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## The Politics of Translation under Chairman Mao's Leadership

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### Abstract

Officially regarded as a political weapon, Chinese translation under Chairman Mao's leadership (1949-76) was intended as part of the Communist propaganda to achieve ideological unification and build a revolutionary discourse. It was always linked with Mao's many political and ideological movements, and therefore, was politically overloaded in terms of its role definition, administration, institutionalization, organization, choice of texts, textual manipulation, censorship, etc. This paper looks at how the politics of translation in this period was played out through official planning and control, criticism and self-criticism, importing Marxism, Leninism, and Stalinism and exporting Maoism, manipulative treatment of Western literature, and language policy. It also discusses the special case of *Cankao xiaoxi*, where translation served as Mao's recipe for vaccinating his Party against the "poisonous" West.

### Background

One thing that characterized Chairman Mao's leadership (1949-76) was constant and violent political and ideological struggle<sup>1</sup>, and translation, as part of the Communist "superstructure," played various domestic and international roles in the Maoist revolution. A look at how Chinese translation in this period was understood, planned, institutionalized, censored, and manipulated may exemplify the political nature of translation that manifests itself in different forms.

The first generation of Chinese Communist leadership was only too aware of the role of translation as a weapon in its decades of struggle against foreign colonial powers, domestic feudal forces, and the Kuomintang under Chiang Kai-shek (Guo, 2006). Most of the top leaders had some overseas experiences as revolutionary students. For instance, Premier Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping studied for many years to become Communists in France. In the 1920s, indeed Paris and Lyon were intellectual, ideological and organizational bases for the growth of Chinese Communism. From the 1930s, the international base moved to the Soviet Union, which brought up large numbers of Chinese cadres.

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<sup>1</sup> There is a long list of ideological and political campaigns, including 1) the Land Reform (1950), 2) criticism of the movie *The Story of Wu Shun* (1951), 3) The Intellectuals' Ideological Reform Movement (1951-1952), 4) The Anti-Three Evils and Anti-Five Evils Movements (1951-1952), 5) The Promoting Dialectic Materialism over Idealism Movement beginning with criticizing Hu Shi (1954-1955), 6) Suppressing the "Anti-revolutionary Group Headed by Hu Feng" (1952-1955), 7) The "Let a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend" Movement (1955-1957), 8) The "Anti-Rightist Movement" (1957-1958), 9) The "Anti-Ma Yinchu's Reactionary Essay on Population" (1958-1960), and 10) The Great Cultural Revolution (1966-76) (see Zhu, Guo & Li eds., 1992).

Some of the Party leaders were actually respected translators of Western texts. For instance, one of the founding fathers and Secretary General (1921-1927) of the Party, Chen Duxiu (1880-1942), a key leader of the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement, was a major translator. Qu Qiubai (1899-1935), leader of the Party executed by the Kuomintang, was a major translator and translation theorist. Zhang Wentian (1900-1976), having overseas experience as a student in Japan and the USA and elected Secretary General of the Party in 1935, translated such writers as Wilde, Bergson, Storm and Brandes (see Lin *et al.* eds., 1988, pp. 695-696). Although Mao himself did not have any overseas experience, he was surrounded by comrades with linguistic and cultural experiences of the West.

Before the Communist leadership came to power in Beijing, the project of socialist translation had been designed. As early as May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1942, at the height of anti-Japanese and anti-Kuomintang campaigns, Mao delivered his famous speech on the policy of literature and art in Yan'an, the then Chinese Communist headquarters. It clearly stated that literature and art, as part of the superstructure, must serve the proletarian political purposes (Mao, 1991). It evolved into the guiding principle for the New China's cultural theory and practice.

On the eve of the founding of the New China, a group of Communist translators headed by Dong Qiusi (1899-1969) had established the Shanghai Translators Association, trying to develop better ways to contribute to the historical transition. Immediately the Association started the monthly magazine *Fanyi* (Translation), with Dong being the editor-in-chief. In July 1950, Dong began editing the first and only translatology journal *Fanyi tongbao* (Translation Bulletin). In his "Lu Xun and Translation," Dong called for establishing a new system of Chinese translation studies based upon Lu Xun's ideas (see Chen, 1992, p. 362) under the guidance of Stalin's linguistic theory<sup>2</sup>. The article was published in *Fanyi* on October 1, 1949, the day when Mao proudly declared to the world that from then on the Chinese people would stand up and be counted.

In Mao's Party and government, well-known translator-turned writers and theorists were assigned to important posts, such as Minister of Culture (Mao Dun, 1896-1981), Director of the Academia Sinica (Guo Moruo, 1892-1978), and Director of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party [Lu Dingyi, 1906-96, representative to the Communist International (1919-1943) from 1928 to 1930].

Thus ideologically, organizationally, and institutionally, translation as part of Communist propaganda and socialist construction was to be implemented.

