
Articles

China at the Turn of the 20th Century:

Translating Modernity through Japanese

YANGSHENG GUO

China's various forms of verbal and non-verbal engagement, interfacing, and confrontation with the West since the end of the 16th century culminated in the disaster of the Boxer Movement in 1900, when the Qing Dynasty fell to the hands of the "Allied Forces of Eight Powers." To survive, China needed a new language to translate, and to be translated into, modernity that was basically of Western design. Great translators such as Yan Fu and Lin Shu had tried to mediate between Classical Chinese and modern Western vocabulary and grammar. Under the then domestic and international climate, there was little time for such linguistic, intellectual, or cultural efforts. At this crucial moment, as a state policy, the Qing government sent large numbers of Chinese students, scholars, businessmen, and officials to Japan. These people brought back to China Japanese translations of the West that had helped to modernize Japan during the Meiji Restoration. Thus something that was unique in global intercultural exchange took place: a flowing backward of Chinese new vocabulary and grammar from Japan. This soft-landing of a new, half-mediated, and half-digested language pushed China to the discursive door of modernization—an ongoing process that is changing the world.

Background

In a sense, modern Chinese history can be described as an ongoing process of translating the West to re-define Chinese identity in colonial and postcolonial contexts, and in this endeavour, Japanese has played an important role, both literally and symbolically. This massive translation effort started towards the end of the 16th century, when Western missionaries tried relentlessly to reach the heart of the walled Middle Kingdom, which was rejecting all the vanguards of Western colonial forces—Jesuits, merchants, traders, pirates, sailors and adventurers—as “barbarians.”

The journey of the missionaries into the heartland of China was difficult. As early as 1550, Francis Xavier (沙勿略) had attempted to enter Guangzhou. After preaching several years in Japan Xavier had concluded that to convert the Japanese it was important first to convert the Chinese since China had been the source and inspiration of Japan. But on arrival he was forced to stay on a small island called Shangchuan (Gu, 1995), and he died of illness there not long after. As noted in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (1999, online), after St. Francis Xavier died (November 27, 1552) a series of fruitless attempts at getting into China were made. In 1568, 1575, 1579, and 1582, Jesuits, Augustinians, and Franciscans stepped on Chinese soil, but were forced to withdraw, sometimes after ill treatment.

On January 24, 1601, however, two missionaries, Matteo Ricci (利玛窦, 1552–1610) and Didacus Pantoja, broke through all the barriers and found their way to Beijing. Their passports were their Confucian scholar-style attire, something they had found most acceptable and appealing to the then Chinese officialdom. They made no mention of their intention to preach the Gospel. Instead,

they declared “that they were religious who had left their country in the distant West because of the renown of the good government of China, where they desired to remain till their death, serving god, the Lord of Heaven” (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1999, online). Well versed in Chinese classics, Ricci would cite numerous Confucian texts and demonstrate to the Chinese that Catholicism was in conformity with Confucianism. For example, during his preaching services, he once told the Emperor Wanli (who reigned from 1573 to 1620): “*Shangdi* (God) is what you call *tian* (Heaven). He once inspired Confucius, Mencius and many of your past emperors and kings. We are not here to deny your Confucian tradition but to present to you something complementary” (see Gu, 1995, p. 6. Translation mine).

The methods and strategies with which Ricci and others exercised their prudence worked. Ricci was not only accepted, but well liked and respected. “Through the ‘backdoor’ of some court eunuchs,” Ricci won great favor of Emperor Wanli, who offered him a position at court (Chen, 1992, p. 58). Inspired and encouraged by Ricci, many other European missionaries followed. Catholicism became so popular that toward the end of the Ming Dynasty, as many as 540 at the imperial court alone had been converted to Catholicism (Xu, 1938, p. 202), and Catholic believers in China totalled about 150,000 (Gu, 1995, p. 9).

With Ricci and other Jesuits, early Chinese translation of the West began. Since there were no Chinese who understood European languages, it was in fact Westerners who began this Chinese translation of the West. The missionaries—including, most notably, Sabbathinus Ursis (1575–1620), Nicholas Trigault (1577–1628, who brought a huge library of 7,000 Latin books to Beijing from Europe), Joannes Terrenze (1576–1630), John Adam Schall von Bell (1591–1666), and Ferdinandus Verbiest (1623–1688)—collaborated with three major converts, the “Three Pillars of the Catholic Church in China.” They were Xu Guangqi (1562–1633), Li Zhizao (1565–1630), and Yang Tingyun (1557–1627). Other major collaborators include Wang Zheng (1571–1644), Li Tianjing (1579–1659), Feng Yingjing (?–?) and Yang Zhihua (?–?).

The missionary-convert translations ranged from Christianity, mathematics, astronomy, physics, mining and metallurgy, hydraulics, to anatomy, biology, metaphysics and logic. In fact, as Lu (2000, online) writes, from the arrival of Ricci to the death of the last Jesuit, Father Louis de Poirat, in Beijing in 1814 (after the suppression of the Jesuit order), within some 233 years, there were 69 Jesuit authors, including later J. Bouvet (1656–1730), who published 212 books in Chinese. Of these books, as Lu (2000, online) notes:

Thirty-five ... were of the highest quality in astronomy, science, machinery, agriculture, and technology, by the standards of the Academia of Lincei in Rome, whose members included Galileo, Kepler, Leonardo da Vinci, Christopher Clavius (teacher of Matteo Ricci and Joannes Torrenz) and others. Fifteen books belong to philosophy and theology proper, including parts of the “*Cursus Coimbricensis*” of Coimbra University, Portugal, and Saint Thomas Aquinas’ “*Summa Theologiae*,” under the title of “Summary of Supernatural Science.” The remaining 162 books were strictly religious, dealing with selected readings from sacred Scripture, catechisms, maxims, liturgy, hagiographies, prayers, and devotions.

A textual examination of the translations (see Guo, 2002, pp. 84–119) shows, among other things, how deep and wide the linguistic and cultural divides were for translating the Western logocentric word into the sinocentric character. It shows how a theology-based, trade and industry oriented culture could hardly be translated into the Chinese common-sense-guided and agriculture-based culture. Meanwhile the translations were only available to an elite group of Chinese. Ironically, even within the small circle at the imperial court, those translations stirred up an intellectual, religious, and political power struggle. For instance, some of the court officials perceived, with good reason, the translations to be a heterogeneous system of nature, society and human life that was fundamentally

challenging the Chinese system of unquestioned beliefs regarded as self-evident. Headed most notably by Xu Changzhi of the late Ming Dynasty and Yang Guangxian of the early Qing Dynasty, they campaigned against the Jesuits and converts. They were vehemently determined to deride and demonize the West.

