

***The Ways of Translation***  
***Constraints and Liberties of Translating Chinese***  
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***Terminology in metalanguage as a possible solution***

There is not possible 'fidelity' or 'infidelity' in turning over (*fan* 翻): everyone can have her own view of 翻 and of fidelity/infidelity within 翻, just as everyone can have her own view of fidelity/infidelity in a couple. It cannot be productive, therefore, to consider fidelity or infidelity in translation, there can be only commitment. As the stimulating title of this congress shows very well, the main problem of discussing translation problems is metalanguage. For a discussion about translation to be profitable, it is necessary to use (technical) terms instead of (common sense) words. For this reason, words like "literal", "free", "faithful", and so on are to be banned from discussions if we want them to be understandable and shareable between discussants. The starting point for debate must focus on the target of the translated text (metatext reader), because there are as many 'fidelities' as there are metatext model readers. Moreover, within a text it is possible to find as many possibilities for its 翻 as there are translators: each translator, each communicator, ultimately each person may choose among the many aspects of a text the one – or the ones – that deserve 翻. And some of the others must be sacrificed in its name.

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***How to establish the text to translate? Some methodological issues in reading Early Chinese manuscripts***

The paleographic materials recently unearthed in tombs dating from the 4th to 2nd century B.C. are changing our perception of early Chinese thought, adding many important pieces of information about the cultural debate in pre-imperial China and about the forms of ancient texts. Now that tomb libraries from the 4th century B.C. are being restored to us by archeology, we finally have strong evidence confirming that many of the "Classics" that history has transmitted to us, were affected by a "cut and paste" textual compilation strategy, which reveals a reduced level of authorship and a highly developed

sense of editorial enterprise during the process of text production. To accept the idea that a text is “an entity in fieri” entails a strong revision of our conceptions of unity, coherence, authorship, affiliation and dating.

What becomes clear from examining a good part of the recently acquired manuscripts is that segmentation, modularity and instability seem to be the most characteristic features of Warring States texts. This has a strong impact on critical interpretation and translation.

What's involved here, then, is the redefinition of certain traditional categories, and in this process of reinterpreting and rewriting the history of ancient Chinese thought, the contribution of these manuscript sources is crucial, in spite of the partial and incomplete nature of the information they transmit to us. From a codicological perspective, the new finds make it possible for us to better understand the concrete nature of the texts that were circulating during the Warring States period: their identity, their material "confines", the implications stemming from the use of a writing system that had yet to be codified.

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### ***The practice of the remainder in translation from Chinese***

The theory of the remainder occupies a crucial place in translation theorist Lawrence Venuti's thought. It focuses on the releasing of the minor variables existing in the target language (its *remainder*) within the scope of a minoritizing translation project, in order to produce a target text respecting cultural difference. The twofold nature of the remainder involves both reproducing and rewriting – in that it allows to preserve the otherness of the foreign work and language on the one hand, and to enrich the target language through non-standard usage on the other hand – and may be applied to translation from Chinese with intriguing effects. This article intends precisely to explore the possibilities of application of the theory of the remainder to translation from Chinese, resorting to significant examples drawn from May Fourth fiction, in order to suggest the validity of this specific translation strategy in safeguarding and emphasizing the specificity of the original.

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### ***Translation, modernity and the past: the case of Zhang Ailing***

What happens in translation when a modern Chinese narrative text is

interspersed with elements borrowed from traditional Chinese fiction? The case of Zhang Ailing translation can be exemplary and challenging at the same time: the very modernity of her early fiction, written in the 40s with a very sharp eye on many aspects of real life and showing a good understanding of western literature and many of its modern techniques, goes along with an exquisite language and style which borrows from classical Chinese literature for the narration, for the repetition of fixed phrases and for the technique of dialogues. But how can a contemporary translation in a Western language give account of this complexity and richness without losing the specificity of Chinese language and without resulting in a “Western invention of China”? This has much to do with a deep understanding of the real meaning of the original text and its position in the literature of the time, but depends also on the role the translated text should play in a different culture.

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***Translation, Transcription, and Being Translated: Reflections on the Challenges of Chinese-English Literary Translation***

This presentation will offer a series of reflections on the myriad challenges confronting translators working with Chinese source materials. Starting from the perspective of a working Chinese-English literary translator, I will offer specific textual examples of different types of challenges facing translators to be drawn from my own practical experience. Dealing mostly with the modern Chinese novel, I will examine a variety of issues including, 1) linguistic regionalisms, 2) translation and transliteration, 3) tenses, and 4) logistical inconsistencies. The theme of linguistic regionalisms affects not only region-specific vocabulary and slang, but also examples of how certain terms carry essentially the same meaning, but can undergo more subtle shifts in degree and emphasis. This is especially true when working with texts from Taiwan and Hong Kong. The long-standing debate over transliteration versus translation of proper names is never a simple either/or choice, but rather engages with larger debates over readability versus loyalty to the original. Attached to this issue is also the question of what type of Romanization system to appropriate. While *pinyin* is now the acknowledged standard for the English-speaking world, numerous cases (including works set in Hong Kong or Taiwan, written before the advent of *pinyin*, or even contemporary works written in the first person but set before 1949) pose a challenge to both the hegemonic status of *pinyin* and the translator striving for consistency. With tenses largely determined by context in Chinese, implied shifts in tense can provide a difficult task for translators to confront. I will offer examples of this

engagement with shift in tenses by offering examples from the fiction of Yu Hua, Wang Anyi and Wu He and propose various options for addressing the translation of a language without a built-in system tenses into western languages where the translator must make a conscious decision concerning the grammatical tense. Finally, I will cite examples of logistical inconsistencies in the source text and the options available to translators to confront these flaws, which whether due to carelessness, poor editorial standards, or other reasons, have become a part of the text as it is known and read in the original language.

