

Theories & Strategies:  
A Study Of Translation  
Between Heterogeneous Cultures

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异质文化翻译研究中的  
理论与策略

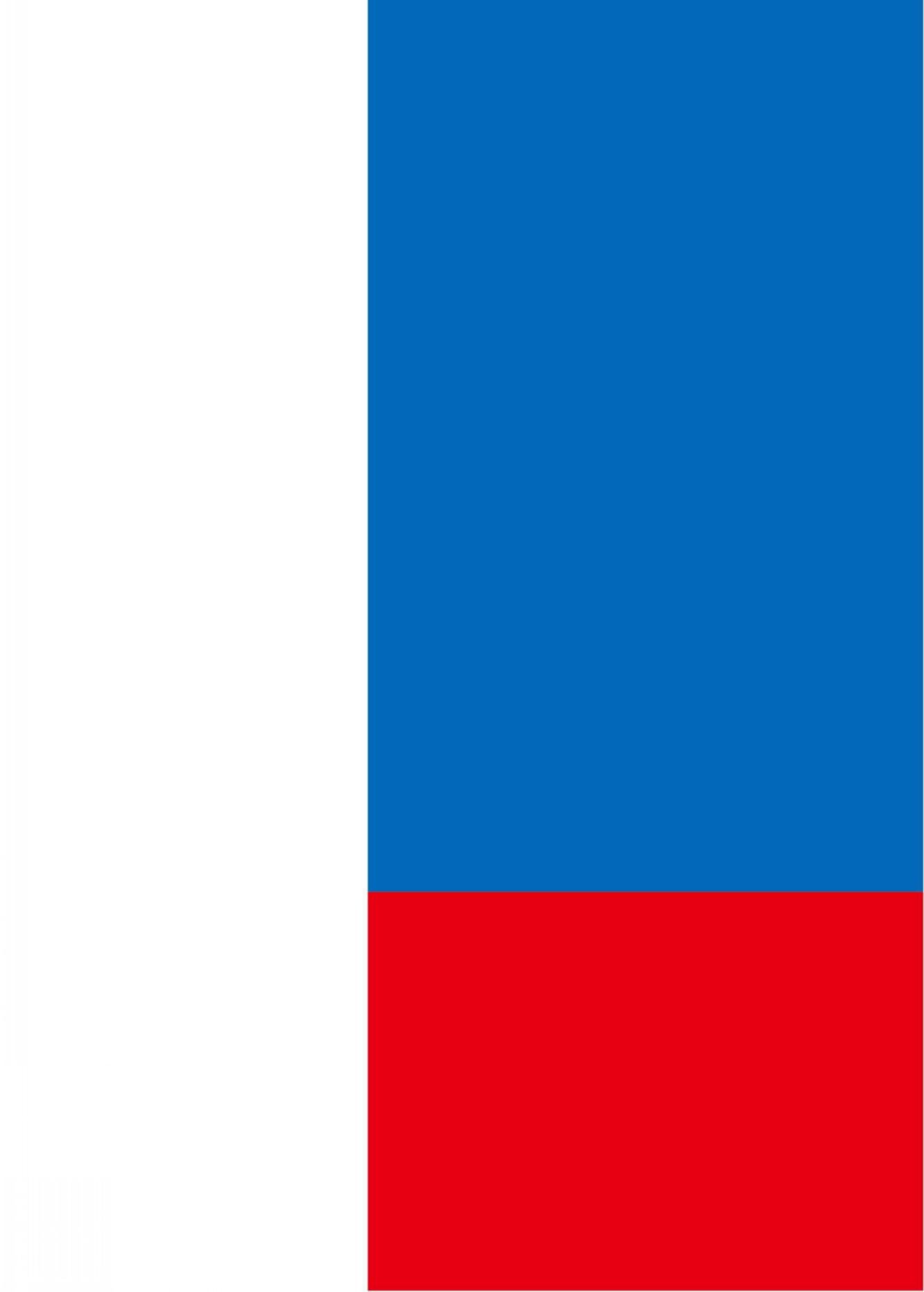
Wang Qingjiang et al.

