and committed suicide together with his wife in September 1966 after having been abused by Red Guards.

materials emphasise that translation connects people as they progress towards a better future, yet still conclude by stressing the importance of maintaining a 'correct' attitude towards translation.

Today, China is undoubtedly in a state of modernity. At this juncture, I find the concept of multiple modernities coined by Shmuel Eisenstadt (2002) helpful. In my view, the modernity that Qian Zhongshu and others evoked in the first half of the twentieth century has yet to arrive. Zygmunt Bauman (2007, 9) has characterised modern consciousness as one that "criticises, warns and alerts. It makes the action unstoppable by ever anew unmasking its ineffectiveness". I agree with Shih Shu-mei (2001, 385) who has remarked that the project of modernity in China is incomplete. She considers this "not due to an unfulfilled promise, as Juergen Habermas lamented in the Western context, but instead due to it being a particularly arduous, violent, repetitive, and long process, longer than any modernist writer could have anticipated".

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