Due to the hidden agendas of the Jesuits, strong objections among part of the Confucian scholar-officials, and the China-Roman Catholic disputes over the rites, Emperor Yongzheng (reigned 1723–1735) banned Christianity along with maritime intercourse with foreign countries. China lost her opportunity to further translate, be informed about, or learn from the rapidly growing West. A century later when the West headed by Britain returned by breaking open China's closed door through gunship diplomacy, China had no way to avoid facing the West as a realistically destructive Other.

The Opium War between China and England (1840) sent China on its long march towards translating the “barbarians” in order to control them. Chinese translation moved radically towards its utilitarian, anti-colonial objective in the name of Yangwu Movement (洋务运动). For nearly half a century, it fell into the absurd logic of “Chinese body versus Western function,” which implied Western science and technology should be used to serve the Chinese soul. Inevitably, this Occidentalist way of translation went against the nature of translation as primarily intercultural understanding and mediation. The massive textual translations of Western military science and technology particularly pushed China further away from gaining a fair understanding of the “truth” of the West. Subsequently, China's various forms of verbal and non-verbal engagement, interfacing, and confrontation with the West culminated in the disaster of the Boxer Movement in 1900, when the Qing Dynasty fell to the hands of the Allied Forces of Eight Powers (Britain, USA, France, Germany, Russia, Japan, Italy, and Austria).

One of the few “positive” spin-offs of Western colonization was sending Chinese students to the West, which ushered in a new era in which the elite part of the new generation took up the task of transforming the Old China from the inside by learning, speaking, and translating both textual and cultural vocabulary and grammar of a capitalized West.

Linguistic Challenges in Translating Modernity: The Case of Yan Fu

Yan Fu the translator

Chairman Mao (in Lin *et al.*, 1988, p. 89. Translation mine) once wrote:

Since the defeat of the Opium War in 1840, the progressive Chinese experienced all kinds of hardships in their search for truth from the West. Hong Xiuquan (1814–1864, leader of the 1850–1864 Taiping Rebellion), Kang Youwei (1858–1927, leader of the 1898 Wuxu Reform), Yan Fu (1853–1921) and Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925) represented this line of Chinese before the birth of the Chinese Communist Party.

That Mao should give such a credit to Yan as a translator is somewhat surprising. However, Yan's life indeed reflected the process of undoing of the Old China. He was born in Fuzhou, one of the most colonized cities in the coastal province of Fujian. At the age of 13, he was enrolled in the Fujian Naval Academy, one of the major academic institutions founded during the Yangwu Movement. At the age of 24, as part of the Qing government scholarship program for overseas studies, he was picked by the Imperial Court to be sent to the Greenwich Naval Academy in Britain. There he became interested in Western philosophy and politics in comparison with the Chinese practices. Graduating in 1879 from the Academy, Yan returned to the Fujian Naval Academy as an instructor. Later he became the director of the Tianjin Naval Academy. Meanwhile he sponsored and supported several translation

journals and newspapers, and was involved in establishing several academic societies. In 1908, he was appointed head of the Imperial Institute for Examination and Approval of New Terminology. In 1912, Yan became the first president of Peking (Beijing) University.

Yan's interest in the relevance of modern Western scholarship to China was ever present, but the decisive moment in his patriotic efforts did not come until the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895. That war woke the Chinese to the fact that the mere import of Western science and technology could not save or defend China. There was something working at a deeper level. People both in and off the centre of political power were looking for answers. By this time, having been repeatedly defeated, humiliated, dehumanized, exploited and oppressed by the foreign powers, the political and moral authority of the Qing Dynasty had been eroded, leaving a kind of cultural vacuum. The previously valued “body” was not functioning, and the “function” had no “body” in which to realize itself.

In 1895, immediately after the Sino-Japanese War, Yan published two influential essays *Yuan qiang* (On the Basic Principles of Strengthening the Nation) and *Jiuwang jue lun* (On Saving China). In the first essay, Yan analyzed the domestic and international situations using Darwinian and Spencerian sociological theories. He pointed out that neither the old feudal system of laws nor the Western science and technology-oriented Yangwu Movement could secure the survival of China in the new international context. Instead, Yan suggested, China should proceed to reform three aspects simultaneously: enhancing the physical strength of the people, enlightening the intellectual power of the nation, and renewing the civil virtues of the Chinese society. Yan then proposed a package of reforms, which touched on China's essential issues of education, society and politics. Many of the concepts and ideas in this essay, well translated from the West, though new, were understandable and acceptable to the readers.

Yan devoted himself to translation in the hope of achieving these three reforms. In a letter to a friend written in 1899, Yan briefly mentioned his original intention in doing translations. He said:

Since last year (the 1898 Wuxu Reform), I have been closely observing changes in the times and in human affairs without accomplishing anything. If our fellow countrymen remain unenlightened, nothing can be achieved by either the conservatives or the reformists. However, even if the Imperial Court does nothing or does everything wrong, the descendants of the Yellow Emperor will not fall into foreign slavery so long as more and more Chinese become informed of both China and the West. Even if we Chinese are temporarily enslaved, the day for our national resuscitation will surely come. Therefore I have kept myself away from any worldly attachment, and devoted myself to nothing else but translation (in Chen, 1992, p. 126. Translation mine).

In his aloof detachment, Yan actively engaged himself in Western learning, carefully choosing to translate those theories he regarded as most fundamental and indispensable for Chinese survival and rebirth. His choice was based upon his understanding of the cultural differences and the complicated relationship between China and the West. In his essay “On the Urgency for Reform,” Yan criticized the theory of Chinese body and Western function, famously remarking: “How could it be possible for a cow to be the body with a horse as its function?” To him, Western advanced sciences and technologies could hardly be related to the Chinese feudal system of society. “Chinese learning has its own body and function, and so does Western learning. Divided, the two can exist side by side; united, both would die.” In his opinion, there were fundamental differences between the two cultures:

While Chinese value the three cardinal guides, Westerners hold equality as of the first importance. Chinese appoint people on grounds of personal favour, Westerners on their merit. China rules by filial piety, whereas the West rules by justice. China honours emperors and/or masters, while the West honours people ... China has numerous taboos, while the West is open to criticism. Economically, Chinese emphasize regulating the flow while Westerners focus on opening up the source; Chinese value a simple way of life while Westerners tend to pursue luxury and entertainment.... As far as learning is concerned, Chinese find pride in erudition, Westerners

value new knowledge. When disasters occur, Chinese put the blame on the mandate of heaven, Westerners on human factors (in Wang, 1996, pp. 361–362. Translation mine).

