Robert Neather


In the past few decades, the international academia underwent “an astonishing translation theory boom,” and witnessed the publication of “a spate of English-language translation theory anthologies where there were none before,” (Robinson, 2014: xvii). In the process, the underlying Anglo-American translation theories flooded into China (or rather, Chinese mainland) since 1976, the year marking the end of the Cultural Revolution. It generated immense impact on epistemology of oriental scholars (Cheung, 2009). However, English publications regarding Chinese translation remarks were sparse.

Without surprise, contributions that Chinese translation theorists made to West-dominated international translation community were seemingly not worth mentioning, and China only played a peripheral role in the global arena of translation studies. In essence, translation studies and beyond in China presents a centuries-old history dating back to Zhou Dynasty (c. 11th century to 256 BCE) and involves kaleidoscopic topics. Moreover, the advent of thoughts such as post-colonialism and post-structuralism (since the 1990s) impelled some Westerners to introspect Eurocentrism and actively appreciated idiosyncratic cultures of the Other, (Fei, 2015). Under these circumstances, the noted scholar, translator and humanist (Martha P.Y. Cheung) called for unearthing indigenous resources concerning translation to reproduce Chinese translation philosophy, and to set up a bridge to reinforce a dialogic engagement between East and West to alter the ingrained prejudice.

Specifically, she mapped out the compilation of *An Anthology of Chinese Discourse on Translation* initially spanning the 5th century BCE to 1911 to utter the voice of China. It is actually “a collection of historical documents on the ideas, views, reflections, and theorizations about translation,” (Cheung, 2006: 1). Cheung initially devoted seven years to the translation and the partitioning of *An Anthology of Chinese Discourse on Translation, Volume 1: from Earliest Times to the Buddhist Project*. After its publication, the work reverberated as one might expect.

In John Minford’s appraisal, the volume dispels “the reputation China has acquired of having always been a monolingual, monolithic, inward-looking culture in which translation has played little part,” (2010: 321). Hitherto, a dozen

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of bilingual book reviews can be found. Additionally, the book was reprinted by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press in 2010, which further enlarged its readerships. The testimonies promote its dissemination and make its popularity clear. Unfortunately, physical torture halted Martha's program when the preparation of the second volume “was at an advanced stage,” (p. xvii). However, her collaborator Robert Neather carried forward the baton and edited the manuscripts that Cheung left behind. Hence the long-waited masterpiece could be finally brought to fruition.

Generally, An Anthology of Chinese Discourse on Translation, Volume 2: From the Late Twelfth Century to 1800 encompasses 28 entries and follows previous style: (1) writer (name, dates of birth and death); (2) headnote (writer’s biography); (3) passage showing overt and covert opinions on translation (including the gist, its original work); (4) interpretations made from the perspective of our times. Over half passages are devoted to the transmission of Arabic and Latin texts concerning science and technology. The book is made up of three sections. There are introductions about the compiler, editor and translators as well as a preface by Neather. Meanwhile, Theo Hermans contributed an overview before each section to provide background information.

Section one is made up of five politics-related entries in dynasties of Western Xia (1038-1227), Liao (947-1125), Jin (1115-1234), Mongol Yuan (1271-1368) and early Ming (1368-1644) respectively. The first entry introduces the writer’s compilation of a bilingual (Tangut-Chinese) glossary to underline that translation is crucial to alleviate hostility between the Tangut and Han Chinese. Entries 2-4 delve into multi-ethnic emperors’ sponsorship in rendering Chinese classics to strengthen their reigns. The fifth shows that cultural similarities constitute “the condition of possibility of all translating,” (p. 1) through Ming ministers and Muslim astronomers’ collaboration to transform Islamic astronomical works into Chinese under royal instructions.

The next section embraces sixteen entries ranging from 1604 to 1643. Most of them are involved in the evangelization of European Jesuit missionaries under the disguise of views on scientific and technological translation. Hermans outlines “the Jesuit mission to China more generally,” (p. 17) and “put it in a wider perspective,” (ibid.). Tellingly, eight passages are authored by Xu Guangqi (1562-1633), Li Zhizao (1565/1571-1630) and Yang Tingyun (1557-1627), the “three ‘pillars of Chinese Catholicism,’” (p. 22). Others include Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), Giulio Aleni (1582-1649), Chen Yi (1613-1649), Wang Zheng (1571-1644), Huang Taiji (1592-1643), Giacomo Rho (1592-1638), and Bi Gongchen (D. 1644). Most entries emphasized the importance and role of translation from different aspects. The scientist and official Xu Guangqi was “the first Chinese to translate European books into the Chinese language,” (p. 25). He