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INTRODUCTION

Die Gewalt einer Sprache ist nicht,
daß sie das Fremde abweist,
sondern daß sie es verschlingt.¹
J. W. Goethe

The migration of knowledge through cultures and time is a complex and multifaceted issue. Any study of the exchange and nativization of ideas, texts and scientific disciplines across temporal and/or cultural boundaries must consider a wide range of economic, social and ideological aspects that are inevitably involved in the process of transmission and reception. Certainly, the failure or success of such processes depends to a significant degree on economic pressures and incentives, the demands and proclivities of relevant groups or individuals, and the ideological constraints to which textual and intellectual production are subjected in a given society. Yet, consideration of these non-linguistic factors must not eclipse the fact that migrations of knowledge remain above all instances of *translation* in the ‘narrow’, non-metaphorical sense of that word; i.e., “the process of transforming a specific piece of one language (commonly a text of some sort) into another language”.²

In the early stages of the transposition of such ‘pieces of language’ into a foreign environment, the terms that are coined or redefined for that purpose in the recipient languages are of greater importance than any of the above mentioned aspects. For a brief transitional moment, these terms represent the only tangible interface between the two contexts and the meanings that are set in motion across their borders. To their usual role as more or less arbitrary semiotic shells, they are fully relegated only after their definitions and systematic values are settled in the new contexts—which may well require years or even decades of negotiation and debate.

Lexical changes initiated by the influx of new or foreign knowledge are therefore of interest not only to historical linguists and lexicographers but also to students exploring the transcultural histories of

¹ The power/violence of a language is not to reject the Other but to devour it.

² Scott L. Montgomery. 2000. *Science in Translation. Movements of Knowledge through Cultures and Time*. Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, p. 4.

science and thought. This twofold interest is amply confirmed by the case examined in this volume: the translation of knowledge from and about the West in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century China. While lexical and cultural borrowing were by no means new phenomena in China (or anywhere else), the swiftness and the extent of change in this period had no parallel in Chinese history. Within less than one hundred years, the Chinese language absorbed, or indeed ‘devoured’, the nomenclatures of the most diverse branches of Western knowledge whose formation had taken millennia—including several periods of cross-cultural translation—in the occident. In the climactic decades around 1900, the Chinese scientific and political lexicons were almost completely displaced by new terms, many of which denoted entirely or partly novel ideas. Perhaps even a man like Feng Guifen 馮桂芬 (1809–1874), one of the most ‘progressive’ and well-read reformers of the 1860s, would have been at a loss to decipher the terms in which matters of state were discussed merely one generation after his death. Like readers of Xu Bing’s wonderfully perplexing “New English Calligraphy”, which we chose for the cover of this collection, he might have felt bewildered by so many new terms whose shape at first sight seemed familiar but on closer inspection turned out to be essentially foreign in content—at least to the Chinese world he had known.

THE QUESTION OF TERMS

Irrespective of their linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the translators and interpreters of Western knowledge in late Qing China were acutely aware of the need for adequate terms to convey the ideas they wished to propagate. Some of the Westerners involved in this process had strong reservations about the prospects to solve this problem due to the presumed inaptitude of the Chinese language and script; others held such an exaggerated esteem for that medium that they expected it to become the future ‘universal language’.³ We have little evidence what Chinese themselves thought about this issue before Yan Fu 嚴復 (1853–1921) formulated his “three criteria of translation” in 1898. However, there is no reason to assume that any Chinese translator doubted the general capacity of the Chinese language to express foreign ideas, even if it did

³ See also David Wright. 2000. *Translating Science: The Transmission of Western Chemistry into Late Imperial China, 1840–1900*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 235–8.

not yet provide terms to express them. More balanced assessments by Westerners emerged only after they had lost their privileged position as exclusive mediators of the new knowledge that China so badly desired. Once they had come to accept their relegation to the status of outside observers, however, partisanship gave way to fascination, and it is to this fascination that we owe the earliest studies of our problematique.⁴