These insights, coming out of a genuinely bi-cultured mind, illustrated some major gaps between China and the West. To bridge the gaps, from 1894 onward, Yan undertook to translate such Western theories as had never been heard of in China, including evolution, politico-economics, and ethics. His translations, among others, include *Evolution and Ethics and Other Essays* (T. H. Huxley, 1894) (1898), *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (A. Smith, 1776) (1901–1902), *The Study of Sociology* (H. Spencer, 1873) (1903), *On Liberty* (J. S. Mill, 1859) (1903), *A System of Logic* (J. S. Mill, 1843) (1905), *A History of Politics* (E. Jenks, 1900) (1904), and *The Spirit of Laws* (C. L. Montesquieu, 1743) (1904–1909).

One can hardly reconstruct the immense impact these translations had upon China. The appearance of each translation was no less than a shattering moment for long-cherished Chinese traditions. Together with Lin Shu, who liberally translated over 180 Western works into Chinese, Yan launched a cultural enlightenment movement that led to the Literary Revolution (1908) and the May 4th Movement (1919) (see Guo, 1992). Here a question arises: how could Yan Fu, or how did he, manage to convey the culturally heterogeneous ideas of the West into Chinese that was confined largely in the linguistic world of a feudal society?

A textual analysis

What challenged Yan Fu as a translator was, in a broader sense, different paradigms of cultural and social constructs encoded in the two different linguistic systems. In a narrower sense, the challenge was that he could hardly find verbal or cultural equivalents in the target language. In comparison with the difficulties encountered by the Jesuits and converts in their mostly science and technology rendition, what Yan faced was often a civilizational divide defying easy mediation. For instance, while Ricci and Xu Guangqi might have had problems deciding on mathematical equivalents in Chinese, they could follow their respective lines of mathematics traditions, and arrive at points of equation through verbal, non-verbal or illustrative means.

For Yan, however, things were much more complicated. The difficulties lay in the linguistic structures of philosophy, ethics, morality, anthropology, economy, religion, sociology, politics of the industrializing West. When translating works of philosophy, as the linguist Saussure pointed out, translators shoulder responsibilities that go far beyond translation. They have to introduce a whole new system of philosophical concepts into the target culture. In the process, what matters first is not translation of words, but of their definitions, not of signifiers but of the signified (see Gao & Wu, 1992, p. 118). Looking for or creating equivalents in the classical Chinese to Western modern, bourgeois, capitalist vocabulary was already an onerous task. To define those Western concepts and ideas in the feudal language of Chinese would seem beyond reach.

For example, in a linguistic tradition that talked about Nature and Man as one and the same, how could one express the concept of *evolution* in the scientific, Darwinian sense which involves the whole process of Cartesian dichotomy? This tradition worshipped its cultural ancestors such as Confucius and Lao Zi as the source and highest order of civilization, and taught its young to follow, and therefore to constantly return to the cultural realm envisioned by those sages. Paradigmatically it was a philosophy of regression. This does not in any way mean that Chinese culture had no idea of progress, competition, or survival of the stronger in the usual senses of the terms. However, its language was indeed inadequate to convey the idea, together with its associated, clearly defined vocabulary and grammar, that human history is a linear process of progress towards the survival of the fittest.

In a patriarchal tradition that had taken for granted the absolute power of the emperor in national affairs and of the male in the family, the language so developed could hardly work in the contexts of the theories Yan was translating. There was no way for the Western ideas of *equality, freedom, democracy, liberty, autonomy, individualism* and so on to have a shared basis with the Chinese social and political discourses. These ideas were not only alien to the Chinese concepts of familial and social order; they were running exactly against the Chinese way of individual and social thinking. To translate such theories would involve subversion of the very basis upon which China as a long-standing civilization had been socially organized.

Another challenge Yan as a translator was confronted with was the language of acceptance in his time. Although the empire was falling apart, its working language was still the Classical Chinese, which was accessible mainly to the elite, scholar-official class. These people monopolized not only the linguistic and intellectual resources, but also political and material resources of the nation. An irony thus emerged. On the one hand, his translations were intended for the new generation of Chinese who stood for the hope of overthrowing the old by creating a new culture with the help of Western learning. On the other hand, the language of translation available to him which would hold promise of intellectual and social change was something beyond the reach of the intended reader.

This and other challenges were so strong that, as Yan himself said in his famous preface to Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics and Other Essays*, he often "hesitated for half or one month on determining an equivalent" (Editorial Board, 1984, p. 6). Some of Yan's writings may be taken at best as examples to show linguistic and cultural divides and his efforts to overcome them. In his comments on translating the word *economy*, which he translated as *ji xue*¹ (计学), Yan wrote, in Classical Chinese:

Ji xue, called *ye ke nuo mi* (叶科诺密, economy) in the West, comes from Greek. *Ye ko* (eco) refers to family/household. *Nuo mi* (nomy) is the transferred meaning of *nie mo* (nomia), referring to *zhi* (治, management). In the sense of *ji* (calculating or settling accounts), it starts from the household. By extension, it means things such as measuring, paying, receiving payments and managing. In its broadest sense, it covers everything concerning a country's production and supply. Since it is all-inclusive, the Japanese have translated it into *jing ji* (经济, economy), and the Chinese have given *li cai* (理财, managing financial affairs or wealth) as its equivalent. From the viewpoint of equivalence, *jing ji* seems to be too broad, while *li cai* too narrow. Therefore I have chosen to use *ji xue*.... In ancient classics, we find many such words as *kuai ji*, *ji xiang*, *ji xie* (account or accounting); in oral speech we have words like *guo ji* and *jia ji* (national economy and livelihood) — all these appear to be more equivalent to the Greek *nomia*. In fact (Adam Smith's *Inquiry into the Nature and Cause of Wealth of Nations* is a book of *ji xue* (in Gao & Wu, 1992, p. 128. Translation mine).

