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Twentieth-Century Chinese Translation Theory

Modes, issues and debates

Leo Tak-hung Chan
Lingnan University, Hong Kong

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Twentieth-Century Chinese Translation Theory: Modes, issues and debates
by Leo Tak-hung Chan

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List of contributors

Evangeline Almberg has a B. A. (Hons) from the University of Hong Kong and a Ph.D. from the University of Stockholm. She is currently a full professor at the University of Macao.

Kelly Kar-yue Chan is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Edinburgh and currently teaches at the Polytechnic University of Hong Kong.

Leo Tak-hung Chan is Head of the Department of Translation, Lingnan University, Hong Kong. His articles have appeared in TTR, Babel, Across Languages and Cultures and The Translator. His most recent publication is One into Many: Translation and the Dissemination of Classical Chinese Literature (Rodopi, 2003).

Chapman Chen currently teaches translation as Assistant Professor at the Department of Chinese and Bilingual Studies at Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

Julie Chiu is Assistant Professor of Translation at Lingnan University. She has published two books of translation and articles on the translation of fantasy novels and modern Chinese free verse. She is presently engaged in research on contemporary “short-short” stories and time in translation.

Gilbert C. F. Fong is Reader/Professor at the Department of Translation, Chinese University of Hong Kong. He translated many plays by Gao Xingjian, published in The Other Shore and Snow in August. He also edited Studies on Hong Kong Drama and Plays from Hong Kong, and is Editor of two journals.

Han Yang has a B. A. (Hons.) and a Ph.D. in Linguistics from the University of York, UK. She is currently an Assistant Professor in Language and Translation at the Open University of Hong Kong.

Orlando Nang-kwok Ho has a B. A. (Hons.) from the Chinese University of Hong Kong and a Master’s degree from the University of New South Wales. Currently, he is doing part-time teaching at the Open University of Hong Kong.
Sara Ho has a B. A. (Hons) from the City University of Hong Kong and a Master's degree from the Hong Kong Baptist University. Currently, she is doing HRD work in the Hong Kong Housing Authority.

Brian Holton, currently teaching translation at Hong Kong Polytechnic University, has translated many texts into both English and Scots. He is currently translating another book by the contemporary poet Yang Lian, and has recently finished a Scots translation of "The Nine Songs" ("Chu Ci").

George Kao has published a number of Chinese translations under the penname of Qiao Zhigao; most notable among these is that of Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.

John Tsz-pang Lai has a B. A. (First Class Hons.) and an M.Phil. degree from the University of Hong Kong. Currently, he is a D.Phil. candidate at the University of Oxford.

Matthew W. K. Leung obtained his B. A. (Hons.) (English and Comparative Literature), M. Phil. (Comparative Literature) and M. A. (Language Studies) from the University of Hong Kong. Currently, he is Associate Professor in the Department of Chinese, Translation and Linguistics, City University of Hong Kong.

Rachel Lung Wai-chu obtained a Ph.D. in English Language and Linguistics at the University of Essex, and is now Assistant Professor in the Department of Translation at Lingnan University.

Tan Zaixi has a B. A. degree from Hunan Normal University (People's Republic of China), and a Master's and a Doctorate degree from the University of Exeter (United Kingdom). He teaches translation as a Scholar-in-Residence in the English Department of the Hong Kong Baptist University.

Laurence Wong is Professor and former Head of the Department of Translation at Lingnan University, Hong Kong. His latest publication is a Chinese verse translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

May Wong has a B. A. (Hons.) from the Chinese University of Hong Kong and a Master's degree from the City University of Hong Kong. Currently, she is a Public Relations Officer at a commercial firm and teaching part-time at the Open University of Hong Kong.

Yau Wai Ping obtained his B. A. and M.Phil. from the University of Hong Kong, and his Ph.D. from the Hong Kong Baptist University. He taught translation at Lingnan University and is currently Co-ordinator of the translation program at the School of Professional and Continuing Education, University of Hong Kong.

Priscilla Yip, a court interpreter with the Hong Kong Government, is currently studying for her M. A. at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Wai-lim Yip, intercultural poet, translator, critic, theorist, and East/West comparatist, has published more than 40 books in English and Chinese. He has been Professor of Chinese/ Comparative Literature at the University of California at San Diego since 1967.
Preface

Initially, this book grew out of an interest in systematically analyzing the history of translation theory in modern China. The study of metatextual material (like theory and criticism) helps us understand the norms upheld by a certain society at given points in time, and in recent years it has attracted the attention of translation scholars and teachers. The importance of knowing more about the history of translation theory is that it allows us to see through the surface features of translated texts, providing information that will support, or compel us to revise, our hypotheses. There are different concerns in different periods, as witnessed, for instance, by the perennial debate on the proper way to translate poetry, especially with regard to formal matters like rhymes and metrical patterns. In different periods different answers have been posed, and actual translations must be seen as responding to the multiplicity of positions advanced by the theorists. This fact is borne out nowhere else more clearly than in the various methods used by Chinese translator-poets to render meter through the course of the twentieth century.

Theoretical debates, of course, also reveal broader political concerns and are not necessarily concerned only with the practicalities of translation. For one obvious example: the fierce disputes between Lu Xun and Liang Shiqiu need to be viewed against the backdrop of rivalries between the Left-league Writers and the Crescent Moon Society in the 1930s. It could be said, in fact, that what happened behind the theories is more fascinating than the theories themselves. Indeed, the controversy over whether translation is as much an act of creation as original writing reflects the struggle on the part of translators to gain respectability, first in the 1930s and then again in the 1990s. Judging by the fact that the arguments, vehemently presented by both sides, are still heard even today, evidently the battle has not yet been won.

One thing highlighted by the present anthology of translated essays is that translation theories seldom exist independently. Most have to confront oppositions of one kind or another, so that a fruitful way of studying the history of translation theory to see how ideas are dialectically juxtaposed, as well as how this affects practicing translators who constantly have to choose between
alternatives. Anthony Pym has put this succinctly in *Method of Translation History*: “In principle, since no one theorizes just to state the obvious, each individual theory or act of theorization should find at least one counterpart somewhere” (p.129). For translation scholars, one might add, the translation theories propounded through the centuries revolve around possible choices more than likely solutions.

Naturally, in contrast to elements of contention and disagreement, we should also notice some attempts at reconciliation or resolution. For instance, Lin Yutang sought to bypass the distinction between literal and sense-translation with his theory of sentence-for-sentence translation. However, in the poststructuralist and postmodernist times that we happen to inhabit, a universally agreed theory of translation may not be possible, or even desirable. Consequently, the chances are that we will continue to live — but thrive — between the polar opposites of translation and creation; literalism and liberalism; foreignization and domestication; translation as art and as science; formal and spiritual resonance; and so on and so forth.

Two caveats. Some readers going through Part II of this book might think that certain articles ought to be included in a different debate than the one they are presently allotted to. For instance, in the final part of Sun Zhili’s article on “Some Thoughts on Building Our Nation’s Translation Theory” (included in “Translation Theory for China”), the author expounds at some length on the “Science vs. Art” debate. Several articles, too, are at least partially concerned with the controversy over literal and sense-translation, though they do not belong to Section E. In allotting the 38 articles to the eight different sections, however, the primary concern has been to show how each debate has evolved through a number of articles that were historically connected, in the sense that some were actually written in response to others that preceded them. Other readers might think that certain articles have been inadvertently left out. The truth of the matter, however, is that while a more comprehensive selection could have been made, one wonders if that is at all advisable at this stage of the game.


Offering indispensable help in the preparatory stage of the book is a longtime friend and colleague, Paul Levine, without whom this project might not have taken off at all. I hope the final product has not fallen far too short of his expectations. I am especially indebted to the twenty translators, all of whom exercised the utmost patience during the three years in which the book was looking for a publisher. Among those to whom I am grateful for timely help and expert advice are: Chu Chi-yu, Eugene Eoyang, Luo Xuanmin, Sherry Simon, Mary Snell-Hornby and Xu Jun. I am glad this book has finally found a niche where it can feel truly comfortable. For this I have to thank Professor Gideon Toury, Editor of the Benjamins Translation Library; the two anonymous reviewers, who spotted many an omission or repetition; and Isja Conen, who ensured smooth sailing for the manuscript after it was accepted for publication.
Part I
CHAPTER 1

The traditional approach: Impressionistic theories

Much of the current evaluation of Chinese translation theory has tended toward one of two extremes: either it has been valorized as belonging to a distinctive, separate tradition, so that any attempt to seek Western equivalents can only be futile, or it has been denigrated as lacking in analytical depth and philosophical insight as compared with Western translation theory. There is some truth in both of these views, though difference does not need to be equated with inferiority or, for that matter, superiority. Speaking of the distinctiveness of Chinese views of translation, it is a well-known fact that in China, translation has for centuries been regarded as a marginal, if not trivial, activity. St. Jerome’s (346?–420) belief that translations can be used to appropriate ideas from another culture to enrich one’s own would have found little favor with the Chinese. Chinese thinking on translation remained for some time strongly influenced by an attitude which saw the target culture as infinitely superior, and hence not quite the “recipient” — until the tables were turned at the beginning of the twentieth century.

As for the criticism that Chinese translation is deficient in analytical rigor, it must be admitted that many Chinese translation theorists are prone to vague, impressionistic assertions concerning translations. That is the case with the early Buddhist translator-theorists working in the second to the tenth centuries, with the seventeenth and eighteenth-century Christian converts who translated religious and scientific writings from the West, and even with the early twentieth-century theorist Yan Fu (1854–1921), whose “three principles of translation” practically set the perimeters for present-day discussions on translation in China. This impressionistic bent is evidenced in the direct borrowing of terminology from the discourse of traditional literary criticism, presumably in the absence of existing terms for the description of translated works. It is not until the extensive importation of Western linguistic parlance since the 1960s that a more systematic, and less subjective, analysis of the translational process is made possible.
What this scenario reveals in effect is that, up until recently, intuitive judgments concerning translations often formed the basis for theory. This showed itself in a proclivity to theorize with reference to "good" translations as opposed to "bad" ones. Before the linguistic approaches of theorists like J. C. Catford and Eugene Nida came to China, there was in Chinese translation theory less emphasis on the translation process — on what happens in interlingual transfer — than on the quality of the product itself, and on what constituted a good translation. For James Holmes, translation theory is distinct from criticism in that theory is concerned with evolving principles and models, not "in describing existing translations, observed translation functions" (Holmes 1988: 73), whereas criticism always focuses on translated texts and inevitably entails an element of subjectivity. 1 If that is the case, was much of the discussion that passed for translation theory in China actually translation criticism? Or was this a theory that focused more on description and evaluation of the product than on analysis of processes? I propose to address these issues below, through a study of the key ideas propounded by noted translation theorists of the first half of the twentieth century, among them Yan Fu, Fu Lei (1908–1966), and Qian Zhongshu (1910–).

**Yan Fu’s “three principles”**

Yan Fu’s three principles — fidelity (xin), fluency (da) and elegance (ya) 2 — were widely accepted as essential criteria for understanding translations ever since their appearance almost a century ago in Yan’s preface to his own translation of T. H. Huxley’s *Evolution and Ethics* (1898). They have also become the fundamental tenets of twentieth-century Chinese translation theory. Though there have been attempts to remove “elegance” from the list or replace it with other principles, the importance of fidelity and fluency has gone pretty much unchallenged. Perhaps these three principles are best defined by Yan himself, rather than by the multitude of translation theorists in his wake who sought to extract other meanings from them:

Translation involves three requirements difficult to fulfill: fidelity (xin), fluency (da) and elegance (ya). Fidelity is difficult enough to attain but a translation that is faithful but not fluent is no translation at all. Fluency is therefore of prime importance. Since China’s opening to foreign trade by sea, there has been no lack of interpreters and translators. But if you assign them any book to translate and tell them to meet these two requirements, few can do so. 3

It is easy to see the degree to which fidelity, elegance, and especially fluency are terms of an evaluative nature, and indeed Yan Fu proceeded in his treatise to critique his own translation of Huxley. He noted how much he had tampered with the original text in the interest of fluency: he freely added to or deleted from it, since to him the translation should not be unnecessarily constrained by the linguistic structures of the source text. For a brief while it appears that he was privileging fluency over and above the other two terms of reference, though a little later on he observed that, while there should be room for the translator to re-create, this was nevertheless “not the right way of doing a translation.” Hence, to cut short the ongoing debate on whether Yan Fu regarded fidelity or fluency as the more central criterion, we need to note that, in principle (as against even his own actual practice), he stood on the side of fidelity to the original. In so doing, Yan Fu falls squarely within the tradition of the majority of Bible translator-theorists in the West, for whom faithfulness, or respect for the source text, was to be defended as a virtue.