### **Translation as ideological unification**

#### ***Criticism and self-criticism***

As a rule, Chinese Communist ideological unification was achieved through the systemized practice of criticism and self-criticism hailed as one of the "Party's three important styles of work" (the other two being integrating theory with practice, and forging close links with the masses). These criticisms and self-criticisms were contextualized within, and guided and measured by, the Party's basic principles and standards.

The first few months of the New China witnessed some measure of freedom for individual and freelance translators in their choice of politically neutral or non-sensitive texts and methods of translation. A number of translators took liberty with this freedom, and produced translations riddled with errors at an astonishing rate. This situation was perceived to be unregulated and anarchic by the Communist authorities,

<sup>2</sup> In his article "Marxism and Problems of Linguistics" (*Pravda*, June 20, 1950), Stalin criticized the idea that language is a superstructure on the base. This brought an end to the then dominant Marrist school of linguistics, the Japhetic Theory.

who took immediate action. According to Sun (in Xie ed., 2000), on March 3, 1950, the first shot against such translators was fired by the *People's Daily*, the Chinese Communist mouthpiece directly supervised by Chairman Mao. Under the headline "Be Serious about Translation Work," the newspaper carried three articles, criticizing what had happened to translating the mainly Soviet Union literature.

This was "enthusiastically echoed by the entire world of translation," as Sun (in Xie ed., 2000) noted. For example, the aforementioned *Translation Bulletin* published one critical article after another, accusing some well-known translators of being fame and fortune-hungry, and irresponsible in text selection, wording and phrasing, and accuracy. It called on the translators being charged to criticize themselves by relating to Chairman Mao's ongoing "Intellectuals' Ideological Reform" and "Anti-Three Evils and Anti-Five Evils" movements. In 1952, one of the accused published, in the same journal, a letter of apology, admitting to all the charges that had been laid against him. Meanwhile his publisher also made a public apology, promising to stop publishing the translations in question, and vowing to strictly abide by the rule of manuscript review and censorship in the future.

Had those criticisms and self-criticisms been limited to academic and ethical levels, they might have been, in some ways, positive and constructive. As it turned out, however, "criticism" easily became an organized movement of witch-hunting, political persecution, and public censoring, and "self-criticism" inevitably developed into a process of self-censoring under the ever-intensifying political climate. Consequently, many translators, being politically classified into "Reactionary" and "Rightist" groups, were imprisoned, sacked, or dis-engaged from any translation practice. Many were psychologically abused, physically tortured, and even beaten to death during Mao's Great Cultural Revolution.

### ***Planning and control***

As a matter of course, the Communist Party relied fundamentally on official planning, propaganda, and control for securing ideological unification. Not long after the *People's Daily* published its open criticism, the Publishing Bureau of the Central Government of the People held in 1951 the first national translation work conference. The central theme was how to plan and control, as well as how to improve, translations. The keynote speech was titled, literally, "Strive for the Plan-nization<sup>3</sup> and Quality Improvement of Translation Work." The Conference passed two important documents: Draft Regulations on Translation Work of Translation Institutions in Government Bodies and Organizations, and Draft Regulations on Publishing Translated Books by Public-Private Joint Enterprises (see Chen, 1992, p. 374). This constituted a basic framework within which translation was to be conducted. A series of political translation projects was soon planned out and implemented, which will be discussed later in this paper.

In the field of literary translation, in line with the objectives set by the conference mentioned above, the China National Writers' Association, a government institution, held in 1954 the First National Literary Translation Work Conference. Older translators who were now new officials such as Guo Moruo and Zheng Zhenduo (1898-1958), Deputy Minister of Culture, addressed the conference, which was concluded with the keynote speech by Mao Dun. In his speech, Mao Dun, having briefly reflected on China's glorious two-thousand-year-old tradition of translation, stressed the importance of literary translation as part of the ongoing socialist cultural construction. He said (in Chen, 1992, pp. 375-376. Translation mine):

While we Chinese people are working selflessly for the socialist industrialization and socialist economic transformation, we are also carrying on the socialist cultural construction. The new socialist culture can never be created in isolation or divorced from historical or world connections. Its growth

<sup>3</sup> The Chinese original word used is 计划化 (*jihua hua*, literally plan-nization, with the root *jihua* being followed by the suffix *hua*.) Having no English equivalent, the word meant that all translation work (including choice of original text, translator, proofreader, reviewer, publisher, and distributor) must be carefully planned before it could start.

and development must depend both on carrying forward the most valuable cultural traditions of our own, and on assimilating the cream of world classical and modern progressive literature.

From the ancient to the modern, from the East to the West, from Homeric epics to the latest Soviet Union literary achievements, from India's *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* to today's Aragon of France and Foster of America, outstanding works representing the highest achievements of world literature are numerous. They are infinitely rich in contents. And all of them are what the Chinese people need today. They must become indispensable spiritual food for our national cultural life. They must become nutrition for cultivating and watering the socialist literature and art that are being created.

