Book Review

Wang, Dongfeng (2014). 跨学科的翻译研究
[*An interdisciplinary approach to Translation Studies*]
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During the past two decades, Translation Studies has developed rapidly in China as an emergent discipline. One scholar who has contributed extraordinarily to that development is Professor Wang Dongfeng, one of the most prominent figures in the cultural and poetic study of translation in China. Professor Wang's recent book *An Interdisciplinary Approach to Translation Studies* is a collection of papers that were published from 2000 to 2014. It is a condensed view of his major research over the years, and a snapshot of the panorama of contemporary Chinese Translations Studies.

The book consists of four sections, each of which is a focused study of a particular issue in literary translation, such as coherence, poetic value, and manipulation. In order to deal with these issues, theories and methods from linguistics, poetics, cultural studies, and other neighbouring disciplines have been borrowed.

Section One is a linguistic study of translation. The central issue to be discussed is coherence in literary translation. Here, coherence is defined as a multi-layered and multi-dimensional network of relations with which a text is interwoven and through which it is understood (p. 6). It is created by the operation of language at different levels and on different dimensions. Translation is defined, accordingly, as "a process of reconstructing that network of relations to the greatest extent" (p. 6). The four chapters of this section deal respectively with coherence on the dimensions of grammar, semantics, pragmatics and stylistics.

Grammatical coherence is thought to consist of intra-sentence relations and inter-sentence relations. Of particular importance to literary text is the effect of coherence created by marked grammatical structures. At intra-sentence level, these may take the form of ungrammatical sentences. At inter-sentence level, it happens when grammatical ties between sentences are intentionally removed or when a certain grammatical structure is extensively used. Therefore, in literary translations, "grammatical structures should not be disposed of at will" (p.19).

Semantic coherence of literary texts is taken to be a matter of lexical relations. Two patterns of lexical cohesion, reiteration and collocation, outlined by Halliday and Hasan (1976, 288) are referred to for the analysis. It is shown that reiteration could help the literary translator to recognise the echoing and

cumulative effect created by repetition of a lexical item across a span of text, while collocation could help disambiguate some lexical items.

Pragmatic coherence in translation can be achieved when translation is regarded as "a cooperative act between the translator and the source text writer" (p. 39) and when the "maxims for the translator" (p. 40), inferred from Gricean maxims, is followed. And the translator is advised to pay special attention to the representation of implicatures of the source text for at least three reasons. Firstly, the process of inference that the reader has to go through in his search for implicature is a major source of poetic effect. Secondly, the working of implicature is often culture bound, posing challenges for its recognition. Thirdly, translators are easily subjected to the tendency of "rationalisation" and "clarification" which often causes "textual deformation" (Berman 2000).

Stylistic coherence of a literary text consists of the tension between "a background network", which is a configuration of normal and standard language use, and "a foreground network", which refers to the systematic use of deviations (p. 58). In order to achieve stylistic coherence in translation, the literary translator is advised to follow the principle of "deviation for deviation and norm for norm" (p.64), so that the two networks of language use and the tension between them can be reproduced.

Section Two is about the poetics of translation, and focuses on issue of recreating poetic value in literary translation. The four papers in this section have stirred up heated academic debate in Chinese Translation Studies. They include not only a rethinking of traditional standards of translation but also a re-orientation for literary translation.

In the first two chapters, the author draws on Post-structuralism and Formalism to deconstruct the twin standards of fidelity and fluency. Relying on Post-structuralism, especially its denial of pure presence, intrinsic meaning, and unmediated access to reality, the author demonstrates that the very thing to which translation was traditionally required to be faithful does not exist, and that the ethics for faithful translation do not hold. Formalism, with its insistence on 'literariness', is quoted to show that fluency in translation usually comes at the price of poetic value.

