

CULTURE CONTACTS AND THE MAKING OF CULTURES

Papers in Homage to
Itamar Even-Zohar



Edited by

Rakefet Sela-Sheffy and Gideon Toury

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRANSLATION STUDIES INTO A DISCIPLINE IN CHINA

Chang Nam Fung

It is the purpose of this paper to give an account of the development of translation studies into a separate academic discipline in China as a result of transfer, that is, “the process whereby imported goods are integrated into a home repertoire, and the consequences generated by this integration” (Even-Zohar 1997a: 358-359), of Western translation theories in spite of active resistance. Before we proceed, however, it is necessary to trace the development of translation studies into a discipline in the West, so that comparison can be made in later sections.

1. The Development of Translation Studies in the West

According to the accounts of James S. Holmes, in his part of the world, for centuries there was only “incidental and desultory attention” to the subject “from a scattering of authors, philologists, and literary scholars, plus here and there a theologian or an idiosyncratic linguist” (Holmes 1988: 67); “they all too often erred in mistaking their personal, national, or period norms for general translation laws. And they all too frequently substituted impressionism for methodology” (Holmes 1988: 99-100).

After the Second World War, the subject of translation enjoyed a marked and constant increase in interest, mainly on the part of linguists, Holmes (1988: 67-68, 100) conceded, but he was unimpressed by their work:

They have, by and large, moved down a different road, one that has turned out to be a dead end. Accepting the basic self-imposed restrictions of structural and/or transformational linguistics, they have labeled “equivalent” target-language glosses for source-language words, groups of words, and/or (at best) sentences considered out of context. (Holmes 1988: 100)

Echoing Holmes, Theo Hermans dismissed the traditional approach for being “unsystematic, essayistic and practice-oriented” and the linguistic approach for “treat[ing] translation merely in terms of differences between language systems” (Hermans 1999: 21).

Explaining the emergence of translation studies as a discipline, Holmes observes that when researchers from an adjacent area bring with them the paradigms and models that have proved fruitful in their own field to bear on a new problem that has just come into view in the world of learning, they will legitimately annex the problem as a branch of their discipline “if the problem proves amenable to explication, analysis, explication, and at least partial solution within the bounds of one of their paradigms or models”; however, the linguistic approach to the study of translation has failed to “produce sufficient results” (Holmes 1988: 67). This is because, from the point of view of Holmes and others, treating translation as purely or primarily a matter of linguistic operation is a perspective too narrow for “the complex of problems clustered round the phenomenon” (Holmes 1988: 67), and because the linguistic paradigms have provided no theoretical tools for the description of translational norms without value judgements (Toury 2000: 279). As a result, another type of situation happened: as tension grew between researchers who were trying to use established methods to investigate the perceived new problem and those who felt a need for “new methods”, the second type of researchers gradually established “new channels of communication” and developed “a new disciplinary utopia, that is, a new sense of a shared interest in a common set of problems, approaches, and objectives” (Holmes 1988: 67).

This new discipline was given a name and a structure by Holmes in his seminal paper “The Name and Nature of Translation Studies” (Holmes 1988: 67-80). Perhaps more importantly, it was equipped with a tool for real research—in contrast to criticism—in the form of polysystem theory, which has provided the theoretical foundation for Gideon Toury’s Descriptive Translation Studies, and has inspired a number of other scholars such as André Lefèvere, Theo Hermans, Susan Bassnett and José Lambert. Together they formed a group later to be known as the “Manipulation School” or “Translation Studies School”, whose members share some of the basic tenets of the theory, such as systems thinking and descriptivism, although they are not all polysystemists.

Looking back at the development of translation studies from today’s vantage point, we may perhaps make a fairer assessment of the pioneering role played by the linguistic approach. Although Eugene A. Nida uses “equivalence” as a key word in his practice-oriented *Toward*

a Science of Translating (1964), he is concerned with the functioning of the text in culture, not just with “glosses” of words or sentences. J. C. Catford’s *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* (1965) is focused on language differences, but it gives a systematic, descriptive analysis of what may happen linguistically in translation. Both works have substituted methodology for impressionism, representing a step forward in scholarship if compared to the traditional approach. It is not surprising that their approach “appealed” to Toury, showing to him that “translation really is a subject in its own right” (Toury 2000: 278-279). Indeed, one may even wonder whether translation studies would have developed to the present state without this linguistic phase.

Nevertheless, it is no coincidence that the linguistic turn of the 1960s, in spite of all its achievements, has not led to the growth of translation studies into a separate academic discipline.

