New Frontiers in Translation Studies

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Translation Studies as a discipline has witnessed the fastest growth in the last 40 years. With translation becoming increasingly more important in today’s glocalized world, some have even observed a general translational turn in humanities in recent years. The New Frontiers in Translation Studies aims to capture the newest developments in translation studies, with a focus on:

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Ziman Han · Defeng Li
Editors

Translation Studies in China
The State of the Art

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Translation Studies as a Young Established Discipline in China

Ziman Han and Defeng Li

About two decades ago, Xu, a leading translation studies scholar in China, claimed that “theoretical research on translation in China lags behind the West by at least twenty years” (Xu 1996, p. 3). The claim soon sparked a controversy amongst Chinese translation teachers. Many strongly objected the assessment and on the contrary, insisted that translation studies in China has its own strengths, imbued with its own tradition and characteristics, and that it is totally inappropriate to compare translation theories and translation studies in China with those in the West (e.g. Dong 1997, p. 4). The controversy seems to have been settled now to the favor of the latter view. Xu’s claim has not been referred to for years, and translation studies has now become an established discipline, with both Ph.D. and M.A. translation (studies) programs offered in hundreds of universities in China, and considered as a second-tier discipline in the national academic discipline table. This is a settlement, of course, only based on institutional recognition. Academically, there has been no widely known agreement among translation scholars as to whether translation studies in China is now on a par with that in the West. Given such vastly different views as outlined above, we deem it useful to expand the discussions to include both Chinese and Western translation scholars so that a constructive comparison of translation studies in China and the West can be made.

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Unfortunately, Chinese translation scholars generally publish in Chinese and therefore their research is not readily accessible to their Western colleagues who generally do not read Chinese. Some Chinese translation scholars have realized the problem and made remarkable attempts to publish their research in English or French. The first contemporary attempt might be the special issue of *The Theory and Practice of Translation in China* published by *Meta* in 1993, guest edited by Xu and Wang. A similar attempt was the 1996 special issue of *Chinese Translation Studies in Perspectives*, guest edited by Wang. Afterwards, a number of people have published their monographs or edited volumes in English in the west, such as Chan (2003), Cheung (2006), Wang and Sun (2008), Chan (2015) and Hu (2016). These special journal issues, edited volumes and monographs, together with the increasing number of research articles published in English by Chinese scholars, have indeed helped present China’s translation studies to the West. But due to special constraints or different objectives, they generally came short of providing a panoramic view of current translation studies in China.

It was against such a background that this very book was conceived. Leading scholars in different fields, or sub-fields, of translation studies in China were invited to contribute a chapter on a topic of their expertise. We hope that will enable translation scholars in the West as well as those in other parts of the world to know what translation scholars in China are now engaged in, what they are studying and what progress they have made. The studies by Chinese translation scholars may not be all pioneering; they nevertheless show that traditions and perspectives other than the Western ones also work in translation related research. This is of particular importance, as some believed that the spread of Western translation theories “has the potential to obliterate different traditions…” (Williams 2013, p. 2). To paint a relatively full picture of the state of the art of translation studies in China, seven articles in this collection present bibliometrical studies summarizing different aspects of translation or translations in certain fields. The rest of the chapters feature research on specific topics, showcasing the interests of Chinese translation scholars and also exemplifying recent advances in translation studies in China. It is anticipated that such a combination of macro and micro depiction of translation research in China will offer the reader a better view of the current development of translation studies in China.

More specifically, the first two chapters offer overviews of translation studies in China, but taking different perspectives and approaches. Adopting a historical perspective, Tan took issues with characteristics of Chinese translation theories or discourses, a topic that had inspired the most heated debates among Chinese translation scholars in the past 40 years. With a detailed analysis of the Chinese tradition of and thinking on translation, he concluded that the two terms “Chinese translation discourse” and “Chinese translation theory” can both be used to refer to Chinese translation studies “because there exist both a Chinese tradition of studying and discussing translation and a Chinese legacy of theoretical ideas about translation.” He identified three fundamental views as the defining features of Chinese translation discourse, i.e. the views on the activity or phenomenon of translating and interpreting; the requirements or prerequisites for the translator and interpreter; and the fundamental principle of Xin (信 translational faithfulness). These three
views are believed to carry the very quality of “Chineseness” of Chinese translation discourses. Tan also offered his thoughts on the debate of translation as ‘a science or an art’, the debate in the country about the introduction of foreign thoughts and theories on translation, and the debate about the Chineseness of Chinese translation theories. These debates are the main dynamics for the contemporary development in Chinese translation discourses. This chapter was a follow-up to the author’s other article on the same topic, published in 2009 and the historical dimension in it was of particular implication for translation studies in modern China, not least showing that traditional Chinese thinking on translation indeed sheds much light on modern translation studies and that translation studies in China, or any other country, is deeply rooted in its history.

Han made a comparative analysis of research published in *Chinese Translators’ Journal*, the flagship journal of translation studies in China and *Babel, the FIT journal*, over the past 30 years between 1987 and 2016. He found that “there is a clear predominance of literary translation” in translation studies in China and indeed an obsession about literary translation is noticeable among Chinese translation scholars”. Such a trend, however, is not as conspicuous as in the West as the dominance of literary translation is much stronger in *Babel*. He then discussed the factors behind the obsession in China and argued that such an obsession about literary translation is detrimental to the development of the discipline of translation studies in the country.

