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Book Review

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The volume titled *Translating China for Western Readers: Reflective, Critical, and Practical Essays* is an edited volume that explores the theme of translating China for Western audiences. It was edited in 2014 by Ming Dong Gu and Rainer Schulte, who are both distinguished scholars and professors of Comparative Literature (University of Texas). The book contains a compilation of twelve scholarly papers presented at the Symposium “Translating China into the West,” which took place in Dallas, Texas, in 2009. It was first published by State University of New York Press in 2014 and reprinted two years later.

Translating Chinese literature has become an increasingly significant endeavor with China’s rise on both economic and international scenarios. Gu and Schulte examine the current state of English translations of Chinese literature, reader reception, and propose the reader-friendly translation strategies. Given the cultural nuances embedded in Chinese texts, translating them poses considerable challenges which, if not handled properly, may lead to sheer disaster. This volume, thereby, aims to provide a comprehensive theoretical framework with practical guidelines for translating Chinese texts in a way that is accessible and appealing to Western readers.

In alignment with its overarching goal, the present collection follows a reader-friendly approach, which is reflected in several aspects. Firstly, the editor requested the authors of the essays to revise their work with a focus on the perspective of Western readers. This demonstrates a conscious effort to make the content more accessible and relatable to the target audience. Moreover, each essay employs real examples that facilitate the understanding and comprehension of Western readers. For instance, in Chapter 1, Cheng's conceptual definition of translation, which highlights the importance of adhering to the semantic meaning, is exemplified by the Chinese term *Dao*, which should be translated as "path" rather than as "creative activity of heaven and earth." The latter risks overinterpreting the original meaning and obscuring the various interpretative nuances inherent in the term. By revising essays to accommodate the reading experience of Western readers and incorporating specific examples, the book aims to address the intricacies involved in translating Chinese texts in a reader-friendly manner.

The volume is well-structured, comprising three distinct parts, each consisting of four insightful essays that explore various aspects of translating Chinese texts. Part 1 serves as the theoretical framework by emphasizing the importance of understanding the source culture as an essential prerequisite for producing a translation that effectively resonates with its intended readership. Cheng's essay (Chapter 1) initiates its discourse by applying hermeneutic principles of understanding to the translation process. This approach emphasizes the necessity of understanding the whole, its constituent part, and the reciprocal relationship between the two to establish the equivalence between languages. Within this scholarly discourse, Ekström (Chapter 2) further expounds on the importance of understanding cultural nuances and finding similarities within dissimilarities. By comprehending different worldviews, one can identify common sensibilities shared by these divergent perspectives and employ metaphor as a translation strategy. A thorough grasp of the source text is essential, yet producing an appealing translation remains a considerable challenge. To address this, scholars such as Wang (Chapter 3) advocate for the naturalization of source texts to increase their resonance with Western readers, citing the success of Mo Yan as a pertinent example. In contrast, Gu (Chapter 4) supports a *writerly approach* to translation, which underscores the translator's creative agency. This approach is exemplified by figures like Pound, whose recreation of Chinese poems garnered great acclaim and exerted a profound influence on numerous Anglo-American poets.

Building upon the established theoretical frameworks, Parts 2 and 3 delve into practical aspects of translation. Notably, scholars concur in the importance of avoiding a strict adherence to linguistic matching when translating Chinese texts. As a result, scholars and translators have vowed for the reader-oriented approach in the translation process, leading to a redefinition of faithfulness. Kubin (Chapter 9) has proposed the fidelity in the tentative to create an art piece in the target language, exemplified by Goldblatt's translation of *Wolf Totem*. Others have put forth the concept of aesthetic fidelity. Wu (Chapter 6), Liu (Chapter 7) and Chen (Chapter 12) discuss this notion as the realization of *yijing*, which involves replicating in the target language the same realm that transcends images. In pursuing this objective, preference is given to nominalization over *eventualization*, as nouns are more evocative than verbs. Turner (Chapter 10) and Barnstone (Chapter 11) are among the scholars who propose metrical fidelity, emphasizing the maintenance of rhetorical figures while ensuring that the translation avoids clumsiness.

Taken as a whole, the volume encompasses several notable strengths, including its authoritative nature, its adoption of an experimental approach to address the translation challenges, and its formulation of new concepts that challenge established Western stances. In the subsequent paragraphs, I will elaborate on these aspects in detail.

One of the strengths of the volume lies in its shared authoritativeness. Each essay is written by a professor affiliated with a prominent institution and specialized in fields such as Chinese history, philosophy, poetics, literature, and translation studies. For instance, Michael Nylan is a professor at the University of California, Berkeley, a world-renowned institution ranked 10th in the QS World University Rankings 2024 and 6th by subject (history). Frederick Turner and Ming Dong Gu, both professors of literature at the University of Texas at Dallas, represent an institution known for its interdisciplinary focus on the arts and humanities. Beyond the United States, other contributors come from European universities: Martin Svensson Ekström, from the University of Gothenburg—one of Sweden's largest and leading universities—and Wolfgang Kubin, an emeritus professor at Germany's highly reputed Bonn University, add valuable European perspectives to the field. In China, Ning Wang, a Changjiang Distinguished Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Tsinghua University (ranked first in China and 25th in the QS Rankings 2024), and Huawen Liu, from Shanghai Jiao Tong University, a top-tier research university in China and globally, further enrich the volume's international scope. Professors' affiliations with globally recognized institutions and their

profound understanding of the subject matter not only contributes to a rich and multifaceted perspective on the challenges involved in translating Chinese texts, but it also adds depth and credibility to the insights presented in the book. As a result of the work's academic validity, readers can benefit from a reliable and trustworthy source of information.

