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**From the Myth of Translation to
the Task of the Translator:
A Multimedia Application for
Translation Teaching and
Learning**

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**From the Myth of Translation to the Task of the Translator:
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Abstract

Translation activities have been discussed largely in negative ways, in terms of the distortive or disruptive impact of the translator's choices. Much theoretical energy has been directed at stripping the translator of deliberate, or indeed subconscious, divergence from the authorized meaning of the original text, so that an essentially textual process can proceed without intervention from the real world of human interaction and motivation. Unfortunately and also fortunately, this hypothetical situation does not occur. Many interactive elements are involved in the process of translation. Reuben Brower (1947:1) points out that 'translation like poetry is not limited to a single easily isolated activity.' Snell-Hornby (1995:81) also thinks that 'translation is a complex act of communication in which the ST-author, the reader as translator and translator as TL-author and the TL-reader interact.' The aim of the paper is to underline the interactive textual and extra-textual relations which influence the translation process, in order to re-define translation as an interdisciplinary activity, which bridges the gap between different fields of study through processes of communication, interpretation and re-creation, and to provide a forum for a more open debate of these issues.

First, in this research, poetry is selected as a particular genre to experiment with different translation styles and methods. Poetry is the core of culture and language. Every semantic unit of poetry plays a significant role, addressing the sense, the emotion which the poets encounter and experience in the world. Naturally poetry reading becomes a kind of journey of self-reflection; different readers have different interpretations of the poetic text, therefore, various journeys would be generated through reading the same poem by many readers. Besides, readers may also have different responses to the same description or image due to their cultural differences; hence, more deviated differences are always found during the translating process. That is to say, there is no adequate TT which can reflect all dimensions of the ST. Translating poetry is to transfer one's own response to the text. As the reproduction of a source poem is made for exploring more textual styles, forms of presentation, and even literary genres, Chinese poetry provides a kaleidoscope through which we can examine the problems of cross-cultural translation activities. Translating Chinese poetry not only reflects linguistic, textual, or poetic problems, but also re-maps the

ideological and mental understanding in order to avoid the mistakes caused by fixed stereotyping. However, this type of cultural stereotyping still occurs regardless of frequent cultural communication and commercial activities. Craig Clunas (2000: 58) gives an interesting example:

[...] Western interpretations have often thought of the Chinese as lacking a sense of individuality, but what is being misunderstood here rests on an assumption that a Western construction of individuality is the only kind. (I vividly remember a Chinese classmate explaining to me that while ‘Who am I?’ is one of the central questions of the western tradition, its literal Chinese equivalent, ‘Wo shi shei?’ simply sounds like the speaker has received a bump on the head.)

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The challenge lies in the divergent preconceptions, almost the irreconcilability, of two cultures. Compromise, that acceptance of limits, of the impossibility of future negotiation, is just the easiest strategy. Very often, translation problems may not be as simple as deciding whether to choose a fluent, or a foreignizing, writing style. Readability, or acceptability, is indeed a relative term which can differ markedly from period to period depending on cultural interaction and change.

When translating Chinese poems, what I consider the most important challenge is to reproduce in English the peculiar force and strength, the inner as well as the outer meanings, of what the original writer created solely and exclusively for and in Chinese language and Chinese culture. My fidelity is directed towards neither the ST nor the author, but towards the translating project- a project in which both original poet and translator participate. This participation is continued in a different way as the target reader gets involved during the reading process. Clive Scott (2000: 247) comments that

[...] We should translate not the meaning of the ST, but the ST as read by the translator (where reading is not to be confused with interpretation). This is to suppose that the translator seeks to comprehend the ST, not so much in a semantic sense as in the sense of being alert to its moods and directions, to the ways in which it *makes* its meanings.

The translation process may indeed be a process of re-inventing. Things which make sense in the source language may not necessarily mean the same thing, or anything, in the target language. Therefore, sensitivities to both languages and cultures, and to the creativity of a new textual presentation are equally important. To me, behind the translated words is the third culture, a mingling of source culture and target culture, but not a compromise, because the relationship between them can never be settled. There is always a negotiation process going on, based on the degree of mutual understanding. 'Chinoiserie' may be one of the names for that process. Dawn Jacobson (1993: 7) points out that 'Chinoiserie continues to flourish. Its ability to bob along with the changing tides of fashion has made it an abiding, if often unrecognized, leitmotif in the design of everyday object.' Translating Chinese poetry is to reproduce that leitmotif in a new mood, a new way, which makes Chineseness mean something to the English reader.