For some years there have been rather harsh criticisms of Yan Fu’s theory of translation, most of them directed against his principle of elegance, and some against that of fidelity. Several scholars underlined the uselessness of “elegance” as an analytical term, and asserted that Yan Fu had included it in his tripartite model simply because he wanted to suggest that the ornate classical prose style of the Tongcheng school, in which *Evolution and Ethics* was translated, was the best language for translations. 4 Now that such period tastes have become outmoded (and plainer styles preferred), so should the criterion of elegance. Others, eager to elevate the criterion of fluency, argued that the pursuit of embellishment in translations can be subsumed under “fluency,” since whatever style is chosen, the main goal is still to attract readers to the translation. A fluent style could serve the purpose even better than an elegant one. In fact, one problem with both terms, elegance as much as fidelity — or even fluency — is their lack of specificity, which weakens considerably their use as analytical tools; there are as many interpretations of them as there are theorists who choose to talk about them. As will be made apparent below, such vagueness of reference can be seen in several other recurrent terms in Chinese translation theory.

While Yan Fu’s ideas have by and large provided the framework for Chinese thinking about translation in the twentieth century, a little observed fact is that there was an alternative approach to translation theory at the end of the nineteenth century, expounded by the leading philologist of the time and Yan’s contemporary, Ma Jianzhong (1845–1900). While spending the greater part of
his time writing a voluminous grammar of the Chinese language based on borrowed Western grammatical categories, Ma presented “A Proposal for the Establishment of a Translation Bureau” in 1894. In this treatise he adumbrates an approach to translation drawing on the insights of what must be termed (in hindsight) contrastive linguistics. For Ma, in order to succeed at his task, the translator needs to analyze with the minutest care the source and target languages. By placing together for comparison individual words and sentences from the two languages, he seeks to identify the causes for similarities and differences in expression. He stresses that only after thoroughly understanding the original should one proceed to translate.

Ma Jianzhong differs markedly from Yan Fu in his emphasis on close textual analysis and his valorization of the literal method in translation. Set in contrast to Ma, Yan Fu appears more of a proponent of latitude in translation — although he does, as we noted above, concede that fidelity is something not to be disregarded. Of course, Ma’s attention to the language of the original (and that of the translation) did at times go to exaggerated lengths. With philological enthusiasm he encouraged the translator to pay special heed to the etymologies of words, as well as semantic changes over time. Nevertheless, one will not have been amiss in viewing Ma Jianzhong as the first of a line of Chinese linguists who actively enlisted the aid of Western linguistics to explicate Chinese grammar and syntax. He is virtually the pioneer of Chinese translation theorists who adopt a language-oriented approach to translation, focusing on equivalence in translation. Unfortunately, however, the rise to prominence of Yan Fu’s three principles was paralleled by the neglect paid to Ma’s ideas through the twentieth century. The linguistic turn was one that Chinese translation theory was slow to take; it did not occur until after midcentury, when theorists like Liu Miqing and Jin Di appeared on the scene.

Fu Lei’s “spiritual resonance”

Meanwhile, the stock of impressionistic terminology with an evaluative coloring continued to expand. Another widely used term in twentieth-century Chinese translation theory is Fu Lei’s “spiritual resonance” (shensi). To many, Fu Lei had released the discussion of translation from the constraints imposed by Yan Fu’s three principles with his introduction of this principle in 1951, in his preface to his second rendition of Honoré de Balzac’s Le Père Goriot. Fu left no doubt that his was a term appropriated from traditional Chinese aesthetics, a term associated in particular with painting criticism. According to him, “In terms of effect, translation, like imitation in painting, should be in search of resemblance in spirit rather than in form.” “Formal resonance” (xingsi) is, for translation scholars brought up on Western linguistics, much the same as “formal equivalence.” But it is clear that Fu Lei’s use of the term was more vague, and he merely intended it to refer to whatever is not “spiritual resonance,” the paired but opposed term. The two terms only set up a continuum of sorts with an evaluative prejudice, since the rendering of the spirit is adjudged to be infinitely superior to that of, if we may, the “body.”

Other than the evaluative bent, Fu Lei’s terms suffer also from a looseness of reference. In fact, “spiritual resonance” has remained perennially enigmatic. Like Yan’s three terms, it has kept theorists busy hunting for exact connotations for decades, without coming any closer even today (as fifty years ago) to a grasp of its precise implications. Innovative as it may seem at first sight, when understood in context, this concept has an ancestry traceable back to discussions of “spiritual assonance” (shenyun or fengyun) in the 1920s and 30s. At the time these terms were most often bandied about by poetry translators like Guo Moruo (1892–1978), translator of Shelley and Goethe, and Zhu Shenghao (1912–1944), translator of Shakespeare. Guo Moruo’s discussion of “the achievement of spiritual assonance in translation” in an article he published in 1922 is especially pertinent to the present discussion. For him:

The translator of poetry does not exercise his skill through checking up the dictionary for others, nor does he act as if he is deciphering telegrams at the telegraph office. The life of poetry resides in an inherent musical spirit. . . . If we simply translate poems literally, then we turn out translations not of an artist, but of a linguist (Chen 1992: 268).

Two telling points are conveyed by this passage. First, in spite of the fact that Guo Moruo shows a keen concern for translating the essential spirit of a work of art, he still offers little help in clarifying the meaning of the term “spirit” — which for him seems largely a matter of rhyme and metre. Second, Guo appears again to be mounting an assault on the linguistic approach, this time through a disparagement of the linguist’s concern for capturing the literal meaning, or “semantic equivalence” in contemporary translation terminology. The painter/translator comparison, as well as the dichotomy stipulated between the outward “form” and the inward “soul” of a literary work, reminds us how closely this school of Chinese translation thinking resembles that of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Western translation theorists like John
Dryden (1630–1700) and Alexander Frazer Tytler (1747–1814). For example, Tytler — whose theories were introduced to the Chinese through Zheng Zhenduo (1898–1958) in an article, “How to Translate Literary Texts” (1921) — has said that, even without using the same colors, the translator has to give his picture the same force and effect of the source text, to re-capture the “soul” of the author. Yet this is not to suggest any direct Western influence on Chinese translation theory; quite on the contrary, a term like “conveying the spirit” has occurred in an ancient a Chinese text as the Book of Changes, and terms like “spiritual assonance” have for centuries figured prominently in the poetry-talk (or poetry criticism) tradition.\(^9\) Hence one would be missing the mark if one attempted to re-cast Fu Lei’s ideas in modern Western linguistic discourse. To re-interpret “spiritual resonance” as equivalent to Eugene Nida’s theory of “dynamic equivalence,” for instance, serves little more than delimit the field of reference of Fu’s term. As is typical of critical terminology used in twentieth-century Chinese translation theory, their vagueness is also partly the cause of their continued relevance.\(^{10}\)

Qian Zhongshu’s “realm of transformation”

In common with Yan Fu’s three principles and Fu Lei’s all important aesthetic criterion, Qian Zhongshu’s “realm of transformation” (\textit{huajing}) describes what an ideal translation is like, differentiates the good translation from the bad, and contains hidden echoes of similar terminology from traditional Chinese poetics and art criticism. Qian’s critical term is marked by even greater imprecision in that it simply posits a state that the successful translation is supposed to have reached, and which is out of bounds to poorer translations. Unlike his predecessors, however, Qian does not define the “realm of transformation” through a critical discussion of his own work. In his seminal article on Lin Shu (1852–1924), renowned translator of Charles Dickens, Walter Scott and Rider Haggard, Qian began by talking briefly about the etymological and semantic associations of the Chinese character \textit{yi} (“to translate”), to which I shall return in a moment.\(^{11}\) Then he explained what he meant by “transformation”:

\begin{quote}
The highest standard in literary translation is \textit{hua}, transforming a work from the language of one country into that of another. If this could be done without betraying any evidence of artifice by virtue of divergences in language and speech habits, while at the same time preserving intact the flavor of the original, then we say that such a performance has attained \textit{huajing}, “the ultimate of transmutation.” (Luo 1984: 696)
\end{quote}

Lest the sources of Qian Zhongshu’s theory be thought of as completely Chinese, especially given the Buddhist and Daoist overtones carried by the term “transformation,” one needs to be reminded that Qian’s immediate sources were in fact Western. In a footnote, he said that a similar criterion was posited in the seventeenth century by the French scholar George Savile, First Marquess of Halifax, and then in the twentieth century by the German scholar Wilamowitz-Mollendorff, as well as the French poet Paul Valéry. In this way Qian’s ideas become clothed in a cross-cultural guise. The metaphor that Qian proposed for this kind of perfect translation is the transmigration of souls (again a phrase with Buddhist associations), wherein the body undergoes a transformation, but the “soul” is retained. This may sound oddly similar to Fu Lei’s “spiritual resonance,” yet Qian’s theory of transformation is hardly a variant version of Fu’s. As Qian’s detailed analysis of Lin Shu’s translations later on in the essay shows, this transformation can take sundry forms, producing translations that are immensely successful while differing on the surface from the original.

Hence, to say that Qian Zhongshu’s “realm of transformation” remains very much an impressionistic jargon and not of much analytic utility is not to belittle Qian’s contribution as a translation theorist. At the very least the idea of transformation implies that the translator can have great laxity as well as latitude as he carries out his task. Qian, too, defines the function of a “good” translation differently from theorists before him, in a way that renders his theory of transformation relevant and usable. For him, “a good translation annihilates itself” (qtd. in Luo 1984: 698); by enhancing readers’ interest in the original, it encourages them to seek out the source text, leaving the translation behind. By contrast, a bad translation “annihilates the original”; the reader will not want to read either. In his role as mediator between the original and the translation, the translator uses all the energies and skills at his disposal to effect a successful transformation. By thus re-orienting the perspective of the translator, Qian opens the door to the possibility that the translated text can be an improvement on the original, and the translator can exercise judgements as to how his source text can best be translated.

With Qian Zhongshu’s notion of total transformation, of the original text being “reborn” as a translation, we also come very close to a contemporary Western conception of the autonomy of the translated text which lives a life of its own, and which may even bring the original work to completion. Jacques Derrida, the West’s leading deconstructionist, has incidentally remarked that “transformation” is a term that he believes should replace “translation”:
In the limits to which it is possible or at least appears possible, translation practices the difference between signified and signifier. But if this difference is never pure, no more so is translation, and for the notion of translation we would have to substitute a notion of transformation: a regulated transformation of one language by another, of one text by another. (Derrida 1981: 240)

For his part, Qian Zhongshu sought to rationalize the connection between “translating” and “transforming” by recourse to some verbal antics. German readers are already familiar with the semantic links between Übersetzung on the one hand, and transfer/transport on the other, while Italians can ponder with bemusement the maxim, Traduttore, traditore. For Qian, the Chinese character for “translation” (yi) has etymological and associative connections with the characters for “seduction” (you), “error” (e), “mediator” (mei), and “transformation” (hua). These express precisely for him the manifold aspects of translation: the translator seeks to seduce the reader, to lure him to the original; the translator is always liable to errors in crossing from one language to another, from one culture to another; and of course the translator “transforms.” And so, like his Western counterparts, Qian forges linkages between terms, which he then uses to build his theory. (One thinks in this context of how Eugenio Donato has taken advantage of the fact that Übersetzung has as one of its senses “leaping over an abyss” to make his point on “specular translation” [see McDonald 1985: 127]).

