

# Book Review:

## Three Anthologies on Traditional Chinese Translation Discourses, With a Focus on 中国传统译论史料汇编(1-6) [Compiled Historical Readings on Chinese Translation Ideas(1-6)]

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中国传统译论史料汇编(1-6) [*Compiled Historical Readings on Chinese Translation Ideas*] (Six Volumes)  
Zhu Zhiyu, Zhang Xu, Huang Libo  
© 2020 The Commercial Press  
4105 pp.  
\$70.99  
ISBN 978-7-100-17734-4

China boasts a long history of translation and a fine tradition of discourses on the art or business of translating. The earliest discussions on Buddhist sutra translation are scattered in the Buddhist-related literature, ranging from the collected Buddhist sutra proper to the lives of Buddhist monks, the Buddhist abstracts, indexes, bibliographies and histories as well as the Buddhist section in the official history of China's feudal dynasties. Later discourses are found in a wider variety of sources as they are based on translation of more extensive fields of knowledge of Western learning. A comprehensive collection of these sporadic and isolated historical materials is of vital importance to translation studies as it provides empirical facts not only for the writing of a general Chinese translation history but also for case studies in translation criticism and translation theory. More importantly, it embodies the editors' perception of translation in the specific context of the dynamically changing relationship between Chinese and Euro-American translation studies.

*Collection of Translation Theories* [翻译论集] (shortened as the Collection below), edited by Luo Xinzhang [罗新璋] and published in 1984, is the first general source book of traditional Chinese translation theories. It was prepared to re-establish an independent system of Chinese translation knowledge in response to the introduction of Euro-American translation theories in the early 1980s. The book brings together over 180 passages on translation from an amazing array of perspectives covering a time frame of over 1700 years. The included excerpts are entitled as in their original texts and arranged chronologically into five periods, starting with the Buddhist sutra translation project in the 3rd century up to the renewed translation enterprise since China opened its door to the outside world in the early 1980s. It includes only 28 items on the ancient and pre-Modern times and an

DOI: 10.4018/IJTIAL.20210701.oa4

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overwhelming portion of more recent discussions since the late Qing Dynasty. Besides, it contains important research articles on the collected passages. To make up for the possible omission in the entry inclusion, a more complete bibliography of more than five hundred treatises on translation is appended as back matter. In the preface to the Collection, Luo Xinzhang drew upon traditional literary theory and aesthetics, summarizing the traditional Chinese translation theories into the evolution of translation criteria, i.e., “案本 [follow the source]–求信 [seek faithfulness]–神似 [spiritual likeness]–化境 [reincarnation]” (p. 19). This view reflects the notion prevailing in early 1980s that translation is primarily a matter of language transfer, influenced in part by the linguistic translation theories of Nida and New Mark, which were among the first introduced into China. As the first comprehensive historical reader on traditional Chinese translation theories, this book is generally acclaimed as a milestone in China’s translation history studies and becomes the most quoted source book ever since its publication.

As a matter of fact, the Collection edited by Luo is an important source book for the making of the first English anthology of Chinese translation thoughts, *An Anthology of Chinese Discourse on Translation, Volume 1, From Earliest Times to the Buddhist Project* (shortened as Volume 1), which was edited by Martha Cheung of Hong Kong Baptist University and published in 2006. This volume was prepared when Chinese translation studies was finding its feet in world translation knowledge system and the Western translation studies was seeking dialogue with non-European translation thinking with the rise of cultural approach to translation studies. Compared to the Collection by Luo, Volume 1 presents China’s translation scholarship as rooted in its social-cultural framework rather than an isolated academic history of translation per se. As Cheung observed in her introduction, this anthology is intended to highlight translation as “a form of cultural representation, and not merely as a process of interlingual communication” (Cheung, 2006, p. 2). For this purpose, Volume 1 brings together 82 traditional Chinese translation discourses, both direct and indirect, from the Spring and Autumn Period to the 13th century. The entire Part One is devoted to indirect discourses, which consists of 25 philosophical, aesthetic and literary passages, to testify the cultural depth of the Chinese translation tradition. Some of them are written by renowned scholars such as Confucius and Laozi, but a fair number of them by less known scholars like Dai Sheng (戴胜 74–49 BCE) or Fu Sheng (伏生 268–178 BCE). Even the 57 direct translation discourses on “the Buddhist project” in Part Two contain outward-looking texts that focus on the relationship between translation and external factors (e.g., the relationship between translation and source/target culture). (Cheung, 2006, Introduction: 15) Each entry has a headnote to introduce its author, followed by English translation of the excerpt and then a commentary in light of current translation scholarship, both well referenced with footnotes and cross-references. This well integrated editorial format provides a contextual description necessary to bring out the cultural backdrop for the Chinese translation tradition from contemporary perspective. Volume 2 of the same project, published in 2017, contains 28 Chinese translation discourses from the late 12th to 1800, largely in accordance with the editorial format as devised by Cheung. As John Minford claimed, this book (Volume 1) is one of those rare instances where, “through the prism of that process of reading and understanding which is translation, old texts and sayings, indeed whole sections of the cultural landscape, are seen in a new light” (2010: 333). The seminal two-volume anthology offers the international audience the first reliable and intelligent access to a wealth of the valuable primary materials on the art of translation from Pre-modern China. It is a welcome supplement to “the modern focus” in Luo’s Collection.