Having thus described the role of literary translation from a rather open point of view, Mao Dun further defined the nature of socialist translation as part of domestic and international political struggle. For the working people in New China, he said, literature from the more advanced socialist countries, particularly from the Soviet Union, was appreciated more as political and ideological textbooks than mere literature. It could not only familiarize the Chinese with the life, struggle, noble internationalism and patriotism in those countries, but also enhance the exchange of intellectual, emotional and spiritual experiences between the peoples. On the other hand, Mao Dun went on to say (in Editorial Board, 1984b, p. 3. Translation mine):

We are also deeply concerned with and emotionally attached to the revolutionary and progressive literary works in all the capitalist, colonized and semi-colonized countries. Through these works, we become deeply aware of how the people in those countries are, under reactionary rule, unyieldingly and persistently struggling for their own liberation and a better life for tomorrow against imperialist aggression and slavery. Their miserable and painful life is what we experienced yesterday, and can evoke our profound sympathy. Meanwhile their current struggle for independence and freedom is part of the peace-defending and anti-aggression struggle of the people all over the world. It is right in this struggle that our Chinese people are related by flesh and blood to all the peoples in the world.

This "rational" process of politicizing literary translation resulted, perhaps both from and in, the dominant political mentality of control, plan and unity. In the same speech, which was to be the government policy, Mao Dun said (in Chen, 1992, p. 377. Translation mine):

Our country has entered the period of socialist construction and socialist transformation. All the economic and cultural causes (projects) have been gradually placed on the track of *zu zhi hua* (literally organization-ization) and *ji hua hua* (literally plan-nization). The unplanned, chaotic situation of literary translation work must no longer be allowed to exist. Literary translation must be, under the leadership of the Party and the Government, uniformly planned, organized and carried out in proper order by the controlling government bodies and institutions concerned.

This first national conference thus determined the future course of literary translation, which was to be moving away from any intercultural and aesthetic concerns to the sole focus of political struggle. As can be seen from Mao Dun's speech, tensions arose between the awareness of cultural needs that could hardly be 'planned' or 'organized' in actuality and official recognition, justification and regulation of what were legitimate needs that should be satisfied. Within the whole social and cultural system designed following the Communist political principles and agendas, 'cultural needs' were to be created and propagandized in a planned and controlled manner. Translation was therefore a tool to both create and satisfy those needs.

**Building a proletarian revolutionary discourse**  
***Importing Marxism, Leninism, and Stalinism, and exporting Maoism***

While the founding of the People's Republic of China seemed to symbolize the victory of Marxism in China, Mao's Party and government still needed adequate Communist vocabulary and grammar to develop a proletarian revolutionary discourse to justify and strengthen its leadership. Translating Marxist classics goes back to the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement of 1919 (Guo, 2006), and by 1949, according to some incomplete statistics (Wu, 2001), about 530 Marxist works in translation had been published. On the other hand, due to three decades of anti-colonial and civil wars, most of the works by Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and their major exponents had not been systematically rendered into Chinese.

As an urgent political task, in 1950, *Renmin Chubanshe* (the People's Press) was established, whose mission was to publish political works of the Party and State, especially Communist classics. For the first two years, the Press mapped out its scheme of Marxist publications, checked against the existing authoritative texts in translation, reprinted older versions, and organized new translations. On January 1, 1953, the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau (CCTB) under the direct supervision of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party was founded (see Chen, 1992, p. 477). As a "nationally unified Marxist translation centre," the mission or mandate of the Bureau was to "translate the complete works by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin in a systematic and planned manner" (Wu, 2001). Many experienced translators the New China had were assigned to work as professional Marxist translators; many well-known professors and international sinologists and experts with different academic backgrounds from major universities and social science academies across China were to be involved in proofreading, revising, and improving (in terms of Chinese wording, grammar, and rhetoric) the newly translated works, and in establishing and finalizing Chinese equivalents of Marxist concepts and terminologies.

Because of the geopolitical environment China was facing, complete works by Stalin, rather than by Marx, Engels, or Lenin, were first translated by the CCTB. From 1953 to 1958, the 13-volume complete works, including treatises, speeches, reports, and letters by Stalin from 1901 to 1934, were carefully rendered, meticulously proofread and revised, and published and distributed nationally. The CCTB then focused on Lenin. From 1955 to 1963, the complete works of Lenin in 39 volumes were finished, and more than 2.47 million copies were printed and distributed. The project of translating the *Complete Works of Marx and Engels* started also around mid-1950s. From 1956 to 1974, 39 volumes were published (see Wu, 2001). Through its translations, the CCTB constantly provided standardized socialist and communist vocabulary and grammar for the nation to learn, study, memorize and practice.

The whole project of translating Marx and Engels, however, was not completed until 1985, when all the 50 volumes were finally published. What is most revealing here is that politics played its role even in the political task of translating the Communist "Bibles." According to Wu (2001, online), at the height of the Cult of Maoism during the Great Cultural Revolution, the "Ultra Leftists" within Mao's Party represented by Lin Biao (1907-71) and the "Gang of Four" tried to stop the translation by finding "political" faults with specific translated texts, and by promoting their slogan that "Ninety-nine percent of our reading list should be Chairman Mao's books." Consequently, from 1968 to 1971, not one single Marxist translation was published, and eighty thousand copies of works by Marx and Engels that had been printed were sealed up in storehouses.