The purpose of the foregoing discussion, however, has not been to argue for convergences between Chinese and Western thinking about translation as a process of cultural and linguistic transfer, but to define the impressionistic elements in twentieth-century Chinese translation theory with greater precision. This I have done by looking at five central concepts, and on the whole it appears that, while comparisons at every point can be made with Western theories, Chinese theorists have very much gone their own way in that they have manipulated terms derived from traditional Chinese poetics in general and painting criticism in particular, to describe a realm of activity that suffered initially through its marginal status. The choice of terminology, however, reflects a special Chinese emphasis on evaluating (rather than describing or analyzing) the translated product impressionistically; discussions of translation almost invariably begin by proposing ways of “telling the good translations from the bad ones.” The preference for evaluation, together with the overall de-emphasis of the linguistic approach, and the blurring of the lines of demarcation between theory and criticism, are perhaps the distinguishing hallmarks of a body of translation theory propounded in China in the twentieth century.

Postscript

As the century turns, a new phase in the discussion of the impressionistic jargon in Chinese translation theory seems to be emerging, almost as a reaction against decades of Western-dominated translation thinking — or perhaps as a rebound from the decades-long disparagement of traditional theories. On the one hand, there is a deep feeling that the concepts of “faithfulness,” “fluency,” “elegance,” etc., have been misrepresented, and that a return to origins — particularly what was involved in the translation of Buddhist sutras — may help eliminate the obfuscation. Indeed, readers not acquainted with the Chinese situation may view the whole debate about terminology as muddled and unnecessary. It is in this context that the work of Zhu Zhiyu (see Zhu 2001: 3–8), especially his re-examination of the core meanings of terms like “spiritual resemblance” and “realm of transformation,” assumes significance. Debates at conferences and symposia between traditionalists and Western-trained theoreticians are still fierce and appear to admit of no easy resolution, reflecting a growing recognition that a more accurate presentation of impressionistic theories is in order.

On the other hand, a younger generation of scholars are making brave attempts to reinvigorate the hackneyed scholarly discussion of translation by resorting to the full range of impressionistic terms available, and by exploring the possibility of utilizing them in the exegesis of translated texts. Of special note is the work of Liu Huawen, who, by bringing in an array of aesthetic terms centering around shen (spirit), qi (ether) and xing (form), exemplifies the power of “impressionistic” terms in explicating the relationship between the translator and his Other (Liu 2002: 95–112). She does this through a detailed analysis of several translations of a famous poem from the Tang dynasty. What she says at the conclusion of her article is tantamount to a defense of traditional Chinese translation theories and their applicability to a twenty-first-century environment:

In reflecting on the issue of aesthetic response in translation, I came to realize that, although traditional Chinese translation theory can be subsumed under anben (basing on the original), quxin (searching for fidelity), shenhua (aiming to be imbued with the spirit) and huajing (attaining the realm of transformation), it is not adequately covered by these broad terms. We see only the tip of an iceberg, since traditional Chinese translation theory is grounded on traditional theorizing about literary writing developed through the centuries. Even though Chinese translation theory puts a premium on intuitive experience rather than abstract
reasoning, empathetic response rather than logical thinking, it nonetheless is based on a rich crop of critical literary theory, and should therefore not be slighted. (Liu 2002: 110)

Notes

1. These can be considered hallmarks of Descriptive Translation Studies, an approach that has garnered increasing interest among translation scholars since the 1970s. The demarcation of criticism as belonging to the “applied” branch of research, as an enterprise separate from theory, is a central concern for this School. For a comprehensive discussion, see Toury (1995, esp. Part 2). In such terms, much of twentieth-century Chinese translation theory can be designated as “traditional.”

2. Yan’s three principles have been variously translated; readers are referred to Part II of this anthology. The three translations adopted here are chosen because they can be readily understood by those familiar with the current Western discourse on translation theory. “Fluency” is used in the sense that Lawrence Venuti intends it to mean in Venuti (1995). For him it is the dominant strategy in translation in the West since the seventeenth century.

3. See the first paragraph of Yan’s “Preface to Tianyanlun” as translated in Part II of this book.

4. Among those who suggested doing without “elegance” is Qu Qiubai, for whom this criterion is counter-productive and undermines the effectiveness of the other two criteria. For Frederick Tsai, another prominent twentieth-century translation theorist, it can be replaced with “adequacy” (tie) (see Tsai 1972: 18-19).


6. There is a significant Western influence on both Liu and Jin. Liu’s Present-Day Translation Studies (Liu 1993) is one of the more influential books on translation theory written for a Chinese readership. In 11 chapters it deals with “translation as a discipline,” “a model for Chinese translation theory,” “translatability and untranslatability,” “the aesthetics of translation,” “the translation of style,” and so forth. The contrastive linguistics background that informs Liu’s discussion throughout is made evident in his detailed references to the ideas of Western linguists like Saussure, Humboldt and Martinet, among others. Ji Di collaborates with Eugene Nida in writing On Translation (Jin and Nida 1984), a popular text used in university courses on translation theory.

7. For Fu Lei’s ideas on translation, see Fu (1981). For a recent study of the various aspects of his life and work, see Serena Jin, ed. Fu Lei yu tade shijie (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co., 1994).


9. Wong Wai-leung has traced the use of impressionistic critical terms in discussions of traditional Chinese poetry. For him, many of the terms are used descriptively and evaluatively, and analytical terms are scarce (see Wang 1976, esp. Chap.3). For a more extensive consideration of similar aesthetic terms as well as their recommended English translations — like fenggu (forceful style), xianqing (leisurely sentiments), wenrou (gentleness), qu (oblique style) and yijing (poetic state) — see Deeney (1994, esp. 87-98, 107-14). On the merging of “formal resonance” with “spiritual resonance,” see Deeney (1994: 59).

10. Among those who have registered their dissatisfaction with “spiritual resonance” is Huang Yushi (Huang 1995: 285).

11. See Qian’s “The Translations of Lin Shu” in Part II of this anthology.

12. There are other semantic links mentioned by Qian that may be of some interest: yi has been defined by traditional Chinese philologists as referring to the “transmission of the language of the barbarians, of birds and beasts”; fan refers to “the turning-around of a piece of embroidered silk,” so that everything faces the opposite direction. One may add that one of the homophones for yi also means “to change.”
CHAPTER 2

“Modern” theories of the 1920s and 30s

The period beginning with the May Fourth Movement in 1919 and ending with the outbreak of World War II can be viewed as the decisive period in modern Chinese translation history. In terms of translation output, especially in the field of literary translation, and of the amount of theoretical discussion on translation, it rivals two other high points of modern Chinese translation history, namely, the late Qing period and the late 1980s-early 90s.

Historical conditions in those periods have prompted developments in translation theory and practice. When the last of the Chinese dynasties — the Qing — followed its downward trend toward disintegration by the end of the nineteenth century, the eagerness to absorb things Western as a way of “saving” the country led to a flurry of translation activity unmatched by any since the great epoch of medieval Buddhist translations. As the twentieth century drew to a close, there was also an incentive to rapidly import ideas from the West. The re-opening of China, which came with the resumption of power by Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s, spurred translation activity on the part of “Fifth Generation Translators,” in particular of works from America and Europe (in contrast to translations from the Soviet Union in the preceding era). In both periods (the late Qing and the Reform or “Post-Mao” Era), theories of translation were propounded with fervor by practitioners, scholars and academics.

Nevertheless, it is in the 1920s and 30s that one sees translation theory entering a distinctly modern phase, when translations assumed a key role in ushering in what has been termed Chinese modernity. “Modernity” is not an easy concept to define, and one can even conceive of it broadly as a kind of space in which one’s place in the world is variously imagined. In the Chinese case, one can see it as an ever-changing project developed in unequal cross-cultural dialogue and interaction. As such, it began as early as the mid-nineteenth century; it continued in a series of distinct moments in which the foreign as “Other” was contested and/or contained; it might not even have concluded even by today. In fields as diverse as politics, economics and philosophy, the confrontation with the West was carried on. But a fact less often noted is that translation also became implicated in the modernity debate,
perhaps directly so. While understandable, it is perhaps unfortunate that translations of the late Qing have been allowed to overshadow those of the 1920s and 30s in Chinese translation histories. The latter greatly outnumber the former, and current research has established that they reached a much wider readership, creating an influence well outside the elite circle of readers. The theories that accompanied translation production in the 1920s and 30s, too, are simply fascinating.

Such theories simply set the stage for much of the theorizing to follow in the century. Scholars and translators were then engaged in intense debates about the nature and function of translation in the "new" China. Most notably, there were fierce disagreements about issues of "foreignization" (the method of allowing cultural and linguistic differences to stay intact), the use of Europeanized structures and expressions in translation, and the criterion of fidelity. All these issues then got embroiled in yet a more general debate about the influence of translation on original writing. Finally, looming in the background was a deeply-felt need to modernize the nation on the political, cultural and linguistic fronts — to, in other words, realize the grand "Modernity Project."

**Literalism versus liberalism**

There is little doubt that the May Fourth literary giant Lu Xun (1881–1936) stood at the center of the debates on translation in the late 1920s and early 1930s; in more ways than one he can also be considered the first modern translation theorist in China. Among historians of translation, Yan Fu has long been eulogized as the "founder of modern Chinese translation theory," while Lin Shu has been acclaimed as the most influential twentieth-century Chinese translator — presumably because he had translated more than anybody else, with 184 translations to his credit. The time has come, however, for a re-evaluation of such widely accepted platitudes. To begin with, Lin Shu's translations, albeit influential for a while, were essentially cast in the late Qing mode of "free translation" or rewriting. The objection raised then was not that they paid no heed to the requirement of "fidelity," but whether they could be considered translations as such. Before one is prepared to stretch considerably the concept of translation to include a large corpus of "second copies" of pre-existent works, as André Lefevere has attempted to do, the place of Lin Shu in Chinese translation history ought to be problematized rather than accepted as fact.

On the other hand, Yan Fu has apparently done little to deserve the almost overblown position granted him in the history of translation theory. He simply wrote one short treatise, where he advanced his three principles of "fidelity, fluency and elegance" — terms first used in the Six Dynasties by the Buddhist monk-translator Zhi Qian (ca. 2nd century). What should not escape notice from our modern-day standpoint, in fact, is that Yan is more traditionalist than modern. That he has been incessantly cited by his successors is an indisputable fact, yet uncompromising critics have also suggested giving up his three principles as a necessary step to making further progress. Furthermore, his best-known translation, the Tianyanlun, has been repeatedly charged with having taken liberties with the original text, hence falling short of being a truthful Chinese "rendition." As with Lin Shu, one sees conflicting views expressed about Yan.

Indeed, Lu Xun reacted strongly against the translation method favored by both of them, though one adopted it only occasionally and the other, ubiquitously. Ironically, as far as the principle of translation is concerned, Lu Xun might be said to have adhered to "fidelity," which was Yan Fu's first principle, one that preceded fluency and elegance. In not practicing what he taught, Yan participated in the general trend in translation since the late nineteenth century, one in which liberalism took precedence over literalism, and free translation rather than close adherence to the original was the order of the day.