China is a country with a very long history of translation theory and practice and throughout history translation has been used as agent of social change in the country. Chi took an interest in non-literary translation from a historical perspective. He examined the intellectual discourse by Chinese educators and publishers, who ‘championed and carried out translations of Western scientific works’ in the last two decades of the Qing Dynasty (1890s–1900s). Through a systematic account of translation as part of publishing and education, he demonstrated how translation popularized Western concepts and ideas in the country and in turn connected “the Chinese experience with the rest of the world”, and thus enabled the Chinese people to see themselves as being modern.

The development of translation studies as a discipline in China has been much affected by its translation policies. In the fifth chapter, Wang made a review of the research on translation policies in China and found that such research efforts covered such diversified topics as translation policies in history and contemporary China, the interaction between translation policy and translation practice, and the interaction between translation policy and language policy, and all the studies fell into roughly three categories: translation history, language service and institutional translation. She then went on to point out some limitations in current research on translation policies while maintaining that this area of research will continue to grow as the overall language teaching and translation training in the country continue to attract considerable attention among language and translation teachers as well as language policy makers.

One of the most remarkable development in Chinese translation studies in the past ten years is perhaps the fast growth of BA and MA in Translation and Interpreting programmes in the country. Consequently, issues such as programme planning, curriculum design, translation and interpreting teaching methods have attracted much attention among translation teachers. Chen et al. first reviewed
interpreter training in China after the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), noting that interpreter training saw its need right at the end of the Cultural Revolution, did not take off until in the 1990s and boom until in the first decade of the 21st century; they then followed with an in-depth analysis of interpreting training research in China, focusing particularly on course design, teaching content and methods, teaching aims, target student groups, and training tools. They believed that as new technology is playing an increasingly more important role in interpreting, interpreting trainers will have to “adjust their teaching focus accordingly”, and interpreter training will increasingly adopt a “whole person” approach.

Tao examined the training of both interpreters and translators in China, but concentrated on curriculum development over the past 70 years. She believed that there were four types of translation and interpreting curricula, namely language-based, skill-based, translation-competence-based, and translator-competence-based curriculum, which represented four different stages in translation and interpreting curriculum development in China. Following a careful analysis of the curricula of some leading translator and interpreter training programs such as Fudan University and Beijing International Studies University, she elaborated on the fourth type of curriculum. She argued that there are problems with the current translation and interpreting training curricula at different levels and improvement are urgently needed. However, she felt the curriculum on the whole is becoming better; it is “growing more mature and systematic with the development of translation studies and translation teaching in China, reflecting teaching philosophy is changing from behaviorism to constructivism and humanism.”

As China grows more internationalized, hence the growing importance of intercultural communications with other countries, the need for interpreting services and interpreting training has grown exponentially. Ren provided a most comprehensive review of interpreting studies and interpreting research in the country, including Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, since 1949 when the People’s Republic was founded. Like Tao, she divided the roughly 70 years of interpreting studies into four stages, all demarcated by important events related to interpreting, and examined the development of interpreting studies in each stage by reviewing research articles mostly published in academic journals during each period. After highlighting progresses and features of interpreting studies in each of these stages, she concluded that “interpreting studies in China since 1949 has, over the course of approximately seventy years, gone from a state of limited research topics and simple research methods to a state of diversity in research topics, interdisciplinarity in perspectives, and pluralism of research methods.” Nevertheless, four problems, or “weak links”, were identified, which she held should be addressed for interpreting studies in China.

In comparison, Tang and Zhang made a more focused and indepth analysis of interpreting studies in China, by concentrating on research published in reputable Chinese journals between 2007 and 2017. They surveyed the most important interpreting issues that have been published in different journals and the most active researchers. They believed that overall the amount of effort spent on interpreting research was small during this period and the area of corpus-based interpreting studies, often marginalized under the discipline of foreign linguistics, were not
given due attention and that many active researchers mainly built interpreting corpora but without carrying out much follow-up research.

“In recent decades, translation technology has become a norm in translation practice, an important part of translation studies, a new paradigm of translation pedagogy, and a major trend in the industry.” (Chan 2015, p. xxvii) Technology is today particularly valued and frequently utilized in the translation industry in China, and much research has been carried out on how new technologies can be applied to translation practice and translator training. Xu and Guo explained in detail a highly streamlined process they devised for translating literary and history books and how they applied it in their translational practice. Contrary to the common belief that translation technologies, especially computer-aided translation and machine translation technologies, apply only to translations of “non-creative texts” such as engineering and technical documents, they used them in translating books of a literary nature. On this basis, they developed a working model of CAT (computer aided translation) +MT (machine translation) +PE (post editing) for technology-assisted literary translation. Therefore, this chapter is of particular value to both translation practitioners and scholars alike. To the former, the technology-assisted model will help them enhance their translation quality and efficiency; to the latter, this model may challenge their traditional belief about translation and technology, which in turn may inspire them to carry out future research along this line. In Chap. 11, Miao and Sun proposed to build an E-learning platform for translator training. Borrowing from two similar Canadian platforms detailed in this chapter, the proposed platform aimed to cultivate and enhance students’ professional competence and critical thinking skills.

