
Classical Chinese Literature in Translation: Texts, Paratexts and Contexts

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Translation Studies (TS) are all about texts, but then no study in translation is purely about texts. Paradoxical? The answer to this question depends largely on the definition of the term *text*¹, which has grown more and more sophisticated in recent decades, with the introduction of a somewhat bewildering array of derivative terms all sharing the same root -text: *co-text*, *context*, *intertext*, *extratext*, *paratext*, to name but a few. TS are all about texts, as there are always texts involved across the spectrum of translation activities, the most essential ones being the source text and the target text. Nowadays, as a disciplinary convention, even when a theatrical performance or a movie is the subject of examination, they are still referred to as a text: a multimodal text. Taxonomy is a fundamental step for any scientific research. When the reference of the term text has become so all-embracing, confusion arises at times about its explaining power, as it is open to interpretations. Categorization of texts would naturally be needed under

¹ Note by Moss Roberts: *Texere* is Latin for weaving and the concrete image underlying the word text. Text is thus related to weave (textile) —a mosaic of words, and equivalent to composition. Pulling many threads together to form a whole or tying a written work to external factors. Calling a written work a text means looking at how it is (was) put together rather than how it is publicly received as a finished project. Lay as opposed to academic readers never call a book a text, because they take it as a whole completed product rather than the sum of the parts and its historical background or author's biography.

such circumstance. For instance, the distinction between texts and paratexts has proven instrumental in generating fruitful research in TS in the last decade or so. Indeed, such paratextual exploration of translations is continuing to expand and prosper.

Context, which has never really been absent from TS, is now featuring more prominently and explicitly in translation research. Any text is born into a context, of which it is a part, and which in turn, part of it (Kristeva, 1980). No text grows out of a vacuum (Lefevere, 1992), and no translated text is examined without taking its context into consideration. As a multifaceted concept, context has been used as an umbrella term to include the social, cultural, historical, political, agential, and personal environment. Some of these aspects have been commonly acknowledged and discussed in TS, such as the social and cultural backgrounds (e.g. translation of religious texts like the Bible and Buddhist sutras into different socio-cultural backgrounds) and the historical conditions (e.g. translation activities during the May 4th Movement of 1919 and the “Cultural Revolution”). In recent years, the agential and personal have started to be perceived by researchers as part of the context for translation activities (Qi, 2016). Within this framework, probing into the interaction between the network of agents such as the translator, publisher, and readers would help contextualize the translation strategies employed in a given target text. Similarly, scrutiny of the translators’ capitals and *habitus* would shed light on the unique features of his/her translation.

This collection of articles, contributed by scholars from China, Australia, Japan, the U.K., and the U.S., approaches the phenomenon of “Translation of Classical Chinese Literature” from the intersection of texts, paratexts, and contexts. The translation of Chinese literary classics has always been a focal point in the area of TS among Chinese translation researchers. In China, hundreds of scholars and PhD students are conducting research in this area. A simple search by using the keyword *dianji fanyi* 典籍翻译 (translation of classics) on CNKI, a Chinese academic journals database, returns over 1,000 journal articles, with close to 200 being published since the beginning of 2019. Analysis of the year-by-year data in the publication of journal articles reveals that as an area of academic research, translation of Chinese classics really emerged in the 2000s and burgeoned in the 2010s. A mirroring trend can also be found in the publication of English articles in international journals. In terms of collection of essays, there have been regular conference proceedings and graduate textbooks published in Chinese. However, book-length publications in English are still few and far between.

One into Many, as edited by Leo Tak-hung Chan, investigates the translation and dissemination of classical Chinese literature. The book was published by Rodopi in America in 2003, and remained a key text in this field. Another volume entitled *Literary Migrations: Traditional Chinese Fiction in Asia* focuses on the dissemination of Chinese novels from the 17th to the 20th Centuries in other Asian countries. It was edited by French Sinologist Claudine Salmon and published in both Chinese and English by International Culture Publishing Corporation in China in the 1980s. Due in part to the scarcity of references available in English in this field of research, *Literary Migrations: Traditional Chinese Fiction in Asia*, which has long been out of print, was reprinted by ISEAS Publishing in Singapore in 2013. This demonstrated, to a certain extent, the potential of publication in this area and the necessity of dedicated volumes in English language. The current issue of *Translation Horizons* represents an effort to showcase the width and profundity of research that scholars are conducting in the field and to promote exchanges between researchers across the world.

This collection covers a range of literary genres. Texts discussed include fictional works *Sanguo yanyi* 三国演义, *Xiyou ji* 西游记, *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅, *Liaozhai zhi yi* 聊斋志异, and *Huajian ji* 花笺记;

the dramatic text *Xixiang ji* 西厢记; the historian record *Shiji* 史记; and a collection of erotic texts from Imperial China. Structure-wise, this special issue has been distinctly divided into two parts. The first part consists of eight research articles, and the second part, which comprises four essays, endeavors to provide a unique paratextual insight into the black-box of the translators' translation enterprise.