It is worth noting here that while importing Marxism and Leninism, Mao's Party and government also saw the need to export Maoism. In July 1952, the Central Government decided to establish the Foreign Languages Press (FLP), which was under direct supervision of the Ministry of Propaganda of the Chinese Communist Party. The mandate of the FLP was to "internationally propagandize documents of the Party and State" (FLP, online) through translation into dozens of foreign languages.

The FLP immediately undertook to translate the 4-volume *Selected Works of Mao Zedong* into

foreign languages. Some of the best-known scholars and translators, headed by Qian Zhongshu (1910-98), were organized into a special team, which worked for more than six years to produce an English version of Mao's *Selected Works* that was regarded as "faithful, expressive, and elegant." In 1960, Qian joined another team that translated Mao's poems into English.

Through these translations, Maoism exercised its international influence, which reached its peak with the "Little Red Book" (short quotes from Mao's *Selected Works*) in late 1960s. Even today, Maoism is still deeply rooted in the political mentality of some countries in the world.

### ***Literary translation***

As mentioned earlier, there was a period of short-lived freedom for literary translation, which, textually speaking, flourished in its own way, especially in translating Euro-American classics and Russian-Soviet Union literature. This made it possible for Mao Dun (in Editorial Board, 1984b, p. 3. Translation mine) to proudly declare in 1954:

Due to the great victory of the Chinese people's revolution, under the sunshine of Marxism and Leninism and the wise leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, our country has made outstanding achievements in all the aspects, political, economic and cultural. The cause of literary translation is rapidly developing with the cause of literary creation. According to an incomplete statistic by the Press and Publications Bureau of the Central Government, from October 1949 to the end of 1953, the number of literary translations (including Children's literature) published across China totaled as many as 2,151 (books/volumes). This is unparalleled in Chinese history... In the past, an excellent literary translation would have a print-run of only one or two thousand, or at most three to five thousand. But now in general, within one year any literary translation reaches a total of several hundred thousand, and even over one million copies. In particular, the Soviet Union's literary works are the most popular among the readers.

Perhaps as a major translator and Communist official, Mao Dun had never imagined, at the time when he was painting the above exciting picture and rationalizing the "organization-ization" and "plan-nization" of translation, what lay ahead for translators and literary translation. When he was advocating control, he was to be controlled by a system that became uncontrollable.

With Mao's political consciousness running into and through all the cells of the Party and State organs, literary translation, defined and institutionalized at the first national conference, was planned, selected, judged, and evaluated solely on the basis of political correctness. Although what being politically correct was exactly was never clearly identified or defined, and was constantly changing with Mao's personal sentiments, taste, and temperament, choices of foreign literary texts were made according to the translated Soviet Union's literary standards in relation to Mao's theory of class struggle. This meant, in practice, only Soviet Union poets and novelists, such as Gorky, Fadeyev, Mayakovsky, Ostrovsky, A. N. Tolstoy and Esenin, were up to the unwritten or unarticulated standards. Those writers indeed became household names in the 1950s and early 1960s. Some of their writings were included in China's school textbooks. A generation of Chinese grew up with their revolutionary works (Guo, 2002).

As the New China had cut off all the ties with the West, now generally called Western imperialists and reactionaries, Western literature was minimally represented – although it was there, present at both realistic and symbolic levels in China's daily life. Realistically in translation, the West was the old West – the Homeric, Shakespearean, Dickensian and Balzacian West (of mutual suspicion, cheating, deception, and scheming against one another) that had been ideologically filtered and cleansed of any 'impurities' including Dumas, Oscar Wilde, Allan Poe and Baudelaire, who had opened the Chinese eyes to the

emotional world of the West forty years before. Measured with the proletarian revolutionary ruler of socialist realism translated from the Soviet Union, only a few Euro-American revolutionary, progressive writers were up to the standard of introduction. Several writers of "critical realism," who had been praised by Marx, such as Thackeray and Charlotte Brontë, were allotted some space in translation. Some American authors who were labeled as "progressive" for their exposing the darker side of American life, including Mark Twain, Theodore Dreiser, and Jack London, were among the list of the translatable. Quite a number of African-American writers were also favoured for their anti-racist and "militant" spirit and qualities (see Zha, in Xie ed., 2000).

Translating Euro-American literature was more part of implementing Mao's literary policies than any true interest in, or popularization of, Western literature, since the Party's literary standards and vision were materialized in the process of highly selective and manipulative treatment of the more contemporary Western texts. For instance, on the one hand, modernist literature, including Impressionism, Symbolism, Aestheticism, Futurism, Expressionism, and Stream-of-Consciousness, and post-WWII literature, were altogether banned as decadent, according to the then Soviet Union's dominant literary theory. On the other hand, in the 1950s, a little more than a dozen modernist and post-War works of Existentialism, Theatre of the Absurd, and the Beat Generation were translated and published by the Writers' Press and China Drama Press (see Zha, in Xie ed., 2000). However, each copy of these books, appearing in yellow paper cover and therefore sarcastically called *Huangpishu* (Yellow Book, the popular name for Vaccination Certificate), was labeled "Restricted Publication" and "For Critical Purposes Only," accessible only to higher-ranking officials, researchers, and propaganda departments. For any translator or researcher, whose self-censoring function was constantly at work, each copy was practically no less than a warning – a vaccinating treatment – against the decadent West.