Military translation does not seem to have been much studied in translation studies. Even though research on military translation began to appear in Chinese academic journals in the early 1980s (e.g. Ju 1982), and an entry was made for military translation in A Companion for Chinese Translators, the first encyclopedia of translation in China (Fang 1997), studies on military translation did not attract much academic attention until recently. Xu reviewed a set of journal articles retrieved from CNKI, a national database of journals, newspapers, conference proceedings and dissertations, and found that the studies of military translation has been on the rise in recent years, and that scholars from military and non-military institutions have made almost equal contributions in this field, although they seem to focus on different sets of issues and overall the research has been practice oriented. She noted that studies on military translation in China is not as active as in the west, and that the quality of the research is yet to improve before offering her suggestions.

Chen examined a very unique case in the history of military translation: a prisoner of war interpreting between his enemy and his comrades in arms at the demand of the enemy and yet using the interpreting job as a means of fighting against his enemy. By studying Zeshi Zhang’s life experience as well as his interpreting experience in the UNC camp when he was kept as a prisoner of war, Chen provided a fascinating example of translation and interpreting being used as a weapon of resistance. The interpreter was empowered by his enemy but was by no
means neutral when providing interpreting services despite the usual neutrality required of interpreters.

The last four chapters are each on a different topic. Sun made a detailed historical account of the translation and reception of Ulysses in the Chinese Mainland. The study is based on solid data and with a historical dimension. Based on the “tortuous journey” of Ulysses in the Chinese Mainland, Sun depicted three “different scenarios showing different ways of interaction between political ideology, patronage and poetics, and their respective results”. Xiao and Peng made a bibliometrical review of studies on audio-visual translation (AVT) in China between 2002 and 2016. Focusing on issues such as the total number of related publications, themes, and also focus of AVT studies in China in this period, and predicted that there would be more studies on AVT teaching, AVT history and socio-cultural considerations AVT in the Chinese context.

Besides literary and audio-visual translation, translation of philosophical texts has also attracted research attention, in part thanks to the country’s strong drive to translate and disseminate important philosophical texts to other cultures. Guo explored principles for translating Chinese philosophical classics into English and observed that “quite a number of Chinese philosophic texts have been the products of domestication in a broad sense and have been taken into the western cultural system as complements”, hence losing “the unique essence of Chinese philosophy”. By the principle of originality, he contended that Chinese philosophic texts should be interpreted in the context of Chinese culture and history so as to reflect the uniqueness of Chinese philosophy; the principle of autonomousness means that the interpretation of a Chinese philosophical text should conform to the school of ideas the text belongs to. Guo’s contention reflected a heated-debated issue among Chinese scholars in recent years, i.e., how should Chinese literary, philosophical and other culturally significant texts be translated into other languages? Should the translated version be foreignized (retaining their Chineseness) or domesticated (reading like original texts written in foreign languages)? Like many other countries, China is now also actively promoting its culture in the world, and translation is considered as of pivotal importance in this endeavor. A domesticated translation will invariably lead to Orientalism, as explicated by Said, which is of course dreaded by many Chinese scholars. Guo’s principles are in effect to ensure foreignized translations so that Chinese philosophical ideas can be fully retained in the renditions.

The 15 chapters in this book are certainly far from enough to present all the recent development of translation studies in China, nor can they show the myriad of research carried out by Chinese translation scholars. But we hope they serve as a window through which the overall development of translation studies in China can been seen. China is said to have the largest number of translation studies experts, and China now has one of the most established translation education systems in the world, with hundreds of universities offering under- and postgraduate translation degree programs and an enrollment of thousands of translation students. Translation studies as a discipline is young but firmly established in China, and is set to blossom in the years to come.
References

Chinese Discourse on Translation: Views and Issues

Zaixi Tan

1 Introduction

Chinese civilization is by and large autochthonous in that basically it got started all by itself, unlike Western Europe which first and foremost “owes its civilization to translators” (Kelly 1979, p. 1), and that the role of translation had, prior to the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), been marginal to the development of Chinese language and culture. But as history progressed, around the beginning of the Common Era, Buddhism found its way to Chinese society via preaching Indian monks and foreign as well as local Chinese translators. Thus translation, or more specifically Buddhist translation, soon became an essential part of Chinese intellectual and cultural life, so much so that from about the second century onwards and for a very long period of time (i.e. from the middle of the 2nd to about the 12th century) it would not be possible to talk about Chinese history without also talking about translation and the role which translation played in making Buddhism a Chinese religion. In this sense, in the sense of major recorded history, four major movements can be distinguished in the history of translation in China, i.e. (a) Buddhist translation in the Eastern Han-Sui/Tang Dynasties (148–1100s); (b) translation of Western science and technology in the late Ming-early Qing Dynasties (c. 1500s–1700s); (c) translation of Western literary and social sciences works in the Post-Opium War period; and (d) full-scale, all embracing translation activities in the contemporary period of the People’s Republic of China (since 1949, especially since the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976).