In another note, Yan said:

I have reasons for translating it into *ji xue* rather than *li cai*. *Xue* (学, study or learning) is different from *shu* (术, technique or skill). The former examines principles and mechanisms of nature, and establishes natural laws. The latter works to achieve things possible based upon the known principles or laws. *Xue* is concerned with knowledge while *shu* with practice. *Ji xue* is a (branch of) study/learning (science) while *li cai* technique/skill. A term of technique can not translate a (branch of) study/learning. Secondly, production, distribution, management and accumulation of *cai* (wealth) are within the scope of *ji xue* but far beyond the range of *li* (accounting). Thirdly, *li cai* has become a conventional term. Whenever it is used, it is used in the sense of the state rather than the people. I have heard that in ancient times, a *si nong* was called a *ji xiang*. When *shou ling* (local officials) submitted their financial reports, it was called *shang ji*.... This is why I adopt the term *ji xue* (ibid. p. 131. Translation mine).

1. *Ji xue* is composed of *ji* (settling accounts or calculation) and *xue* (studies or learning). Although Yan seems to be right in his comments within the Classical Chinese context, modern Chinese chooses to use the Japanese translation, *jing ji*, as the equivalent for economy.

In a letter to the most important reformist Liang Qichao (1873–1929), Yan wrote:

One might think with thousands of years' civilization, special terms for all studies (learning or sciences) concerning human life can be found in (Chinese) classics. In fact, it seems to me that the absence of special terms (in Chinese) is not at all limited to *ji xue* (economy). The most frequently used words in *ming li* (名理, philosophy), including *yin guo* (因果, cause and effect), *ti yong* (体用, essence-function) and *quan shi* (权实, reality), all came into being only with the import of Buddhism. Today, words like *right* and *obligation* are key words for politicians. However, where can one find their equivalents in our Chinese classics?

... Of the word *right*, three years ago, when I was reading Western political works, I found it could not be translated into Chinese. An awkward translation might be *quan li*, but it would be no better than using *ba* (despot or overlord) for *wang* (king).... Later I happened to open the *Hanshu* (*History of the Han Dynasty*, written in 82 CE), and came across the sentence “*zhu xu hou fen liu shi bu de zhi* (Zhu Xuhou was angry that Liu did not do his bit).” It dawned upon me that the *zhi* (职, duty, responsibility) here should be the right word for “rights.” However, *zhi* is interchangeable with “duty,” and can hardly be applicable. So I had to give up the idea. Not long after, I came across the sentence “*yuan de wo zhi*” in Gao You's *Jing yi shu wen* (Explanations of the Confucian Classics). The “*zhi*”² here ... is the same as the ... *zhi* (duty, responsibility) in *Guan Zi*.... Therefore I have been convinced that (the latter) *zhi* is exactly the right word for *right*. When translating a major concept, one has to think it over by tracing it back to the original, earliest meaning of the Western word, and then examine all its derived and extended meanings. After that, one should decide on the Chinese equivalent by going through the same process in Chinese classics and find their similarities (ibid. p. 130. Translation mine).

In the preface (1903) to his translation of J. S. Mill's *On Liberty*, Yan said:

Some might say the Western word *li bo er te* (liberty) should be translated into *gong dao* (公道, justice) instead of *zi you* (自由). ... In my understanding, the word *li bo er te* comes from *Libertas*, originally the name of the God of *zi you* (freedom). It is synonymous with *fu li dang* (freedom). Freedom means “the condition of being unrestricted.” It is the antonym of *slavery*, *subjection*, *bondage*, *necessity*, etc. When a person is imprisoned, in English he is said “to lose his liberty,” but not his justice. When one unties a dog, in English he is said “to set the dog at liberty,” that is, to give the dog *zi you* (freedom) but not *gong dao* (justice). There is a special word for *gong dao* in the West, that is *za si zhi si* (justice). The two are related but not to be mixed.

The Chinese word *zi you* (自由) often implies such derogative meanings as dissolute, unconventional, reckless and so on so forth. However, these meanings have been derived from *zi you* (自由). The original word simply means unrestricted or unconfined by anything outside (of something). It does not have commendatory or derogatory implications.... J. S. Mill is here using the word *zi you* in its very original sense....

The characters *you* (由) and *you* (繇) are interchangeable in ancient times. In this translation, *zi you* (自由) rather than *zi you* (自由) is used. This is not because I value the past and slight the present, but because, according to the origin of the Western word ... I translate it into *zi you* (自由) so as to show the slight difference (ibid. p. 133. Translation mine).

In an article written in 1913, Yan said:

Nowadays no other word can unite everybody more powerfully than *ai guo* (爱国, loving the nation). *Ai guo* is translated from the Western word *patriotic*, which comes from the Latin word *Pater*, meaning “grandfather/ancestor.” *Ai guo* means to love grandfather/ancestor from whom one's life is born, and one becomes civilized and enlightened through loving one's grandfather/ancestor (ibid. p. 137. Translation mine).

Examples are too many to be cited here. Nearly all of them point to the fact that Yan was caught in between both textual and cultural tensions and conflicts. As a textual translator, Yan was faced with two incommensurable cultural texts; as a cultural mediator, he was often lost in the linguistic gaps. But above all, as a pioneer in bringing China and the West together on some of the fundamental

2. The *Zhi* (直) here is a different word, pronounced also *zhi*. It has different meanings, including: (1) straight; stiff; (2) just; fair; upright; (3) erect; vertical.
3. *Guan Zi*, also translated as *Kuan Tzu*, is an ancient book attributed to the Legalist Guan Zhong, who died in 645 BCE. Confucius highly admired him.

issues separating them, Yan became a major builder of a China-West intercultural text and of an intertextual culture. His efforts laid the basis for modern cultural discourses in China, and modern Chinese cultural discourses could not have been possible without Yan's hermeneutic interpretation and translation of Western classics.