Translation of Western literary theory was even more strictly banned. All through Chairman Mao's leadership, according to Zha (in Xie ed., 2000), the only exception came in 1962, when first the Writers' Press published *Selected Works of Modern and Contemporary American and British Bourgeois Literary and Art Theories* (in two volumes, again labeled "Restricted Publication"). Then the Shanghai Literature and Art Press published the translation of *Selected Essays by T. S. Eliot* (also labeled "Restricted Publication"), the first and last of its kind during Mao's regime. Later that year, Academia Sinica compiled a book titled the *Current Situation of American Literature*, critically introducing a number of "contemporary American bourgeois writers" such as Faulkner, Hemingway, and Steinbeck. The appearance of these books, as Zha noted, was the positive result of political struggle on the part of the more moderate leaders headed by Premier Zhou Enlai (1898-1976) against the Ultra-Leftists within Mao's Party.

Literary translation virtually ceased to exist during one of the gravest cultural disasters in Chinese history, the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), which was actually an anti-cultural, anti-intellectual, and certainly anti-translation, movement that regarded any Western works as "poisonous weeds." The dominant majority of the highly respected scholars and distinguished translators (including those Marxist translators), classified as Reactionary Academic Authorities, were forced into what were called "Cowsheds" (something like concentration camps) in the countryside, far away from any printed material. Many were persecuted to death, or committed suicide. For instance, Fu Lei (1908-1966), the greatest translator of Balzac, R. Rolland and Voltaire, hanged himself in Shanghai after being politically persecuted, physically abused, and publicly humiliated. Many high-ranking, scholar/translator-turned officials were also doomed to fall. For example, as Minister of Culture, Mao Dun became one of the first targets of the Revolution. As soon as the Revolution started, the chief "planner" and "organizer" of the New China's translation cause had to try to protect himself and his family by shutting himself in his home. Yet, like many others, he could not escape from being tortured (see Guo, 2002).

Ironically, in November 1973, a foreign literary translation magazine, *Zhaiyi* (literally *translations of selected passages*, also labeled "Restricted Publication"), was started in Shanghai, the stronghold of the

Communist Ultra-Leftists. In its mission statement, the magazine said: “Our main task is to reveal, through literature and art, the social, ideological, political and economic situations in the Soviet Union, USA, Japan, etc.; to provide source materials for fighting against imperialism and criticizing the capitalist class. Works (to be) published in the magazine are selected by following these principles” (see Zha, in Xie, 2000. Translation mine).

What was published in the magazine was again mostly literature from the Soviet Union. It should be noted here that because of heated ideological and political quarrels and fights between Soviet Union and China in late 1950s and 1960s, the former Big Brother, Russians, had become Soviet ‘revisionists’ or ‘imperialists’ in China’s media. And the Soviet Union’s literature, previously held as a revolutionary model, now “turned” into negative texts that would serve as lessons for the Chinese. Against this background, translating the Soviet Union’s works was in fact setting political targets of criticism – exposing all kinds of evils of the “Evil Empire.” As Zha (in Xie, 2000) noted, the deeper reason for this was that the Ultra-Leftists represented by the “Gang of Four” intended to use those translations to insinuate that the more moderate senior leaders in Mao’s Party were lackeys of the Soviet revisionists. To achieve this end, the highly selective translations were often accompanied by editorials, translators’ prefaces or commentaries that would “critically” relate what happened in the original works to the perceived “reality” in China. Sometimes such “critical” comments were directly inserted in between the lines of the translations.

When the only value of Soviet Union’s literature was seen as simply serving as negative examples for China, Western literature, being viewed as like poisonous weeds, was rendered valueless – even for the political purpose of criticism.

### **Language policy**

Politics of the language of translation had come a long way, at least starting from the Jesuit-Convert translation in the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, which culminated in the China-Roman Catholic disputes over the rites (see Guo, 2002). It manifested itself all the more in the May<sup>4th</sup> Movement (beginning from 1919), during which period, with the language revolution reaching its peak, the use of Classical Chinese or the Vernacular in translation distinguished the more progressive and revolutionary translators from the more conservative and reactionary (see Guo, 2006). Now Mao’s Party and government territorially and administratively unified China, but the political struggle of the language of translation was still there to be resolved.

