

Translating China and Translating the World into Chinese: An Introduction to the Special Issue on Translation/Interpreting in the Chinese World

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Chinese language and culture are part of the longest continuous major civilisation in the world. Chinese language occupies a vital role in the continuity and maintenance of Chinese culture and civilisation. Notwithstanding, it would be inconceivable for China and Chinese culture to be where they are today without the help of translation and without the input from the outside world often via the bridge of translation. This is particularly true if we consider what has been introduced to China and Chinese language, touching virtually all spheres of human activities, both in the first wave of translating the Western world into China about one hundred years ago, and again in the second wave of translation activities in the last thirty years. In the history of modern and contemporary China and Chinese societies, translation has helped to facilitate the migration of knowledge across linguistic and temporal boundaries. Translation has been a powerful means to create and manage change in modern and contemporary China and Chinese societies. It is no exaggeration to say that Chinese culture is a story of translation. In modern and contemporary Chinese societies, the Chinese people have been engaged in two kinds of translation: translating foreign ideas, texts and words into Chinese, and translating traditional Chinese meanings within the new and changed context of a global village. Chinese communicative practices are one of translation, of both diachronic and synchronic transfer of significance, and both inside Chinese and between Chinese and Western languages. Translation and interpretation have played a crucial role in the development of Chinese societies and Chinese people in their contact with the rest of the world, and in its modernity and transformation, be it in the fields of science and technology, literature, politics, linguistics, and tourism, all of which are discussed by the authors in this special issue on Chinese translation and interpreting, authors from China, Taiwan, Australia and the UK.

It is only proper that the *Journal of Specialised Translation* devote a special issue on Chinese translation and interpreting, which I am proud and honoured to edit. Despite the importance and attention given to translation within China and the Chinese speaking world, works by scholars on Chinese/English translation/interpreting from the Chinese language speaking world and beyond are not sufficiently abundant in the English language. Nevertheless, Chinese/English translation/interpreting presents some of the most difficult and intriguing challenges given the vast differences and dissimilarities found in the Chinese and English languages,

cultures and societies, and in the ways of thinking of the users of these two great languages. In this special issue, the readers will be able to get a glimpse of some of the differences, challenges and dilemmas that Chinese/English translators, interpreters and scholars are often faced with.

As a popular saying goes, something gets lost in translation. This may be true, but it is equally true that something can also be found in translation. As the readers may discover in some of the articles in this issue, something is indeed gained and found in or through translation that was not there in the original, something new, something created in the process or as a result of translation. Translation and interpreting is not just a mechanical process of transferring linguistic signs. It is also an active process of creation and creativity. So, no loss, no gain.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this special issue to a most distinguished Chinese translator I have always greatly admired, Yang Xianyi 杨宪益 (1915 - 2009) who passed away in November, 2009. Professor Yang, together with his English wife, Gladys Yang (1919 – 1999, her Chinese name 戴乃迭), both graduates of Oxford University, devoted most of their lives to translating Chinese literary works into English, including translating Chinese classics, such as *A Dream of Red Mansions*, and modern writers such as Lu Xun. Their lifelong works and their dedication have inspired and will continue to inspire generations of Chinese translators in the years to come.

Biography

Deborah Cao is Associate Professor of at Griffith University, Brisbane. Originally trained and qualified as a United Nations simultaneous interpreter, she was educated in China and Australia in both linguistics and law. She has published in the areas of legal translation, semiotics and philosophical and linguistic analysis of Chinese law and legal culture. She is the author of several single-authored books which include *Chinese Law: A Language Perspective* (Ashgate, 2004) and *Translating Law* (Multilingual Matters 2007).

