

## BOOK REVIEW

### 汪宝荣 2022 《中国文学译介与传播模式研究：以英译现当代小说为中心》，杭州：浙江大学出版社 *Modes of Translation and Dissemination for Chinese Literature: With Special Reference to Modern Chinese Fiction in English*

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The past three decades have witnessed the rapid growth of sociological approaches to translation studies, which is even more the case in Europe where systematic attempts at constructing a “sociology of translation” started at the turn of the twenty-first century (Buzelin, 2013: 186). Thanks to the efforts of some sociological-minded translation scholars, socio-translation studies have also gained a foothold in the Chinese academic circles of translation studies. However, there is a lack of systematic research and theoretical explorations in linking sociological approaches to Chinese translation practices (Wang, 2022: 24-25). Given increased scholarly attention to the importance of translation and dissemination modes for Chinese literature to “go global”, the publication of the book under review, which explores five basic modes of translation and dissemination for modern Chinese fiction in the West from sociological perspectives and approaches, is both timely and welcome.

In addition to “Introduction” and “Conclusion”, the book consists of eight chapters. The first three chapters introduce the research background, theoretical framework, research methods and analytic models. Each of the following five chapters is devoted to a particular mode of translation and dissemination through a case study of a Chinese author’s fiction in English.

Chapter One reviews the status quo of socio-translation studies in and outside of China, pinpointing the limitations of the existing domestic studies, including the lack of a comprehensive and compatible theoretical framework, somehow neglecting text analysis and translation strategies, and an inadequate link between sociological theories and translation studies. The literature review reveals that the current research on the translation and dissemination of Chinese literature can be furthered by drawing on Western sociological theories and analytical models, exploring the modes, mechanisms and effects of



translating and disseminating Chinese literature, and examining the dissemination and reception of modern Chinese fiction in the West (Wang, 2022: 33).

Chapter Two focuses on the theoretical framework. Responding to Professor Xu Jun's observation that "the current research on the foreign language translation of Chinese literature has encountered a bottleneck characterized by singularized approaches and duplicate models" (Xu, 2018: 114), the author incorporates three groups of theories into his research, namely, Western sociological theories, socio-translation analytical models, and core theories for descriptive translation studies (DTS). Since DTS is supposedly more familiar to readers in the translation studies circle, only the first two types of theories are introduced and reviewed in some detail. The Western sociological theories include Bourdieu's theory of social practice (commonly known as the "field theory") and theory of cultural production, and Latour et al.'s actor-network theory (ANT). The socio-translation analytical models include Heilbron's analytical model for the world system of translated books, Casanova's analytical model for the world literary field and types of translation, Simeoni's hypothesis of the translator's habitus, and Charlston's theory of translatorial *hexis*. These sociological theories tend to emphasize such social forces as capital, power and structure, often at the risk of "losing sight of actual translation practices" (Buzelin, 2013: 195-196). The author highlights the necessity of applying Lefevere's rewriting theory and Toury's theory of translational norms to describe the translations and explain the translator's decision-making process (Wang, 2022: 34-35).

Chapter Three defines the core concepts used in the book, including "translation and dissemination of Chinese literature", "dissemination impact", "degree of consecration", "the field of modern Chinese fiction in translation" and "actor-network of translation and dissemination". The author suggests using indicators such as the number of reviews, citations of the translation, its reprints and revised editions and the number of libraries holding the item, to investigate a translation's dissemination impact (72-73). Envisaging a translation field of modern Chinese fiction in the cultural production field of the Anglophone world, the author analyzes its structure, working mechanisms and modes (75-81). This chapter also introduces the research methods used, including the macro, meso and micro levels of sociological analysis, and some empirical research methods including semi-structured interviews, documentary research, etc., as are commonly used in sociological inquiry. Based on a critical review of some earlier modes developed by B. S. McDougall, Eva Hung, etc., the author identifies seven modes of translation and dissemination for Chinese literature under the mechanism of "initiator plus publisher", which is designed "to highlight the pivotal role played by the initiator and the publisher in the enterprise" (Wang, 2022: 95). Then he applies the actor-network model to analyze the production and dissemination of translated Chinese literature in the West with special reference to Western commercial presses and outlines five primary modes to be elaborated on in Chapters Four to Eight.

Chapter Four analyzes the working mechanism and pros and cons of Mode 1, i.e., the translation project initiated by an overseas Chinese scholar-translator and published by a Western academic press. This is done through a case study of *Ah Q and Others* (1941), an anthology of Lu Xun's stories translated by Chi-chen Wang and published by Columbia University Press. By tracing Wang's trajectory of professional career and habitus, the author investigates his motivation for translating Lu Xun's short stories and how a translator-initiated actor-network was constructed and operated. It is observed that Wang's bicultural background, professional identity as a scholar-translator and rigorous



attitude toward his work guaranteed the considerable faithfulness and readability of his translations. Through a careful examination of the reception of Wang's version in the Anglophone world, the author posits that its effective dissemination in the USA was realized by constructing an actor-network involving marketing, academic and social recognition, reviews and promotion. The chapter ends by noting that overseas Chinese scholar-translators are gradually withdrawing from this field and therefore in need of more financial and spiritual support (137-138).