First of all, without doubt, the vernacular was to be uniformly used as a unifying tool in the New China. However, the language left behind by Hu Shi (1891-1962, the initiator of the language revolution), Chiang Kai-shek and colonial powers was a destroyed, hybrid, mixed and immature one. Classical Chinese was abolished, but it had to stay to help express ideas that the underdeveloped vernacular could not. Moreover, as the language of long-standing Chinese history and culture, it had to stay if the Chinese wanted to have any sense or knowledge of history. The complicated writing forms of characters had been considered to be a burden, and in the 20s and 30s a number of schemes of character simplification had been proposed, but had not been put into effect because of constant wars. To facilitate learners of Chinese whose written forms have nothing to do with their sounds, different schemes of phoneticization or romanization had been designed and used, including those by Ricci, Trigault, and later Wade-Giles as well as by a number of Chinese scholars (see Chen, 1999). However, none of them was satisfactory in actual use. During the May 4th Movement, frustration with Classical Chinese led some radical scholars to suggest that Chinese should be altogether replaced by English or Esperanto (ibid.).

The vernacular was in a chaotic situation. It was not a pure, standardized, all-inclusive language as opposed to Classical Chinese. In oral speech, hundreds of dialects, sometimes sounding like Chinese and Greek to one another, were found. Story has it that before the founding of the New China, disputes arose as

to which dialect (Beijing, Shanghai, Cantonese, etc.) should be established as the national standard speech, just as there was talk about which city should be the new capital. Because of the long-lasting influence of Mandarin, phonetically, the vernacular was based upon the Northern Dialect.

In a letter to his friend in 1951, the highly-respected translator Fu Lei complained that the norm-less and style-less vernacular had been just adopted from folk speech, and that no particular local dialect could be taken as the backbone of the vernacular. What was being used therefore was a non-South-non-North, but both-South-and-North language of hybridity. Any inherent characteristics and local flavour of those dialects had to be discarded. What was left was some outlines and skeletons that could hardly express the subtle feelings and emotions in the original. Consequently the original vividness, elegance and thought-provocative-ness could not be achieved in translation. The life and soul of a dialect, said Fu, dwell in its colloquial components, which, if employed in translation, would change foreigners into local Chinese, and if not, the translation would lose the local flavour of the original. As a result, a translator had to use the so-called putonghua (common speech, i.e. the vernacular), which, according to Fu (in Editorial Board, 1984b, p. 83. Translation mine):

... is an extremely artificial speech. In other words, it is a speech based upon the Northern Dialect that is devoid of any of its colloquial-ness. What literary value does such a speech have? Unfortunately this is the language we are using in writing. I believe the problem with the style of translation lies mainly in the fact that our language is a "pseudo" one.

In terms of written Chinese, the vernacular remained a mixture of Classical Chinese, various dialects and loans. How to unify these elements into a commonly accepted and effective modern written Chinese remained a question partly for translation to answer, particularly in regard to loan vocabulary and grammar. For instance, due to the colonial history, as Wang said, "more than half of the expressions in common use in present-day Modern Written Chinese are loan words from foreign languages" (in Chen, 1999, p. 86). Studies (Guo, 2002; Guo, 2006) show that Western concepts and Chinese equivalents were ambiguously and paradoxically established in translation. Even transliterations were in no better situation. Historically foreign words and expressions first entered Chinese daily life mainly from coastal areas such as Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Fujian, whose phonetic systems are far from the Northern Dialect. In translations and transliterations, loans became phonetically and even culturally localized and dialecticized. Thus the Cantonese transliterated *fashion*, *insurance* and *ball* into 花顺 (*hua shun*), 燕梳 (*yan shu*) and 波 (*bo*). The Shanghainese transliterated *butter*, *pass*, *steam* and *cement* into 白塔油 (*bai ta you*), 派司 (*pai si*), 水汀 (*shui ting*) and 水门汀 (*shui men ting*). Some phenomena in transliteration were unaccountable. For example, the name Holmes (in Conan Doyle's detective stories) was transliterated into 福尔摩斯 (*fu er mo si*), where the consonant "h" in Mandarin gives way to "f," as in the Cantonese dialect. Some scholars suggested that the Japanese had used 福尔摩斯 for Holmes, and the Chinese simply adopted it (see Guo, 1992, pp. 30-31).

In literary translation, the same foreign names had been phonetically rendered into different words/characters. For example, in four different versions translated by four different translators, the character Peggotty in Dickens' *David Copperfield* was transliterated into 璧各德 (*bi ge de*), 攀古堆 (*pan gu dui*), 辟果提 (*pi guo ti*) and 坡勾提 (*po gou ti*). And the title of the novel was rendered respectively into 《块肉余生述》 (literarily a *lonely survivor's account*, Lin Shu tr.), 《大卫·高柏菲尔自述》 (literally *personal account of da wei gao bo fei er*, Xu Tianhong tr.), 《大卫·科波菲尔》 (*da wei ke bo fei er*, Dong Qiusi tr.), and 《大卫·考坡菲》 (*da wei kao po fei*, Zhang Guruo tr.). Here it can be seen that except 大卫 (David) as a transliteration standardized in the Chinese version of the Bible, other names and proper nouns seemed to be following no common rules.