Lu Xun was obviously not the first theorist to suggest pursuing an alternative in the face of the infelicitous translations prevalent in his time. As early as 1919, in an essay titled "Thoughts on Translation," Fu Sinian already expressed his dissatisfaction with Yan Fu's abandonment of the method of "straightforward translation" or "direct translation" (zhiyi), which connotes — in contemporary translation studies parlance — close formal correspondence to the original text. This method is supposed to be conducive to a "faithful" translation, though one need to be cautioned against equating the method with the desired result as expressed in a principle. It could be carried to an extreme (as Lu Xun did), resulting in "word-to-word translation" or "stiff translation" (yingyi) (which characterizes the effect produced). Over the centuries, in Chinese translation theory the central antithesis was between "straightforward translation" and "sense-translation" (yiyi). But "sense-translation" not only implies semantic correspondence between the source and target texts; it also refers to the free method of translation (more closely denoted by ziyouyi) favored by the likes of Yan Fu and Lin Shu. The terminological confusion, which is the single most important factor leading to interminable debates in
the course of the twentieth century because it kept debaters talking at cross purposes, can be somewhat clarified with reference to the following schema:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zhìyì</th>
<th>Yìyì</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>= Straightforward translation/ Direct translation</td>
<td>= Sense-translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach: Literal</td>
<td>Approach: Liberal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~Formal correspondence</td>
<td>~Semantic correspondence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extreme form: Word-for-word translation (zùiyì)</td>
<td>Extreme form: Free translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect: Stiff translation/ Hard translation (yǐngyì) (Lu Xun)</td>
<td>Effect: Distorted translation (wàiyì) (Lin Shu) (see below)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Existing documents reveal that, among intellectuals of the 1920s and 30s with an interest in translation, there was a tendency to revile the liberal method. For instance, Mao Dun (1896–1981), one of the most prominent novelists of the 1930s, spoke openly against Lin Shu’s translations (Mao 1934). For him, Lin Shu’s translations do not even qualify as “sense-translations,” which is, in any case, a neutral term describing one of two preferred methods of translation handed down from antiquity. Mao Dun flatly denounces them as “distorted translations,” censuring Lin’s inexcusable departures from the source text. Such derogatory labeling of Lin Shu’s translations, in sharp contrast to the praise showered on them a decade ago, was followed up later by others who simply said that Lin was rewriting and not even translating. This bespeaks a concerted movement away from the sort of translation associated with Lin Shu, a movement in favor of greater accuracy and presenting the original as it is.

Against this background it can be seen that Lu Xun was deliberately pursuing a path diametrically opposed to Lin Shu’s, and as if to counteract Lin’s extreme liberalism, he practiced an extreme literalism in translation. His translations, especially of Russian literary works and Marxist literary criticism during the late 1920s, were exemplary in this regard. In reaction against them was Liang Shiqiu (1902–1987), translator of the complete works of Shakespeare. In his “On Lu Xun’s ‘Stiff Translation’” (1929), Liang began by quoting sentences from Lu Xun’s recent translation of Lunacharsky, which hardly made sense. To him Lu Xun had followed the original text too closely and ended up with syntax much too convoluted to be understood. Reading Lu’s translations was, consequently, like “reading a map and trying to locate places with one’s fingers.” Liang averred that they were more than just “stiff translations”; they were “dead translations” (sìyì).

Today, with the benefit of almost a century’s advancement in comparative linguistic research, it is not difficult to see what “went wrong” with Lu Xun’s translations. His literal method resulted in sentences that were downright incomprehensible. Structurally, as a language, Chinese differs drastically from Western languages. In translating word for word from English, for instance, the Chinese translator invariably produces sentences in which the normal word order is seriously violated. More specifically, whereas in many Western languages premodifiers can be placed before, and post-modifiers after, the headword in a noun phrase (as in “the pretty woman in red standing over there”), Chinese permits premodifiers only. Hence in extremely literal translations, several premodifiers have to be strung together by a series of (the possessive) de placed before the headword. This not only makes a sentence look “heavy” at the beginning, but also frustrates the reader as he tries to locate the headword in question. To add to these, the Chinese language, because of the way its verbs are used, is also notorious for its inability to indicate time (past, present, future), modality, aspect, voice and mood (like the subjunctive). Some of the sentences Lu Xun translated could not but leave his readers baffled and outraged (see Lundburg 1989). Liang was justified in his accusations, and he was presenting nothing more than the commonsensical reader’s argument.

However, in Lu Xun’s response to Liang in his essay “Stiff Translation’ and the ‘Class Nature of Literature’” (1930), Lu Xun put forth an explanation for his preference for extreme literalism: he went beyond the choice of a translation method and gave a “political” explanation. After saying that his translations did convey the tone of their originals (a doubtful point, in fact), Lu Xun stressed that proletarian literary critics who had special class interests to champion. Extreme faithfulness to the original was a way of ensuring that “true” Marxist literary thought be presented to those who wanted the facts as they were. Critics, naturally, have not been taken in by Lu’s rationale. David Pollard, for one, has argued that “there is something not quite right in the head of a translator who would say that his translations were not intended to please the reader, but to make him uncomfortable” (Pollard 1991: 10). In any case, the asserted link between accuracy and literalism is extremely tenuous — one can be inaccurate even though one stays very close to the original. The fact that Lu Xun resorts to a variety of arguments (political, aesthetic, linguistic) to justify his method only shows an irrational obsession with literalism on his part.
Europeization versus Sinicization

For Lu Xun, extreme literalism, or "word-for-word translation," is preferred to sense-translation not merely because fidelity to the original is of unquestioned importance, a standard that he will defend at any cost. There is a linguistic dimension as well, since these two methods of translation imply handling the language of the source text at two different levels, that is, translating with respect to larger or smaller units. Given the syntactical difference, between Chinese and European languages, an extreme literalism would mean the grafting of unfamiliar linguistic structures onto the target language, while liberalism, even not of the extreme variety as seen in Lin Shu and in Yan Fu, would allow the translator to domesticate his text. Thus the choice between word-for-word translation and sense-translation is linked to incompatibilities that can be theorized on two other dimensions: (a) between Europeanization and Sinicization, and (b) between fidelity and fluency. These dimensions became inextricably meshed in the discourse on translation in the 1920s and 30s:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method:</th>
<th>Word-for-word (literalism)</th>
<th>Sense-for-sense (liberalism)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language use:</td>
<td>Europeization</td>
<td>Sinicization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principle:</td>
<td>Fidelity</td>
<td>Fluency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lu Xun's preference for Europeanization in translation was expressed most succinctly in his correspondence with Qu Qiubai (1899–1935), a younger colleague and a leftist writer, in 1931–1932.9 Despite differences in opinion concerning the preferred language of translation, there were clear indications of shared goals. The exchange (of three letters) was carried on only in the "spirit of debate" characteristic of the era; more precisely, though, it was a friendly interchange of ideas. Subsequent events actually prove that the tie between the two became closer as a result of the correspondence: they met eventually in 1932 through the introduction of a common friend, Feng Xuefeng (1903–1976).8

In his letter dated 5 December 1931, after congratulating Lu Xun on the publication of his translation of Alexander Fadeyev's (1901–1956) Razgrom, Qu Qiubai stressed his concurrence with Lu's program for inventing a new Chinese language:

Translation — in addition to introducing the content of the original to Chinese readers — has another important function, that is, helping us create a new modern Chinese language. The Chinese language (as well as its writing system) is so deficient that it lacks names for many everyday objects. Indeed it has not developed completely beyond the stage of "sign language" — everyday conversation almost can't do without the help of "gestures." Of course, there is almost a complete absence of all those adjectives, verbs and prepositions that express subtle differences and complex relationships (Luo 1984: 266).9

This is comparable to Lu Xun's view, expressed in his letter of December 28, 1931, that "[The Chinese language] is just too imprecise" and that "To cure this ailment, I believe we have to suffer some more pain and embody our thought in wayward syntactical structures — ancient, dialectal, as well as foreign — so that one day these structures can become our own" (Luo 1984: 276).

For a proper perspective on the argument, influential at the time, that foreign (Europeanized) structures can be imported to replenish the Chinese language, one needs to trace the history of discussion on the strengths and failures of the vernacular language movement. The advocacy of the vernacular (baihua, literally, "plain speech") as a replacement for the classical language (wenyan, literally, "embellished words"), initiated in the late Qing, had gathered a following within a few years of the New Literature Movement of 1917.10 With the rapid success gained by ardent proponents and daring practitioners, the question soon became not one of whether the vernacular should be used in writing at all, but how it could be honed into a means of expressing the thoughts and sentiments of the new generation of writers who used it as a tool. In other words, after the initial optimism, the inadequacy, rather than the viability, of this Chinese language of the future turned out to be a matter of serious concern.

Even before Lu Xun, many had stood on the side of Europeanization, believing it to be beneficial to the development of the vernacular, though many were against it too. Fu Sinian (1896–1950), an early enthusiast of the vernacular, was in favor of Europeanization. He practically opened the century-long debate on Europeanization in his "Thoughts on Translation" (1919), in which he boldly asserted that Europeanization of the Chinese language was "all but inevitable" (Fu 1919: 367). When the debate in newspapers and journals reached a feverish pitch, most intellectuals got involved, with a diversity of positions being taken. Mao Dun and Zheng Zhenduo (1898–1958), purveyors of the New Literature Movement, contributed one essay each to the Xiaoshuo yuebao (Fiction Monthly) to discussing the topic (Mao 1921a; Zheng 1921). Mao Dun was in favor of limited Europeanization: one should not go all the way and end up with expressions unfamiliar to ordinary folk. Zheng Zhenduo adopted a similar stance. For him reforming the classical language is necessary because it is lifeless, too clichéd and unfit for modern expression, but there should be some limit to Europeanization.
In the broad spectrum of views expressed, there were some skeptical positions. Hu Shi painstakingly promoted the vernacular, but for him the best written language is one that is spoken by, or understandable to, the masses (qud. in Liu 1999: 77–78). His was a pro-vernacular but anti-Europeanization stance very similar to Qu Qiubai’s, as I shall explain shortly. For him, the vernacular is best enriched through the importation of dialectal, not foreign, features. Another participant in the early 1920s debate was Fu Donghua (1893–1971), acclaimed Chinese translator of Gone with the Wind and for some time a colleague of Mao Dun and Zheng Zhenduo at the Commercial Press. Writing with a pseudonym, in 30 June 1921, he railed against Europeanization as a kind of “imitation,” noting that imitation of things foreign was as deplorable as imitation of things ancient (Fu 1921). His opinion was that only “what is imagined and what is created is beautiful.”

Even from such a brief synopsis as is given here, it should be evident that in the early 1920s debate on Europeanization, there was a four-way entangled relationship between the vernacular, the classical language, the spoken language (dialects) and foreign languages. Against the backdrop of such a fervent debate, Lu Xun’s position must be seen as extremely delicate. He was poised between two opposed parties — one favoring, and the other resisting, Europeanization. Through his own combination of translation theory with practice, however, he brought the discussion down to concrete terms. He not only theorized, but also experimented with, the idea of absorbing foreign “nutrients” to expand the repertoire of linguistic resources available to the Chinese language, so as to impel it toward becoming accepted as a medium of modern expression. The result was translations that Liang Shiqiu found incomprehensible in an oddly Europeanized vernacular Chinese.