The purpose of stating these facts here is not for the sake of emphasizing how long the Chinese history of translation is or what eventful a tradition of translation China can boast. Rather, it is to underline the basic view that this author has held, i.e. that the practice of translation in the Chinese tradition, like other translation
traditions in the world including that of the West, has also led to the development of
theoretical thinking about translation, and that those major historical movements of
Chinese translation were not only developmental periods of translation practice but
also were periods of theoretical developments on translation. It is based on this
understanding that the present research proceeds to examine such issues as: how
‘translation theory’ and ‘translation discourse’ are both distinguished and related in
the ‘Chinese’ context; what major existing features there have existed that seem to
characterize the ‘Chineseness’ of Chinese thinking on translation, and how Chinese
translation scholarship has been progressing under the new conditions of today.

2 Chinese Translation Theory Versus Chinese Translation Discourse

In the translation studies field in China, there have been two recurrent questions
with regard to Chinese theoretical thinking about translation. One asks: Is there any
‘translation theory’ in China? And the other: if there is, then is there ‘a Chinese
system of translation theory’?

The answer to the first question is a relatively straightforward “yes!” As is
generally true, all practice leads to theory, and the fact that China boasts a long
history of translation practice must necessarily mean that it also boasts a long
history of translation theory, especially ‘translation theory’ in its broad sense, i.e.:

(a) Knowledge about the phenomenon, activity, process or product of translation
(according to general, laymen understanding);
(b) Statements which lay down guidelines about how translation should be done
(Shuttleworth and Cowie 1997, p. 185);
(c) A series of statements, each of which is derived logically from a previous
statement or from an axiom and which together have a strong power of
explanation and prediction regarding a certain phenomenon (Holmes 1988,
pp. 93–94);
(d) Specific attempts to explain in a systematic way some or all of the phenomena
related to translation (Shuttleworth and Cowie 1997, p. 185);
(e) That which “can be broken down into (1) a description of its groundwork, (2) a
description of its subject matter, and (3) a set of rules” (Reiss and Hans 2013,
p. 2);
(f) That whose chief concern is to determine “appropriate translation methods” and
to provide “a framework of principles, restricted rules and hints for translating
texts and criticizing translations” (Newmark 1981/1988, p. 19); etc.

In other words, the various ideas and thoughts produced by the great many
translators and theoretical thinkers in the Chinese history of translation through its
aforesaid four periods of development can all be regarded as building blocks of
‘Chinese translation theory’. These range from (a) the classical period of Buddhist
translation with Zhi Qian (支谦, 3rd century CE) and his distinction between ‘refined’ and ‘unhewn’ translation (翻译的文质之分); Dao An (道安, 314–385) and his discourse on ‘five instances of losing the source’ and ‘three difficulties’ in translation (五失本，三不易); Kumārājīva (鸠摩罗什, 344–413) and his prioritization on conveying the meaning as opposed to precise literal rendering (重意译); Hui Yuan (慧远, 334–416) and his proposition on compromising between ‘refined’ and ‘unhewn’ translation (文质厥中论); Yan Cong (彦琮, 557–610) and his epoch-making translational treatise On the Right Way (辨正论); Xuan Zang (玄奘, 600–664) and his proposal of ‘five guidelines for not-translating a term [and using a transliteration instead] in handling Sanskrit sutras’ (五不翻) and eleven types of work [in the division of labor for translation] (翻译的十一种分工); Zan Ning (赞宁, 919–1001) and his landmark definition of translation as “译之言易也” (To translate is to exchange); etc.; to (b) the late Ming-early Qing Dynasties when the translation of Western science and technology became a dominant feature of translational activity across the country, with Xu Guangqi (徐光启, 1562–1633) and Matteo Ricci (利玛窦, 1552–1610) and their exposition on the importance of science translation; Wei Xiangqian (魏象乾, a 19th century professional Chinese-Manchu translator for the Qing government) and his proposition on the standards for translation and translation training; etc.; to (c) the Post-Opium War period of large-scale translations of Western literary and social sciences works, with Ma Jianzhong (马建忠, 1845–1900) and his initiatives on drawing on the grammatical models of European languages to reform and modernize the Chinese language, and on the development of modernized schools to train Chinese talents via foreign language as well as translation teaching; Lin Shu (林纾, 1852–1924) and his unique way of trans-adapting European novels in large numbers; Yan Fu (严复, 1854–1921) and his epoch-making tripartite principle of Xin Da Ya (信达雅, or faithfulness, smoothness, gracefulness), etc.; and further to (d) the modern and contemporary times with their great masters of translation and translation theory, including Lu Xun (鲁迅, 1881–1936) and his insistence on ‘faithfulness rather than smoothness’ in translation (宁信而不顺); Lin Yutang (林语堂, 1895–1976) and his proposing of the ‘translation studies’ (译学) strategy to ‘treat the sentence as the basic unit of translation’ (句译); Fu Lei (傅雷, 1908–1966) and his prioritizing ‘resemblance in spirit’ over ‘resemblance in form’ (重神似不重形似); and Qian Zhongshu (钱钟书, 1910–1998) and his proposition on ‘complete transformation’ in translation (翻译的“化境’). In view of all this, therefore, the existence of ‘translation theory’ is a hard fact about the Chinese tradition of translation, and there should not be any doubt about it.