From this viewpoint, we can further understand that Chinese poetry differs from English poetry in its poetics and thus in its creative mentality. Chinese and English readers read poetry differently, they have different sensitivities to expression and ambiguity, and different senses of what a poem should be (see Zhu 1986). Chinese poetry very much relies on certain conventions, as Irving Yucheng Lo argues: 'The non-inflectional nature of Chinese and the terseness it permits are matters of linguistic convention rather than poetics: readers should not assume that poetry lies in brevity alone' (Lo 1975: xv). Such a language, without the burden of case, gender, mood, tense and number, enables the poet to concentrate on essentials, but leads easily to confusion for the translator. Besides, in most Chinese poems, it is assumed that the speaker 'I' is always crouching behind the poetic utterance. Consciously or subconsciously,

Chinese poets seem to prefer leaving out the subject, even in the subjective lyric; the functional, dramatic ‘I’ of the poet, or of the poetic persona, is generally invisible. However, ‘the omission of the subject permissible in Chinese does not mean that the gender of the subject is undefined: what it means is that it is not syntactically or semantically necessary’ (Eoyang 1993:97). The following poem 江雪 ‘River Snow’ serves as a good example for classic Chinese poetics.

千qian 山shan 鳥niao 飛fei 絕jue
(1000/ mountain/ bird/ fly/ disappear)
萬wan 徑jing 人ren 蹤zong 滅mie
(10000/path/person/ trace/ extinct)
孤gu 舟zhou 蓑suo 笠li 翁wong
(single/boat/bamboo-leaved coat+hat/ old man)
獨du 釣diao 寒han 江jiang 雪xue
(alone/ fish(v.)/ cold/ river/ snow)

The italic spelling after each Chinese character is the mark of pronunciation, and the word-by-word translation is provided under each character. The initial words in each of the lines - *千qian*, *萬wan*, *孤gu*, *獨du*-signifying ‘thousand, ten thousand, single, alone’ do not necessarily mean exactly the number they indicate, but emphasize the dimensions or isolation of the poetic image, to intensify symbolic significance and emotional association. Furthermore, if we single out these four characters, put them together and read them consecutively as: *qian wan gu du*, they would form a four-character idiom, meaning ‘extreme loneliness’. In this way, the meanings are re-combined and what were originally a thousand mountains, ten thousand paths, a boat and an old fisherman are immersed in this ‘extreme loneliness’, composed by the four initial words. Besides, the meaning becomes dramatically powerful, because the most important semantic units: ‘many’ and ‘loneliness’ are punched out twice in a subtle and cunning design which expresses the poet’s thought implicitly and weaves the poetic meaning as a whole. One may find in Chinese poetry, words are like a mosaic tile, having a variety of color and shape. Such arrangements of words are untranslatable but they do alert us for another layer of potentiality for a more sophisticated design of multimedia version. My possible translation in the form of hard copy is provided as follows

Thousands of mountains- bird’s flying no more
 Millions of paths- man’s appearing no more
 Solitary raft, straw cape, an old man alone
 Fishing: cold river snow

The meaning cannot be brought across cultural and poetic boundary and following the meaning linguistically would lead the translator to a dead end. Instead of the signifier, one needs to focus more on the signified in the poem. What needs to be looked into is the meta-text, the black box of translation

process or so called intermediary version for the real break-through from the myth of poetic translation; a real way out makes the task of translator possible and meaningful. Theo Hermans (1999:122) suggests that

When texts are moulded and manipulated via any number of intermediary versions and stages, it is no longer relevant to speak in terms of ‘source’ and ‘target’, let alone that translations could be ‘facts of one system only’. Binary models postulates, nearly delineated systems and the idea of translations as complete texts cannot cope with the hybrid nature of many of the operations in these types of discourse.

Many scholars of translation tend to think of translation in terms of binary concepts between two opposed alternatives: between text as St and text as TT; between translating individual words or whole sentences; between studying translation in terms of linguistics or of literature. However, erasing the line between the two extremes, breaking the frame of division, may offer us a pretext for rethinking translation. The ambition to erase that line in-between leads me to develop the multimedia version to readdress the importance of meta-text. One of the example is presented in the Figure 1 attached at the end of the text.