Textually, Yan employed any method available to bridge the gaps and divides. He meticulously investigated traditional theories and methodologies of Buddhist and missionary-converts' translations. As a comparative study between Yan and the Buddhist translator Kumarajiva (CE 344–413) conducted by Wang (1988, pp. 38–39) shows, Yan followed the practices of the latter in omitting part(s) of the original texts, in rearranging chapters or sections of the original, and in changing the actual original texts. For instance, in his translation of Huxley's *Evolution*, here and there Yan omitted quite a number of sentences or even paragraphs he regarded as unimportant. Sometimes instead of translating, he would summarize what is said in the original, replacing Western historical stories and fairy tales with Chinese ones to create a sense of familiarity and affinity.

To make his translations understandable, Yan sometimes gave lengthy and detailed notes and comments regarding historical developments and the contexts of certain ideas. For instance, statistics (Gao & Wu, 1992, p. 83) show that Yan's introductory remarks and comments in his translation of Huxley's *Evolution* amounted to over half of the book (17, 704: 33, 814 Chinese characters). Out of the 35 chapters, 28 received comments. In 6 chapters, Yan's introduction and comments outnumbered the original texts. In all the 10 books he translated, Yan provided more than seven hundred notes, comments and introductory remarks, which add up to over ten percent of his translated texts.

Yan read extensively, both Western works and Chinese classics, in order to compare and find points of contact for equivalents. He would not let go of one equivalent that was not, in his eyes, linguistically and culturally grounded in the Chinese tradition. This could be seen from his discussion and arguments about translating the words *economy*, *liberty*, *right* and so on. In deciding equivalents, he would systematically take into account the academic and disciplinary contexts in which they appeared. Therefore, when creating an equivalent, he was in fact establishing a new field of study in Chinese that had never been named as such. For instance, he invented the following Chinese terms (Wang, 1984, p. 481; Shi, 1991, pp. 232–247; Gao & Wu, 1992, pp. 108–118):

ming xue (名学, logic), *zhi xue* (质学, chemistry), *zi xue* (字学, philology), *qun xue* (群学, sociology), *xin xue* (心学, psychology), *sheng xue* (生学, biology), *li xue* (理学, metaphysics), *xue xue* (学学, the science of science itself)....

Meanwhile he established, in a systematic manner, Chinese equivalents for the core vocabulary of those fields of science and studies, including *yu* (宇, space), *zhou* (宙, time), *xing* (形, body), *gan* (感, sensation), *jue* (觉, consciousness), *qing* (情, emotion), *zhi* (志, volition), *xin* (信, belief), *yi* (义, concept), *shi* (识, memory), *shen* (神, mind), *zhi* (质, matter), *shuo* (说, theory), *lei* (类, genre), *bie* (别, species), and *cha* (差, differentia).

In cases where Yan could not find any equivalents in Chinese, he would resort to sound translation via syllabic equivalents. Some of the transliterations he invented are still used today, including *wu tuo bang* (乌托邦, utopia), *luo ji* (逻辑, logic), *luo ge si* (逻各斯, logos), *tu teng* (图腾, totem), etc.

What deserves mention here is that through transliteration Yan actually invented some new ways of creating Chinese new characters by employing the method of 形声 (*xingsheng*, semi-pictographic/indicative and semi—or homo—phonic). For instance, in transliterating the word *cori*, a kind of mouse, Yan used the character *shu* (鼠, mouse/rat) as the left, indicative part of another character which denotes the sound. Thus two new characters *ke* (可) and *li* (里) were invented to mean *cori*.

Another example is the transliteration of *turdi* (a kind of bird). Yan used the character *niao* (鸟, bird) as the right, indicative part of another character denoting the sound. Thus two new characters, *shi* (是) and *die* (蝶), were created as equivalents of *turdi*.

To cater to Chinese reading habits and tastes, he would at times change the persons, sequences, structures or perspectives of narration. For example, here is the first sentence of Huxley's *Evolution*:

It may be safely assumed that, two thousand years ago, before Caesar set foot in southern Britain, the whole country-side visible from the windows of the room in which I write, was in what is called "the state of nature."

Yan translated it into:

Huxley is alone in a room, (which is) situated in southern Britain, against a hill and facing the plains. The scenery outside the threshold spreads before the eyes. (So he) falls into imaginations of the scenes existing two thousand years ago, before the great Roman general Caesar came (in Gao & Wu, 1992, p. 94. Literally translated into English by myself).

From this sample, it can be seen that Yan strove at a sinicized rendition of the original. He changed the person from "I" into "Huxley," so that the oratorical original was clothed in the more familiar and acceptable language and grammar of classical Chinese histories. He split the original single sentence into three separate sentences. In so doing, Yan restructured the sequence of events and order of narration according to Chinese reading habits. In between the lines of his version are found drama, suspension and liveliness that could more easily engage the reader. With "the great Roman general," he provided an explanatory element in his translation for those who might not know who Caesar was. All these and other strategies were for easier understanding and acceptance in the Chinese cultural context of the alien theory of evolution.

In terms of culture, Yan's sinicized translation sometimes seemed to have inevitably compromised the cultural "otherness" in the target culture. For instance, the very central concept of evolution, which had no equivalent in Chinese, was translated by Yan into *tian yan* (天演, literally heavenly change), a concept created out of the Confucian-Taoist idea of Nature. By the same token, Yan used *tian* (天, heaven/heavenly) to translate *nature* (天运 / 行, *tian yun/xing*, heavenly destiny/tao) and *survival of the fittest* (物竞天择, *wu jing tian ze*, literally things compete and heaven makes choice). Although some Chinese scholars, such as Wang (1987), marvel at Yan's magical and powerful use of *tian* in many different contexts, such terminology reminds us of the earlier Jesuits-converts' treatment of linguistic-cultural gaps. While *evolution* seems to lay emphasis upon the human factor, *tian yan* appears actually to minimize the human role. The Chinese *tian*, which implies unification of Nature and Man, is by no means identical with the Western concept of Nature held in the 19th century as the opposite of, and object of conquest by, humankind. In this sense, Yan was ironically "dumping" Western heterogeneous, anthropocentric ideas into the "hold-all" of the highly sophisticated idea of *tian*. Or, to be more exact, Yan could not "jump" out of the linguistic net of Classical Chinese as a historical product.