Interestingly enough, Lu Xun and Qu Qiubai utilized similar polemical strategies. Zhao Jingshen (1902–1985), another outspoken translation theorist at the time, was targeted for attack by both of them. It was through disparaging Zhao that both put their views across. Calling him “Venerable Master,” Lu Xun derided the over-emphasis he placed on “fluency,” the second of the cardinal principles laid down by Yan Fu. Already noted above is Lu Xun’s obsession with closely adhering to the original, even to the extent of introducing unnatural expressions into the translation. When Europeanization was advocated as an acceptable feature in translations, awkwardness became compounded with awkwardness. In his letter to Qu, Lu Xun rationalized his use of wayward expressions by differentiating among three types of readers — the well-educated, the semi-literate, and the illiterate — and by saying that his translation method was directed at the first group:

As far as the art of translation is concerned, if the first group of readers is to be the target, I would advocate “literal translation.” In my own translation, even if [a phrase] is unnatural, I will not replace it with a more straightforward expression that shifts the emphasis unnecessarily. Even in creative writing, I think the distinction [among different sorts of readers] has to be made by the author. We import as much as we can, and then digest and absorb as much as we can. What is usable is retained, and what is not is abandoned to the past. So if we tolerate “a certain degree of awkwardness” at present, it does not mean that we are simply on the defensive. (Luo 1984: 276)

Here Lu Xun made clear that his preference for extreme literalism, his deployment of Europeanized structures, and his choice of a rather stilted language of translation were all inter-related, but understandable with reference to the readership he targeted (a very different group than Qu Qiubai’s). His optimism about such a practice can be seen in his belief that the less acceptable Europeanized expressions he introduced into the Chinese language would eventually be discarded through a Darwinian natural selection process and “what is usable [will be] retained.”

Qu Qiubai would obviously have concurred with Lu Xun in so far as the priority of “fidelity” over “fluency” was concerned; in any case, both inveighed against Yan Fu’s translation method. In his letter of 5 December, after noting that Yan had secretly upheld “elegance” at the expense of fidelity and fluency, Qu reproached Zhao Jingshen (a representative of the “fluency” school) for making a serious mistake:

What Zhao calls “fluency” — since it is to be achieved even if this entails a little “inaccuracy” — is of course a way of obliterating the original meaning so as to accommodate the primitive state of the Chinese language. This is not creating a new language. Just the opposite, this is striving to preserve the barbaric state of the Chinese language, to stunt its development. (Luo 1984: 267)

Today, this can be seen as an attack on “fluency” or deomestication strategies like that carried out by Venuti; interestingly, these were associated by Qu with “backwardness.” Furthermore, just like Lu Xun, Qu viewed “fidelity versus fluency” as a language issue. These were not just two translation methods or principles; they reflected the decision of the translator concerning the kind of Chinese language to be used in translation.

However, Qu Qiubai departed radically from Lu Xun in his conception of the best language for translation. Qu is famous for his advocacy of an “absolute
vernacular" based on the speech of the commonfolk: to him, because such a language "copied" the spoken language, it was preferable to Europeanized Chinese. He argued for the enrichment of the Chinese language though the utilization of indigenous resources (dialects) rather than through the importation of foreign words, structures and expressions. The dialects of different regions could be used and incorporated, for him, into the vernacular used in translations. This was part of Qu's program for developing a proletarian literature for the masses, and for him Zhao Jingshen failed precisely not because his position was linguistically indefensible, but because it was ideologically unsound. For that reason Qu pronounced Zhao an "enemy of proletarian literature." Lu Xun, on the other hand, while recognizing the existence of an illiterate readership, did not specify in concrete terms how the needs of this readership could be catered to; his view was more elitist. In that sense, Qu exhibited greater "evangelistic" zeal than Lu Xun in promoting a different language for translation, though he never put it into practice. An absolute vernacular fashioned on dialects, for Lu Xun, was a future possibility only. He sharply differentiated between the spoken and the written languages in terms of their suitability as a medium for translation: "Our written language cannot yet be blended with the crude dialects of the different regions, and it will be either a special vernacular language, or the dialect of one special region. In the latter case, readers outside the region will not understand it" (Luo 1984: 277). As a practical measure, Lu Xun preferred a "special" vernacular to Qu's absolute vernacular.

The debate on the language of translation was thus a crucial part of the discussion on language reform in early twentieth-century China, and it surfaced with the discrediting of the classical language and the emergence of a far-from-perfect vernacular. In his letter of 3 December, Qu Qiubai made an apt comparison of the former to Latin, and the latter to French. For Qu, in medieval Europe, with the help of translations, vernacular languages like French and German gained an advantage over the Latin idiom and managed eventually to establish themselves as "official" languages. Based largely on the spoken Northern dialect, and used for centuries in popular literature (like novels and folk drama), the Chinese vernacular had been propounded very early as a form of writing by language reformers like Qian Xuantong (1887–1939). Many translators of the 1920s and 30s participated in this linguistic revolution by actively deploying the vernacular, rightly perceiving how translations could assist in the modernization of the Chinese language. Lu Xun's hope was that in Europeanizing Chinese, "new modes of thinking" would become expressible. Qu Qiubai was equally interested in language reform, but he was more oriented toward the masses, and more inclined towards utilizing native linguistic resources (provided by Chinese dialects) and resisting Europeanizations. Lu Xun might have been right in pointing out the limitations of Qu's project, but the deeper implications of Qu's ideas had yet to be fully explicated.

Translation and modernity

When, in the 1920s and 30s, China entered her "modern" phase in translation theorizing, she also saw an upsurge in translation production, as evidenced by the thousands of literary translations appearing in print. Theorists like Lu Xun, Qu Qiubai, Liang Shiqiu and Zhao Jingshen, therefore, did not emerge in a vacuum. The cultural conditions were ripe, and the peculiar linguistic situation that had evolved since the late Qing compelled theorists to cope with changing realities. Most significantly, the polemics surrounding how to translate resounded with the discourses on modernity carried on in other spheres of Chinese society at the time. Lu Xun as well as Qu Qiubai simply desired release from the backwardness that had characterized Chinese life at every level. Promotion of a new vernacular — or, simply, vernacularization — was part of a project for national rejuvenation.

More research needs to be done on how the Chinese perception of the importance of translation changed as China entered her "modern" era. In our skeletal history of the century that began with the Opium War (1840) here, only shifts of emphasis can be highlighted; it must not be assumed that abrupt changes marked one period from another. From the mid-nineteenth century on, technical translations were undertaken with the goal of tapping Western sources of military strength. During the final years of the Qing dynasty, foreign novels were translated in the effort to transmit Western models of government and Western political thought. Both approaches testify to the instrumentality of translation: it was supposed to help China acquire the power of the Western "Other" and to impel it along the path to modernity, both technologically and politically. Translations in the 1920s and 30s must be understood as a continuation of this project, though more attention began to be placed squarely on linguistic issues. If anything, the theorization about translation on the part of intellectuals (like Lu Xun), in so far as it concerned the "proper" language of translation, displayed an active engagement with questions of linguistic modernity. (As far as literary modernity is concerned, one notes that very few of the
literary translations of the period in question were of the modernist masterpieces by authors like T. S. Eliot, James Joyce and Marcel Proust. For intellectuals at the time, literary modernity — not literary modernism — was partly realized through translations of nineteenth-century works, be they in the realist, romantic, or naturalistic modes.

Even by the yardstick of contemporary Western translation theory, we need have no qualms about calling Lu Xun a “modern” translation theorist. For one thing, he advocated retaining the foreignness of the original text — especially the foreign linguistic structures — in a way reminiscent of the entire tradition of German Romantic translation theory from Schleiermacher to von Humboldt to Goethe. He also explored, in one translation after another, possibilities for enriching the Chinese language through the importation of Europeanized terms, structures and expressions. Of course, few of his translations had lasting impact; they never were popular or widely known. His theories, too, never created a great impact, not least because of the opposition they encountered and the scant reference to them in subsequent discussions as compared with, say, Yan Fu’s three principles of translation. Nevertheless, the fact remains that it was in the 1920s and 30s that the foreignizing impulse, evincing a desire for the linguistic Other, first reared its head.

As demonstrated above, Lu Xun’s Europeanizing impulse was coupled with a preference for extreme literalism, for fidelity to the original text. This puts him in the company of such Western theorists like Vladimir Nabokov and Walter Benjamin, both of whom valorize the literal method in translation. All three dare to go to the extreme of word-for-word interlinear translation. Furthermore, Lu Xun’s ideas can be partly understood with reference to contemporary translation studies scholars like Lawrence Venuti and Douglas Robinson, who have theorized about the cultural and linguistic processes of foreignization in translation. But if Lu Xun’s ideas happen to correspond to those of present-day translation scholars, the fact is of significance only as a measure of the extent to which Lu Xun had moved bravely ahead of his own contemporaries.

However, in saying that Chinese translation theory became “modern” with Lu Xun and not Yan Fu, and in contrasting Lu Xun’s views on translation with those of his contemporaries, I only wish to draw attention to the Chinese cultural context from which Lu Xun’s ideas emerged, rather than focus on his individual contribution. It is more appropriate to say that, with Lu Xun, Chinese translation theorizing entered its modern phase. One thing readily observable from the series of polemical debates discussed above is that, while Lu Xun appeared most radical, the others were also positioned on various places along the axis of attraction and repulsion as far as the issue of the incorporation of foreign linguistic elements was concerned. All were evincing the “spirit of the times”: not only translation, but also the Chinese language, began to be viewed differently. The translation theories of the 1920s and 30s must therefore be related to the general concern with the attainment of Chinese linguistic modernity, as prefigured already in the 1919–1921 debate on Europeanization. Issues of how to translate became a platform for further exploring this concern.

The opposition to Europeanized and foreignized translations in Lu Xun’s time, given the overwhelming popularity of the domesticated/ Sinicized/ free translations of Lin Shu and others, must have been tremendous. This is seen in Lu Xun’s failure to find a large following for the method he advocated. In fact, throughout the entire twentieth century, the opponents of Europeanization and extreme literalism in translation consistently gained the upperhand. But while Europeanization and literalism, as methods of translation, have not been very popular, their effect has been pervasive. Many a translator have testified to their own experience of failing to avoid Europeanizations, much as they wish to. Many a Chinese person, too, will say that Europeanized Chinese is “modern Chinese.” What Yin Jicheng said in 1927, in response to Hu Shi’s denouncement of Europeanization — that “[the Europeanized vernacular] will, after one, two, three, perhaps four years, not appear stilted to readers” and that “several years later, non-Europeanized expressions will probably become unreadable” (qtd. in Liu 1999: 78) — has turned out to be prophetically fulfilled. Europeanizations have prevailed. Lu Xun’s theory of foreignized/ faithful/ Europeanized/ literalist translation is thus, unwittingly, a tribute to the way in which translation can advance the Chinese modernity project, though initially many critics had serious doubts about its viability.

Notes

1. Especially in the last twenty years or so, the institutionalization, as well as internationalization, of translation studies has substantially altered the theoretical scene in China, and it would not be inaccurate to say that a revolution of sorts is underway even today.

2. Zhi Qian already mentioned xin, da and ya in his “Preface to the Faju jing’’ published in 224.

4. Pérez-Barreiro Nolla suggests “hard translation.” He notes, insightfully, that “hardness... points towards the target language” while literalism points to the source language (Pérez-Barreiro Nolla 1992: 85). I would add that it describes the effect of a translation as well as the method used.

5. For a penetrating analysis of literalism as a mode of translation, especially of why it has persisted, see Shen (1995: 568–79). While citing examples of extreme literalism, Shen does not treat it as an independent category, as I do in the present article.

6. The articles discussed here are all translated in the section on “Literal Translation vs. Sense-Translation” in Part II of this anthology.


8. In 1929 Feng Xuefeng published six translations of Marxist works. The signs of bonding among Lu Xun, Feng and Qu, or their forming something like a leftist clique, seem quite obvious.

9. For this and subsequent quotations from the correspondence between Lu and Qu, the reader is referred to the section on “The Language of Translation” in Part II of this anthology.

10. Yet another term for the vernacular is yuwen, literally meaning “written language based on speech.”

11. Mao Dun later exposed the fallacy of Fu’s argument by noting that Europeanization is a linguistic phenomenon, not a literary one, and so talking about originality and inventiveness is simply confusing one with the other (Mao 1921b). As a matter of fact, the term Ouhua (Europeanization) is deployed only in the Chinese discourse on language, not literature.

12. For the enmity between Lu Xun and Zhao Jingshen, see Wang (1999: 259). Zhao became at the time almost a representative of the “fluency” school. Zhao, however, was ridiculed for his notoriously literal translation of the phrase “Milky Way,” which made him the butt of many sarcastic attacks.