While these pioneering efforts still make worthwhile reading, more sophisticated work by both linguists and historians has considerably advanced our understanding of the subject. Recent linguistic studies have offered a much more comprehensive and at the same time refined picture of lexical exchange in and around China than previous authors were able to present.⁵ Likewise, meticulous historical researches have infinitely enriched our knowledge about the complexities of, as well as the agents, institutions and texts involved in, the transmission and reception of Western science and thought in late Qing China.⁶ Studies aiming to combine or integrate the two approaches and elucidate historical change through the prism of lexical changes and/or vice versa, however, are in many fields only beginning to emerge.⁷

⁴ Cf. Ada Haven Mateer. 1913. *New Terms for New Ideas. A Study of the Chinese Newspaper*. Shanghai: Presbyterian Mission Press; Evan Morgan. 1913. *Chinese New Terms and Expressions*. Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh.

⁵ Cf. in particular Federico Masini. 1993. *The Formation of Modern Chinese Lexicon and its Evolution Toward a National Language: The Period from 1840 to 1898*. Berkeley: Journal of Chinese Linguistics (Monograph Series, no. 6); Koos Kuiper. 1993. "Dutch Loan-Words and Loan-Translations in Modern China: An Example of Successful Sinitification by Way of Japan", in: Lloyd Haft (ed.). *Words from the West: Western Texts in Chinese Literary Context. Essays to Honor Erik Zürcher on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*. Leiden: Centre of Non-Western Studies, pp. 116–44; Shen Guowei 沈國威. 1994. *Kindai Nitchū goi kōryūshi: Shin Kango no seisei to juyō*. 近代日中語彙交流史—新漢語の生成と受容 (A history of lexical exchanges between China and Japan in the modern era: the formation and reception of new Chinese words). Tokyo: Kasama shoin.

⁶ Cf. e.g. Sanetō Keishū 実藤惠秀. 1973. *Kindai Nitchū bunka kōshō shiwa* 近代日中文化交渉史話 (A history of cultural contacts between Japan and China in modern times). Tokyo: Shunjusha; Tan Ruqian 譚汝謙. 1986. *Jindai Zhong-Ri wenhua guanxi yanjiu* 近代中日文化關係研究 (Studies on the cultural relations between China and Japan in the modern era). Hong Kong: Xianggang Riben yanjiusuo; Xiong Yuezhi 熊月之. 1994. *Xixue dongjian yu wan Qing shehui* 西學東漸與晚清社會 (The dissemination of Western learning and late Qing society). Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe. Masuda Wataru. 2000. *Japan and China. Mutual Representations in the Modern Era*. Translated by Joshua A. Fogel. Richmond: Curzon Press.

⁷ Cf. Shen Guowei 沈國威 (ed.). 1999. *Rokugō sōdan no gakusaiteke kenkyū* 六合叢談の学際的研究 (Studies on the academic aspects of the *Shanghae Serial*). Tokyo: Hakuteisha. Perhaps the most ambitious project in this direction to date is the work of

The articles in this book explore how much historians and linguists can gain from crossing the boundaries of their disciplines and venturing out into the domains of the other. While certainly not starting from identical methodological assumptions, all contributors recognize that a subject so obviously situated at the intersection of language and history calls for a pluridisciplinary approach. The present volume illustrates how different versions of such an approach can be brought to bear on the intricate issues surrounding the creation and nativization of new terms and new ideas in late Qing discourses. The essays are arranged in six sections dedicated respectively to: (i) the Chinese language as a medium of lexical exchange; (ii) terms of political import; (iii) the negotiation of equivalencies; (iv) individual appropriations of new terms and ideas; (v) competing scientific nomenclatures; and (vi) grammar. An epilogue places the microhistories of cultural interaction that are presented in many articles in a broader perspective.

SO CLUMSY A MEDIUM ...