Such confusions created obstacles for communication. In fact, starting at least from John Fryer (1839-1928, the major translator in science and engineering during China's Westernization Movement), efforts had been constantly made to standardize loan words. From 1908 to 1911, Yan Fu (1853-1921) served as director of the Office of Loan Words Standardization. It was not until after China had been finally reunited into one social and political system that standardization became a possibility. As early as May 1950, headed by Guo Moruo, the Working Committee on the Unification of Academic Terminologies was organized under the Culture and Education Commission of the Central Government (see Chen, 1992). Insofar as foreign personal and geographical names are concerned, a series of dictionaries compiled by the Xinhua News Agency was published from 1950s to 1970s. The New China's tight control over press and media made it possible for loan words to be uniformly standardized in practice. But work done in this period was largely limited to sorting and straightening out what had already been in use. Most of the Euro-American new vocabulary born after WWII in all walks of life and all fields of studies remained unknown to Chinese.

A serious challenge for textual translators was how to create a new written Chinese language out of the tensions between the Classical and the vernacular, between un-naturalized loan words and natural demands for easy comprehensibility, and between Chinese grammar and grammatical and syntactic Europeanization. How to properly handle these relationships became a concern to top leaders of the New China. For instance, Mao, celebrated as a master of the vernacular and known for his philosophy of 洋为中用 (making foreign things serve China), expressed his views on different occasions. On August 24, 1956, Mao said, for the sake of accuracy he preferred literal/hard translation of theories as Lu Xun (1881-1936) had advocated. He went on to say that "We should familiarize ourselves with foreign things and read foreign books. But this does not mean the Chinese should follow foreigners in a wholesale manner... It does not mean the Chinese should write things like translations" (in Chen, 1992, p. 383. Translation mine). But Mao's language policy is better reflected in what he said later (ibid. p. 384. Translation mine):

It is also acceptable to be neither donkey nor horse. The mule is something that stands in between. When the donkey and the horse are combined, their faces change... China's face – political, economic or cultural – should not remain old. It should change, but Chinese characteristics should be preserved. Foreign things should be absorbed on the basis of what is Chinese. The two should be... organically integrated.

Here Mao seems to be suggesting a "Third Space" of language for the New China. But first of all, what was Chinese was already questionable. In this case, where was the starting-point from which China could march towards that sharing and shared space? Second, how to integrate the two into an organic whole was the real issue, but Mao did not give any answer. Third, when Mao gave this talk to a group of Chinese artists, his political system and cultural policies were not offering any room for free, democratic or creative discussions. The deeper issue here is: should discussions of this nature be allowed, they would inevitably challenge the Communist language of political control, which was the first and last taboo.

In his keynote speech cited earlier, Mao Dun proposed some principles for Chinese translators to follow. He said (in Chen, 1992, p. 379. Translation mine):

A good translator, on the one hand, reads foreign languages, and on the other hand, thinks and imagines with his own native tongue. Only in this way can he extricate himself from the restraints of grammatical and lexical particularities of the original, so that the language of his translations is purely native and at the same time faithfully conveys the contents and styles of the original.

Mao Dun seemed to be advocating here a middle ground, where the source and target languages are organically combined while each retains its own identity. Mao Dun believed this was not only possible but necessary. He went on to say (ibid. p. 380. Translation mine):

Some people think our Chinese vocabulary is poor, inadequate in actual translation... This is not necessarily true. Language comes out of life. Life changes and develops, and new words keep emerging accordingly. Like writers, translators should also look for appropriate words from life or abstract new words out of it. This is part of the creativity of the art of translation. Of course, this does not mean we should not adopt new words or expressions from foreign works. But... this adoption should be based upon the basic vocabulary and basic grammar of our own. It is harmful to uncritically take in what is foreign, or to fabricate new vocabulary and expressions in our native tongue.

It can be seen from above that both Chairman Mao and his cultural officials were envisioning an internationalized culture of language while maintaining the Chinese linguistic characteristics. And translation could have been able to help the vernacular to develop into a more mature, interculturally mediated and effective language. Unfortunately, Mao's political movements soon forced Chinese translation to a corner, where it was simply reduced to a political tool.

#### **Translation as vaccination: The case of *Cankao xiaoxi***

The political nature of Chinese translation under Mao's leadership may be best seen in the publication of *Cankao xiaoxi* (literally Reference Information), which systematically exposed Chinese communists as well as ordinary people to Western ideological 'poisonous weeds.' *Cankao xiaoxi* (still in publication today) is a newspaper dedicated solely to translations of what is happening outside China and on how the rest of the world views China. It relies mainly on Western mainstream media for various sources of information, mostly political but not all. Started publication on November 7, 1931, the paper had been exclusively circulated and read among higher levels of communist leaders. In November 1956, upon Mao's request, the Central Committee of the CCP decided to increase the number of copies from two thousand to 3-4 hundred thousand to be circulated among a much wider audience.