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# An Introduction to the Book

## Process of Progress

The first thought of translation for average people is no more than a skill to transform one language into another. This thought brought us into an environment as if we were in the 18th century when English poet and translator John Dryden (1631—1700) described translation as the judicious blending of these two modes of phrasing when selecting, in the target language, “counterparts,” or equivalents, for the expressions used in the source language: “When[ words] appear. . . literally graceful, it were an injury to the author that they should be changed. But since. . . what is beautiful in one[ language ] is often barbarous, nay sometimes nonsense, in another, it would be unreasonable to limit a translator to the narrow compass of his author’s words; tis enough if he choose out some expression which does not vitiate the sense.”<sup>①</sup> And we are even worse than Dryden as he cautioned, however, against the license of “imitation”, i. e. , of adapted translation: “When a painter copies from the life. . . he has no privilege to alter features and lineaments. . . ”<sup>②</sup>

The thought of translation progressed as our research and reading went profound, and came to a final subversion. We read, for example, “In other words, each community has developed habits of expressions that, over time, have been integrated into the language and lent it to certain characters”<sup>③</sup>. We then found that text was crucial for translation as all the texts in the world where “each slightly different from the

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① cf. Christopher Kasparek, “The Translator’s Endless Toil”, in *The Polish Review*, vol. 28, No. 2, 1983.

② cf. Christopher Kasparek, “The Translator’s Endless Toil”, in *The Polish Review*, vol. 28, No. 2, 1983.

③ J. Delisle, *Translation: An Interpretative Approach*, trans. P. Logan & M. Creery, Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1980, 74.

one that came before it: translations of translations of translations. Each text is unique, yet at the same time it is the translation of another text. No text can be completely original because language itself, in its very essence, is already a translation—first from the nonverbal world, and then, because each sign and each phrase is a translation of another sign, another phrase.”<sup>①</sup> The reading about translated texts was later turned into “a radical view of translation, which sees it not as a marginal activity but as a primary one, and it fits in with similar comments made by writers such as Gabriel García Márquez, Jorge Luís Borges and Carlos Fuentes. Indeed, Fuentes has gone so far as to say that ‘originality is a sickness’, the sickness of a modernity that is always aspiring to see itself as something new.”<sup>②</sup> We also found that the processes of translation remained controversial and various: besides what Yan Fu had proposed his principle of Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance, there were still many others such as Accuracy, Adequacy, and Appropriateness.

For individual translator, translation has become a lifestyle, as Goldblatt put it in an interview, “I am sometimes asked why I translate, since to many it seems a thankless vocation. . . The short and very personal answer to the question is: Because I love it. I love to read Chinese; I love to write in English, I love the challenge, the ambiguity and the uncertainty of the enterprise. I love the tension between creativity and fidelity, even the inevitable compromises. . . In other words, I translate to stay alive”<sup>③</sup>. As a matter of fact, many translators as Goldblatt, do live a life of transplanting seeds from one culture to another and watch them grow and become transmuted. When viewed in history, culture stays alive today because many of such translators take translation as their lifestyle.

We realized, therefrom, that translator’s subjectivity, his freedom, power and violence function in translation. We then raised the following questions. Translation is an act of cultural contact, either personal or textual. When it comes to the personal contact in terms of translation, one question is there: should a translator maintain a

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① O. Paz, “Translations of Literature and Letters”, in R. Schulte and J. Biguenet, ed., *Theories of Translation from Dryden to Derrida*, trans. Irene del Corral, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, 154.

② cf. Sussan Bassnett & Harish Trivedi, “Of Colonies, Cannibals and Vernaculars”, in Sussan Bassnett & Harish Trivedi, ed., *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, New York & London: Routledge, 2002, 3.

③ Michael Berry, “The Translator’s Studio: A Dialogue with Howard Goldblatt”, in *Asian Literature*. No. 3, 2002.

personal contact with the author in order to achieve a more authentic intention of the latter, and thereafter the fidelity of the translated text? To answer this question, one has to ask many others: what's the purpose of keeping contact with author? Is there any possibility and necessariness to contact the author? When should a translator contact an author? Is personal contact with author the only way to properly interpret the original? We further realized that the subjectivity in translation act should include that of the receptors, original authors as well as of the institutions as power holders. Hereon, our journey went through the political elements found in the culture that restrains the translated texts, and so on. . . All these issues in translation have, as a matter of fact, been discussed by scholars at home and abroad, but are motivated to write, and represented in, the book.

## The Heterogeneity of Cultures

Should there be any contributions in our discussion, it would be the translation of heterogeneity between cultures, which we believe it necessary to emphasize. We attempt to find some supporting evidence by collecting fragments of information here and there to justify the main clues that we are following in the book, and here is one: "Looked at empirically, . . . certain texts do tend to be more easily translated than others. Texts tend to be easier when source and target cultures are in close contact or share a similar cultural history, when source and target languages are related, when the source text is already oriented towards the target readership (tourist brochure. . . )."<sup>①</sup> The stress of heterogeneity of cultures concerned with translation, we believe, conforms to the setting in which communication between cultures based on the English and Chinese languages are discussed.