13. Necessary reference must be made here to the works of Antoine Berman and Susan Bernofsky (see Berman 1992; Bernofsky 1998). For Berman, there exists in Germany “a tradition of translation that regards translation as the creation, transmission and expansion of the language” — the same can be said of twentieth-century Chinese translation theory. But the two cases are still different. While in Romantic Germany, translation forges a link between language and national identity — national differences are revealed linguistically — early twentieth-century China’s “modern” identity is to be constructed through a reconstruction of the Chinese language through the absorption of non-Chinese elements.

14. Belief that new ideas emerged through discussion, debate and dialectical confrontation is perhaps another oft-noted aspect of the “May Fourth spirit” (see Tagore 1967; Liu 1999).

15. One should note, when all is said, that the various dichotomies treated seriously throughout the period in question (Europeanization vs. Sinicization, fidelity vs. fluency, literalism vs. liberalism) might also be construed as “false dichotomies,” in that most translators actually tried to find a comfort zone somewhere along the continuum that extended from “alienation” to “domestication.”

Chapter 3

Theories from a postcolonial perspective

Discussions of postcolonial translation have come into vogue in recent years. Originally a term used extensively in literary theory, “postcoloniality” seems suddenly to have been given a prominent part to play in research on translation in Third World countries, particularly India. Undoubtedly, postcolonial theory should have some relevance to all countries that were colonized in one way or another. That being the case, much thought ought to be given to the relevance of postcolonial translation to China. To be sure, China has not been formally occupied by a foreign power in the twentieth century, so she has not experienced a “colonial” period as did her Southeast Asian neighbors, India and most African countries. Indeed, extraterritorial rights over certain parts of the country, like Shanghai and the Yangtse River, were claimed at certain times by foreign powers; Hong Kong was ceded to Britain (though she entered her postcolonial period with the 1997 Chinese takeover); and Taiwan was colonized by the Dutch, and then by the Japanese from the end of the nineteenth century to the end of World War II. However, for Mainland China, where the majority of translations are still carried out and published, the term “postcoloniality” may not mean much. What use do we have for postcolonial theories of translation in the Chinese context?

In hindsight, the influx of contemporary Western critical theory into China is among the most phenomenal intellectual events of the 1980s and 90s. In quick succession, deconstructionism, feminism, and postcolonialism (not postcolonial translation theory, though) were introduced into China. That postcolonial theory has become a reality in both the fields of literature and linguistics is evidenced by the spate of articles and books on the subject by Chinese scholars in the 1990s (Wang Ning 1995: 54–62). It appears that Chinese translation theory will have to face the postcolonial challenge; the question is how the new critical discourse on postcoloniality can become significant and meaningful. Below, I will consider the two “positions” that Chinese translation/cultural theorists have taken as a response to “colonization.” Interestingly, though the concepts of postcoloniality impact on Chinese translation theorizing, the uniqueness of the Chinese case forces us to revise the parameters within which postcolonial theorizing functions.
It must be noted that the terms “postcolonial” and “colonization” are used here in their broader sense, being restricted neither geographically nor temporally. This qualification is important since there has never been any form of territorial colonialism to speak of in the Chinese context; rather, the Chinese have experienced, since the beginning of the century, a partly self-imposed kind of cultural and linguistic colonization. The difference between the Chinese situation and the Indian model, on which most recent postcolonial translation theorizing has been based (see Niranjana 1992), is probably as wide as can be imagined.

To explicate the Chinese case, I will utilize the elements that are the focus of analysis by postcolonial critics: the production of (Western) forms of discourse during periods of colonial expansion, the use of universalist discourses to subjugate colonized and marginalized peoples, and the resistance to the apparently well-meaning imperialist projects. Among these, the idea of native (or nativist) resistance is crucial, especially as many texts, when examined from a postcolonial perspective, reveal the degree to which the “colonized” can re-act, and are not simply acted upon. Different forms of resistance occur over a wide historical span, from the 1920s to the end of the twentieth century. Arguments were made, prior to the 1990s, against translators contaminating the Chinese language through the introduction of Europeanized structures and expressions. Then a reversal occurred in the 1990s, with the counter-argument that the language itself, carrying a unique “cultural cargo,” simply cannot be contaminated. It can be said that the resistance before the 1990s was very much an unconscious one. Subsequent to the work of those translation theorists, a conscious effort was made to combat “colonization” by European languages, but the still-ongoing resistance was forged in the main by cultural critics.

The thirties and sixties: Keeping the language “pure”

A clear contribution of postcolonial theory to our understanding of Chinese translations is the new light it sheds on existing translated texts. This comes about in an act of re-reading: the theory is retroactively applied to a colonial, or even a pre-colonial, period. The body of ideas associated with postcolonial translation theory, when shorn of its temporal-historical dimension, becomes applicable to earlier eras in which postcolonial translation practices, as we know them now, were only nascent. In this context, the first “position” of resistance taken by translation theorists in an earlier period — the call for using a “pure” Chinese language in translating — becomes understandable. A dominant trend in translation since 1919 (the year the May Fourth Movement broke out) was to adhere closely to the formal features of source texts and to import, on a huge scale, foreign terms and expressions. As I have noted in the last chapter and elsewhere (Chan 1996), this was a means whereby the sterile Chinese language could be rejuvenated. The opponents of linguistic Europeanization were, in fact, fighting against a form of colonization; they were attacking a new language emerging primarily out of translations into Chinese, with the following features:

1. the insertion of subjects where none was needed;
2. the increased use of conjunctions and other linking devices;
3. the proliferation of passive structures;
4. the appearance of affix-like morphemes like hua (“ize”) and fei (“non-”);
5. the widespread use of lengthy modifiers.

From our present-day perspective, it seems clear that the linguistic purists were fighting a losing battle: Lydia Liu has proved, with ample documentary evidence, that modern Chinese is a heteroglossic construction, incorporating elements from many languages — though predominantly, we must say, resulting from the aggressive cultural influence of Japanese, English and Russian. Nevertheless, the resistance efforts merit closer examination, especially the two phases of the 1930s and the 1960s.

In the “Language of the Masses Movement” (dazhongyuyundong) of the 1930s, spoken Chinese as it was used in people’s daily lives was considered the best language because, crude as it was, it was at least more “alive.” Apparently the target of attack was Europeanized Chinese. There were, however, deeper implications to the debate, for the question of the kind of language fit for use also engaged issues of ethnic and national identity. The leaders of the movement, like Chen Wangdao (1890–1977) and Ye Shengtao (1894–1988), held that “language, being the supreme symbol of ethnic character,” would be defiled if foreign elements were admitted into it (Fang 1992: 343–48). Like them, Zhao Shuli (1906–1970), a writer of “peasant” literature at the time, advocated using a new language with Chinese characteristics. He was most adamant about avoiding Europeanizations; for him, every nation and every race has its own special linguistic habits, and these distinguish one language from another — and by analogy, one national or ethnic group from another. Zhao believed that Chinese is as fully capable of fulfilling its mission as other
languages are of theirs. In fact, he was of the opinion that, of the two arch-rivals, Europeanized Chinese and classical Chinese (a language which the vernacular has been trying to replace), the former is much more to be feared.

Translators and translation theorists resisted Europeanizations as strongly as creative authors (like Zhao and Ye) did, and they sought to launch an attack from another front. In a way, Frederick Tsai (1918–1996) and Yu Guangzhong (1928–) were representatives of this group. Their call to “purify” Chinese in the 1960s must also be understood as a continuation of the fight against “linguistic colonization” by the West (and Japan). But this time the alternative suggested was not the spoken language or the language of the masses; rather, it was the traditional vernacular used before the twentieth century. This vernacular was a written language first developed near the end of the ninth century. Unlike classical Chinese, which remained the standard written language through the centuries, the traditional vernacular more nearly resembled the spoken language of the past and was used to serve “low-culture functions”; it was used in popular writings like plays and novels of the late imperial era. Although the modern vernacular, having matured slowly since the beginning of the twentieth century, has been developed in part from the traditional vernacular, they remain different in significant ways. Primarily, the modern vernacular has incorporated to a substantial degree European structures and expressions. In their publications of over a decade, Tsai and Yu issued repeated calls to free the Chinese language from the superimposed foreign influences. Their preference, put simply, was for the modern vernacular to be replaced with the traditional vernacular. By so doing, they opened a new chapter in the history of resistance against Europeanizations.

In his book *Studies of Translation*, Frederick Tsai listed infelicities committed by Chinese translators when they allowed themselves to be led (misled, to be accurate) by the English language. Most prominent of these included the excessive use of nominals, the insertion of definite and indefinite articles where they were unneeded, the direct transposition of the passive, and the misuse of suffixes of plurality. The book may appear now to the informed reader as constituting an essay on contrastive Chinese-English linguistics, yet the real significance of Tsai’s approach is that he placed the two languages on an equal footing, as they had seldom been, and asserted by implication that the same ideas could be expressed by each, albeit in different form.

To a large extent, Tsai’s stance needs to be seen against what James Holmes has called “the tendency towards naturalization of the linguistic context” (Holmes 1988: 47–48) among translators since mid-century. The favoring of naturalized translation (culturally and linguistically), as well as the targeting of translationese as a malaise in translation, is seen just as clearly in Yu Guangzhong. Yu addressed the issue from the perspective of what Europeanizations do to the Chinese language, and his argument is tantamount to a point-by-point refutation of Lu Xun’s arguments that we have already seen. This is how he critiqued translationese:

Even good translations cannot adequately reflect the original. Bad translations, other than distorting the sense of the original, often serve to defile and contaminate our literary language. Writers beneath the third rate... produce works on a par with such translations. This kind of translationese has exerted a widespread, pernicious influence on our culture.3

The diametrically opposed views of Lu Xun and Yu Guangzhong are perhaps nowhere else more clearly revealed than in this quotation. The deleterious effects of Europeanizations are, for Yu, felt in writing styles in general. Creativity in translation is not predicated upon the ingenious imitation of foreign languages, and the tendency toward Europeanization needs to be curbed. In comparing the creative writer and the translator, Yu noted in the essay where the above quote appears that the creativity of translation is of a different order, in that it is practiced within constraints. One obvious constraint is arguably the content of the original text, which the translator seeks to reproduce faithfully; another — one that Yu, nevertheless, did not expound on — is simply the target language itself.

Tsai and Yu followed nearly parallel careers: both lived in Hong Kong and Taiwan for extended periods of time; both achieved fame as creative writers (the former an essayist, the latter a poet) and translators; and both not only translated prodigiously but also — as translation teachers raised an entire generation of translators in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Most significantly, both sought to resurrect classic vernacular Chinese novels, such as the eighteenth-century novel *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, as models of language used in traditional times that ought to be emulated by translators (see Tsai 1972: 94–95). Though their views did have a lasting impact, they were not without their detractors. For instance, Frederick Tsai’s stand was criticized as impossible to maintain consistently by an influential linguist from Taiwan — Huang Xuanfan (Huang 1974).4 Citing copious examples from Tsai, he showed why the use of a plural form for “it” (*tamen*) is indispensible, and denounced as impracticable all of Tsai’s suggested alternatives (like repeating the antecedent or not making a distinction between the singular and plural forms of pronouns). For him, all efforts to counter Europeanizations can be half-hearted at best.5
The nineties: Foregrounding Chineseness

While efforts at defending the Chinese language against the onslaught of Europeanized translations have continued into the present, since the 1980s the signs of an alternative mode of resistance have become more and more conspicuous. This second “position” came into existence as a consequence of the recent introduction into Chinese critical and academic circles of new critical theories. If Chinese culture in the May Fourth period (from 1919 to roughly the end of the 1920s) can be said to have been “colonized” for the first time, then Deng Xiaoping’s era from the late 1970s to 1997 has witnessed a “second colonization.” Wang Jing has called this period China’s “second renaissance”; the similarities that it bears to the late 1910s and 20s are unmistakable, for both of these eras saw a massive importation of Western ideas.\(^6\)

The second “position” in the reaction against Western linguistic imperialism was taken primarily by linguists and cultural theorists, and secondarily by translation scholars and theorists. It is apparent that, the current situation in China being what it is, theorizing about the cultural role that translation is to play will originate with those who grapple with Western theory. In what follows, I will discuss at some length the views of a linguist, a cultural critic, and then a translation theorist. All three provide perspectives on translation (indirectly, in the case of the first two) that can be appropriately termed “postcolonialist.”