The purpose of this popular newspaper, as Mao summarized, was to inform, in a timely manner, party members and revolutionary comrades of the physical situations and ideological viewpoints of China's enemies, as well as different ideas held by China's friends. On January 27, 1957, Mao said to national and provincial leaders (in Wei, 2000, online. Translation mine):

Preventing people from being exposed to falsehood, evils or hostilities, to idealism or metaphysics ... such a policy is dangerous... Without knowledge of idealism or metaphysics, without any experience in fighting against such negative sides, (our) materialism and dialectics will remain unconsolidated. The shortcomings in some of our party members and party intellectuals lie precisely in too little knowledge of those negative sides... This newspaper will even publish reactionary speeches and writings against us. It is as good as Communists publishing for imperialists. Why should we do so? The purpose is to put those poisonous weeds, those non- and anti-Marxist ideas in front of our comrades, masses of people and liberals, so that they can be tempered and steeled. We should not practice the policy of a (information) blockade, which is dangerous. By publishing the newspaper, we are pursuing a different line from the Soviet Union. The publication of *Cankao xiaoxi* and other negative texts is to 'give a smallpox vaccination' in order to strengthen the political immunocompetence in our cadres and masses.

On another occasion on March 17 of the same year, Mao said (ibid. Translation mine) of extending circulation of the newspaper:

Some say this will create chaos and confusion. No, it will not. If we don't do so, we would be shutting our eyes and ears in a closed room. Some comrades, concerned that it will be like pouring oil on the flames of reactionary forces, have suggested we run an editorial before each piece of international news. No, comrades! We will not do that. What we want is exactly to let people think and differentiate for themselves... Are we not promoting the smallpox vaccination right now? What is a vaccine? It is a virus, a germ. Once a little of it is injected in the human body, the two will fight against each other... and immunity is acquired. It is dangerous for one not to be sick at all. If ever he falls sick, he will not be able to stand it since he has never fought against any bacteria.

As Mao expected, *Cankao xiaoxi* became “a unique newspaper under the sun” (ibid.). By 1964, it had reached 440,000 copies in circulation. Although it was officially restricted to cadres and Party members, ordinary people could have easy access to it anywhere. In June 1971, in order to make the American journalist Edgar Snow's serial reports on China available to all, the newspaper increased its circulation to more than six million copies (see Wei, 2000, online). For many Chinese, reading *Cankao xiaoxi* was one of the few forms of intellectual entertainment to survive the harsh realities of, particularly, the Cultural Revolution.

Consequently on the one hand, it is apparent that the newspaper of translation was a deliberately manipulated form of ideological control, and that it was highly selective in its choice of texts. By creating a sharp contrast between the New China and the “decadent” West through this small window of translations, the Chinese Communist power defined, justified and strengthened itself.

On the other hand, from a textual point of view, no matter how manipulative a certain political power can be, when it comes to translation, it is still an intercultural engagement. Specifically in the case of *Cankao xiaoxi*, things were directly translated from foreign media, which means the Chinese translators had to keep creating equivalents to Western Cold War concepts and ideas. Through daily translations, this influential newspaper brought the outside world to the Chinese for understanding and interpretation – no matter how politically oriented it was. It created and standardized a great portion of modern Chinese vocabulary, which urgently needed to be developed to address new realities. In a sense, Euro-American vocabulary and grammar themselves are not political. What is political is how they are interpreted by particular people from particular positions.

Furthermore, through translating various texts of the West as the evil Other, China managed to develop a strong, unified and highly centralized political power that almost transcended the bleak realities of economic poverty and technological backwardness. To a certain extent, it helped the Chinese to ideologically de-colonize themselves – to successfully regain their sense of pride, integrity and equality to their former colonizers.

In conclusion, the trajectory of Chinese translation under Mao's leadership was determined by the then international, geopolitical, and Cold War realities. It represented, to a great extent, China's post-war political situation, and particularly China's postcolonial response to the West. Out of the needs of the war against Japan and later Chiang Kai-shek, Mao and his Party loaded translation with heavy political missions, objectives and tasks. When Mao's Party came to power, this policy of translation remained unchanged – again out of political needs, since the New China perceived itself to be surrounded by a hostile, anti-Communist West, and internally threatened by “reactionary” forces in the mainland and Taiwan. Translating Soviet Union texts along with its version of Marxism seemed to be the only choice.

With the ideological war breaking out against the Soviet Union, Mao's China was left with little to translate, which, ironically, helped Mao to carry out his political agenda through the most disastrous 10-year Cultural Revolution.

Lack or absence of translating the West should be, however, interpreted from another perspective. In fact, throughout Mao's years, the West was serving as a dark, invisible but ever-present background against which the New China was defending and defining itself. In other words, the West was textually omnipresent in between the lines of China's daily publications, broadcasts and political meetings. It was translated in an indirect way through the perfectly planned and controlled media, which concentrated on domestic and international class struggle. Whatever hardship China faced was always easily related to the colonizing West; whatever industrial or economic achievement China made was always described as a victory of the proletariat over the Western decadent imperialistic and bourgeois hegemony. All these show how translation is conditioned by politics, and how the politics of translation is played out in complex, complicated, and subtle forms.

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