Traditionally, translation has been looked down upon as a secondary and second-rate activity, and “the social sciences tend to select their objects of study on the basis of cultural prestige, rather than intrinsic interest” (Delabastita 1990: 97). Meanwhile, in the humanities application-oriented research has all along been regarded as less academic than pure research. The study of translation used therefore to be at a double disadvantage in academia. Although the linguistic approach raised the level of sophistication of the study of translation, what it did had led to little change to the double disadvantage of the field as the primacy of the original was upheld and application was still the main concern. The subject still occupied a peripheral position, though slightly improved. Instead of upgrading it to the status of a discipline, the use of linguistic paradigms and models in the investigation of translation represents an attempt to annex this adjacent field. For some linguists such an attempt may not have been intentional, but some others have claimed the subject as a branch of (applied, or contrastive) linguistics.

The credit for establishing the discipline goes first to Holmes’s paper and Even-Zohar’s polysystem theory. The name “translation studies” has enabled the field to gain an identity in distinction with comparative literature and linguistics (cf. Ulrych & Bosinelli 1999: 225), and to acquire a disciplinary status as no existing names could have done, such as the homely and vague term “translation”, or Eugene A. Nida’s

“science of translating”, or Peter Newmark’s “translation theory”. It is no exaggeration to say that Holmes’s paper “constitutes Translation Studies’ declaration of independence” (Hermans 1999: 30). Furthermore, the structure of the discipline that Holmes suggests, comprising as its main body a “pure” branch subdivided into the “theoretical” and the “descriptive” branches, has won for it academic respectability.

The contribution of polysystem theory is three-fold. First, as a theory for description it has given substance to Holmes’s Pure Translation Studies. While the traditional type of translation criticism and, to a lesser extent, the linguistic approach had exhausted their potential and lost their appeal where research was concerned, polysystem theory showed its vitality by widening the field: it is not only that what had previously been excluded as objects of study, such as the so-called quasi-translation, pseudo-translation or even non-translation, were now included, but also that, instead of focusing on the texts alone, the researcher was now encouraged to step back and take a panoramic view of the cultures in which translation takes place. Thanks to polysystem theory, “all kinds of questions could now be asked that had previously not seemed to be of significance” (Bassnett 1993: 142). It “dominated thinking” in the 1980s (Bassnett 1998a: 128), and led to a dramatic change in direction and a boom in research activities, as Hermans observes:

It offered a comprehensive and ambitious framework, something researchers could turn to when looking for explanations and contexts of actual behaviour. A significant amount of empirical and historical work on translation, and especially on literary translation, is directly or indirectly indebted to polysystem theory. (Hermans 1999: 102)

Polysystem theory has thus led the discipline away from the application orientation and paved the way to the cultural turn.

Secondly, its target-oriented approach has mounted “an offensive against the dominance of the original and the consequent relegation of translation to a position of subservience” (Bassnett 1993: 141), and case studies conducted in its framework have proved the vital role of translations in the shaping of cultures, thus “bringing translations in from the margins where they could be properly considered alongside all other texts within a literary system” (Bassnett 1998b: 108).

Thirdly, contrary to the elitism of traditional literary studies in “confin[ing] itself to the so-called ‘masterpieces’”, it rejects “value judgements as criteria for an *a priori* selection of the objects of study” (Even-Zohar 1990: 13), and gives equal treatments to central and peripheral systems. This is in effect an ideological stance that elevates directly the cultural status of translation and, indirectly, the academic status of translation studies as well.

On the whole, the work of Holmes and Even-Zohar has brought about a revolution. All the key terms, such as translation, translation theory, translation research and translation studies, have been radically redefined.

2. Traditional Chinese Discourse on Translation

The development of translation studies in China has taken a similar but more tortuous path.

Being an old and established one, Chinese culture used to be independent and self-sufficient most of the time, developing within its own sphere. It was a central polysystem in the macro-polysystem of the region, interfering rather than interfered with, and seldom felt much need for foreign repertoires. Consequently, there was little translation activity except occasional interpreting in dealings with neighbouring nations and tribes, translation of Buddhist scriptures and, around the sixteenth century, translation of science works initiated by Christian missionaries. It is only natural that under such circumstances scholarly attention to translation problems was at least as “incidental and desultory” as that in the West, if not more so.

It is towards the end of the nineteenth century, when China was repeatedly defeated and invaded by various powers that Chinese culture started a centrifugal movement in the polysystem of the world, with which it had been forced to come into contact. As a strong sense of what Even-Zohar calls “weakness” – I prefer to call it “self-insufficiency” – arose in the nation as a whole, the old central political and ideological systems collapsed, and foreign repertoires were acquired and transferred by sending students abroad, by translating texts in the domains of natural and social sciences, theology, philosophy and literature, and by importing material, in order to reshape nearly every aspect of the culture.