Another example is his translation of *On Liberty* into *Qun ji quan jie lun* (群己权界论, literally on the boundaries of rights between the group and the self). As was seen from above, Yan meticulously studied the word *liberty*, and he knew an equivalent that was already in use. However, instead of adopting *zi you*, he preferred to employ an explanatory method of translation. This speaks about Yan as a cultural interpreter and translator on different levels. First, he was translating into a language that had no appropriate way of expressing the idea of liberty in political and philosophical

senses. Secondly, in the given linguistic framework, the existing word in the vernacular *zi you*, as he felt, carried a derogatory connotation that sounded almost anarchist and vulgar, since the word literally means “do as (one)self pleases.” Thirdly, as a socially and culturally responsible translator, Yan was aiming at creating an image of the West that was at once rational in itself and culturally acceptable to the classical Chinese mind.

Faced with all these conflicts and contradictions, he chose to culturally explain the concept of liberty rather than venturing to establish an equivalent in Chinese. *Liberty* does imply “boundaries of rights between the group and the self,” but *qun ji quan jie* is not equivalent to liberty. Consequently, although Yan set a long-lasting standard of “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance” for Chinese translation in his Preface to his translation of Huxley’s *Evolution*, he strove, at his best, towards expressiveness and elegance at the cost of faithfulness.

Linguistic “Lack”

As discussed above, Yan’s classical translations, although moderate and conservative, prepared China for change beyond the imagination of the Yangwu Movement. They helped to provide a larger context of international and global connection and competition for Chinese to re-locate themselves. They awakened the Chinese to the fact that China’s repeated failure in confrontation with the West was not due solely to its weakness and backwardness in science and technology. With modern Western philosophical, political, sociological, economical, anthropological and other concepts and ideas circulating far and wide, Chinese were moving from the Celestial Empire mentality to an evolutionist mindset.

Although there was as yet no equivalent in Chinese to the word *modern*⁴, the sense of the West being “modern” with its associated vague, as yet verbally undefinable images of progress, democracy, equality, freedom, organization, control, efficiency, science, technology, openness, began to be rooted in the Chinese consciousness. This consciousness grew and was dominated by rejecting anything Chinese as being feudal, despotic, totalitarian, backward, superstitious and so on. In this process, a sense of cultural inferiority arose, which developed into a Middle Kingdom complex still lying behind Chinese sentiments and emotional responses to the West. Under this intellectual trend, to be Western was to be modern; to be modern was to be patriotic—in the sense of securing the survival of the Chinese nation among the jungle of nations in the world. China left itself no time to understand what it meant to become modern or how to ontologically address the relationship between China and the West. It was ready to “colonize” itself against the background of intensified Western colonization. This self-colonization proceeded in a manner of chaos, confusion, contention and contradiction.

For any change to be possible, however, China was faced with two cultural tasks. One was to find a way to alleviate the linguistic poverty as reflected in translations done by Yan and his contemporaries. The other was the cultural choice between the Classical Chinese that was out of touch with actual day-to-day life, and the vernacular that was regarded by the scholar-official class as sub-literary and vulgar.

Lack of a proper vocabulary to signify the changing reality pointed to a social and cultural crisis in China. Since the process of Western colonization had already destroyed the socio-economic basis upon which China’s political superstructure was based, China became lost between the Classical Chinese, which had little to do with actual life experiences, and the new reality that could not be named with the written language available. Although Western ideas were slowly, ambiguously

4. At that time, the word modern had to be transliterated into *mo deng*.

and chaotically disseminated and interpreted through classical appropriations by Yan and other translators, an enlightened, awakened and emotionally boiling nation was desperately in need of a new language to make sense of their destroyed life. The Chinese nation could not live long with a linguistic world full of unmediated, undefined, or generalized terms. For instance, *yang* (洋, foreign or outlandish) was widely used to mean things that were of, from, or for the West, including *yang huo* (洋火, matches, literally foreign fire) and *yang bu* (洋布, machine-made cloth, literally foreign cloth). Or at its worst, the language of that time was permeated with confusing, incomprehensible and unintelligible transliterations such as 赛因斯 (*sai yin si*) for *science*, 德漠克拉西 (*de mo ke la xi*) for *democracy*, 巴力门 (*ba li men*) for *parliament*, 伯里玺天德 (*bo li xi tian de*) for *president*, 费厄泼赖 (*fei e po lai*) for *fair play*, 苦迭打 (*ku die da*) for *coup d'état*, 密斯托 (*mi si tuo*) for *mister*, 哀的美敦书 (*ai de mei dun shu*) for *ultimatum* ... (see Shi, 1991, pp. 240–246; Liu *et al.* 1984).

The untranslatability of such vital terms suggested the existential dilemma of the semi-feudal, semi-colonized China lost between the unredeemed Confucian order and the unreachable new order designed and controlled by the modernizing West. At this crucial moment of history, something that was unique in global intercultural exchange took place: flowing backward of Chinese new words and expressions from Japan. It provided a shortcut for the Chinese to some place where understandable signifiers could be found for the signified.

Translating the West through Japanese

As Francis Xavier sensed, China used to be a major source of culture and civilization for Japan. As early as 285 CE, in order to learn from the advanced Confucian culture, Japan invited the Chinese Confucian scholar Wang Ren from Korea to Japan. Wang brought with him ten volumes of the Confucian *Analects*. This was the first time Japan ever came into contact with a written language. From then on, Japan had more and more access to Chinese classics. But Japanese had remained an oral language until the Tang Dynasty (618–907), when many Japanese students returned to Japan after being educated in China for many years. Some returned students introduced the radicals of Chinese characters and the *cao shu* (running hand or cursive script) to Japan, and created the Japanese katakana (片假名) and hiragana (平假名). 假 (*jia*) means borrow or loan; 名 (*ming*) here means written language. Katakana is a system of written forms developed through borrowing Chinese radicals along with their sounds. Hiragana is a system of character writing based upon the Chinese *cao shu* (see Sun, 1992, pp. 300–308).

For more than a thousand years, Japan has used Chinese characters and studied Chinese classics. The Japanese have helped to preserve and develop the Chinese language in their own ways. Even today, there are over 1,800 Chinese characters legally used in Japan. While in China, the Chinese characters have experienced several rounds of reform and simplification in form, the Japanese have preserved and are still adopting the older forms of writing. In some areas the Japanese use Chinese characters in their archaic and/or Japanized senses, which are often misleading to Chinese audiences. In other areas, the Japanese have created, and are creating, many terms and expressions with Chinese characters, which are visually new but semantically, etymologically, and lexically intelligible to the Chinese. This unique cultural reciprocity played its historical role when China was in the cultural predicament of linguistic disorientation at the turn of the 20th century.