Shen Xiaolong (1952–), currently Professor of Chinese in Fudan University, Shanghai, is a staunch exponent of a new approach to analyzing the Chinese language that discards Western linguistic models (see Shen 1992; 1995a).\(^7\) He sets out to tackle the failure of Western linguistic theory to explain adequately the peculiarities of the Chinese language in his epoch-making study, Interpreting Language (1992). For him, the time has come to revamp the entire Chinese linguistic tradition of the twentieth century, which began with the misguided attempt by Ma Jianzhong in the late nineteenth century to borrow wholesale the Western model, and impose it on the Chinese language. The experience of the last ninety years — especially the insuperable difficulties in analyzing Chinese syntax — has shown that it is futile to try to account for features in the Chinese language simply by theories that were developed in the West with reference to Indo-European languages.

The reception of Shen Xiaolong’s ideas, however, has been extremely mixed. Considered currently as the leader of one of the three main schools of “cultural linguistics,” a new field of study born of the mid-1980s, Shen is sharply differentiated from those cultural linguists whose focus is on the synchronic and diachronic study of how culture influences language and vice versa, and from those who seek to unravel the “cultural content” of a language (Chinese in this case) through an examination of how language adapts to social and communicative needs. Best known for the way in which he highlights language as a system of signs peculiar only to the culture in which it finds itself, a system understandable only by those using the language, Shen has been praised as the “hope of Chinese linguistics.” Yet at the same time, others have openly derided him, saying that he is not worthy of serious attention. The debate on Shen’s true significance (or lack thereof) reflects, in fact, an atmosphere where linguists are eager to revive Western linguistic methods that have been applied indiscriminately, and to establish cultural linguistics as the avenue for “rejuvenating” linguistic study in China. Whether they choose to agree or disagree with Shen, there is little doubt that Shen’s system has arisen out of a unique historical — shall we say, postcolonial — situation.\(^8\)

Nevertheless, in stressing the need to sinicize the study of Chinese grammar, Shen is in fact furthering the cause of linguists of the 1930s, like Fu Donghua (1893–1971) and Chen Wangdao, though he gives a new twist to the model they constructed (see Shen 1992: 416–17). Freely adopting terms from traditional Chinese aesthetics,\(^9\) Shen notes the following peculiarities of the Chinese language:

1. the preference for economy of expression (jian);
2. the aspiration toward achieving phonological harmony;
3. the close attention to balance between empty (xu) and concrete (shi) words; and
4. the tendency to use the various parts of speech freely, so long as what is said makes sense.

Shen concludes in Interpreting Language that such peculiarities reveal the extent to which Chinese can be said to favor “associative thinking,” allow the speaker’s intentions to shape the language, and privilege content (or “spirit”) over form. This partly explains why the language does not fare well when Western linguistic models, with their strength in formal analysis, are applied. Elsewhere he argues that the model of “subject-verb-object” ought to be abandoned in the analysis of Chinese sentences, since the clue to understanding Chinese syntax lies in explicating the use of “phrases” (jududuan), the fundamental unit of the Chinese sentence (see Shen 1995b: 37–39).\(^10\) The essence of Shen’s argument is that a language is inseparable from the culture in which it is nourished, and “when [Chinese] linguistics is severed from Chinese culture, the maternal
source of its being, it becomes stale and lifeless” (Shen 1990: 75). At one point in his *Interpreting Language*, Shen does talk about Europeanizations imported through translations, but he does not elaborate (Shen 1992: 451–52). While only tangentially interested in translation, he nevertheless has put forth a theory with serious implications for translation studies.

A similar remark could be made about Zhang Yiwu (1962–), presently Associate Professor of Chinese at Beijing University, and foremost among scholars who have applied a postcolonialist approach to literary studies in China. Zhang was one of the most powerful voices in the early 1990s against the Western presence in Chinese intellectual life. In contrast to the earlier opponents of Europeanizations, he fights as much against cultural as against linguistic “colonization.” In the first two chapters of his book, *Exploring the Margins* (1993), he describes his resistance strategy: to fight back against Western ideological encroachment on its own terms. He points out that while Derrida advocates breaking down binary oppositions, the opposition between the First World and the Third World is one that has yet to be broken down. Furthermore, for him, China can be a test-case of how a new kind of cultural discourse, one pertinent to a Third World country, can be fruitfully developed (Zhang 1993: 14).

In Chapter 3, in many ways the central chapter of the whole book, Zhang Yiwu elaborates on a key point that Shen has already made: a language must not be seen as a mere sign system, divorced from the culture. He reiterates time and again the idea of the mother-tongue (note the maternal metaphor, used also by Shen Xiaolong) and the ever-present, ever-powerful “collective memory” that it invokes for every Chinese. For the Chinese language carries a cultural residue, accumulated over a historical span of 5,000 years, that can never be erased in spite of violence done to the language through the importation of foreign words, structures, and modes of expression. Like his predecessors who opposed Europeanizations in translation, Zhang sourly notes the irreparable damage done to the native tongue. For him, the impact is seen clearly in the realm of literature, for the language of literature is after all “the distilled essence of the mother-tongue, the agent for the spread of culture” (Zhang 1993: 66).

Unlike his anti-Europeanization predecessors, however, Zhang does not propose ways of further molding the vernacular into a medium of expression that is as effective as Europeanized Chinese. The attempt to enrich the Chinese language through the incorporation of elements from “real” spoken language is for him as ill-advised as the belief that this same language can be improved through the incorporation of translated foreign models. As a method of resistance, Zhang advocates a new kind of written Chinese, for which he coins the term “post-vernacular” (*houbaihua*). Drawing upon examples from literature by major authors on the Mainland and in Taiwan since the 1980s, he discusses the possibility of re-introducing elements of the classical language, denigrated since the 1910s, into contemporary written Chinese. It is his opinion that the classical language, the more refined, terse, and compact language of the traditional literati that served “high-culture functions” for two millennia (from the second century B.C. to the end of the nineteenth), should be given a greater role to play. With a Derridian touch, Zhang Yiwu sums up the postmodern view of language embodied by the postvernacular thus:

> [It] recognizes the fissure, the cleavage between the signifier and the signified, between language and reality. Language is no longer subordinate to the object of signification; it does not connect with reality; it is simply a moving and free-floating signifying system. (Zhang 1993: 71)

Zhang takes pains to point out that his advocacy of the postvernacular does not amount to a rediscovery of (or a return to) the classical language, or the defeat of the vernacular language in the competition for ascendance. What he stresses is the potency of the classical language as a carrier of cultural residue and its possible contribution to the emergence of a new mode of expression. Furthermore, Europeanizations are accepted, because it is no longer possible to completely purge them from the Chinese language. But Zhang is far from arguing for Europeanizations, like Lu Xun did in the 1920s and 30s. Lu did not think that the Chinese language was adequate for its purposes, whereas Zhang holds the opposite view and revalorizes the classical language, saying that it is more than adequate. Zhang’s position is also different from those who propose that the Chinese language should be completely romanized (see Qu 1989: 3.298–309) or replaced with Esperanto, the “World-language.” He restores dignity to the Chinese language while recognizing the difficulty of keeping it pure.

Zhang’s postvernacular is a hybrid language that admits elements of diverse sorts. It is reminiscent of the “in-between” language that Samia Mehrez describes in her study of Francophone North African texts in the postcolonial period — a “newly forged language” that is capable of “exploding and confounding different symbolic worlds and separate systems of signification in order to create a mutual interdependence and intersignification” (1992: 121–22). Seen from this perspective, a postcolonial critic (or a “nativist semiotician,” as he has been called in China) such as Zhang Yiwu can be said to have moved to the other end of the spectrum on the issue of the proper language for
translations. As opposed to linguistic purity, he favors hybridity. In fact, the position that Zhang assumes is postcolonial in two senses: his recognition of hybridity and his refusal to accept the modern vernacular — very much a “colonial product” — as a replacement language for classical Chinese.

The views of Shen Xiaolong and Zhang Yiwu furnish a context for better understanding the recent work of Liu Miqing (1939–). A graduate of Beijing University who taught at his alma mater and at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Liu has written prodigiously on Chinese–English translation and to date has authored six books. Taken together, these present a systematic and coherent body of ideas on translation unmatched by few other theorists in the twentieth century. His earlier full-length studies, most of which were published in the 1980s, deal variously with the translation of different genres, skills in translating from English into Chinese, and contrastive study of the two languages. However, Present-Day Translation Studies (1993) (a Taiwan reprint of a Mainland version published in 1990) is by common consent his representative work; as a comprehensive re-examination of issues pertinent to translation theory, it summarizes Liu’s views on aspects of translation theory like the basic operating mechanisms in translating, translation as a mode of thinking, the stages in the translation process, translatability and untranslatability, and the translation of style. This study was followed in 1995 by Introduction to the Aesthetics of Translation, in which the subject of aesthetics (already touched upon in one chapter in Present-Day Translation Studies) is singled out for separate and detailed treatment.

As Liu Miqing himself has noted, his complete oeuvre forms a closely-knit system that attempts to formulate a translation theory for modern China. As early as 1987, at the first Conference on Translation Theory on China, he called for the establishment of “Chinese translation theory,” and this issue is brought up again in his Present-Day Translation Studies. Stating at the outset that there are no global translation theories and that all theorizing can only proceed from knowledge of a pair — or a very limited number — of languages, Liu advocates developing translation theory from the actual experience of translating from or into the Chinese language:

Undoubtedly, the basic paradigm of Chinese translation theory should begin and end with our mother-tongue. … we cannot disregard the distribution of lexical meanings and functions in the Chinese language either. Accordingly, we may summarize the basic paradigm as one which emphasizes semantic and functional description (my emphasis) (Liu 1993: 30)

The maternal metaphor may or may not have been intended, but its shared use by all three theorists shows how crucial it is to the counter-discourse.

To be sure, Liu proceeds to expatiate on the specificity of the Chinese experience of translation by discussing the special features of the Chinese language in terms similar to those used by Shen Xiaolong. He stresses how the Chinese language, unlike Indo-European languages, is composed of “sentence sections,” which are the primary building blocks (bankuai) for clauses, sentences, and even paragraphs. These sections are strung together rather loosely, as aggregates or conglomerates, and cohere around the “topic” or the thought to be expressed. It is in this sense that “spirit controls form” (yi shen yu xing).

By contrast, in Indo-European languages formal features play a significant role in sentence making, and instead of building blocks, a language like English is structured by means of “chain connections” (Liu 1993: 33–35). While clearly an over-simplification, this mode of describing the difference of the “language of the colonized” from the “colonizer’s language” is gaining popularity. Basil Hatim has noted how the Arabs — like the Chinese, perhaps — have been described as tending “to fit the thought to the word… rather than the word to the thought”; for them, “the words become the substitutes of thought, and not their representative” (Hatim 1997: 16). One may add that, besides this, the vagueness of thought that linguists have identified in Arabic is almost comparable to the so-called “expressive” nature of the Chinese language, which is prone to present ideas in a cinematographic manner.