It is in this period that translation became a central system for the first time, and that what is sometimes regarded as the first Chinese translation theory was born, in the form of “*xin, da and ya*” (faithfulness, comprehensibility and elegance), put forward as “the three difficulties in translation” by Yan Fu (1901/1933), the pioneering translator of Western works on social sciences. The theory was soon revered as the only guide for translators and the only yardstick for translation critics (see Luo 1984: 593). Decades passed before it was seriously challenged by some (such as Zhu 1944/1984: 448-449, Zhao 1967/1984: 726). Later, there were attempts to reinterpret or modify it (such as Liu Zhongde 1994: 9; also see Chen 1992: 411-418). But, according to Luo Xinzhang (1984: 595-596), the three criteria have not been successfully refuted, and none of those who have probed into the question of translation criteria, Yan’s exponents and critics alike, have ever gone beyond their shadow.

Yan’s theory has dominated Chinese discourse on translation until the 1980s. It was innovative in terms of the level of theorization when it appeared, but has hampered the development of translation theory for a century (Chu 2000: 12-13) – in recent years there are still attempts to uphold it as the “gold standard” in order to keep out foreign theories (Liu Airong 2001; also see Zhang Jinghao 2006: 59-60). This is a case in which an innovative, primary model, after its perpetuation, has become a secondary one, effecting a new kind of conservatism (see Even-Zohar 1990: 21). Tan Zaixi (2000: 17) attributes this perpetuation to the tendency to hold the ancients and authorities in high esteem that exists in the Chinese tradition of scholarship.

However, the influence of Yan’s theory on translation practice might have been over-estimated. His three criteria, especially “elegance”, were proposed to justify his extremely target-oriented strategies, which were the norm in a time when the Chinese linguistic-literary polysystem was still stable. Two decades later, as the total culture was in a crisis, source-oriented strategies gradually prevailed, especially in left-wing literary circles. Lu Xun, the leading revolutionary writer cum translator of the time, advocated “faithfulness rather than smoothness” in translation as a means to import not only new ideas but also new ways of expression in order to cure the “impreciseness” of the Chinese language (Lu 1931/1984: 275-276). What with his literary and

political status and the support of Mao Zedong (see Chen 1992: 383), Lu's discourse on translation has been canonized and has continued to influence translators for over half a century, while the systemic position of translation has become less central (Chang 2005: 61, 70-71). This phenomenon may be described as perpetuation of a norm crystallized in an earlier phase.

Centred on the "literal versus free" controversy, Chinese discourse on translation until the 1980s has also been "unsystematic, essayistic and practice-oriented". What makes it somewhat unique is its preoccupation with the search and establishment of a universal translation criterion. This is illustrated by Fan Shouyi who, after a survey of the various criteria proposed since Yan Fu, sums up the common concern of many translation theorists and practitioners in China: "we need one set of criteria as a common measure for translators to abide by. It could be Yan Fu's 'xin, da and ya' or any other set which is unanimously accepted" (Fan 1992: 155).

Moreover, Chinese writings on translation are mostly very short. For example, Yan Fu's theory, which Zhang Jinghao (2006: 59-60) claims to be no less profound than that of Alexander Tytler, is expounded in about 1000 characters, in contrast to Tytler's treatise *Essay on the Principle of Translation*, written a century earlier, which is around 50,000 words in length.

The study of translation in China used to be an amateurish activity, in the sense that there were very few (if any at all) full-time theorists or researchers. The subject, given its practice orientation and low level of theorization, stayed at the very periphery of the polysystem of scholarship. Yet it seemed to be content with the status quo: it remained in a state of self-sufficiency vis-à-vis foreign repertoires much longer than Chinese culture as a whole and some adjacent disciplines such as linguistics, as traditionalists maintained that Chinese translation theory "has its distinctive characteristics" and "constitutes a system of its own" (Luo 1984: 588).

3. Two Waves of Westernization

The first wave of westernization took place in the early 1980s. After the Cultural Revolution, there was a crisis or vacuum in Chinese culture as people were generally dissatisfied with established repertoires, while

the government started to implement the policy of “reform and opening to the outside world”. As Western repertoires were transferred on an extensive scale, translation participated in reshaping the culture. These cultural conditions kindled an interest not only in the study of translation but also in foreign models. A number of scholars in mainland China, mainly junior ones, began to introduce Western translation theories, mostly by linguists, such as Eugene A. Nida, J. C. Catford and Wolfram Wilss. These foreign repertoires, transferred via the periphery, produced a great impact on Chinese translation studies.

These theories functioned as primary models in China, but by the time of their transference their innovative role in the source systems had been taken over by other theories, such as Skopos theory, polysystem theory and other cultural theories of translation.