Japan embarked on its national project of modernization—the Meiji Restoration—in 1860s. While at the same time when China was caught in the political, philosophical and intellectual wars between “Chinese body” and “Western function,” the Japanese devoted themselves whole-heartedly to both textual and cultural translation of the West. By the time when Yan and his contemporaries

were racking their brains, often futilely, for proper Chinese equivalents of Western ideas, the Japanese had already gone through the process. They had created numerous words with Chinese characters to translate Western concepts. And those loan words had linguistically evolved into maturity after years of social and cultural trials and tests in Japan.

At this very time, as a lesson drawn from the Sino-Japanese War (1894–95), the Qing Dynasty turned its eyes from the West to Japan for advanced learning. On August 2, 1898, Emperor Guang Xu (reigned 1875–1908) issued an imperial edict to send students to Japan (see Ding, 1990). Soon Chinese crossed the “narrow strip of water” in large numbers to be educated in Japan. Official statistics show that while in 1899, only 200 went to Japan, the number grew quickly by 1903, when over 1,300 students, official or self-sponsored, went to Japan. In 1906, the number rose to more than ten thousand. Meanwhile, officials at different levels, from county, prefecture, province to the court, traveled to Japan for short-term visits (see Ding, 1990).

Soon the waves of Chinese students and scholars storming to Japan started to roar back, in terms of culture. Beginning from 1900, Chinese students in Japan engaged themselves in translating Japanese or Japanese translations of Euro-American works into Chinese. They organized themselves into different translating groups and societies such as *Yi shu hui bian she* (Compilation Society of Translations) and *Jiao ke shu yi ji she* (Society of Translating and Editing Textbooks). Their translations were either printed in Japan and sold in China or printed and distributed in China.

The rate and range of those translations can be seen in the following example. In 1903, a group of students of the Shanghai Literary Society in or returned from Japan, headed by Fan Disheng, translated and published 100 volumes of Japanese school and university textbooks and references. Under the title of *A General Encyclopedia*, they include books of and on religion, philosophy, literature, education, politics, law, geography, history, natural sciences, industry and commerce. According to Tian, before the Sun Yat-sen Revolution (1911), the majority of textbooks used in China’s secondary and post-secondary schools were translated or re-translated from Japanese (see Ding, 1990, pp. 202–208).

In contrast to Yan Fu, who spent over 3 years (1894–96) on Huxley’s *Evolution* and 6 years (1897–1903) on Spencer’s *Study of Sociology*, these translators were working at an astonishing speed. Their work was greatly facilitated by the linguistic affinity between Japanese and Chinese. They did not have to spend “half a month deciding on a Chinese equivalent” as Yan did. Rather, they could, very often, copy Japanese equivalents of Western concepts. They were importing Western ideas whose Chinese equivalents had been created or invented by the Japanese using Chinese characters.

The Japanese employed, and are still employing, different methods of translating Western ideas. Their methods were more or less the same as those used by Chinese translators. According to Shi (1991, pp. 247–253; also see the whole book by Liu *et al.* 1984), their strategies include: 1) using Chinese characters to transliterate Euro-American terms; 2) using Chinese characters to half translate and half transliterate Western words; 3) creating new Chinese characters using the method of *xing sheng*; 4) inventing new Chinese characters as equivalents to Western terms; 5) creating new words with Chinese characters; 6) taking Chinese terms from their contexts in Classical Chinese writings to translate Western ideas; and 7) using words or terms already existing in Classical Chinese writings. Through these and other methods, the Japanese had already produced the kinds of modern Chinese vocabulary desperately needed by the Chinese.

Thus, at the turn of the century, a unique phenomenon of global intercultural exchange took place. While large numbers of Chinese moved physically to Japan to learn from the West, greater quantities of Western cultural vocabulary and grammar clothed in the Chinese language were

flowing back to China. In a short period of time, Chinese social customs began to give way to modern Western practices, in matters such as clothing, hair style, diet, social etiquette and forms of entertainment. Without much effort, modern Western core vocabulary in politics, law, sociology, sciences, history, military affairs—nearly all areas of Western learning—began to have Chinese equivalents. This includes words which dominate different stages of China's social, political and cultural transformation (see Shi, 1991, pp. 247–253; also see the whole book by Liu *et al.* 1984):

进化 (<i>shinka</i> in Japanese) for <i>evolution</i>	革命 (<i>kakumei</i>) for <i>revolution</i>
解放 (<i>kaiho</i>) for <i>liberation</i>	阶级 (<i>kaikyū</i>) for <i>class</i> (as in class struggle)
共和 (<i>kyōwa</i>) for <i>republic</i>	社会 (<i>shakai</i>) for <i>society</i>
社会主义 (<i>shakai-shugi</i>) for <i>socialism</i>	公民 (<i>kōmin</i>) for <i>citizen</i>
共产主义 (<i>kyōsan-shugi</i>) for <i>communism</i>	规范 (<i>kihan</i>) for <i>norm</i>
国际 (<i>kokusai</i>) for <i>international</i>	文化 (<i>bunka</i>) for <i>culture</i>

Such words flowed into China and were conveniently adopted in all walks of life at such a rate that ordinary Chinese did not, and do not, realize they were from Japanese. These words replaced most of the new words created by Yan Fu and his contemporaries. In fact, statistics (in Wang, 2005) show that 70% of the terms currently used in sociology and humanities are from Japanese.

Most Chinese would not emotionally accept the fact that the many modern words they use to live with are of Japanese origin. As Shi (1991) noted, even Chinese scholars differ on the issue of whether those words borrowed from Japanese should be regarded as loan words. Some argue that from the ways the Japanese created Chinese characters/words, it should be admitted that except for some Japanized transliterations with Chinese characters of Euro-American concepts, the majority of Japan-born vocabulary was an extension or variation of Chinese characters/words. This is because most Chinese characters created by the Japanese followed the 6 Chinese ways of character construction (六书, *liu shu*), and most of the words of Japanese origin were created out of the linguistic and cultural contexts of Chinese classics.