The significance that the project of dethroning the two standards bears in China is well worth mentioning. Fidelity and fluency, together with 'elegance', were canonised by Yan Fu (1898), and have always been taken as the default ideals for translators. While different systematic studies of translation were attempted in the West and translation polyvalence was unveiled, many Chinese translation scholars still indulged in anecdotal talks and impressionistic remarks centring around Yan Fu's three-word standard. The budding new discipline would not really bloom and flourish in the Chinese context if traditional standards still held control. And it is largely due to this deconstructive effort that the broad scope of translation was opened up.

As far as translation is concerned, deconstructing traditional standards is simply a means. The end is to re-orient literary translators, and this constitutes the theme of the succeeding two chapters of this section. The principle of *de yi wang xing* (得意忘形) – i.e., *getting* the meaning and *forgetting* the form – that used to hold sway, is shown to be incompatible with the spirit of Formalism. Translators are suggested to "revive the form" (p. 133), that is, they should give greater importance to how meaning is unfolded rather than to assuring its easy flow. To this end the author advocates the foregrounding of the 'ab-uses' of language in the process of translation.

Section Three is a cultural study of translation, and the central issue to be discussed concerns the manipulative powers exerted both on and by translations. Some recent theory from the West, including notions such as

'political agenda' and 'resistant translation' (Venuti 1995), is introduced and discussed in the third chapter. However, what makes this section more interesting is that such Western theories are fleshed out and tested using cases of translation in China, and that a fuller understanding of the causes and effects of some translations is offered.

First, the influence of the translator's cultural attitude is discussed as a critical response to polysystem theory. According to Even-Zohar (1990), the strategy that the translator adopts is determined by the position of translated literature within the literary polysystem, and that position is determined in turn by the social circumstances in which the literature is embedded. For example, when the native literature is weak or peripheral, translated literature would maintain a primary position and foreignisation would be the prevailing strategy. However, the author's study of the heterogeneity of translations in China during the 1920s and 1930s defies that generalisation. The reason is that the respective positions of native and translated literature within the literary polysystem are not solely an objectively-determined social fact. They are also a matter of the translator's cultural attitude (p. 159). In the case of China, translators who would cherish the glorious past were reluctant to acknowledge that Chinese culture was weak or peripheral, and tended to prefer domestication. On the contrary, those eager to break from tradition would place translated literature in a primary position, and favoured foreignisation in their translations.

Second, Sutra translation and Yan Fu's translations offer studies that serve to illustrate how ideology manipulates translation as "an invisible hand" (p. 169). When Sutra was first introduced to China, Confucianism and Taoism were the dominant ideologies. Sanskrit scriptures that catered well to the interest of the ruling class were most favoured. And in the process of translation, the scriptures were filtered through Confucian ideas and Taoist concepts. The result was a set of hybridised and localised Buddhist thoughts that conformed to the ruling ideology. The sway of ideology is also evidenced in Yan Fu's translation. Eager to cure Chinese society and enlighten arrogant feudal officials and scholars, Yan Fu had scrupulously chosen to translate works that contained advanced ideas from the West. In order to make those ideological constructs easily accessible to the ruling class, within which the feudal ideology was deeply rooted, he had to "wrap the pills of western thoughts with the candy coat of classical language" (p. 183).

Next, the shaping force of translation is discussed and illustrated with two cases of mistranslation: Ezra Pound's translation of ancient Chinese poetry, and the translation of Western poetry during the period of the New Cultural Movement. These are mistranslations in the sense that they conform neither to the sound patterns of the original poems nor to the metrical forms prevailing in the target culture. Each was initiated by a clear agenda. Pound was motivated by poetic innovation, and the cultural elites in China were driven by the urge to break with the old and bring forth the new. Both cases of mistranslation have triggered a grand modernist poetry movement whose influence can still be felt today. Pound succeeded in subverting the Victorian poetic tradition and setting the Anglo-American Imagist Movement on stage. The forerunners of New Cultural Movement managed to advance the vernacular language movement and usher in the golden years of Chinese modern poetry.