The primarization of models after crossing cultural borders is not rare (Even-Zohar 1990: 92). Given the state of translation studies in China at that time, either linguistic or cultural theories would in all likelihood have played a primary role if transferred. What determined the transference of the former was not just their accessibility, that is, “the possibility of getting hold of a source”, but ultimately their availability, that is, “the legitimacy of implementing what the state of accessibility can offer” (Even-Zohar 1990: 93).¹ The main concerns of most translation scholars in China were still practical matters such as translating, translation criticism and translator training, as the distinction between applied and pure research was not yet made. Attaching importance to reader response, Nida’s theory is more egalitarian than the Chinese socio-cultural norm of “loyalty” of the inferior to the superior, and therefore it served as a mild antidote to the predominant concept of primacy of the original, which was out-dated as the systemic position of translation was no longer as central as in Lu Xun’s time. Its effect is reflected by the fact that most criticisms directed against it are made on the ground that it pays too much attention to reader response at the expense of the author (such as Liu Ching-chih 1986, Liu Yingkai 1997). Besides, its principle of equivalent effect gave the hope of put-

¹ In Even-Zohar’s later writings (such as 1997b: 21) “(legitimately) usable” is used to refer to what he formerly meant by “available”, while “available” just means “accessible”.

ting an end to the age-old “literal versus free” controversy, and its methodology had the appeal of scientificity and academicity.

Nida’s theory, introduced separately but almost simultaneously through the work of two scholars (Jin & Nida 1984, Tan 1984), was an instant hit. It assumed a central position and remained there for over a decade. However, it has not brought about a revolution. Although it has taken the reader into consideration, it is still focused on the comparison of the source and the target text. It is politically safe as the external factors of translation, such as power and ideology, are left untouched. Similar to traditional discourse on translation, it is prescriptive, aiming at setting a criterion based on faithfulness. Its relation with Chinese discourse is one of competition and complicity. While taking over the central position from the latter, it has reinforced the practice-orientation of Chinese translation studies and the value system of Chinese culture.

The second wave of westernization was initiated by junior scholars in Hong Kong in the 1990s. Although translation programmes began to be offered at degree and sub-degree levels in Hong Kong in the 1970s and proliferated in the 1980s following the rapid expansion of the tertiary education sector, there was very little research in those days for three reasons: neither a doctoral degree nor research ability was essential for a position in all colleges and universities; academic status could be gained through translating, translation criticism, creative writing, and teaching; and research output in adjacent areas recognized as translation studies was not yet an established field. In the 1980s the most popular theories were those of Nida and Peter Newmark, especially after Hong Kong and mainland China began to have academic exchanges, in which Hong Kong had a “trade deficit” in translation discourse in the sense that works by mainland Chinese scholars were read and adopted as teaching material in Hong Kong much more than the other way round.

In the 1990s, as universities in Hong Kong entered the consolidation phase, research was given more importance, and a trend was started to require university teachers new and old to have a doctoral degree. Meanwhile, some scholars felt that prescriptive theories, both the philological and the linguistic type, had failed to “produce sufficient results”. Therefore, in their research papers and/or Ph.D. theses they

turned to descriptive models, such as polysystem theory, (Toury's) Descriptive Translation Studies and Hans J. Vermeer's Skopos theory, and later also to other culture theories, such as post-colonialism. In a few years most of the relatively active translation researchers in Hong Kong have taken the cultural turn. Or rather, it is the cultural theories that have enabled them to have new ideas and new findings, and consequently to be more productive.

These theories were introduced to mainland China mainly by Hong Kong scholars through journal papers, translations, conference presentations and guest lectures. It took a much longer time for them than linguistic theories of translation to be tolerated and accepted due to their incompatibility with the traditional value system and the underlying concept of translation of Chinese culture.

In the new millennium the importation of foreign theories has been taken over by scholars and publishers in mainland China. The *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (Baker 1998) is being translated into Chinese, and a large number of English books in translation studies have been made available in China in low-price editions.

On the whole, translation studies in China are now very much westernised, with cultural theories at the centre. In recent years, polysystem theory seemed to be particularly popular among Ph.D. candidates, which has led to a distinguished scholar wondering: "Nowadays every thesis in translation studies talks about 'polysystem theory'. Are there no other theories?" (See Lü 2006) According to Zhang Jinghao (2006: 59), among the articles published in 2005 in *Chinese Translators Journal*, the top journal in mainland China specialized in translation, 69.16% have recourse to foreign translation theories or translators. In this context "foreign" means the West, because translation theories have been imported from no other parts than Europe and North America.

4. The Effect of Westernization

The most significant effect of westernization is the establishment of translation studies as an independent discipline. As Western theories ushered in a boom time for the study of translation, new disciplinary utopias began to take shape in the 1980s, in Hong Kong and mainland China separately, and the two joined forces in the 1990s.

