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The impact of translation activities in history and now. Introduction to the Special Column on “The 1st UK-China Symposium on Translation Studies”

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Translation and interpreting (T&I) have played and continue to play important roles in Sino-British diplomatic, trade and business relations as well as people-to-people exchanges. The English/Chinese stream has also been developed in scores of T&I programmes in the UK and in hundreds of T&I programmes in China. Against this background, the “UK-China Symposium on Translation Studies” series have been launched since 2021 as a biennial event co-organised by a UK university and a China university in order to promote academic exchanges among T&I scholars from Anglophone countries and Sinophone countries and regions, and exploration of various aspects of T&I studies with a focus on English/Chinese T&I practice and education.

The 1st UK-China Symposium on Translation Studies was held at University of Leeds on 16-17 August 2021, co-organised by University of Leeds and Beijing Foreign Studies University. The symposium received widespread support from the international academic community in T&I. The its academic committee constituted over 20 prominent scholars in T&I studies from the UK and China’s mainland, Hong Kong and Macau, including Mona Baker, Jeremy Munday and Binhua Wang from the UK, Kaibao Hu, Xuanmin Luo, Wen Ren, Keifei Wang and Wei Zhang from Chinese mainland, Dechao Li, Rachel Lung and Robert Neather from Hong Kong, and Defeng Li and Yifeng Sun from Macau.

This symposium focused on the theme of “Translation and interpreting studies in the East and West: Advances, convergence and divergence”. It attracted eight keynote speeches and 50 presentations selected from over 70 submissions. The two-day conference was attended by around 590 registered participants from around the world.

The Special Column

Thanks to generous support of *Asia Pacific Translation and Intercultural Studies* (APTIS), our proposal of publishing a special column with quality articles from this symposium was accepted by APTIS in August 2021. After several rounds of reviewing, revision and editing, five quality articles have been selected for this special column, which all address a common theme: How do translation activities impact history and the present? Three articles adopt a historical perspective, one article a chronological perspective and the other a contemporary perspective.

Yingmei Liu and Brian James Baer’s article, entitled “Translation Criticism and the Emergent Field of Sinology in the British Empire: A Case Study of *The China Review: Or, Notes and Queries on the Far East* (1872 – 1901)”, addresses the emergence of translation criticism in *The China Review*. Drawing on a corpus of translation reviews, it observes a shift in translation procedures over time. While earlier translations were remarked to promulgate exoticised stereotypes of China throughout the British Empire, adopting often literal and highly foreignised approaches to translation, towards the latter end of the period covered by the corpus the reviews aided the reception of Chinese works in the British Empire by advocating for domesticating translations in order to combat the inferior view of China in Great Britain. However, this raises interesting questions about the facilitation of Britain’s colonial expansion and imperialism, offering a unique counterpoint to Venuti’s oft-cited advocacy of foreignisation.

Xiaorui Wang’s article on “The Translator as Activist: The Case of Yan Fu as a Pioneer Activist Translator

in Late Qing China” explores Yan Fu’s activist translation in China, drawing on the content of prefaces to his translations. This unique analysis of the activism undertaken by one of China’s most well-known translation practitioners and thinkers addresses Yan’s agendas of protecting China from foreign imperialism, opposing the long-standing autocratic monarchical governance of China and strengthening the nation by harnessing modern and in many cases Western scientific and technological developments. Wang explains that Yan sought to promote change and reform by associating the thematic concerns of his translations with contemporary issues such as good governance, wealth, prosperity, and national strength, further suggesting that these themes may have been a driver behind the selection of these books for translation. The article concludes by considering the cyclical relationship between activism and translation, with activism encouraging translation practice, and translation practice reinforcing activist goals.

Zien Guo’s contribution on “Rethinking the History of ‘Cession’ from a Translational Perspective: A Case Study on the Translation of ‘Unequal Treaties’” investigates China’s unequal treaties with Western powers signed during 1842-1911. The treaties impose a number of significantly one-sided demands, including territorial cessions, which have been subject to analysis by many historians over the years. Focusing on the translation of these treaties, drawing on critical discourse analysis and systemic functional linguistics as an analytical framework, the article explores lexico-grammatical and semantic properties of the texts and their ideological implications. The various Chinese translations of key terms such as “cede” and “in perpetuity” reveal the shifting power relations between China and Great Britain over this period, with many of the discrepancies between the source text and translations favouring the dominant power, Great Britain, in many cases. Guo argues that the diachronic critical analysis of the translation can reveal the evolution of relationships and power dynamics between China and Western powers, which can in turn feed into the evaluation of significant events in the history of China.

Saihong Li, Qi Li and William Hope’s paper on “Translating (and Rewriting) Jane Austen’s Food Across Time and Space” analyses the translation and perception of Jane Austen’s depictions of food in Chinese contexts from 1935 onwards using a corpus of multiple translations of Austen’s novels. Their analysis not only exposes the important role of food in Austen’s novels, but also reveals the shifting strategies adopted by translators to forge a connection between Chinese readers and Austen’s food culture and society. While losses are revealed, the corpus reveals intertextual threads linking the various translators’ approaches to certain terminology and, as the authors dub it, a ‘hereditary’ influence on successive translations of Austen’s work. By exploring a range of translations across time, this methodological approach offers interesting insights into the ways in which the temporal and cultural distances are bridged between Austen’s Britain and contemporary China.

Finally, John Qiong Wang and Kun Liang’s article, entitled “De/reterritorialising the Historical Context of Translated Non-fiction: A Somatic Approach to the Study of the Chinese Mainland and Taiwan versions of *River Town*”, analyses the mainland Chinese and Taiwanese translations of Peter Hessler’s autobiographic book *River Town*, in which Hessler paints a realist picture of the small city Fuling in late 1990s. Because the mainland Chinese translator, Li Xueshun, is a resident of Fuling and a teacher at the college where the American writer set the book, the article engages with the somatic involvement of the translator and the co-construction of the narrative by the source author and translators. Contrasting the two translations, the authors reveal that the inconsistencies and inaccuracies in the Taiwanese translation are largely due to the lack of transnarrative voice and somatic perspective. The translation by Li Xueshun is argued to offer a more fluent and focalisation of the narrative, inevitably aided by the translator’s local knowledge. The article demonstrates how the somatic experience of translators can have an influence on decision-making during the translation process and, moreover, matters of accuracy and faithfulness to extra-textual realia.