One will readily see how rude, how clumsy, how inadequate
such a vehicle of thought [the Chinese language] must be.
“Gustavus”

Even if no one will go as far today as “Gustavus” in his brazenly arrogant statement of 1877, prejudices about the Chinese language and its ability, or inability, to integrate foreign words and notions are still recurrent themes in China-related scholarship. In her opening essay, Viviane Alleton takes issue with the most prevalent of such preconceptions. Alleton argues that neither the morphology nor the Chinese writing system constitute obstacles to lexical borrowing. If translation is preferred to phonetic adaptation in modern Chinese, it is due to the language’s unusual aptitude for composing systematically related sets of terms. Further topics in her poignant discussion include misconceptions about the significance of Japanese for the modern Chinese lexi-

⁷ (cont.) Lydia Liu who probes the history of ‘translation’ in a very wide sense in order to conceptualize the formation of ‘Chinese modernity’ or, even more generally, the exchange of ‘meaning’ in global perspective. Cf. Lydia H. Liu. 1995. *Translingual Practice. Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900–1937*. Stanford: Stanford University Press; id. (ed.). 1999. *Tokens of Exchange. The Problem of Translation in Global Circulations*. Durham, London: Duke University Press.

con; the overestimation of translinguistic factors; and a number of social and historical factors that are often cited as evidence that the Chinese experience is in all too many ways 'unique'.

That the Chinese language is (and has been) involved to no lesser degree in global circulations of cultural items than any other is underlined by Benjamin T'sou, who adds a contemporary perspective to the problems of lexical and cultural borrowing discussed in this volume with regard to the late Qing. Drawing on data from his project on *Language Variation in Chinese Communities*, T'sou makes a strong case for a 'broad approach' to the diffusion of cultural items across linguistic boundaries. In contrast to a 'narrow approach' limited to phonetic adaptations he suggests that any lexical item reflecting foreign origin should be considered in order to measure the nature and extent of cultural impact. He shows that different attitudes towards lexical borrowing are shaped by the intricate interdependent relationships between languages, cultures and social structures. Constraints on lexical importation are seen to be related to the cultural compatibility of foreign items. T'sou insists that there are regularities governing how such items are manifested in the recipient languages and that these can be deciphered by analyses taking into account linguistic as well as sociological and cultural considerations.

In concluding this section, Wolfgang Lippert recapitulates the most important stages in the modernization of the Chinese and Japanese lexicons during the nineteenth century and highlights features that facilitated lexical borrowing between the two languages. According to his account, translators of Western texts into Chinese did not start creating new morpheme combinations until about 1860. The inventions that were then made served as welcome sources of inspiration for Japanese interpreters of Western thought, such as Nishi Amane (西周, 1829–1897). Additional terms coined in Japanese typically followed the word-formation patterns of Chinese, thus allowing their smooth importation into Chinese contexts after the translation of Japanese texts was recognized as a short-cut to acquiring new knowledge.

THE POLITICS OF NAMES

Ideological factors play an undeniable role in the creation and normalization of terms and terminologies in many fields, but nowhere is their influence more acute than in the languages of politics, law and soci-

ety. Studies of the keywords circulated in these ideologically sensitive areas are therefore of particular interest to students of history with a penchant for language. Xiong Yuezhi examines three key terms that rose to prominence in late Qing political discourse. Although early usages are attested for the Chinese words that are used today for ‘liberty’ (*ziyou* 自由), ‘democracy’ (*minzhu* 民主) and ‘president’ (*zongtong* 總統), all three notions stood for new ideas in a crucial period of intellectual ferment. In the case of ‘liberty’, it took several decades before ancient meanings implying ‘lawlessness’ or ‘recklessness’ were fully replaced by a less offensive understanding. ‘Democracy’ was burdened with similarly negative connotations before 1900. In this instance, however, the reason was not the persistence of traditional meanings but the condescending view of Protestant lexicographers who paraphrased ‘democracy’ as ‘government by the rabble’. The notion of a ‘president’, i.e., a head of state whose ‘mandate’ is renewed in regular intervals by public elections, was a source of particular amazement for the late Qing audience, and this is reflected in the variety of terms that were proposed to translate it—ranging from ‘gang leader’ and ‘tribal chieftain’ to ‘monarch’ and even ‘emperor’.

In a similar vein, Fang Weigui emphasizes the ‘symptom-function’ of language for decoding the changing attitudes towards foreigners in late imperial China. Drawing on an extensive range of documents, including the diaries and travelogues of early Chinese envoys to Europe, Fang traces the connotations of various terms used to refer to foreigners and their otherness. Initially derided as ‘barbarians’ or even ‘savages’, people from abroad came to be regarded as just that by the last decades of the Chinese empire. Within the conceptual framework of late Qing discourse, this terminological shift can be interpreted as the emergence of an increasingly cosmopolitan world-view despite enduring socio-psychological and political resistance.