Translation studies have become an independent discipline in Hong Kong by all standards. Among the nine universities, there are at present two departments of translation, two research centres for translation, and a few chair professors of translation. Altogether they offer six B.A. and five M.A. programmes that have “translation” in the title, and many of them began to admit Ph.D. students in translation studies in the mid or late 1990s. Moreover, there are two academic journals that specialize in translation studies. Perhaps the most important indicator is that translation is listed as a discipline in the Research Assessment Exercise conducted by the University Grants Committee of Hong Kong (University Grants Committee of Hong Kong 2007).

This course of events has apparently been rather natural, given the great demand on translation programmes at all levels. However, if the large number of translation teachers who came from adjacent areas had not taken the “translational turn” but continued to do research in their original field, or if translation studies had remained practice-oriented, there would not have been Ph. D. programmes or much research output in the discipline, as was the case before the mid 1990s. Then it might well have been annexed by some other disciplines.

The situation in China has been more complicated. There were calls in 1987 for the establishment of translation studies (or translatology) as a discipline (see Mu 1995: 31-33), especially by Tan Zaixi, one of the importers of Nida’s theory (Tan 1987). The ways to achieve this goal were discussed, and what most people had in mind was an applied discipline based on some linguistic theories, such as Nida’s socio-semiotics (see Mu 1995: 33). Eight years later another call was made in a journal article (Chang 1995). Suggesting that the discipline should be founded on the descriptive branch according to Holmes’s conception of translation studies, it provoked a strong reaction from Lao Long (1996). These two articles “raised a storm” (Sun Huijun & Zhang Boran 2002: 4) in mainland China, stirring up heated debates among translation scholars on the disciplinary status of translation studies, first in 1996-1997 and on a larger scale in 1999-2001. The minority view was that translation studies had not become an academic discipline even in the West, and could hardly ever hope to do so (Lao 1996, Zhang Jinghao 1999), while the majority argued that it should and it could, and, in the second round of debate, that it had, even in China. Mu Lei (2000) has

provided data concerning academic bodies, journals, teaching from undergraduate to doctoral levels, departments of translation, etc., which strongly indicate that translation studies has indeed become a discipline in its own right in mainland China.

At present, mainland China and Hong Kong seem to be the only regions in the Far East where translation studies is an active research area and is widely recognized as a serious academic discipline, thanks to the contribution of Western theories, while Taiwan is fast catching up in recent years. In other Far Eastern countries translation studies seems to remain largely practice-oriented, with pure translation studies being the pursuit of just a few idiosyncratic scholars.

Another consequence of the influx of western theories is that it has brought the originally stand-alone system of Chinese translation studies into the polysystem of international translation studies, occupying a peripheral position there. Beginning from the late 1990s the flow of translation discourse is no longer unidirectional, as Chinese discourse on translation – past and present – is introduced to the West through translation studies journals and anthologies of Chinese writings on translation. As a result, that position has become slightly less peripheral, but it remains to be seen whether Chinese translation studies will become a source of repertoire transfer.

5. Resistance

New translation theories and the endeavour to establish translation studies as a discipline have met with what Even-Zohar calls passive resistance at most in the West: “people do not engage themselves with working covertly against the new options. They simply ignore them” (Even-Zohar 2002: 48). Occasionally one may hear a linguist or a philologist complaining about the cultural turn, but there seems to be no need to argue either for or against the establishment of the discipline. In contrast, they have met with active resistance in mainland China, in the sense that there are people who “engage themselves in a more or less overt and straightforward struggle against the planned repertoire” (Even-Zohar 2002: 48).

The most prominent form of resistance is the claim that Chinese theories are good enough while foreign ones are nothing new or better. During the first wave of westernization, Luo Xinzhang, a veteran trans-

lation scholar, without making much reference to foreign theories, asserted that Chinese translation theories had formed “a system of its own”, which is unique in the world, and therefore that there was no need to be “unduly humble” (Luo 1984: 588, 603). In the new millennium, when virtually all Western theories have become widely known, there are suggestions that they do not compare favourably with existing Chinese theories. For example, what Nida means by “dynamic equivalence” was already said by Ma Jianzhong at the turn of the twentieth century although in different wording: “a good translation is that from which readers may draw the same benefits as from the original”; Venuti’s “foreignization” versus “domestication” are not substantially different from “literal translation” versus “free translation” (Zhang Jinghao 2006: 60); and polysystem theory’s prediction of translational norms shifting with the position of translation is nothing new, since Yan Fu has formulated a translation method of “addition, reduction and alteration” (Liu Airong 2001: 43) – apparently meaning that Yan had been able to formulate target-oriented strategies long before polysystem theory was there to tell him what to do.