Elsewhere in his book, Liu also opposes the form-oriented and analytical features typical of the English language against the thought-oriented and synthetic power of Chinese. Such over-generalizations about languages are, of course, quite dangerous, but one notices readily the “strategic” function they can serve in postcolonial discourse. Indeed, Liu’s presentation of the Chinese language as different, but distinct, from other languages contrasts remarkably with the denigration of the language as inferior and inadequate by men of letters in the 1920s and 30s, such as Lu Xun. Seen in a broader context, Liu Miqing’s desire to theorize about translation on the basis of an assumed “equality” between Chinese and Western languages can be understood as the cumulative result of decades of thinking positively about their mother-tongue on the part of translators. On the question of the perniciousness of Europeanizations also, Liu stands closer to his postcolonial contemporaries (such as Zhang Yiwu) than to the harsh critics of Europeanized Chinese (such as Tsai and Yu) of earlier decades.
In Introduction to the Aesthetics of Translation, his most recent book, Liu initiates a completely new view of translation as an activity, developing a discourse on translation that can be seen as almost counter-hegemonic. In striking contrast to his earlier works, which testify to his familiarity with Western translation theory, this book is sprinkled everywhere with references to seminal texts by Chinese aestheticians, from Laozi, Liu Xie (c.465–522), Zhong Rong (c.465–518), Sikong Tu (837–809) to Wang Guowei (1877–1927). Among these figures, Laozi is raised to a position of utmost prominence. His dictum, from Daode jing (Classic of the Dao), that “beautiful words are not truthful; truthful words are not beautiful” is cited to clarify the debate between fidelity to the original and artistry in translating. Concepts corresponding to modern Western reception/semiotic theory are sought from Liu Xie and Liji (Book of Rites) — the latter, it is said, addressed two millennia ago the methods by which the translator “decodes the feelings” expressed in a literary text (Liu Miqing 1995: 200). In a lengthy section on the rendition of the source text style, ten different styles of writing — reserved, bold, refined, natural, adorned, diluted, light-hearted, forceful, solid, humorous — are expounded with reference to at least one example of Chinese-English translation in each case (see Liu Miqing 1995: 213–38). In line with the sinicizing approach adopted throughout the book, the “Chinese” origins of each style are documented with quotations from traditional Chinese aesthetics texts.

Translation and resistance

If we understand postcolonial discourse broadly and see it as essentially a question of positionality, then the basic strategy of resistance deployed by all three theorists considered in this chapter is obviously to foreground Chineseness. By pointing out alternative (read “nativist”) modes of understanding and contesting prevailing (read “Western”) paradigms, they have effectively intervened into and altered perceptions of what the language of translation should be. Insofar as they have voiced similar oppositions to the epistemic violence done to the Chinese language, the earlier theorists can also be regarded as postcolonialist, though they may have worked in the “colonial” period. One phenomenon worth pondering is that the resistance efforts were very strong at precisely those times when “colonization” proceeded most ferociously — a fact all too obvious in the 1990s. Indeed, the history of cultural resistance in China shows not only that feelings for sinicization are most intense where Westernization poses the greatest threat, but also that the impact of postcolonial thought is most powerful not in the place of its origin, but in its place of destination, at which it arrives with all its colonial appendages. One wonders if there might even be a paradoxical love-hate relationship between the colonizers and the colonized, rendering it necessary to rethink the myth of the inevitable confrontation — or opposition — between the two.

Notes

1. For examples of Japanese, English, French, German and Russian terms that have become very much a part of the Chinese language, see Liu (1995: 284–301, 343–378).
2. For a description in English of the differences between classical Chinese, the traditional vernacular, and the modern vernacular, see Chen (1993).
3. See Yu’s “Translation and Creative Writing” as translated in Section D of the second part of this anthology.
4. See the translation of Huang’s “Review of Si Guo’s Studies of Translation” in Section C of the second part of this anthology.
5. When all is said, however, there is little doubt (as Edward Gunn has proved with documented evidence) that instances of new Europeanized structures have declined since the thirties (see Gunn 1997: 31–61 and Appendix). For Europeanized structures and expressions in twentieth-century Chinese prose, see Wang (1959: 299–383).
6. Wang Jing depicts at some length the intellectual atmosphere of the 1980s, calling it a “culture fever.” The proliferation of academic journals, the holding of conferences and the inauguration of related publication ventures are aspects of this “second colonization” (see Wang Jing 1996: 46–52).
7. Many of the essays by Shen have been translated into English (Shen 1997).
8. This is an aspect of the “culture fever” that Wang Jing (1996) has not considered; her emphasis is on the literary scene. In the main, the reaction against Western linguistics takes the form of a refusal to continue using the analytical methods of the structuralists and an attempt to highlight the “humanistic” study of the Chinese language.
10. Shen ends this article by stressing the need “to develop a linguistic theory with Chinese characteristics” (1995b: 41).
11. The promotion of Esperanto was most fervent during the early twentieth century; among the better known advocates were Ba Lin and Cai Yuanpei. For some time there was a craze for learning Esperanto among Chinese intellectuals in Shanghai. An abundance of
litery works were translated from Esperanto by Zhou Zuoren and others, and an exchange of views concerning the use of this "World-language" that lasted for two years was documented in the 1917–1919 issues of the journal Xin Qingnian (New Youth).

12. The leading spokesman for the link between postcoloniality and hybridity is Homi Bhabha (see Bhabha 1994: 212–35).

13. These are Wenti yu fanyi (Genre and Translation) (1985), Ying Han fanyi jingeng xunlian shouce (Training Handbook for English-Chinese Translation) (1987), and Han Ying dui bi yanyu fanyi (CE-EC Contrastive Studies and Translation) (1991), respectively. References will be made in the rest of this article to Liu (1993; 1995). Liu’s most recent publication is Fanyi jiaoxue: shiwu yu lilun (Translation Teaching: Practice and Theory) (2003).

14. Liu Miqing also stresses the importance of building a Chinese translation theory (1989: 12–15). Another theorist making the same point is Luo Xinzhang (see Luo 1984: 1–19). For a recent discussion of Liu Miqing’s research, see Lei (1993).

CHAPTER 4
End of the century: The impact of “new theories”

In the West, the incursion of “new translation theories” into academia was begun decades ago. Evolving out of European and Anglo-American contexts, such theories have made, on their first appearance, a decisive break with the so-called linguistic approaches which found their earliest exponents in theorists like Catford and Newmark, whose works on translation, appearing as early as the 1960s, can be said to have set the directions for the development of the entire discipline. The difference between the “old” and the new has been articulated in a variety of ways. For some, it was the evolution from a normative approach to a speculative one; for others, a shift from a micro-level to a macro-level of study; for still others, it signaled a “cultural turn” in the field, with translation theorists turning increasingly to non-linguistic disciplines (like anthropology) for insights relevant to translation.

Given such a state of affairs, those brought up on the older theories have no other alternative than learn to make adjustments, though these are by no means easy. For, after all, coming under fire in the new context are the age-old and sanctified notions of linguistic equivalence and fidelity to the source text, now replaced with new-fangled terms like “Otherness,” “hegemony,” and “différence.” Some responded by noting how the meaning of the term “translation” has been broadened beyond recognition — even becoming almost synonymous with what the anthropologist Talal Asad calls “cultural translation” — and consequently lost its specificity (Asad 1988: 141–64).

Among the theorists of the 1990s, two have played a significant role fueling the move in the new direction. In Siting Translation (1992), Tejaswini Niranjana advanced the thesis that British civil servants during the Indian colonial era were engaged in translating Indian sacred texts with the intention of imposing a definitive interpretation on them. Their act was grounded on the belief that English was a “purer” language and that the time was ripe for such texts to be reinterpreted. To this, Niranjana averred, the Indians in the post-Independence period have responded by re-translating the same works
in question themselves. In his introduction to *Rethinking Translation* (also published in 1992), Lawrence Venuti denounced the translator who covers up the violence often done to a translated text through the much sanctified method of translating “invisibly.” While his arguments had been expounded elsewhere earlier (Venuti 1986: 179–212), it is in *Rethinking Translation* that they were made widely known for the first time. It is also this anthology which made available the views of some of the leading deconstructionist theorists of translation of our era. In its wake, it can fairly be said that an entire school of theorists of this persuasion have moved on stage, making themselves known through radicalizing translation studies. One can cite, for instance, the feminist approach of Sherry Simon and Louise von Flotow, the postcolonial approach of Douglas Robinson, and the deconstructive approach of Rosemary Arrojo, among others.

**Imports from the West**

Viewed from a wider perspective, new translation theories are part and parcel of the body of ideas referred to in the West as “poststructuralist.” In the Chinese context these have been dubbed “New Theory,” a term much bandied about in Chinese academic circles in the 1990s. Among the first to introduce the term to Chinese readers is Zhao Yiheng, currently a professor of Chinese at the University of London. At the beginning of his article, “Post-isms and Chinese New Conservatism” (1995; translated into English for *New Literary History* in 1997), Zhao discusses poststructuralism, postcolonialism and postmodernism as three strands of thought imported into China in the 1980s, although he notes that a host of other “isms” popular in academic discourse at the time can be subsumed under poststructuralism (Zhao 1995: 4–15). It must be emphasized, of course, that the focus of his discussion was literary and cultural theories; new *translation* theories were much slower to enter China.

Some even date the entrance of New Theory into China to 1985, when Fredric Jameson toured the country’s major universities, giving a series of lectures which were later translated and published in an anthology. For some, this initiated the period of China’s “culture fever” which ended with the government’s crackdown on student protesters in Tiananmen Square in 1989. On the heels of Jameson, other Western scholars also paid their visits. Two conferences at which postcolonialism became a hot subject were held in 1995. At the International Conference on Cultural Studies held in Dalian (August 1995), scholars like Terry Eagleton and Ralph Cohen were invited to give lectures; at the International Conference on Cultural Dialogue and Cultural Misreading (October 1995), which took place in Beijing, Douwe Fokkema, Gerald Gillespie, and Mario Valdes were the principal speakers. Yet another international conference that served as a forum for debating the applicability of Western critical theories, including postcolonial theories, was the Conference on Critical Theories: China and the West, sponsored by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and held in the summer of 1997 in Changsha, Hunan. Fredric Jameson was again one of the keynote speakers at this conference. Thus, before the century drew to a close, recent literary and critical theory from the West was already well-planted in Chinese intellectual soil; this is not dissimilar to the way in which sundry kinds of commodities have successfully found a place (at roughly the same time) in the Chinese market.

The importation of ideas was also continued through a succession of efforts to translate seminal Western works in the field: Zhang Xudong translated Walter Benjamin; Zhou Ning translated Jauss and Holub; Xu Wenbo translated Harold Bloom; Tan Daming and Gong Jianming translated Robert Scholes; and Wang Fengzhen translated Terry Eagleton. Alongside these translations, anthologies of translated essays by Western theorists have appeared as well, including Zhang Jingyuan’s *Contemporary Feminist Literary Criticism* (Zhang 1992) and Wang Fengzhen, Sheng Ning and Li Zixiu’s *A Selection of the Most Recent Critical Essays in the West* (Wang et al. 1991). Several series of translations of works in critical theory further fueled the craze, and these include those by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (since 1986), the Liaoning People’s Press (edited by Li Zehou, one of the most eminent of living Chinese philosophers), and the Joint Publishing Company. The speed with which New Theory from the West was introduced is astounding. In fact, within the span of a decade or so, hundreds of works relating to Western theories on feminism, new historicism, deconstructionism, etc., were translated. The most remarkable thing about what happened is that, although these “new” concepts originated in various places in the West over the course of decades, in China they all appeared at roughly the same time. In 1991–92 alone, Toril Moi, Hans-Georg Gadamer, I. A. Richards, Jonathan Culler, E. D. Hirsch and Wolfgang Iser were introduced to the Chinese reader simultaneously.

While the poststructuralist impact on China in the fields of literary and cultural studies, as given above, is undeniable, the influence of new translation theories is still rather murky. It may help to talk of their impact in two different areas, first in teaching and then as an object of intellectual inquiry.