It can be seen that many Chinese words created by the Japanese out of traditional Chinese contexts were endowed with foreign and alien meanings. For instance, the word 民主 (*min zhu*, democracy) does appear in one of the earliest Chinese classics, the *Book of History*. But in that context, *min* (people) *zhu* (master) is used exactly in the opposite sense of democracy: it stands for emperors or officials—masters of the people. Another example is 革命 (*ge ming*, revolution). Indeed, *ge* (change) *ming* (fate, destiny) as a word can be found in the *Book of Changes*. However, in that context, it means “changing the mandate of heaven,” whereas revolution is defined as and popularly understood to be an attempt by a large group of people, often using violent methods, to change the political system of their country.

What is important here is that through this two-way intercultural exchange, the way was prepared for the Chinese language to be fundamentally revolutionized in terms of vocabulary. For instance, Classical Chinese words are monosyllable-based, which means a character is usually a word. They do enjoy the advantage of being simple, concise, and economical. When they are read aloud, they do impress the audience as being solemn and highly refined, especially with those modal particles such as 之乎者也 (*zhi, hu, zhe, and ye*) in Classical Chinese writings. Yan Fu convinced himself that pre-Han Dynasty vocabulary, syntax and wording were more faithful, expressive and elegant than “the vulgar language (i.e. the vernacular) of the recent times” (in Editorial Board, 1984, p. 6). Therefore he chose to use mono-character words as equivalents to Western terms, including 宇 for space, 宙 for time, and 形 for body.

However, mono-character-based words, having been used for thousands of years, have acquired more meanings than any fairly educated person could master. They tend to be ambiguous and

misleading, open to different interpretations. In contrast, Japanese translations of such words, as can be seen from above, are mostly bi-syllabic. They are actually similar to words used in Chinese daily life. Extensive use of those words in the rising media and school textbooks in China gradually marginalized Classical Chinese mono-character words.

While, to make sense, one has to put most Classical Chinese words within the traditional Confucian–Buddhist–Taoist discursive contexts, those Japanese-made words seem to be neutral. With two or more Classical Chinese words combined into one, the reader has to move out of any specific Classical references to achieve an understanding of the new meaning(s). This neutral quality of the bi-syllabic words strips mono-syllabic words of the historical, local, moral, subjective, superstitious and gender-discriminating contexts and contextualization that often characterize Classical Chinese writings. It endows modern vocabulary with a sense of “objectiveness” and “scientificity.” To be clear, objective, scientific, and therefore manageable and controllable is what “modern” implies, among other things. And the import of Japanese-made words provided a linguistic key for China to the discursive door of modernization.

From Yan Fu’s 天演 (*tian yan*, heavenly change) to the Japanese 进化 (*jin hua*, evolution), from Yan Fu’s 群己权界 (*qun ji quan jie*, boundaries of rights between the group and the self) to the Japanese 自由 (*zi you*, liberty or freedom), Chinese revolutionized itself in a short period of time. Within a few years in the first decade of the 20th century, Classical Chinese gave way to Modern Chinese.

This soft-landing of a new language of modernity pushed China onto the road of a century’s radical and violent struggle at the cost of millions and millions of lives from Sun Yat-sen’s Revolution, the Northern Expedition (1926–1927), the Anti-Japanese War (1937–1945), the Civil War (1945–1949), to the Korean War (1950–1953), the Anti-Rightist Campaign (1957), the Great Leap Forward (1958), the Great Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), and the 1989 Tian’anmen Incident. All those wars and movements centred round basic but half-digested/mediated cultural, socio-economic, political, and geo-political concepts and -isms largely imported from Japan. One wonders what would have happened if Modern Chinese had evolved in the manner of Yan Fu’s heavenly change. Would China have developed a more dialogical, neo-Confucian language that would enable the Chinese nation to achieve a new, truly “modern” identity in a postcolonial world?

References

- Catholic Encyclopedia*. (1999). Online edition: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15346a.htm>. Retrieved October 20, 2005.
- Chen, FK. (1992). *A history of Chinese translation theories*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Languages Education Press.
- Ding, G. (Ed.). (1990). *Cultural transmission and transformation: Chinese culture and education*. Shanghai: Shanghai Education Press.
- Editorial Board. (1984). *Collected papers of translation studies (1894–1948)*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Teaching and Research Press.
- Gao, HQ. & Wu, CG. (1992). *The translator Yan Fu*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Languages Education Press.
- Gu, CS. (1995). *Missionaries and modern China*. Shanghai: Shanghai People’s Press.
- Guo, YS. (1992). *English-Chinese translation*. Nanchong: Southwest Petroleum Institute Press.
- Guo, YS. (2002). *Chinese translation of the West*. (Unpublished doctoral thesis.) Edmonton: University of Alberta.
- Lin et al. (Eds.). (1988). *A dictionary of Chinese translators*. Beijing: Foreign Translations Press.
- Liu, ZY. et al. (Eds.). (1984). *A dictionary of loan words in Chinese*. Shanghai: Shanghai Dictionaries Press.
- Lu, M. (2000). Dialogue of Christianity with cultures in China of yesterday and today. Online edition. <http://www.everyonesaquinas.org/1Dialogue.htm>. Retrieved November 10, 2004.

- Shi, YW. (1991). *Foreign cultural ambassadors: Loan words in Chinese*. Jilin: Jilin Education Press.
- Sun, PQ. *et al.* (1992). *A history of education in China*. Shanghai: East China Normal University Press.
- Wang, BB. (2005). Japan standing in between China and the West. In *Shanghai Wenxue* Editors (Eds.), *Select essays (vol. 2): Watching over the soul*. Online edition: <http://www.china.org.cn/chinese/ch-yuwai/193347.htm>. Retrieved November 8, 2005.
- Wang, JH. (1996). *The new literature of the May 4th Movement and foreign literature*. Chengdu: Sichuan University Press.
- Wang, KF. (1988). Kumoriva and Yan Fu. *Fanyi tongxun* (Translation Bulletin), 4, 38–39.
- Wang, KF. (1994). On historical studies of translation culture. *Foreign Languages Teaching and Research*, 100, 57–61.
- Wang, ZL. (1984). Yan Fu's intention. In FLTRP Editors (Eds.), *Collected works in translation studies* (pp. 479–484). Beijing: Foreign Languages Teaching and Research Press.
- Xu, ZZ. (1938). *A general history of Catholicism in China*. Shenjiao zazhishe.