However, the answer to the second question asked above is not quite as obvious as to the first. In a sense, it can be both ‘yes’ and ‘no’. ‘Yes’—because there has been a clear line of development in China in the theoretical thinking about translation from ancient times to the present (Luo 1983, p. 12). ‘No’—because it is not easy to determine how ‘systematic’ theoretical efforts had to be to constitute ‘a Chinese system of translation theory’. Indeed, what has been found in the Chinese tradition is often a pool of isolated ‘prefaces’ or ‘annotations’ to translated works (i.e. paratexts to translations, including epitexts and peritexts). In the words of
Wang (2003, p. 2), though it may be possible to speak of there being a Chinese ‘tradition of translation theory’, there has not been quite a Chinese ‘system of translation theory or theories’. This is not only due to the fact that it is difficult to determine whether a theoretical effort is ‘systematic’ or ‘unsystematic’, but also the fact that there are controversial views as to what can or cannot be categorized as Chinese ‘translation theory’ in the first place, especially from a modern perspective. Consequently, people start to explore ways to bypass using the term ‘Chinese translation theory’.

One of these efforts has been to use ‘Chinese discourse on translation’ where the term ‘Chinese translation theory’ might have traditionally been used. For example, instead of entitling her anthology Chinese Translation Theory, like Douglas Robinson calls his book Western Translation Theory (1997), Martha Cheung preferred using the word ‘discourse’ to ‘theory’ (or theories, etc.) in the title of her book, i.e. An Anthology of Chinese Discourse on Translation Vol. 1—From Earliest Times to the Buddhist Project. By using ‘discourse’ this way, in both its ordinary and Foucaulian sense, Cheung wanted to “highlight the point that no writing is done in an ideological vacuum. The workings of patronage, poetics, and economics leave their marks everywhere in the passages that make up the anthology, and are traceable as acknowledgements of help and support in both material and spiritual forms, and as remarks about taste, preferences, and constraints” (Cheung 2006, pp. 1–2).

Clearly, the strength of Cheung’s view on ‘discourse’ lies in its allowing for the avoidance of treating Chinese theoretical thinking about translation as ‘theory’ in any reductive sense, in the sense that when interpreted by the standards of Western translation ‘theory’ Chinese translation ‘theory’ may not seem as forceful. However, I would also like to point out that it is nevertheless important to distinguish between what Cheung (2006) called ‘(Chinese) discourse on translation’ and what would generally be conceived as ‘(Chinese) translation theory’. From the way I see or use the two terms, they are different in their basic reference. In common usage, ‘discourse’ means: “written or spoken communication or debate” or “a formal discussion of a topic in speech or writing” (Compact Oxford English Dictionary); or “the expression of ideas; especially formal and orderly expression in speech or writing” (Cheung 2006, p. 1); whilst ‘theory’ signifies: “a conjecture, an opinion, a speculation, or a hypothesis” (Compact Oxford English Dictionary). In a sense, this is to say ‘discourse’ is where ‘ideas’ (‘theory’, ‘theories’, etc.) are produced. I take this differentiation as a valid one and think that it can be legitimately applied to our discussion of what is ‘translation discourse’ and what is ‘translation theory’. In other words, by following this basic line of thought, there is not only ‘discourse on translation’ in the Chinese tradition, but this ‘discourse’ contains what can be called ‘(Chinese) translation theory’.

The above distinction entails this: in discussing the Chinese tradition of translation, I do not argue for either the exclusive use of ‘(Chinese translation) discourse’ or that of ‘(Chinese translation) theory’. I argue for the use of both terms and both concepts, because there exist both a Chinese tradition of studying and discussing translation and a Chinese legacy of theoretical ideas about translation.
This having been said, it is nonetheless important to note that the theme term I am using for this paper is ‘Chinese translation discourse’, rather than ‘Chinese translation theory’. There are three reasons for doing so. Firstly, ‘discourse’ covers a wider semantic area than such other words as ‘theory’, ‘theoretical thinking’ or ‘idea/ideas’. As explained above ‘(Chinese translation) discourse’ is where ‘(Chinese translation) theory’/‘theories’, ‘theoretical ideas’ or ‘ideas’ are found. Secondly, a greater sense of neutrality in opinion is thus entailed, as one would probably not disagree with the claim that there is a Chinese tradition of discourses on translation, even though differences in opinion may arise over whether there is ‘a system of theory’ in the Chinese translation tradition. And thirdly, the use of ‘(Chinese translation) discourse’ as the theme word would provide a more embracive basis for our discussion that not only involves translation theory per se but the broader issues of Chinese culture in which Chinese translation theory is imbedded. It is exactly from the perspective of this embracive nature of ‘Chinese translation discourse’ that we will now proceed to examine how the Chinese have perceived translation in ways that can be regarded as characteristically ‘Chinese’.