In recent years a renowned professor cum translator, Xu Yuanchong, declares that the “literary translation theories of Chinese school [*sic*] are the most advanced in the world of the 20th century”, on the ground that “only the Chinese school has solved the difficult problems” in translating between the two major languages of the world – Chinese and English (Xu 2003: 52, 54). By “the theories of the Chinese school” he actually means his own, which he claims to have guided him to “produce the largest quantity of literary translations with the highest quality in the world” (Xu 2003: 54).

Zhang Jinghao (2006: 60) blames foreign theories not only for their inability to guide translation practice, but also for bringing Chinese discourse on translation from a state where there is an authority (that is, Yan Fu’s theory) to a state where there is none, which he considers “a retrogression”.

Those who take the strongest objection to foreign theories are more or less the same people who assert that translation studies can hardly hope to become an academic discipline, which a growing number of academics have been endeavouring to establish with the help of Western theories. Their argument, however, is not always consistent. On the

one hand, attacking the conception of a practice-oriented discipline, they argue that since there are no translational laws to be found that may guide translators to solve practical problems, translation studies as a discipline can only be “descriptive”, which means subjecting all translational phenomena to analysis and theoretical explanation without formulating any laws (Zhang Jinghao 2001: 63; also Xu 2001: 19); on the other, they are of the opinion that “it is futile and worthless for pure theories to create ‘translatology’ out of thin air” (Zhang Jinghao 1999: 44, Xu 2001: 19). Besides, there is the statement that “since translation was not a discipline 5000 years ago when it first appeared, it is certainly not a discipline today” (Zhang Jinghao 2001: 64), which is made apparently through what Hermans (1991: 166) describes as “a fatal confusion between the discipline’s object-level (translational phenomena) and its meta-level (the scholarly discourse about translational phenomena)”. And there is the assertion that translation studies is not yet widely recognized as a discipline in the West, mainly on the basis that the commonly used term is the prudent “translation studies” while the term “translatology” is nowhere to be found in dictionaries of English (Zhang Jinghao 1999: 35, 2006: 59).

A moderate form of resistance is the call for the establishment of “Chinese translation studies”, or a “translation studies with Chinese characteristics”², with the argument that since Western theories are concerned only with translation between European languages, which belong to the same language family, they are bound to be inapplicable to translation into or from the Chinese language, which is very different from European languages (such as Gui 1986, Zhang Boran & Jiang Qiuxia 1997, Sun Zhili 1997).

It seems that what lies at the root of Western translation theories meeting with active resistance is a clash between two traditions in three respects at least. First, academic research is very much a Western tradition. Although the whole modern education system in China and most other Asian countries, including the university, is modelled on that of

² It should be noted that the term “translation studies with Chinese characteristics” has a political and nationalistic undertone as it draws on the slogan “socialism with Chinese characteristics”, which Deng Xiaoping invented in the 1980s to defend his economic reforms from accusations that he was switching from socialism to capitalism.

the West, some of the basic academic values have not yet been accepted or even understood by all people. Traditional Chinese scholarship is very utilitarian, believing that learning should in one way or another bring immediate benefits to society. In the old times the aim of learning was cultivation of one's own self, leading to harmony within one's family, regulation of the kingdom, and ultimately pacification of the world. Traditional Chinese intellectuals are therefore prone to make value judgements, and they have little affinity for concepts such as detachment, neutrality and descriptivism. After China was repeatedly defeated by foreign powers, technological advancement and economic growth became major concerns. This may explain why most people on either side of the debate over the disciplinary status of translation studies have been talking about a discipline that is application-oriented in nature. Even today, in certain quarters applied research tends to be prioritized over academic research for its own sake. In 2001 a scholar opined:

The theories we now need are those that can guide translation practice. Since in today's China there are too many things waiting to be translated and translation expertise is too much in demand, pure theoretical translation studies is not urgent for us. That is what Western translation theorists are interested in because the aim of their research is hardly to guide practice. (Liu Airong 2001: 44)

Moreover, as traditional Chinese scholarship tends to value insights and daring hypotheses (or conjectures, or even assertions) more than in-depth analysis and careful proving with hard evidence, methodology and theorization have hardly any place there. These traits are very much present in the writings of those who take objection to Western translation theories.

Secondly, in Chinese culture, as in most Eastern cultures, cohesion of the entity and conformity to dominant norms are emphasized at the expense of individual rights and competition. As Benedict Stavis observes, traditional Chinese culture does not share "Western religion's idea of equality in the eyes of God", and "the political ruler had as much right to rule his nation as a father had to rule his family", which is indicated by the fact that the Chinese word for "country" (*guojia*) includes the character for "family" (*jia*) (Stavis 1988: 67-69). Obedience rather than independent thinking is encouraged. Given these values,

the dethronement of the original, as advocated by Skopos theory and the “Manipulation School”, is regarded as heresy, not only by traditionalists but even by some of those who endorse Nida’s theory, and the dethronement of Yan Fu’s theory without a replacement, as a consequence of the emergence of so many theories, is blamed for creating chaos.