Having also worked with a variety of other mediums, including screenplays, scripts, subtitles/supertitles, prose essays, interviews, poetry, and academic papers, I will also discuss how the experience engaging with different mediums and genres can offer new perspectives on the act of translation. Among these different literary forms, the interview is a medium which tests and seemingly compromises several of the long-standing rules adhered to by most literary translators. Using examples drawn from the process of transcribing/translating my book, *Speaking in Images*, I will examine how this process can open up new opportunities for rethinking traditional literary translation as well as the editorial process. Finally, I will reflect on how the experience of having one's own work rendered into other languages can place the act of translation in a new context, while introducing a new series of challenges, including censorship.

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***Medieval Chinese as a Target Language: Translation Strategies in the Early Chinese Versions of Buddhist Scriptures***

A substantial part of the present Chinese Buddhist canon consists of translations – mostly from Indic languages (Buddhist Sanskrit and several varieties of Middle Indic) – of various typologies of Buddhist texts. They represent the largest (and, in many respects, most interesting) body of translated literature in the pre-modern world.

The present paper will examine some recurrent problems faced by Buddhist translators, focusing on the strategies elaborated to solve them, and also discussing some key features of Chinese as a translation language.

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***Lu Xun and “hard translations”: the specificities of Republican literature***

When pleading in 1930 for “hard translations” that, by remaining very “close”

to the original text, would require the reader's heightened concentration,<sup>1</sup> Lu Xun exposed himself to the accusation of illegibility, which has lasted to the present day. This discussion raises an important question about the specificities of the new literary vernacular that appeared in the wake of the May Fourth movement. Famously derided by Qu Qiubai as a "new wenyan" and later by Mao as "foreign baguwen" (yang bagu), it is a style that resists fluid translation and aesthetic effects, a style that arguably has been handed down all the way to contemporary Chinese literature (this is probably what Wolfgang Kubin was hinting at in his violent critique of contemporary writers). For the European translator, this raises concrete questions about the desirability of avoiding repetition by introducing a more varied vocabulary, or breaking down long sentences. This paper will attempt to discuss, using concrete examples, whether these idiosyncrasies should be seen as characteristic of modern Chinese literature (and translated as such), grounded in a literary project that seeks to resist aestheticization, rather than glossed over as shortcomings, in an overly normative approach to the very idea of literature.

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### ***The rhythm of thought: some problems of translating syntax in modern Chinese literature***

According to some tendencies in Translation Studies, a more holistic approach should be taken when translating a literary text (Meschonnic); not only the text in itself but also its formal structure has to be rendered, as well as the cultural and psychological background lying behind the syntactic frame of language. In literary texts, word-order, sentence-order and discourse progression are often the result of particular states of mind, or else of specific aesthetic purposes, which are expressed in different ways by different languages.

Chinese syntax went through radical changes during the twentieth century, often oscillating between a strong Euro-japanese (Gunn) flavour and a more traditional structure. In both cases, when translating modern Chinese literary texts, the translator is confronted with an intriguing dilemma: is it possible to render the author's psychological and artistic intents into the syntax of the translator's own language, or is he/she compelled to adapt the original rhythm to the syntactical conventions of the target language? I will analyze this translational problem through some representative samples of twentieth century Chinese literature.

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<sup>1</sup> Lu Xun, " 'Hard translations' and the "class character of literature' " *Erxinji*.

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***Between fidelity and betrayal, between constraint and freedom, the choice of pragmatism: the translation of Mo Yan's novels***

In translation studies an opposition is often established between target-oriented and source-oriented translators – that is, translators opting for a thorough fidelity to the source language and translators who prefer to seek fluidity in the target language, going so far as to « betray » it. Sometimes, beginner translators may be afraid of being criticized for taking one side or the other. According to our experience in translating about twenty literary works by contemporary Chinese writers, this distinction – although relevant in carrying out an analysis of existing translations – should not hamper the work of an accurate translator. In our opinion, literary translation – as a form of creation yielding, just like literary creation, as much pain as it does pleasure – should not be strictly governed by dogmatic rules that risk to hinder the translator's own creativity. As a precondition, of course, the translator should master, to the maximum possible extent, both the source and the target language, as well as the culture that the two languages convey. Once these two issues have been addressed, we call for the right to adopt a pragmatic *modus operandi*, examining difficulties on a case-by-case basis, taking the time for an accurate reflection, and not hesitating to adopt, by turns, a source-oriented (hence “faithful”) or a target-oriented (hence “unfaithful”, although not going as far as to “betray”) approach. We will try to account for this attitude, which some may find heretical, through an analysis of some examples drawn mainly from our translations of Mo Yan's novels.

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***There's a tense for every activity under heaven: strategies for choosing verbal tenses in literary translation from Chinese into Italian.***

The translation I've recently carried out of Liu Heng's novel *The Happy Life of the Garrulous Zhang Damin* has offered me the occasion for some reflections upon the management and treatment of verbal tenses throughout the translation itself. The beginning of the novel may be seen as a still of Zhang Damin's own family, taken (as we can realize in the end) after all the

episodes making up the main plot have been narrated, while its very conclusion reminds of Chaplin's typical fading out, where the main character walks away along a solitary road, turning his back to us. The chronological nature of the events taking place between such visual start and conclusion require from the translator some substantial choices as regards the verbal tenses to make use of in the metatext.

Besides, *The Happy Life of the Garrulous Zhang Damin* is permeated with a great lot of cultural elements and allusions scattered along the narration; making them clear to the reader of the metatext would give him/her access to the subtext of the novel, which tells about the development and the condition of Chinese society from the late Sixties to the early Nineties.