Divergent conceptions of ‘rights’ remain one of the most controversial topics of debate between China and the West until today. In his study of the origins and development of the modern Chinese notion of ‘rights’, Rune Svarverud draws attention to the blurred distinction between ‘rights’ and ‘power’ in Chinese discourses. The terms denoting these two notions are both pronounced as *quanli* in Chinese and share the character *quan* 權 in their written forms. In his discussion, Svarverud traces the linked fates of the two terms, which are clearly distinguished in the West, from their roots in classical texts through

their usage in translations of international law and debates on ‘natural’ versus ‘political’ rights. Of special interest is his reconstruction of the complex itinerary of the *quanli* for ‘rights’ from China to Japan and back, distinguishing it as a particularly telling example of a Sino-Japanese ‘round-trip word’ (V. Mair).

NEGOTIATING EQUIVALENCE

According to Roman Jakobson, interlingual translation, or ‘translation proper’ as opposed to ‘intralingual’ and ‘intersemiotic’ translation, involves “two equivalent messages in two different codes”.⁸ Against the hypothesis of the general ‘untranslatability’ of languages, Jakobson argues that

... all cognitive experience and its classification is conveyable in any existing language. Whenever there is deficiency, terminology may be qualified and amplified by loanwords or loan-translations, neologisms or semantic shifts, and finally, by circumlocutions.⁹

However, even scholars sharing Jakobson’s belief in the translatability of any language and his optimism about the eventual filling of any lacunae will point out that equivalencies cannot be established through a single stroke of the pen or brush and that—not only in cases of deficiency—they remain by nature fragile and hypothetical.

The three articles in this section illustrate in different ways that equivalencies are the malleable results of various forms of negotiation. The European notion of ‘logic’, whose naturalization is discussed by Joachim Kurtz, was initially received in China with total unconcern, no matter in which terms it was presented. Equivalence in difference only became an issue after some interest for this esoteric science was aroused and renditions of ‘logic’ became the subject of a public controversy about the properties of ideal translation terms. By the end of the debate, each of the main contestants could rightfully claim equivalence to the term ‘logic’ by the simple fact that the notion had by then become so familiar in Chinese contexts that the choice of the term no longer mattered. However, these claims were once again

⁸ Roman Jakobson. 1959. “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation”, in: Reuben A. Brower (ed.). *On Translation*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, pp. 232–39; 233.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

eroded when some intellectuals started to call for a terminological separation of ‘Chinese’, ‘Western’ and ‘Indian’ logic in order to ease the construction of a distinctly Chinese ‘logical identity’.

In the case of the Chinese terms *jìqì* 機器 ‘machine’ and *jīxié* 機械 ‘machinery’, which are presented by Zhang Baichun, equivalence to modern notions was established in a much more organic way. While the story of ‘logic’ reveals an initial deficiency in the Chinese lexicon, the morphemes *ji*, *qi* and *xie* had a long history of usages that are closely related to the notions they have come to represent today. Even if changes were less dramatic and proceeded very much along the lines of the frequent redefinitions of terms within one and the same linguistic and scientific culture, the domains of all three morphemes and the compounds formed from them were progressively extended. Thus, *-ji* came to be employed as a generic suffix for ‘machine-like appliances’ during the second half of the nineteenth century, and *jìqì*, which had already been used by Jesuit translators to render the Latin term *machina*, was simultaneously taken as the most general designation for mechanical equipment.

A third example for the negotiation of equivalencies is discussed in Iwo Amelung’s article on the introduction of Western mechanics in China. Amelung draws attention to the dynamics of terminological development in the late Qing. New ideas were not only presented in newly coined or redefined terms; sometimes they were also propagated via terms from earlier layers of scientific contact. A case in point is the term *zhongxue* 重學 ‘the study of weight’ that had been coined by Jesuit missionaries as a translation for ‘mechanics’. Due to the connotations it had acquired then, the term’s revival in the nineteenth century did cause confusion, in particular among non-specialist readers unaware that the contents of the discipline had entirely changed. Perhaps, however, it was just the failure to establish equivalence which made alternative readings possible and facilitated the construction of a presumed Chinese tradition of ‘mechanics’ that was extracted from the *Mojing* 墨經 (Mohist Canon) and other early texts.