Ann-Marie Hsiung's article compares three English translations of *Xixiang ji*, both textually and paratextually. The three target texts (TTs) selected for comparison are representative of different translation orientations and strategies, which are consistent with the capitals and *habitus* of their respective translators as well as with their intended uses. Hsiung identifies the disparity in intention between the three texts through scrutiny of the paratextual elements of the translations. She also makes insightful comments on the various ways the TTs are presented to their readers and how scholarly endorsements have helped shape the reception of the translations. With the support of textual comparisons, Hsiung concludes that the scholarly translation by Stephen West and Wilt Idema, poetical features of Xu Yuanchong's version, and the theatrical function of the rendition by Grant Shen were not only reflective of their translatorial dispositions, but they also somewhat influenced, if not determined, the translators' selection of the versions of the source text (ST) in the first instance.

Yuan Tao and Chonglong Gu make a comparative study of "the three most influential" English abridgments of *Xiyou ji*. On the basis of paratextual analysis and narrative theory, they probe into the diachronic reframing of the Chinese classic, particularly how they (re)position the genre in the TT. The text was presented as a Christian type of mission to heaven by Timothy Richard (1913), and as "a folk tale compounded with religious, historical and sarcastic elements" by Arthur Waley in his 1942 translation *Monkey*. Athony Yu's retranslated *Xiyou ji* in four volumes was completed in the 1980s. More than two decades later, Yu edited his complete translation and produced an abridgment entitled *The Monkey and the Monk*, focusing on the theme of karma and redemption. By examining the three versions which were devised in the early-mid-end of the 20th century, Tao and Gu astutely argue that altogether, the translations "help construct the book's narrative accrual in the West".

Wayne Wen-chun Liang's contribution presents a case study of the English translations of *Liaozhai zhi yi* by Herbert Giles (1880/2010) and by John Minford (2006). In *Liaozhai zhi yi*, Pu Songling used allegories to reflect the "everyday life of ordinary people" and to convey his sympathies. The female supernatural beings, as a constant subject in *Liaozhai zhi yi*, were often depicted by Pu Songling as "beautiful, kind, obedient, loyal, and passive". Liang contends that these characteristics are reflective of the "values and images of traditional Chinese women from the Confucian perspective". In his article, Liang approaches the transposition of the female images by translators from an imagology perspective. While existent studies within the framework of imagology attach more importance to "issues such as localities, nationalities, and ethnicities", Liang's research differs from them by situating the examination of how the images of Chinese women were transformed in the hands of the two translators within the socio-cultural contexts of the target culture, focusing on the impact of the translators' social trajectory on their reconstruction of the Chinese female images.

In the article by Wenqing Peng, three partial (re)translations of *Sanguo yanyi* are presented and discussed both textually and paratextually, with paratexts featuring more prominently. After introducing the three versions by Z. Q. Parker (1925), Yang Xianyi & Gladys Yang (1962a, 1962b), and Cheung Yik-man (1972), respectively, Peng makes selective textual comparisons between the versions to ascertain their similarities and differences, and reaches a preliminary conclusion about the genealogical relations between the last two translations. To support this argument, she proceeds to analyze the various types of paratextual

evidence, such as the translatorial preface, allographic preface, and annotations. Based on Venuti's critical interpretation of retranslation as value-creation, Peng evaluated Cheung's contribution of value to the dissemination and reception of *Sanguo yanyi*. The author reiterated that paratexts could shed light on the dynamic relations between different agents of a translation, but they may also be unreliable and thus deliberately misleading.

English translations of *Liaozhai zhi yi* are approached from the perspective of domestication by Yu-kit Cheung, who selected a primary paratextual element of any text, i.e. the title. Cheung provides a comprehensive overview of the translational history of *Liaozhai zhi yi* in English, and delves into the historical texts to contextualize his interpretation of the title in the Chinese source text and English translations. Based on his observation, the title across all English translations demonstrates a clear tendency of domestication. Cheung argues that such domestication is intended to establish sufficient connection between the text and its readers, as the title is the first point of contact between them. The domestication displayed in the title, however, does not necessarily mean that the whole target text adopts a domesticating approach. In Cheung's opinion, the domestication of the title, which is achieved by means of normalization, is determined by the status of Chinese literature in the literary polysystem of the target culture.

P. P. Thoms's English translation of *Huajian ji* is the focus of Wang Yanhua's article on ethics of representation in translation, which was proposed by Andrew Chesterman in 2001. Wang discusses Thoms's translation through a perceived degree of otherness in the Chinese source text, i.e. when there is zero otherness, partial otherness, or total otherness in comparison with the target culture. Textual and paratextual examples are employed in the analysis to support the author's reflection upon Thoms's ethics of representation. Wang argues that Thoms's representation ethics was influenced or shaped by multiple factors, the most significant of which are the bilingual format of the target text and the paratextual regime of the translation. The fact that the source and target texts concur in the English translation greatly constrained the translator's creativity, suggesting that fidelity to the source text is paramount. Such intended fidelity saw Thoms make recourse to paratextual elements such as copious annotation to complement textual representation of the Chinese work.