The transformation of poetic meaning can be vividly designed through the animated frame-by-frame work and the image projected in the translator’s mind can be conveyed via the interaction of words, images and sounds in a hypertextual on-line environment. In order to present every layer of the poetic meaning and the untranslatable implication between poetic lines, I developed multimedia resources as an effective means of experimenting with multiform presentation and of exploring new dimensions of reading, writing and translating; in fact, multimedia can fruitfully supplement the traditional goal – the single translated text- so that the target reader can experience Chinese poems in a hyperlinked context which activates linguistic, cultural and ideological features, but does not allow these to impede a personal, creative response. On the contrary, multimedia can produce an environment in which the textual, contextual and translational are mutually liberating. According to Robert Breyer and Sean Riley (1999:309)

Multimedia describes the content and the type of data that is being transferred across the network, rather than the use to which the data is put. [...] To many people, the phrase “a picture is worth a thousand words” captures the essence of multimedia very well.

Transferring data without physical boundaries, and complementing text with images and acoustic input, are the most significant contributions of computer technology. The techniques of the Internet, which include hyperlink, technically speaking, is ‘a place in a web document you can select using a pointing device, like a mouse, that will take you to a document stored either on your web server or any other web server on the internet’ (Metz 1996: 4) The entire structure provides a kind of possibility to fulfill the total translation, translating with every layer of meaning.

Therefore, I designed a set of class plan and teaching methodology to develop a multimedia learning environment for English major students to learn

Translation Studies. In my design, over two consecutive semesters, the language instructor dynamically customizes and re-designs teaching contents through the multimedia tool and the platform Blackboard. Off-class assignments are given in different forms, i.e. translating, rewriting, filling-in, text-analysis, and theoretical application. Students have to download the assignments and fulfill the missions individually and also within their group. The practice has been carried out for five years and the result shows that a well-designed target text can disperse the myth of one-to-one correspondence during the pursuits for 'true language', and can certainly expand the textual performability to create different types of reading experience and learning process. Furthermore, students can post their digital translation on line to form a cyber reading and translating space to generate more discussion on translation problems (see Kumar Das 2008). Most important of all, through this digital experiment, various translation processes can be guided and developed, and the translation issues can be discussed to provide learners with more opportunities to rethink the essence of translation and therefore to redefine translation. Translation readers as well as the translators may meet up in this cyberspace and mutually influence each other. The roles of readers (see Zhang 2007) can never be passive and the translation activity can be fruitfully encouraged in this thoughtfully-designed learning space. The translators or translation learners apply this kind of meta-texts as a kind of basis or a kind of trigger to re-create more faithful and meaningful TTs. Reading and translating poetry via this innovative technology enables target readers to experience the textual meaning across cultural and linguistic barrier. Translating poetry then is to explore various dimensions of textuality, and to grasp the essence that the poet has tried to convey. This type of translation practice creates a meaningful multi-layered environment for the target text to live in, breaking down the temporal and spatial constriction of the source text. All TTs can be linked through on-line devices to produce a hypertextual poetic reading cyberspace. This type of multimedia application is one of the ways to respond to the Chinese poetic untranslatability. The potential of multimedia explored attempts to exercise the capacity for creative thought, as translation itself is a creative activity by its very nature. The process of multimedia translation increases one's visual and formal awareness of works of translation, and allows one to gain a deeper insight into the social, political and ideological factors which influence the production and interpretation of translation. For the translator, translation teachers and translation learners, the text-based world seems to be more comfortable and hard copy is familiar, secure and not replaceable. Yet we can also create multimedia productions and facilitate on-line interactive learning, so as to continue to explore, and experiment with, different modes of presentation and different methods of translation.

Finally, with the development of the multimedia and hypertextual environment, we can foresee fundamental changes in the status of translation and its definition. Translation is no longer to be considered as a derivative work of less literary merit, but as something creatively on a par with the original and equally deserving of copyright. The definition of translation,

which traditionally, requires linguistic faithfulness, has shifted its focus to functional equivalence in terms of cultural attitudes and behavior. Translation is not a formal procedure of substitution on the basis of a simple one-to-one correspondence. Thus, new translation strategies such as multi-versions in the form of hard copy, or multimedia presentations as workshops for further creation, should be taken into account. And correspondingly, a theory that accommodates flexible methodology, combining multimedia, translation and cultural and interdisciplinary studies, is called for.