Over the past decade, China’s translation studies has been committed to serving China’s social and cultural agenda from international perspective after it has incorporated the merits of its own tradition and of Euro-American translation scholarship. The deepening of translation research need continued supply of intellectual resources from a more panoramic and concentrated database. Compiled Historical Readings on Chinese Translation Ideas(1-6) [中国传统译论史料汇编](1-6) (shortened as the Readings below), jointly edited by Zhu Zhiyu [朱志瑜], Zhang Xu [张旭] and Huang Libo [黄立波], is the third and largest collection of traditional translation theories available to date. Most of the included passages are based on primary literature, and a considerable number of them have been brought to light for the

first time. The six-volume, 20-year-long project is another important achievement in the accumulation of research materials for Chinese translation studies.

First, the historical materials included are more wide-ranging than ever in the scope of coverage. The introduction defines the principle of entry selection loosely as “related to translation theories and translation methods” (Zhu Zhiyu et al., 2020, p. 28). This principle results in an amazing panoply of thinking about translation of five major categories: general essay, translators’ preface or postscript, translation review, themed discussion, and cultural history of translation, which are further divided into 16 sub-categories. Of the five major categories, “the themed discussion” encompasses such topics as terminology translation, translation methods, translation principles/standards, literary translation, poetry translation, drama translation, religious translation, Europeanization of Chinese language, retranslation/translation/adaptation, etc. The “cultural history of translation” covers translation policy, choice of source text, translation history and translation figures. The Readings strive to be a factual chronicle of translation thoughts in history and all these categories are arranged chronologically, without any commentary or annotation.

Second, the Readings is an unprecedented collection of nearly 900 translation treatises from the end of the Eastern Han Dynasty to the 1950s. By way of example, 24 items of Buddhist sutra translation in Luo’s Collection grow to 89 in the Readings. Particularly notable is the growth of entries from 1920s to 1930s, the climax of the spreading of western learning in China when relatively concentrated discussions about translation were scattered widely on an increasing number of new publications. Dozens of translation treatises in the 1920s (including research papers thereof) in Luo’s Collection increase to 210, collected separately into volume 2 dated from 1920 to 1923 and volume 3 dated from 1924 to 1929. Lu Xun [鲁迅] tops the list of the most productive authors, with 32 of his remarks included. He is followed by Lin Shu (林纾, 22 entries), Zhou Zuoren (周作人, 21 entries) and Zheng Zhenduo [郑振铎] 19 entries]. While Luo collects only two essays written by Zheng Zhenduo [郑振铎]—“What are the Methods of translating literature?” [译文学书的方法如何?] and Mr. Lin Qinnan [林琴南先生]—, the Readings includes as many as 19 of Zheng’s passages, some of them published under his pseudonym “Xidi” [西谛]. Most of the included materials are excavated for the first time and cited from their very original documents like “Current Affairs” [时事新报], “Fiction Monthly” [小说月报], etc. It can be seen that Zhu and his co-editors indeed have brought a great deal of industry to this project.

Of course, for an anthology of this magnitude, the value of the new inclusions becomes the focal point. The 52 new items of Buddhist sutra translation, for example, are mostly the prefaces and prescripts that describe the circumstances leading to the translation work, words of acknowledgment and remarks on the quality of the translation. A Preface to Apitan [阿毗昙序] written by 4th century monk translator Dao An contains a brief note: “Fonian transmitted it orally, Huili and Sengmao wrote it down and He summarized its purport” [“佛念译传, 慧力、僧茂笔受, 和理其指归”] (Zhu Zhiyu et al., 2020, p. 9). This new entry provides more empirical evidence on the forms of collaboration between individual monk translators at the early stage of Buddhist sutra translation. It points to the fact that translation was jointly undertaken; that the translation process consists of three clear-cut stages of oral translation, transcription, and overall polish; and that the Buddhist sutra translation was initiated by the monk translators themselves.

Finally, the Introduction presents a clearer picture of the general development of traditional Chinese translation thought and outlines the main features thereof, based on the extensive materials. It outlines the ways in which traditional Chinese translation theory originated, makes bibliometrical analysis of thematically assorted translation literature and reviews the development and the compilation of translation literature. The editors argue that the group perception of translation in different periods constitutes the translation norms of each era, and that the historical materials included in the Readings provide a reliable extra-textual database for reconstructing the translation norms in different historical era. It also contends that the themes of translation theory interact with social development.

All in all, the three large-scale collection of traditional Chinese translation theories collect an exciting diversity of views, reflections and theoretical thinking to meet the needs of data development of translation in different periods. Among them, the sources collected by Zhu Zhiyu in this book represent an invaluable archive for the study of a particularly interesting case of translation for more systematic and specialized study of the history of Chinese translation.

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