What is meant by heterogeneous cultures? Right now no one, if culture is taken as part of Civilization, seems to make much efforts to provide theories or criteria of how a culture should be discerned heterogeneously from another. Samuel Huntington in his controversial book *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*, for example, identifies 8 civilizations in the world, which are Western civilization, Latin American, the Orthodox world, the Eastern world, the Sinic civilization, Japan, the

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<sup>①</sup> Gideon Toury, *In Search of a Theory of Translation*, Tel Aviv: Porter Institute, 1980, 24 – 25. cf. Chasterman, 12.



Muslim world, the civilization of Sub-Saharan Africa. ①The British historian, Arnold Toynbee, formulated a complex theory of the growth and demise of civilizations. Of the twenty three distinct civilizations Toynbee identifies, sixteen are dead and gone. Of the seven currently existing civilizations all but one, Western European Christendom, have broken down and are no longer growing. Whether classification of civilizations as such be the criteria is to be further verified and tested, but it may in one way or the other an index with which one may judge the cultural heterogeneity.

The next index to be considered is the language, of which family it belongs. Language is believed to be closely related to culture, without each of which the existence is but meaningless. Since each of the world languages is ascribed to a

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① According to Prof. Huntington, Western civilization comprises the United States and Canada, Western and Central Europe, Australia and Oceania. Whether Latin America and the former member states of the Soviet Union are included, or are instead their own separate civilizations, will be an important future consideration for those regions. The traditional Western viewpoint identified Western Civilization with the Western Christian ( Catholic-Protestant ) countries and culture. Latin American including Central America, South America ( excluding Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana ), Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Mexico, may be considered a part of Western civilization. Many people of the Southern Cone regard themselves as full members of the Western civilization. The Orthodox world of the former Soviet Union, the former Yugoslavia ( except Croatia and Slovenia ), Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece and Romania. Countries with a non-Orthodox majority are usually excluded ( Shia Muslim Azerbaijan, Sunni Muslim Albania and most of Central Asia, Roman Catholic Slovenia and Croatia, Protestant and Catholic Baltic states ). However, Armenia is included, despite its dominant faith, the Armenian Apostolic Church, being a part of Oriental Orthodoxy rather than the Eastern Orthodox Church. The Eastern world is the mix of the Buddhist, Chinese, Hindu, and Japonic civilizations. The Buddhist areas of Bhutan, Cambodia, Laos, Mongolia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand are identified as separate from other civilizations, but Huntington believes that they do not constitute a major civilization in the sense of international affairs. The Sinic civilization of China includes the Koreans, Singapore, Taiwan, and Vietnam. This group also includes the Chinese diaspora, especially in relation to Southeast Asia.

family, known as language families<sup>①</sup>. It must be pointed out that since in a language family, there might be several branches of languages, the heterogeneity would vary in degree. In other words, the closeness of one language to another may indicate the degree of that heterogeneity or homogeneity.

The third index that one may refer to is the cultural concepts expressed in different languages. How similarly or how differently two languages express the same cultural concept will determine how homogeneity or heterogeneity they are. The more universally that one language, for example, shares with another, the more homogeneous they are, and vice versa. This index may be controversial in that whether that in human languages there are exactly “the same concept” because there are no absolute standards to judge or refer to. When one concept in a language is compared with that in another, there are more or less the differences, and the gap of such differences may become the degree to measure.

In translation practices, we may safely say that the more the gap of differences two languages or two cultures are, the more difficult translation and communication between them would be, and, for the sake of cultural understanding, the more significant of translation. When it comes to communication between the east and the west, between Chinese and English, which are of highly heterogeneity, the mission of translator will become tougher, which could inevitably and easily result in rewriting, transformation of text and even the distortion of cultural concepts.

To emphasize the heterogeneity between cultures is by no means to say the inaccessibility to each other, but to claim that there are more of toughness, uniqueness and exoticism in compromising and transliterating between them. As is

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① A language family is a group of related languages that developed from a common historic ancestor, referred to as protolanguage(“proto-” means “early” in Greek). The ancestral language is usually not known directly, but it is possible to discover many of its features by applying the comparative method that can demonstrate the family status of many languages. Sometimes a protolanguage can be identified with a historically known language. Thus, provincial dialects of Vulgar Latin are known to have given rise to the modern Romance languages, so the Proto-Romance language is more or less identical to Latin. Similarly, Old Norse was the ancestor of Norwegian, Swedish, Danish and Icelandic. Sanskrit was the protolanguage of many of the languages of the Indian subcontinent, such as Bengali, Hindi, Marathi, and Urdu. Further back in time, all these ancestral languages descended, in turn, from one common ancestor, known as Proto-Indo-European (PIE). Language families can be subdivided into smaller units called branches. For instance, the Indo-European family has several branches, among which are Germanic, Romance, and Slavic. See Irene Thompson, the Language Families, in website about the world language.

discussed in the book; most translations between cultures are as imperfect as it is for life.