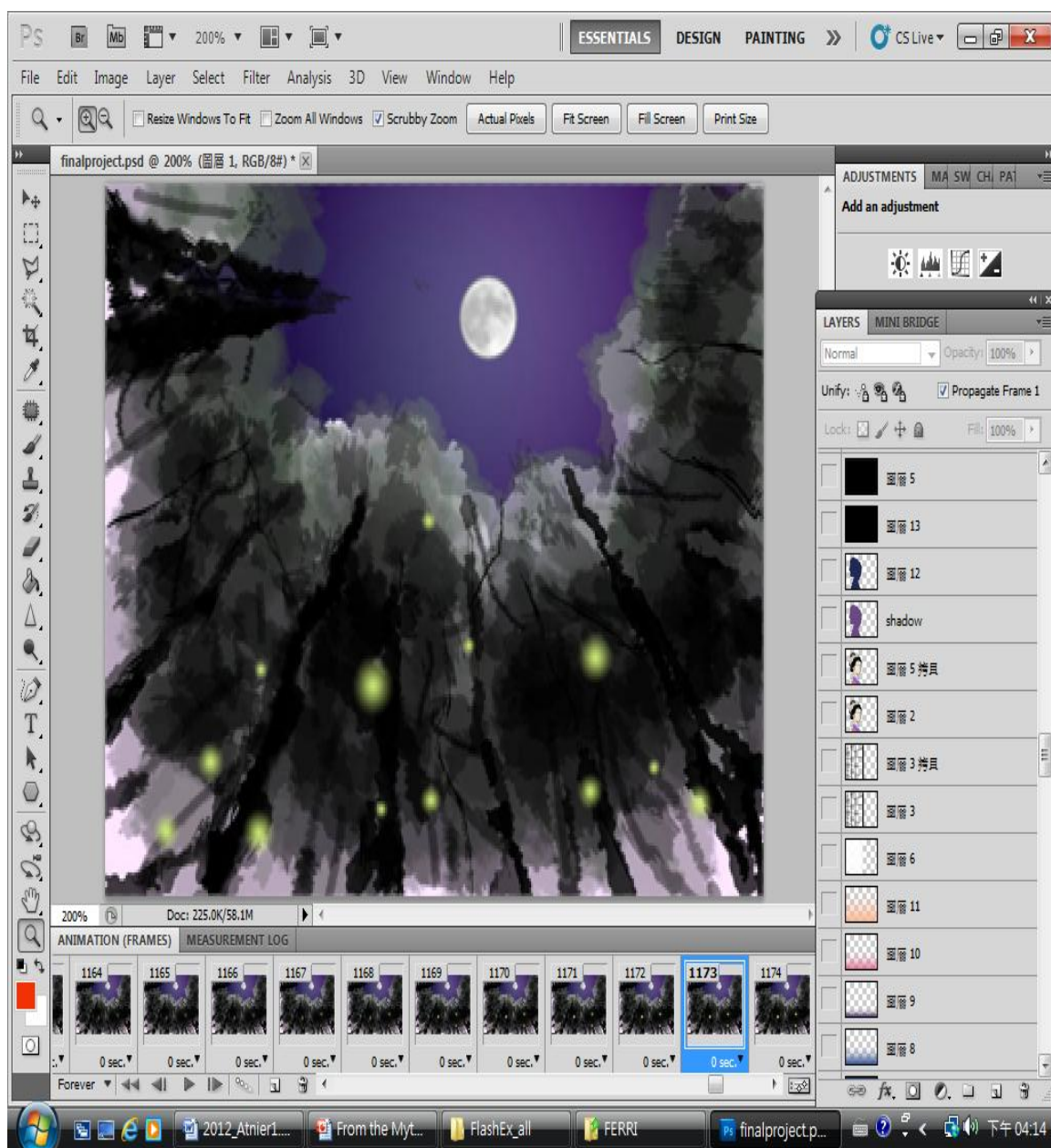


Fig. 1 Experiment for poetry translation from Chinese into English. Content areas were painted with the ink style using the software of Photoshop Imageready. The layer of each design process was clearly provided. Highlighted frame was to show the details of the second-by-second design.

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