In addition to the volume's authoritative nature, another notable strength lies in its integration of theory and practice through an experimental approach, where the scholar observes a phenomenon, poses a hypothesis, analyzes the case, and formulates a valid theory that serves practical ends. Chapter 12, authored by Chen, provides a notable illustration of this methodology. Chen examines the successful translations of Pound in comparison to those of Lowell, aiming to understand the factors contributing to Pound's success. Chen hypothesizes that the reason for Pound's success lies in his realization of the Chinese concept of *yijin*. Through a comparative analysis, Chen finds that Pound's translations demonstrate a higher level of aesthetic faithfulness, while Lowell's translations prioritize linguistic faithfulness. From this analysis, it can be inferred that translations that effectively capture the essence of the *yijin* are considered more successful and appealing to readers. This experimental approach not only validates the feasibility of replicating the *yijin* in the target text but also provides valuable guidance for translators in their pursuit of producing accessible translations that resonate with the target readership.

Another significant strength of the volume is underscored by its insightful perspective on the enduring dilemma in the translation studies concerning the definition of translation and the role of the translator. Within the volume, one of the traditional topics discussed is the dichotomy between literal and free translation. Gu rejects this criterion and suggests the existence of a fluidity in translation practices, wherein the translator progresses from a stage focused on faithful source-text-oriented translation to a writerly translation, that aimed at creatively reproducing the inherent spirit of the source text. These two forms of translation are not opposing, but rather complement each other. This perspective calls for a more nuanced understanding of translation practices, one that goes beyond a simplistic dichotomy, and explores the translation as a formative process for the translator.

An additional discussion revolves around the reconciliation of fidelity and beauty through the redefinition of faithfulness in terms of aesthetics. Traditionally, faithfulness has been associated with strict adherence to the source text, emphasizing linguistic accuracy and semantic equivalence, as

exemplified by Nida's formal equivalence and Newmark's semantic translation. However, scholars within this volume argue for a broader understanding of faithfulness that takes into account the aesthetic qualities and intentions of the original work. By prioritizing the artistic beauty of the source text, particularly in the realm of imagery, translators strive to reproduce the aesthetic impact and emotional resonance of the original piece in the target language. This view of faithfulness challenges the notion that translation is a purely mechanical process focused on accuracy. Instead, it highlights the translator's role in facilitating the exchange between two languages and cultures and breathing new life to the source text.

The need to assure the continued life of the source text leads to a significant paradigm shift in the perception of the translator's role, challenging the conventional understanding of their function. Traditionally, translators were viewed as intermediaries responsible for transferring the source text into the target language while prioritizing fidelity to the original content and linguistic aspects. However, the volume introduces a different perspective, proposing that translators should be regarded as creative writers or even co-authors of the source text. This viewpoint emphasizes the active role of translators in modifying the text. As observed by Kubin, Chinese texts often contain problematic elements, and since translators do not enjoy the same aura as authors, they are compelled to address these issues in some manner; otherwise, they risk being perceived as incompetent. Thus, creativity in managing translation challenges become crucial. By recognizing the creative agency of translators, the volume underscores their ability to make creative choices during the translation process. This reframing of the translator's role embraces their active participation and contribution, which, to some extent, resonates with Venuti's emphasis on the translator's invisibility.

Alongside the proposition of writerly translation, the exploration of aesthetic fidelity and the reinterpretation of the translator's role as a creative writer, another noteworthy aspect of the essays in this volume is their consistent emphasis on the use of comparison, which contributes to the originality of the work. This comparative approach allows for a deeper understanding of the challenges involved in translation and is particularly evident in Chapter 10, *Translating the Tang Poets*, written by Turner, and Chapter 12, *Aesthetic Fidelity versus Linguistic Fidelity*, written by Chen. Turner's essay employs comparison by drawing parallels between Tang poets and Western artists, highlighting similarities in style. For instance, he compares the sensibility of early Tang poets, such as Haoran Meng, to Western artists like Giotto. Through these

comparisons, Turner enables readers to grasp the essence of Tang poetry by relating it to familiar artistic expressions from the Western tradition. On the other hand, Chen's essay focuses on comparing the translations of two different translators of Chinese poetry. Through this comparative analysis, Chen illustrates why one translation may be considered superior to another, providing readers with an opportunity to form their own judgments on the translation. This comparative approach not only contributes to the originality of the volume but also aligns with the reader-friendly nature of the volume by facilitating readers' understanding of the subject.

In conclusion, the volume successfully accomplishes the editor's objective by providing an insightful and reader-friendly exploration of translating Chinese texts for Western readers. By establishing a solid theoretical foundation and offering practical examples, the volume equips readers with valuable strategies for engaging with the challenges inherent in translating Chinese literature. Its scholarly rigor and broad appeal make it a meaningful resource for a wide range of individuals, including scholars, translators, educators, students, and anyone interested in the field of Chinese translation, literature, and cultural studies.