## The Purpose of the Book

Different from the program that focuses on translation studies, MTI in China's universities is intended for its candidates with practical skills and experiences in translation. This assumption leads to at least two misconceptions in regard with teaching theory: translation practice is more valued than translation theory; and the ignorance of translation theory either in the candidates' term papers or in their final reports, for example, is tolerated and even justified by judges as well as teachers. Two questions based on the misconceptions, then, have to be asked: shouldn't a theory help in dealing with practical problems? Is it true that MTI, an educational program in university, would just train the skill, rather than cultivate the mind, of our candidates? The answers to the questions are too definite to give here and the pursuit of them has become a motivating force to edit and write a book such as this one in the hope that translation theory as a whole will receive enough attention, and translation theory itself will be attractive both to teaching and learning.

This effort is made through both the design of the book and the strategies proposed in using the book. The book, quoting widely from scholars of translation studies and partially from philosophers, linguists, etc., who touch upon translation in their works, places translation in various settings such as historical, epistemological, methodological etc.. To facilitate the MTI candidates, we offer cases concerning their future career. This arrangement is to lead the learners or readers at large to such understanding as of what elements are involved in translation; how the scholars would see translation in different processes and how, more significantly, our MTI candidates may apply these theories to the problems found both in their theses and in their practical missions. This book, prior to publication, had served as textbook for the 2015 MTI students in two universities in the lectures. *Theories & Strategies in Translation* by Prof. Wang Qingjiang.

## Framework of the Book

The book, as we shall see in the table of content, consists of 15 chapters.

The first two chapters, after the introduction, may serve as appetizer of discussing translation in which we try our best to include scholars' views from five perspectives and the development of translation in a time as early as we may trace back to.

Then we suddenly shift to a seemingly individual topic in chapter three, the subjectivity that affects much of the result of translation. But individuality is in reality very often constrained by the political and cultural ambience, which one will read in chapter four and five; and, in a time when we are exposed more and more to other cultures, by the global context, which may be found in chapter six.

Through chapter seven to ten, theories are introduced concerning with society, to which Toury and Bourdieu arguably link translation; how translation may be adapted to and interact with the society; the modern technology like internet which may shape the way we perceive translation; and how the thought of translation may be transmitted like memes, as is proposed by Chasterman. (Despite much inadequacies, we do make efforts to check China's situation by taking these theories into consideration. ) The four chapters attempt to demonstrate another sort of environments in which translation operates.

The last five chapters give more attention to translation strategies. Translator ethics in chapter eleven, for example, may be viewed as personal quality in association with the profession, but may be seen, together with other strategies such as textual analysis and equivalent translation, etc. , more as an approach to offer good translation. As it is found in the last chapter, some suggest techniques be given in the hope that readers of the book will check how translation management may help with quality control. By the way, in the appendixes samples for composing thesis and signing contracts are the strategies, too, that may be hopefully of some use.

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# Chapter 1 Perceiving Translation<sup>①</sup>

## 1.1 Essence & Natures of Translation

Nida, et al. say that the essence of translation lies in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and second in terms of style.<sup>②</sup> Baumann et al. use “translation” to refer to word-for-word transfer ( or “ventriloquation”, as they call it ) which includes “the techniques, crafts, and possibly grafts, of language-to-language transformations” and “the simultaneity of translating and editing processes”<sup>③</sup>. However, Gideon Toury makes much effort to define translation as a communicative act: translation is communication in translated messages within a certain cultural-linguistic system, with all relevant consequences for the decomposition of the source message, the establishment of the invariant, its transfer across the cultural-linguistic border and the recomposition of the target message.<sup>④</sup> And translation, therefore, is a kind of activity which “inevitably involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions.”<sup>⑤</sup>

According to Nida, a “gloss translation” mostly typifies formal equivalence where form and content are reproduced as faithfully as possible and the TL reader is able to “understand as much as he can of the customs, manner of thought, and means of expression of the SL context”. Contrasting with this idea, dynamic equivalence “tries to

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① This part partially quotes Mahmoud Ordudari at Translation Journal (Website).

② E. Nida & C. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969, 12.

③ Gerd Baumann, Marie Gillespie & Annabelle Sreberny, “Transcultural Journalism and the Politics of Translation: Interrogating the BBC World Service”, *Journalism Theory, Practice & Criticism* Vol. 12, No. 2, 2011.

④ G. Toury, *In Search of a Theory of Translation*, Tel Aviv University: The Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics, 1980, 17.

⑤ G. Toury, *Nature and Role of Norms in Translation*, London & New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 1995, 200.