3 Three Characteristic Perceptions in Chinese Translation Discourse

Given the immensity of the Chinese history of translation, it would not be possible, nor is it the intention of this research, to cover everything that may be important about how Chinese translators and translation thinkers have perceived translation. For example, all the historical figures and their thoughts and ideas that we have briefly related to in the previous section are important. Also important is the vast indigenous reservoir of translational terminology ranging from the Chinese nomenclature of translation principles and methods to that of the operational skills and techniques, e.g. 信 (Xin/faithfulness), 达 (Da/smoothness), 彰 (Ya/gracefulness); 死译 (Siyi/morpheme-for-morpheme translation), 直译 (Zhiyi/literal translation), 意义 (Yiyi/meaning translation), 活译 (Huoyi/free translation), 胡译 (Huyi/uncontrolled free translation), 增译 (Zengyi/addition), 删译 (Shanyi/omission), and 改译 (Gaiyi/alteration), to name but a few. However, rather than covering all possibilities in Chinese thinking about translation, we shall focus only on those ways of thinking that this author regard as the most representative of the Chinese, especially against an implicit contrast with their non-Chinese (e.g. Western) counterparts. In this connection, three such ways or perceptions are identified for the discussion, namely: the perception of the activity of translating/interpreting; that of the requirements of/prerequisites for the translator/interpreter; and that of the fundamental principle of Xin (translational faithfulness).
3.1 Chinese Perception of ‘Translating/Interpreting’

The earliest record of the activity of ‘translating/interpreting’ or the agency of the translator/interpreter in China is found in the Liji (《礼记》) or the Book of Rites.\(^1\) The book describes the social forms, governmental system, and ancient/ceremonial rites of the Zhou Dynasty (c. 1050–479 BCE). The original text is believed to have been compiled by Confucius (551–479 BCE) himself, while the copy commonly referred to today is said to be edited and re-worked by various different scholars of the Eastern Han Dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE), principally Confucian scholars Dai De (戴德) and his nephew Dai Sheng (戴圣) during the Warring States Period (475–221 BCE). In Chapter Five of the book, i.e. that on Royal Regulations, there is this following passage:

五方之民, 言語不通, 嗜欲不同, 达其志, 通其欲, 东方曰寄, 南方曰象, 西方曰狄鞮, 北方曰译, 《礼记·王制》

The people living in the five regions spoke different languages and had different customs, likings and preferences. In order to make accessible what was in the minds of different peoples, and in order to make their likings and preferences understood, there were functionaries for the job. Those in charge of the regions in the east were called ji (the entrusted; transmitters); in the south, Xiang (likeness-renderers); in the west, Didi (they who know the Di tribes); and in the north, yi (translators/interpreters). (Tr. by Cheung 2006, p. 46)

Another early, equally important text on translation is provided in the classic of Zhouli (《周礼》) or the Rites of Zhou,\(^2\) which was reportedly compiled during the Western Han Dynasty (207 BCE–25 CE), at a slightly later time than the Book of Rites. As a collection of treatises on the official system of the Zhou Dynasty and national institutions of various states of the Warring States Period, the Rites of Zhou gave a brief description of the Post of Translator/interpreter in the chapter on the Qiuguan Sikourank (秋官司寇/Autumn Officers of Justice), or the Xiang (likeness-renderers) Officer (i.e. Translating/interpreting Officer or Interpreting-Functionaries) of the Autumn Officers of Justice. The relevant description of the post in the book is as follows:

象胥: 掌蛮夷、均蛮、戎狄之国使, 掌传王之言而谕说焉, 以和亲之。若以时入宾, 则协其礼与其辞, 言传之……《周礼·秋官司寇》

The xiangxu [likeness-renderers: xiang象, minor government officials] are responsible for receiving the envoys of the tribes of Man, Yi夷, Min闽, He貉, Rong戎, and Di狄. They are charged with conveying the words of the King

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\(^1\) Also translated as the Classic of Rites, the Record of Rites, or Collection of Treatises on the Rules of Propriety and Ceremonial Usages. The Liji (《礼记》) is one of the Five Chinese Classics of the Confucian canon, the other four being the Classic of Changes (《易经》), the Classic of Poetry (《诗经》), the Classic of History (《书经》) and the Spring and Autumn Annals (《春秋》).

\(^2\) The Rites of Zhou (《周礼》), originally known as the Zhouguan (《周官》) or Officers of Zhou, is one of the three ancient ritual texts listed among the classics of Confucianism, the other two being the Book of Rites (《礼记》) and the Etiquette and Ceremonial (《仪礼》).
and explaining his meanings to the envoys so that harmonious relations with these tribes may be maintained. At regular intervals, when the heads of these states or their representatives come to court to pay tribute, the xiangxu are responsible for overseeing matters relating to protocol; they also serve as interpreters… (Tr. by Cheung 2006, p. 43)