ON THEIR OWN TERMS

As pioneering mediators of cultural and scientific knowledge, translators and interpreters can make some, if not all, the difference. In late Qing China, as in so many other cases, infidelity was often the twin

sister of ingenuity. Lin Shu 林紓 (1852–1924), for example, ‘translated’ more than one hundred literary texts of Western origin into Chinese without knowing any foreign language. Still, the *belles infidèles* emerging from his versatile brush took the public imagination by storm. The only translator to exert comparable influence at the time was Yan Fu, whose conception and practice of the tasks of the translator is discussed by David Wright. Yan Fu’s most famous translation is that of Huxley’s *Evolution and Ethics*, but his other works encompassed a much wider range of modern European thought. Wright shows how Yan Fu’s attitudes towards lexical ambiguity, scientific terminology and the creation of neologisms coloured his work. His success as a translator is seen as coming from his ability to illuminate the spirit of the source-texts by the light of the Chinese tradition.

Ingo Schäfer tells a very different story with regard to Tan Sitong’s 譚嗣同 (1864–1898) appropriation of terms and ideas from Western natural philosophy. Organizing his account around the ‘incision’ in Tan’s philosophical and political outlook that is commonly characterized as a turn towards ‘wholesale Westernization’, Schäfer examines how this rupture is reflected in Tan’s discussions of the phenomena of nature. The complex interplay of Chinese and Western elements in the concepts of *qi* 氣 and *yitai* 以太 ‘ether’ around which Tan builds his ‘old’ and ‘new studies’ reveals how hard he tried to work his way out of the spiritual predicament of his torn generation.

Wang Yangzong takes a new look into the renditions of chemical terms by one of the most famous translation teams in nineteenth-century China, John Fryer (Fu Lanya 傅蘭雅, 1839–1928) and his Chinese assistant-*cum*-mentor Xu Shou 徐壽 (1818–1884). Wang reviews the terminological choices of the two men with regard to three sets of chemical terms and analyzes the translatory strategies they employed. For their translations of the names of the chemical elements, Xu and Fryer devised a highly effective program integrating phonetic and graphic aspects that ensured the lasting success of their inventions. On the other hand, their decision simply to combine these terms to render chemical compounds proved utterly infertile. Finally, their infelicitous translations of various chemical concepts reveal that their knowledge of chemistry was already outdated by the time their works were completed. Wang’s account thus suggests that the success of terminological creations depends on much more than translatory strategies, no matter how well they may have been crafted.

COMPETING NOMENCLATURES

In striking contrast to Japan, where the standardization of terminology was early recognized as one of the most urgent tasks of the emerging scientific community, the translation of Western knowledge into late imperial China was long marred by the coexistence and confusion between competing nomenclatures. The forms and variety of such competition are illustrated by the three contributions in this section.

On the basis of the terms listed in three bilingual dictionaries, Shen Guowei analyzes early missionary attempts to create comprehensive Chinese nomenclatures. Shen argues that the different strategies adopted in these works may be taken to reflect, on the one hand, the state of terminological development, and on the other, the personal views of the compilers about the task at hand. Elijah Bridgman avoided coining new terms even in anatomy where the Chinese lexicon was exceptionally poor. The result of his timidity was semantic confusion as his strategy to extend the meanings of existing words or phrases left too much room for ambiguity. Wilhelm Lobscheid typically took a much bolder but no more successful approach. Many of his inventions reflected a peculiar understanding of the Chinese language that may have been influenced by linguistic practices in the region where he was based. Justus Doolittle's dictionary synthesizes the nomenclatures available by 1872. Shen stresses that most of these consisted of consciously created compound words, with the notable exception of medicine. Nonetheless, hardly any of the sets of terms coined by the missionaries survived the competition of rival terms from Japan after the turn of the century.