In section Four, the author takes an integrated approach to translation. In each chapter of this section he offers a comprehensive study of cases that resonated strongly in modern Chinese history. The goal is to reveal the rich meanings that abound in each example, such as the historical appeal that called for the translation, the socio-cultural context in which it is embedded, and the linguistic features with which the texture of the original work is re-inscribed.

These studies bring home the point that translation is inexorably complex and Translation Studies is necessarily interdisciplinary.

The first chapter of this section explores how "the translation of a short poem succeeded in shaking a high building" (p. 237). The poem is *The Isles of Greece*, Canto the Third – LXXXVI of Byron's *Don Juan*. The 'high building' is late-Qing and early-Republic society. The six translations examined here differ from each other as far as poetic convention, metrical form, sound pattern, and language use are concerned, but all sparked a sense of national crisis and a spirit of freedom within Chinese readers, and quickened the downfall of the feudal system. Moreover, they mirrored the game being played by different poetic ideals and language norms. With these translations, the tight grip of traditional poetic convention – characterised by strict metrical patterns and classical language – was loosened, and a new poetic form that endorses free verse and vernacular language began to get the upper hand.

In another paper of this section, the author seeks to disinter the historical memories buried in Chen Wangdao's translation of *The Manifesto of Communist Party*. This also was a translation called into being by the national agenda, for its appeal in the extensive search for a means to save a nation in crisis. As to the translation itself, several observations have been made. Firstly, it is heavily influenced by the Japanese version in so far as vocabulary, terminology and stylistic features, which signals the role of Japanese as a mediating language for importing Western ideas. Secondly, modern vernacular instead of classical dialect is used, revealing the translator's support for the language movement of the day. Thirdly, the stylistic features and rhetorical effects of the source text were fully echoed, due in large part to the fact that the translator was a renowned scholar in rhetoric.

The last chapter of this part is a study of Zhu Shenghao's translation of Shakespeare. As one of the most brilliant translators in China, Zhu's translations have always enjoyed the widest popularity among Chinese readers. According to the author's observation, that popularity is largely due to the methods of semantic extension and structural reshuffling used skilfully by the translator. By semantic extension he means that Zhu would choose to change the word form whenever necessary so that the meaning of the source flows smoothly and naturally (p. 298). Structural reshuffling is used to deal with grammatical disparities between Chinese and English, so that the translation would be read with perfect ease and not intrude upon the reader as being clumsy or awkward.

The book covers a wide spectrum of themes, ranging from discussions of specific issues in translation, critical thinking of traditional ideas, introduction and essaying of Western ideas, to careful examination of some translational events. Moreover, while this book is theoretically ambitious, it does not float upon abstract reasoning. The rich sources of examples included in the book have made it thoroughly readable and lent more persuasive force to the author's arguments. It could serve different purposes for different readers. First, it is a highly recommendable reference book for those interested in having a general picture of contemporary Chinese Translation Studies and a better understanding of some translations in the history of modern China. Second, the different chapters of the book, each addressing a specific issue of translation with wide theoretical sources and illustrations, would furnish young scholars and practising researchers with excellent examples on how to carry out effective researches in Translation Studies. Third, it is a wonderful guide for literary translators, in that it can remind them of what is to be avoided and what is to be stressed in translation.

There are also some problems. Because the book is a collection of papers that were published over a span of 14 years, some examples and theoretical

references used in one chapter can sometimes be found in another. Although the papers collected in each section are wonderfully written, some of the issues seem to require more supporting evidence and research effort.

However, just as the flaws in jade cannot obscure its splendour, such limitations cannot reduce the overall value and significance of this book. Professor Wang displays not merely a willingness to learn from different schools of thought, but also a critical stance towards imported ideas. He is always ready to place different theories and methodologies on trial and explore their relevance to translation-related issues in the Chinese context. With the present compilation, he further contributes to the boom of Translation Studies in China and enriches the reservoir of this discipline internationally.

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