Five important comments can be made about the two passages cited above and about the activity of translation/interpreting or the agency of the translator/interpreter in ancient China. First, in recorded history, these texts (the first in particular) constitute the earliest texts of Chinese discourse on translation/interpreting, and indeed they have been frequently quoted as such in Chinese translation studies. It must be noted, though, that these passages are not the hard evidence of translation itself nor are they theoretical discussions of translation problems. Nonetheless, the fact that official titles by way of Ji (寄), Xiang (象), Didi (狄鞮) and Yi (译) in the Book of Rites: Royal Regulations and Xiangxu (象胥) in the Rites of Zhou were given to people who functioned as ‘administrative clerks’/’government officers’ and whose duty it was to help communicate between people speaking different languages clearly indicates that ‘[interlingual] translating’ (in the sense of ‘[interlingual] interpreting’) was already an officially recognized mediating activity when the Book of Rites chapter on the Royal Regulations or the Rites of Zhou chapter on the Autumn Officers of Justice was being compiled. Of the four terms of the Book of Rites, i.e. Ji, Xiang, Didi and Yi, and the term Xiangxu of the Rites of Zhou, which were all used in those very early times to refer to translating/interpreting the activity and/or the translator/interpreter the actor or agent, Ji, Xiang, Yi and Xiangxu have survived till today with Yi becoming the most commonly-used, unmarked term for ‘translating’ and ‘interpreting’, or for ‘translator’ and ‘interpreter’. The meaning that has been built into the act or agency of translating and interpreting via the use of these various terms of Ji, Xiang, Didi and Yi and Xiangxu is a significant cultural fact about Chinese theoretical and philosophical thinking about translation, a point that deserves to be elaborated further below. Second, the fact that both The Book of Rites and The Rites of Zhou were compilations on events during or since the Zhou Dynasty is good evidence that ‘translating/interpreting’ in China is at least 3,000 years old. Third, contrary to the rather ‘invisible’ status of their counterparts in other societies, interpreters/translators in ancient China occupied a relatively high social position because they were given the title of ‘government officials’/’interpreting-functionaries’, albeit not of a particularly high official ranking. Fourth, the role of interpreters/translators in ancient China was more than that of ‘language specialists’—it was a role with socio-political responsibilities because interpreters/translators were called upon to help maintain “harmonious relations” with people who “living in the five regions spoke different languages and had different customs, likings and preferences”. And fifth, and this is the most important point in terms of Chinese translation discourse, the use of different designations for interpreters/translators in ancient times was significant because these

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3See also Lung (2011, pp. 59–75) for a discussion of the ‘government officials’/’envoys’ status of Chinese translators/interpreters in the old times, for example in the Tang Dynasty of the 7th to 10th centuries.
designations serve as a window through which we can see how the ancients perceived interpreting/translation or how they perceived translators/interpreters, and how that perception has evolved in the Chinese tradition of translation discourse.

To understand this ‘typically Chinese’ perception of the role and meaning of the translator or interpreter more clearly and readily, a quick summary of these and other related designations would be helpful:

(1) As seen above, in *The Book of Rites*, four terms were used to refer to translators/interpreters:

(a) Ji (寄): the entrusted; transmitters;
(b) Xiang (象): likeness-renderers;
(c) Didi (狄鞮): they who know the Di tribes; and
(d) Yi (译): translators/interpreters).

(2) In *The Rites of Zhou*, a related term was used:

(e) Xiangxu (象胥): Likeness-renderer Of function, Translating/Interpreting Of function or “interpreting-functionaries” (Cheung 2006, p. 46)—in a sense this designation can be regarded as the classical predecessor to the modern/contemporary Chinese title given to the translator/interpreter, i.e. *Fanyiguan* (翻译官), meaning: ‘translating/interpreting officer’, which is so named because in the Chinese tradition translators/interpreters were often employed as ‘civil servants’ and worked as government officials.

(3) The terms (a), (b), (c) and (e) are no longer used in modern and contemporary Chinese translation discourse. However, the collocation of (a) with (b) is quite frequently used even today in such neologisms as:

- *Xiangji zhicai* (象寄之才—likeness-transmitter talent, i.e. translator/interpreter);
- *Xiangji shipin* (象寄视频,—likeness-transmitter video, i.e. translated/dubbed video) *Xiangji duanpian* (象寄短片—likeness-transmitter video, i.e. translated/dubbed video clip);
- *Xiangji zhai* (象寄斋—home of likeness-transmitter, i.e. name of a translation blog); and
- *Xiangji fanyi fuwu youxian gongsi* (象寄翻译服务有限公司—likeness-transmitter translator/interpreter services company, i.e. Xiangji Translation Company Ltd.).

(4) The term (d) *Yi* (译) has survived and become the dominantly used designation today for the activity of translation and interpreting, except that at some point during the first major Buddhist translation period another character, *fan* (turn over), was prefixed to *Yi* resulting in the new word:

(f) *Fanyi* (翻译): *fan* (turn over) + *yi* (translate)—translate/interpret.

In fact, much more than just ‘the activity of translation’, the surviving, dominant term *Yi* as well as its subsequent alternative *Fanyi* is an umbrella term capable of covering both translation and interpreting as an activity, and translators and
interpreters as the agent of the activity. Syntactically, it can be used as a noun, a verb and even an adjective, as used in Yiben (译本/translated text) and Fanyi wenxue (翻译文学/translated literature).