In her analysis of mathematical terminology, Andrea Bréard deals with a different kind of competition. In contrast to other sciences, mathematics had a long history in China and possessed a sophisticated technical terminology. Bréard shows that this terminology was modified and extended within the traditional semiotic framework during the nineteenth century. Some of the men active in these efforts applied themselves simultaneously to the translation of mathematical texts from the West and created new sets of terms for this purpose. The most significant and enduring aspect of these translations was the introduction of operational symbols in formulae. Most of their other new terms flourished only for a transitional period before being superseded by Japanese loans.

Georges Métaillé reconstructs how the modern Chinese botanical terminology progressively emerged from the nomenclatures of pre-modern forms of botany. The modern botanical terminology, which was settled around 1920, has almost nothing in common with the nomenclatures created by foreign and Chinese translators in the period between 1858 and 1898. Rather it was imported wholesale from Japan where interest in scientific botany had set in at the end of the eighteenth century and terminological standardization had already been achieved. Yet, the success of the terms from Japan was not in the first place due to their intrinsic quality but to the contingent fact that they were available as an effective terminological tool when Chinese scholars eventually became interested in a subject with little direct relation to the nation's wealth and power.

GRAMMARS OF ALTERITY

The two papers in the concluding section address a particularly intricate aspect of language contact: the conceptualization of the grammatical structures of one language by means of terms adopted from a very different other. In his account of the first grammar of the Chinese language written in Chinese, Ma Jianzhong's 馬建忠 (1844–1900) *Mashi wentong* 馬氏文通 (Basic principles for writing clearly and coherently by Mister Ma), Alain Peyraube traces the possible Chinese and Western sources on which this exceptionally influential work may have been modelled. According to his analysis, influences of earlier Chinese works can be detected only in the adaptation of a few terms of grammatical import. The Western grammars of Chinese to which Ma may have had access were also of limited importance. Terminological evidence and Ma's explicit aspiration to write a 'universal grammar' of the Chinese language suggest that the *Mashi wentong* was rather designed on the model of the French *Grammaire de Port-Royal*. By showing how a classical Western text inspired the first Chinese grammar in the modern sense, Peyraube's contribution complements Haun Saussy's account of how the Chinese language was deprived of its grammar by ignorant nineteenth-century linguists in Europe.¹⁰

¹⁰ Haun Saussy. 1999. "Always Multiple Translation, Or, How the Chinese Language lost its Grammar", in: Lydia Liu 1999, pp. 107–26.

But how important are explicit grammars and adequate grammatical terms for successful translation? In his case study of Dao'an 道安 (314–385 AD) and Yan Fu 嚴復 (1852–1921)—two key figures in the history of translation in China—Michael Lackner shows that although separated in time by more than one and a half millennia the two translators had similar difficulties in conceptualizing the syntactical differences between the Indo-European languages they aspired to translate and their native Chinese. Due to the lack of appropriate terms both were unable to define these differences clearly. However, implicit or intuitive knowledge of syntactical structures and the pragmatic use of analogies enabled both to complete successful translations even without terms to designate unfamiliar features like ‘relative clauses’ etc.

Christoph Harbsmeier’s “epilogue” situates the problems discussed in this volume in a broader perspective. Many of the articles clearly indicate that by 1912 most of the linguistic, intellectual and institutional tools for participation in global discourses were at hand in China. At least in the narrow realm of terminology, the paramount influence of the May Fourth movement on the formation of the modern Chinese language (or indeed Chinese ‘modernity’) should thus be open to debate. In his ‘informal’ notes, Harbsmeier takes this issue one step further by questioning other tenets of what he calls ‘May Fourth linguistic orthodoxy’. In many ways, May Fourth can be interpreted as a culmination of earlier discoveries, including the conception of a national language as a medium of nation-building. May Fourth efforts at standardization and language planning, which went of course far beyond matters of terminology, resemble many comparable European and non-European movements in utilizing language for the sake of national homogenization and establishing a decisionist political rhetoric whose distinguishing features are contrasted in Harbsmeier’s careful analysis with traditional rhetorical devices.