The third source of clash is internationalism versus nationalism, which is to a great extent a product of the second factor. When cohesion is of paramount importance in a social entity, national identity will overrides all other identities. The high sensitiveness in Chinese culture to national identities results in a tendency to use nationality as the first criterion for the classification of not only people but also cultural products. Hence the distinction between “Chinese” and “foreign” theories.³

As mentioned above, Chinese culture used to be the central system in the macro-polysystem of the region, and seldom felt much need for foreign repertoires. Naturally it had a sense of superiority, which was so strong that it may be aptly described as Sinocentrism: The Chinese called themselves “the Central Nation” (*Zhongguo*) because they truly believed they were at the centre of the world.⁴ After China was defeated by Western powers and Japan, it was not only relegated to the periphery in the polysystem of the world, but it also lost its central position in the region of East Asia. A sense of inferiority arose, but the old sense of superiority lingered on, so that for the culture as a whole there

³ Nationality is sometimes used even to sub-classify foreign theories. For example, a “Series of Translation Studies Outside China” were published in mainland China in 2000-2001, comprising *Contemporary Translation Studies in UK*, *Contemporary Translation Studies in France*, *Contemporary Translation Studies in USA*, and *Translation Studies in USSR*. (A more literal translation of the Chinese titles would be *Contemporary British Translation Theories*, etc.) Such a way of classifying translation theories seems to be academically untenable since the body of theories thus grouped together (see Liao Qiyi 2001: 302-328) may not function as a system vis-à-vis another body, and the views of a theorist (such as Hermans) may not be treated in isolation to those of another one belonging to another nation (such as Even-Zohar).

⁴ For example, a map of the world brought to China by the Christian missionary Matteo Ricci in the sixteenth century had to be redesigned to make China appear right in the centre instead of at a corner in order “to win the good will of the Chinese” (Ricci 1953: 166-167; also see Wang 2006: 43).

has been a superiority-inferiority complex, which is responsible for its mixed attitude to foreign repertoires.

Although nationalism has seldom been overtly invoked as a weapon to repel foreign repertoires in translation studies as it has been in some other realms such as politics and show business,⁵ it is very much present in the rhetoric of the most adamant opponents of Western theories such as Zhang Jinghao, who ridicule the *Chinese Translators' Journal* for publishing too many articles that have recourse to foreign translation theories or translators, suggesting that it has actually become a "Foreign Translators Journal" (Zhang Jinghao 2006: 59).

The effect of nationalism is usually more insidious. For instance, one of the justifications for the establishment of 'Chinese translation studies' is that China needs its own set of translation criteria because "Chinese culture has a long history and (therefore) a remarkable capacity to accept and assimilate heterogeneous items" (Zhang Boran & Jiang Qiuxia 1997: 9). This is the kind of politically correct statements that national or nationalistic feelings tend to produce, and such statements usually go unchallenged. One may see from a polysystemic perspective that the two qualities – having a long history and a capacity to assimilate heterogeneous items – do not usually go together. The fact is that until it lost its central position, Chinese culture was generally not receptive to heterogeneous items (Buddhism being an exception).

6. Reflections on the Present State of Affairs

I would like to reflect upon two questions concerning the present state of affairs. The first is: of all countries in the Far East, why is it China where translation studies has been established as an academic discipline?

There is no doubt that Western translation theories, especially the cultural ones, have made the difference. But then why is China the only one that seems to be receptive to cultural theories of translation? Hong

⁵ Zhang Guoli, a movie star in mainland China, for instance, called the media that programmed many Korean TV series "traitors to China" (*Hanjian*) and the watching of such series "a treasonable act". Faced with such criticisms, the State Administration of Radio Film and Television said in 2006 that the programming of Korean TV series might be reduced by half (Ettoday 2006).

Kong translation scholars, who had much better access to these theories, must have played a role in initiating the import of cultural theories, but their efforts would not have resulted in the transfer of these theories without the support of their mainland colleagues and official blessing in mainland China. Cultural theories may have been introduced earlier into Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, where polysystem theory was known in the 1980s, but they do not seem to have caught on there, at least not in translation studies. As these places have been in closer contact with the West, what with their better access to information, and political and ideological affinity between the two parts, one may assume that it is they that are more likely to accept Western repertoires, but apparently it is not. Before more research is done, my answer to this question can only be tentative.