Lintao Qi's article proposes to summarize some translational challenges particular to classical Chinese texts, which are remote to contemporary translators not only in terms of time and space but also in aspects such as obsolete orthographical features and archaic cultural references. Qi points out that translation between alphabetical English and the ideographic Chinese is more than interlingual. It can also be considered as a borderline example of intersemiotic translation. Furthermore, as punctuation marks are typically missing from classical texts in China, translators would need to have their STs punctuated before attempting any translation. The process of punctuating is indeed another layer of translational action, where different translators may come up with radically different interpretations. Drawing on *Jin Ping Mei* for textual examples, Qi makes a comparative study of two complete English translations by Clement Egerton and by David Roy, with topics covered in the analysis including translation of personal names and allusions.

The second part of this issue features contributions by scholar translators, including William H. Nienhauser, Moss Roberts, Mark Stevenson, and Tomoyuki Tanaka. Nienhauser is a professor of classical Chinese literature at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He specializes in early traditional Chinese fiction, history, and poetry; and he is in the process of retranslating *Shiji*. Envisaged as a project of several years, the translation of *Shiji* spans over three decades. In his contribution *Into the River of History*, Nienhauser recounts with detail and humor how he started learning Chinese, his interaction with other

scholars of Chinese literature, how the translation project of *Shiji* germinated in the 1980s, his team translation strategies and unique procedures adopted, and his *Shiji* workshops in many parts of the world among others. For anyone interested in Neinhauser's English translation of *Shiji*, this article will be a must-read paratext to deepen their understanding of the target text, enrich their reading experience, and potentially open new avenues of research.

Mark Stevenson is an anthropologist, and his cultural-historical research is text-based and concerned largely with gender, sexuality, and social space in late-imperial China. Stevenson co-compiled and translated the sourcebook *Homoeroticism in Imperial China: A Sourcebook* in 2013, which was collected by close to 1,000 libraries around the world, as a quick search on WorldCat would suggest. The book brings together over sixty pre-modern Chinese primary sources on same-sex desire in English translation. Working together with his co-translator and aiming at addressing misconceptions about Chinese homoerotic materials in previous translations, Stevenson decided to translate all the content selected from histories, poetry, drama, fiction, and miscellanies by themselves, which is in itself innovative among sourcebooks in this area of research. Innumerable challenges are inevitable when it comes to any translation project concerning written texts produced across two and a half millennia. In his contribution, Stevenson shares the lessons they learnt from this creative translating enterprise, with elucidation of their translation approaches supported with insightful textual examples.

Jin Ping Mei has been translated and adapted into Japanese multiple times since the Edo Period (1603-1867). None of the existent translations, however, is really complete. The sexual descriptions, for example, are always bowdlerized due in large part to censorship, a similar case with many other cultures as well. Inspired by David Tod Roy, who has produced a scholarly complete English translation of *Jin Ping Mei*, Tomoyuki Tanaka is now working on his Japanese retranslation of *Jin Ping Mei*, accompanied by numerous footnotes based on sound research. Tanaka published the first out of three envisaged volumes of his translation in 2018, and is currently working on the second volume which is due to be released in 2021. Tanaka's contribution to this issue is built upon his key speech at a dedicated conference organized by *Translation Horizons* in Beijing in October 2019. In the article, Roy's influence on Tanaka's translation philosophy and approach can be clearly traced, not only in the way the source text is interpreted, but also in terms of the employment of paratexts to complement and enrich the translated text.

Moss Roberts is a professor of East Asian studies at New York University. On his long list of publications on Asian language and culture, there is the widely acclaimed English translation *Three Kingdoms*. At present, Roberts is working on the (re)translation of *Lunyu*. In his article "The Language of Values in the Ming Novel *Three Kingdoms*", Roberts (2007) gives an in-depth analysis of the key concepts of traditional Chinese values such as *yi*, *zhong*, *xiao*, and *ti*. These concepts are central to any sound appreciation of *Three Kingdoms*, but adequate interpretation of them can only be achieved when they are situated in the context of representative texts of Chinese civilization over the last few millennia. Roberts traces these terms back to *Liji*, *Shiji*, Confucius's *Analects*, and *Mencius*, among others. It is on this basis that Roberts provides a critical recount of the relevant storyline in *Sanguo yanyi*. This article will serve as an important paratext to Roberts's translation of Chinese literary works, including but not limited to *Three Kingdoms* and *The Analects*.

With its inclusion of textual and paratextual materials, this collection of essays is of potential interest to not only scholars in the areas of Chinese Studies, Translation Studies, Literary Studies, and Intercultural Communications, but it may also appeal to communities outside the academia who simply enjoy reading about literature.

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