(5) Apart from the above designations, other terms have also been used:

(g) Sheren (舌人): she (tongue) + ren (men)—people were familiar with foreign places and languages and functioned as language mediators or “minor government officials responsible mainly for communicating with the various foreign tribes” (Cheung 2006, p. 36). The coinage of the term ‘tongue-men’ also date back to as early as the Zhou Dynasty, out of the belief that non-Chinese, ‘barbarian’ language speakers spoke by flipping their tongues over. Documentation of this extraordinary view was found in the Lüshi Chunqiu (《吕氏春秋》; literally Mister Lü’s Spring and Autumn [Annals], which was an encyclopedic Chinese classic text compiled around 239 BCE under the patronage of the Qin Dynasty Chancellor Lü Buwei):

反舌夷语与中国相反，故曰反舌也。(Lüshi Chunqiu, Ch. 2: Gongming功名)
Barbarian languages are spoken just the opposite of the Chinese language and were spoken with tongues flipped over. (Tr. by Lung 2005, p. 44)

蛮夷反舌，殊俗异习之国。(Lüshi Chunqiu, Ch. 19: Weiyü为欲)
Barbarians speak with their tongues flipped over and display different practices and customs from the Chinese. (Tr. by Lung 2005, p. 144)

Terminologically, attempts have been found to define the dominant term Yi/Fanyi (translate/interpret):

(1) ‘To translate/interpret’ means ‘to transmit’ (On Language, Volume 13 [Yang Xiong, BCE 53–18]; 译, 传也。《方言•十三》杨雄)

(2) ‘To translate/interpret’ means ‘to transmit the words of the tribes in the neighbouring regions’ (First Chinese dictionary Shuowen Jiezi [Xu Shen, c. 58–147]; 译, 传译四夷之言者。《说文解字》许慎).

(3) ‘Yi’ [to translate] means ‘to state in an orderly manner and be conversant in the words of the country [i.e. China] and those outside the country’—annotation provided by Kong Yingda (qtd. in Cheung 2005, p. 33).

(4) ‘To translate’ means ‘to exchange’, that is to say, to change and replace the words of one language by another to achieve mutual understanding”—annotation provided by the 7th century annotator Jia Gongyan (qtd. in Cheung 2005, p. 33).

(5) ‘To translate’ means ‘to exchange’, that is to say, take what one has in exchange for what one does not have—definition provided by the Buddhist monk Zan Ning in “Tang Jingzhao Dajianfu Si Yizheng Zhuan Xilun” [Treatise on the biography of Yijing, monk of the Tang capital monastery of Dajianfu] (qtd. in Cheung 2005, p. 34).
In sum, while basically only *Yi* and its subsequent alternative *Fanyi* are normally used today, all meanings imbedded in the various other terms can somehow also be read into *Fanyi* and *Yi*. These include the meanings of translators/interpreters as ‘transmitters’ (*Ji*) of messages; ‘producers of a similar/equivalent effect’ (*Xiang*; likeness-renderers); ‘language mediators’ who know the ‘foreign language and culture’ (*Didi*; those who know the Di tribe); and ‘government language officers’ (*Xiangxu*; Likeness-renderer Officers or Translating/Interpreting Officers).

The two most important meanings of all in *Fanyi* (the expanded form of *Yi*) as a verb are those of ‘exchange’ and ‘liken/resemble’. Interestingly, in Chinese the character *Yi* (semantically: translate/interpret) is a homophone to the character designating ‘exchange’ or ‘change’ (*易/, which is homophonically the same as 译/translate), so phonetically the statement “译者言易也” (‘To translate’ means ‘to exchange’ [or ‘to change’]) in Chinese is “Yi zhe, yan yi ye”. This perception of ‘translate/interpret’ as an act of ‘exchange’/‘change’ is indeed a true reflection of the basic property, or rather one of the two basic properties, of translation. For in conventional understanding, ‘to translate’ must necessarily mean to “[e]xpress the sense of (words or text) in another language…” (*Oxford English Dictionary*) or to “express the meaning of words of one language by way of another language” (“把一种语言文字的意义用另一种语言文字表达出来”—*Modern Chinese Dictionary*).

On the other hand, a further explanation of the meaning of *Fanyi* (turn over + translate/interpret) is provided by the 11th century Chinese monk translator Zan Ning (赞宁, 919–1001):

翻也者，如翻锦绮，背面俱花，但其花有左右不同耳。[Translation is like turning over a double-faced piece of brocade, for although the patterns are the same on both sides there is a difference between them in what is on the left and what is on the right.] (Zan Ning, qtd in Ma 1999, p. 169; my translation)

This other meaning of translation, as I see it, is the meaning of ‘likeness’/ ‘similarity’/‘equivalence’ required of the target text to the source text. And this is also a basic property of translation. For if there was no ‘likeness’/‘similarity’/ ‘equivalence’ between the TT and its ST, there would not be any act of ‘translating’ involved between the given texts. Of course, translational ‘likeness’/‘similarity’/ ‘equivalence’ does not mean absolute ‘identity’. Rather, it only means the kind of sameness of patterns on the two sides of a piece of brocade—the two sides are like each other in some or many ways but are never exactly the same.

### 3.2 Chinese Perception of ‘Prerequisites for the Translator’

In the Chinese tradition of translation discourse, the way in which the requirements of or prerequisites for a translator are perceived is characterized by an emphasis on the moral aspects of the requirements. This emphasis in turn is a reflection of traditional Chinese philosophy in general.