It seems that the difference between China and the rest of the Far Eastern region lies mainly in the readiness to accept foreign repertoires. The cultures of the latter places have each gone through a westernization phase, during which they were eager to take in Western repertoires, but they have become more or less stabilized. Although they also assume peripheral positions in the world to different extents, for some decades there has not been a general sense of self-insufficiency. In contrast, in Chinese culture there has been a strong sense of self-insufficiency since the late 1970s, which is reflected in China's urge to modernize, and to do so by learning from the West. As cultural theories of translation happened to emerge in the West in such a moment in history, it was no surprise that it is China that has been more receptive to them.

The second question is the so-called Eurocentrism in academic circles in general and in translation studies in particular. Some mainland Chinese scholars have cited the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (Baker 1998) as an example. Observing that in the *Encyclopedia* the translation histories and traditions of European countries receive much more attention than those of African, Latin American and Asian countries, and "the whole picture of international theoretical translation studies is represented by the theories of a few developed Western countries", they conclude: "The power of discourse is in the hands of the academic elite in Britain, America and other developed countries, while theorists in the majority of countries suffer from 'aphasia' in the

international forum on translation studies" (Sun Huijun & Zhang Boran 2002: 5).

Western models are no doubt in the centre of Chinese, let alone international, translation studies, but this state of affairs has been determined primarily by factors that are internal to the academic polysystem, while external factors, such as political, ideological or economic ones, have played only a secondary role. Unlike the importation of Christianity and opium, which was initiated by powerful outside agents, the transfer of Western translation theories to China was undertaken by peripheral agents from within to fill a perceived vacuum, to serve as theoretical frameworks – which are lacking in China – for the description and explanation of Chinese phenomena. They have fulfilled that function. In terms of inter-systemic struggle, in mainland China the discipline of translation studies has become much less heteronomous, and in Hong Kong it is even more autonomous than in many parts of Europe as there are now more teachers specializing in both the pure and the applied branch of translation studies. In terms of scholarship, the understanding of Chinese translation phenomena is now much wider and deeper than in the pre-disciplinary stage. For example, Yan Fu's translation practice was often criticised out of context by traditional theorists for deviating too much from the original and for using Classical instead of Modern Chinese (such as Han 1969: 13-14; Liu Zhongde 1994: 7), but from a polysystemic perspective it can be seen that his acceptability-oriented strategies were determined by the fact that he translated for the literati and officialdom in a time when Classical Chinese (including its language and literature) was still firmly in the centre (see Chang 1998: 34-35). It has also been argued (and hopefully demonstrated) that, with minor modifications, some Western models, such as Dirk Delabastita's typology of pun translation (see Chang 2003) and Javier Franco Aixelá's typology of strategies for translating culture-specific items (see Chang 2004), may provide better guidance than their Chinese counterparts not only to research but also to translation practice in the Chinese context because they are descriptive, sophisticated and non-language-specific. The Westernization of translation studies in China can therefore be seen as a classic case in which a polysystem borrows repertoires from others to fulfill certain

self-perceived needs, saving the effort of inventing them entirely by itself.⁶

There has been a strong desire in China for dialogue between the East and the West⁷ on an equal footing. It seems that as far as translation studies is concerned, this desire is based on a simplistic division of the world into two uni-systems. One should bear in mind that what is called the West is a polysystem consisting of its own centres and peripheries. Moreover, most of the models that are making most of the running in translation studies originated from the peripheries – from a group of junior scholars, most of them working in non-prestigious universities at the margin of Europe, with English as their second language. If some of them are from Great Britain or the United States, they are not in Yale, Harvard, Cambridge or Oxford, where there is not such a humble discipline as translation studies. If they constitute the “elite” today, with the “power of discourse” in their hands, it is because their theories have satisfied an academic need. It is not that their theories dominate the discipline because they are the elite in the first place. It is a double irony that their models are on the one hand snubbed by the very centres of Europe and on the other regarded as the source of Eurocentrism by peripheral nations that have benefited from them.

Returning to the encyclopaedia in question, while any cultural product is bound to be circumscribed by its milieu, I wonder what the poor editor could have done in the mid 1990s to increase the representation of the so-called Third World countries. It seems doubtful whether there was much research into the translation histories and traditions of these countries, or any translation theory there that was comparable to, say, polysystem theory or Skopos theory, in terms of uniqueness and academic depth. Even if there was, information was lacking in English, the lingua franca of the world.

The inequality that most Chinese scholars are suffering from in international translation studies lies mainly not in the lack of cultural

⁶ I am indebted for this remark to Itamar Even-Zohar, who commented on my paper at the “Culture Contacts and the Making of Cultures” workshop.

⁷ In this dichotomy the word “East” (*dongfang*) in Chinese usage usually means China alone. Another commonly used dichotomy is “China and the West” (*Zhongxi*).

prestige but in the command of linguistic and economic resources. There is very little one can do about it except work harder.

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