

Chiyu Chu and Libo Huang. 2013. *Traditional Chinese Theories of Translation: Terminology*. Changsha: Hunan People's Press. ISBN 978-7-5438-9499-0.

Reviewed by Huarui Guo (Southwest Jiaotong University)

The book *Traditional Chinese Theories of Translation: Terminology* focuses on the history of the translation of terminology in China. The authors – Professor Chiyu Chu and Libo Huang – have spent ten years collecting raw materials. Debates on translation of terminology constitute a significant part in the development of traditional Chinese theories of translation, as the situation is more complicated in China than in western countries. It covers a long period in the history of China from East-Han Dynasty (about 25 A.D) up to 1949 when the People's Republic of China was founded. All the papers on terminology published by Chinese as well as foreign scholars during this period fall within the scope of research, including those written by western missionaries who have had an influence in China through their publications. Matteo Ricci, John Fryer, and J. S. Roberts are a few of them.

The content of the book is organized in two parts. Part I deals with discussions and debates about the strategies and principles of the translation of terminology; and Part II presents itself as a summary of the efforts made on the part of various organizations to regulate scientific terminology, both official and non-official. The appendix offers a list of principles, strategies and unification measures in the translation of terminology in chronological order.

Part I consists of 13 chapters. The authors propose their general views on translation: expressing new things in old language (p. 3). The problem of the translation of terminology is at the core of the theoretical debate about “name” and “reality” in translation. It involves translation both at the linguistic level and the cultural level. The present book exemplifies how ancient Buddhist classic translations and Christian classic translation handle the linguistic and cultural differences in terms of terminology. Translation of Buddhist classics represents the earliest introduction of foreign culture at large scale in the history of China. For some of the early translators, when they translate, the focus is on syntax and lexicon instead of cultural differences so that the Buddhist classics are garbed in Taoist thoughts. It takes a long time for the translators of Buddhist classics to acquire a full understanding of cultural differences and break away from the influences of Taoism (p. 14). There is a huge difference between the way Buddhist classics were translated at an early period and the way Christian classic was translated during the late Ming and early

Qing Dynasty. In the former case, the translation of terminology ignored the cultural connotations of Buddhist terminology while in the latter case missionary translators were fully aware of the cultural connotations of Christian terminology in their translations, especially of *the Bible*. Early dissemination of Christianity in China borrowed terminology from Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist expressions to a greater or lesser extent. An interesting analysis of how Matteo Ricci interpreted his translation of the fundamental term in Christianity – “God” is provided in the book. The word he had chosen in Chinese to represent “God” is not his own creation, but the way he interpreted it is indeed unprecedented (p. 18). Through his interpretation, both Confucian and Buddhist classics became part of Christianity and the uniqueness and supremacy of Christianity was therefore established.

Scientific translations in late Qing China constitute an important part in the history of translation in China. It goes without saying that John Fryer’s thoughts on translating scientific terms have a profound influence. He is the first individual to take up translation methods in a theoretical, detailed and systematic manner since western science was first introduced into China during the Ming Dynasty. Except for the scientific works introduced in large number, works in the field of humanities are also translated. Discussions about the translation of common terms (in opposition to scientific and technical terms) in the late Qing Dynasty are assorted, including country names, person names, place names, official systems, measurements, things, the way of numbering the years, etc. All these discussions indicate how methods of translation evolved as time and situations change. The translation of terminology usually involves debates about transliteration and translation of meanings. As time goes by, the people involved in the discussions encompass scientists, scholars and even readers, apart from the translators.

Part II engages with the efforts made by different organizations to regulate the translation of scientific terms, which begins with the late Qing Dynasty. In the 60s and 70s, the early activities feature cooperation between Chinese and foreigners where the latter plays a major role and most of them are missionaries. Government officials are involved but their roles are more symbolic than authoritative. Translators both Chinese and foreign are not well equipped with professional knowledge. Later, John Fryer who then was working for King-Nan Arsenal proposes to employ professional Chinese translators who are more likely to have useful insights on translation activities. After 1900 Chinese scholars made initial efforts to unify terminology without having to rely on foreign help. In 1908, Qing government published two terminology dictionaries and it marked authoritative involvement of government in unification efforts. Part II concludes with an analysis of the development of activities involved to unify translation of scientific terms.

The book is well-structured and thought-provoking. A topic very often discussed in different books about translation history in China – the vogue of “free

translation” in late Qing China (before 1911), can find its theoretical background here. From the present book it is not difficult to draw the following conclusion: in late Qing China, especially from the 1890s onwards, a huge number of scientific and literary works were translated in China in a free style. That happened when western science and civilization was introduced on a large scale for the first time in Chinese history, and people were at a loss about how to deal with the new realities that were imported from the west, so domestication was preferred to ensure intelligibility. As the introduction of the western science and civilization became more important, foreign features tended to be given priority and translation strategy started to change from domestication-oriented to foreignization-oriented.

From the materials about translation practice and debated collected in this book, it is also quite obvious that through the ages from ancient to the 20th century China, the discourse and debates about the translation of terminology was less around the binary dichotomies of literal and free translation, but more about how literal and free translation strategies are applied in practice. The debates did not focus on the choice to make between literal and free translations, but rather about choosing the right strategy in a given situation. Whether for early translations of Buddhist classics, or for missionary translations of the Christian works, it is hard to tell which strategy is employed in translating because as a matter of fact both strategies are adopted, but to different degrees. Furthermore, in the history of translation theories in China, the focus has rather been on the struggle between translating phonemes and translating meanings. This provides a new understanding of binary dichotomies of literal vs. free translation, foreignization vs. domestication translation strategies, etc.

Government support in the unification of translation of scientific terms testifies the politics involved in translation as an event. The same also holds true for the debates on the translation of “God” in the newspaper *Wan Guo Gong Bao* (*Review of the Times*), which turns out to be a power struggle among different denominations of Christianity.

In the history of translation in China, there has been a tradition of cooperation between foreign interpreters and Chinese writers, which might not necessarily be paralleled in other countries and deserve more scholarly attention.

There are a few points where I do not quite agree with the authors. The authors propose to employ “zhi” and “wen” to describe traditional translation strategies, as they are used by ancient scholars in China (p. 6). For quite a long time in Chinese history, the “zhi” translation strategy had been gaining the upper hand. According to the authors, Yan Fu is the first person in Chinese history to deny the “zhi” or “literal” translation tradition by putting forward his translation idea of “faithfulness, expressiveness and taste”. Yan Fu is the first person in late Qing China to

introduce western thoughts. But why the change? The book leaves the question unanswered.

When it comes to missionary efforts to unify scientific term translation, the authors make objective and positive comments on missionary efforts and believe that all these efforts on the part of missionaries were initially made for dissemination of Christian civilization. An expression often adopted is “objectively (in opposition to “subjectively”) the missionary efforts brought progress to China.” Indeed, it is true. But at the same time it should be known that behind the dissemination objective some of the missionaries were working toward the bliss of China through introduction of Christian civilization. That whether it works is another thing. After all, Christian missions and missionary works is a more complicated subject than it appears at first sight.

Reviewer's address

Huarui Guo
School of Humanities
Southwest Jiaotong University
Chengdu, Sichuan
China

329085784@qq.com