Chapter Five explores the operation of Mode 2, namely, the translation project initiated and sponsored by a Chinese government agency and published by the Foreign Languages Press (FLP), through a case study of Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang's co-translation of Lu Xun's stories in the 1950s—1980s. It is noted that the Yangs' professional habitus differ markedly from each other in terms of source text selection, translation principle and strategies. Yet Gladys tended to subscribe to the translation principle held by her husband in their co-translations, leading to "a translation style that was primarily shaped by Yang Xianyi's translatorial habitus" (148-149). To show the dissemination impact of the Yangs' version, different editions published by the FLP and their historical contexts are combed through, along with 10 English versions of Lu Xun's fiction published or reprinted in the UK and USA between the 1950s and 1990s. It is observed that there was a small market receptive to the Yangs' version in the two countries during the same period (163). Then the author analyzes the mechanism under which the FLP initiated the Lu Xun translation project by focusing on two actor-networks. This is followed by an analysis how the production mode and process at the FLP affected the outcome of the Yangs' version. The quality and style of the Yangs' version and their translation strategies are described and explained, leading to the conclusion that "it is neither perfectly precise nor completely fluid" (178). The reception of the Yangs' version in the Anglophone world is carefully examined, followed by a tentative analysis of the mode and process of its dissemination. The chapter ends with a discussion of the pros and cons of this source culture-initiated mode, and how to improve this approach for better dissemination as the mode is still being practiced in China (196-197).

Chapter Six investigates the operation of an actor-network involved in Mode 3, that is, the translation project initiated by a Western sinologist and published by a Western academic press, which functions in the same way as Mode 1 with the only difference that the initiating translator is a sinologist. The case under study is Lu Xun's *Diary of a Madman and Other Stories* translated by W. A. Lyell and published by the University of Hawai'i Press in 1990. A brief survey of Lyell's professional career shows that he entered the field of literary translation through his academic research and English translation of Chinese literature. Looking into the process through which Lyell's professional habitus took shape, the author notes that as a "pure scholar-translator" Lyell consistently adopted a scholarly approach to literary translation in his career, with a long translator's introduction, providing copious notes and employing interpretive translation (209-210). A brief discussion is made as to the internal and external factors that drove Lyell to translate Lu Xun's short stories, how he enrolled the University of Hawai'i Press into an actor-network, and how his version was produced and disseminated. The author makes a fine-grained analysis of Lyell's renderings of Lu Xun, concluding that Lyell's is by far the most "scholarly" English version, "surpassing in many ways not only Chi-chen Wang's but also the Yangs'" (229-230). The reception of Lyell's version in North America is examined, followed by tentative analyses of its dissemination mode and process. The author notes that this mode of translation



and dissemination applies particularly well to “those important Chinese literary works that are unlikely to sell well on the Western book markets” (241).

Chapter Seven explores the workings of an actor-network involved in Mode 4, i.e., the translation project initiated by a Western sinologist and published by a Western commercial press. The case study involves Nobel laureate Mo Yan’s two novels, i.e., *Red Sorghum* and *The Republic of Wine*, which were translated by Howard Goldblatt and published by Viking Penguin in 1993 and Arcade Publishing in 2000 respectively. An examination of Goldblatt’s professional career and habitus shows that his accumulated capital as of 1990 enabled him to enroll in big commercial presses like Viking Penguin and his translatorial habitus underwent diachronic changes. The initiation of the translation project and the translation and successful dissemination of *Red Sorghum* are investigated by envisaging the construction and operation of three actor-networks involving various human and non-human agents, including Goldblatt, Mo Yan, Viking Penguin, Zhang Yimou’s movie *Red Sorghum*, book reviewers and sellers, readers, etc. Through a comparison of the publisher’s overall capital, the driving force of a movie adapted from the Chinese novel, and the novel’s marketability in the West, the author concludes that *Red Sorghum* far outweighs *The Republic of Wine* in dissemination impact. The chapter ends by noting that Mode 4 is widely recognized as “a mostly effective mechanism”, though it does not always guarantee success as the sinologist tends to select texts randomly for translation (309).

Through a case study of Yu Hua’s *The Seventh Day* translated by Allan H. Barr and published by the Random House in 2015, Chapter Eight examines the operation of an actor-network involved in Mode 5—the translation project initiated by a Chinese author and published by a Western commercial press. A survey of Barr’s educational and professional background leads to the observation that his scholarly habitus and symbolic capital accumulated in the academic field gained him access to the field of modern Chinese fiction in translation and qualified him as a trusted translator of Yu Hua. Then the author explores the initiation of the translation project and its reception in the Anglophone world by tracing the construction and operation of actor-networks. This is interposed by a careful examination of the quality, features and strategies of *The Seventh Day*. The chapter concludes that though not a “usual practice” for the time being, Mode 5 has a big chance of success if four “conditions of capital” are met (348-350).

The main research findings are summarized in “Conclusion”. The author also discusses the implications of his research in promoting Chinese literature abroad, including creating better “external and internal conditions”, adopting a combination of different modes of translation and dissemination, supporting world-renowned translators, publishers, media, critics, etc. in their endeavors, producing world-class audiovisual products adapted from Chinese literary works, enhancing the quality and marketability of such literary works, etc. Finally, avenues for further research on the topic are suggested.

One of the many merits of this book is its formulation of an actor-network model for analyzing the production and dissemination of translated Chinese literature in the West. It is developed by incorporating Bourdieu’s theory of social practice into Latour et al.’s ANT, which according to the author can complement each other (96). Revolving around this actor-network, the author examines, through careful and detailed case studies, five key modes of translation and dissemination. He examines



the translator's professional career, habitus development and capital accumulation, the process of initiation, translation, and dissemination of Chinese literature, weighing the pros and cons of each mode and discussing their implications in promoting Chinese literature abroad. Original and useful, the analytical model developed by the author might be applied or modified by scholars doing similar research projects.

Another merit is its attempt at exploring translation and dissemination modes for Chinese literature and the processes involved by applying sociological theories and methodologies. In Chapters Four to Eight, the author investigates the complex workings of a translation project, including initiation, production, dissemination and reception, showing his insight and rigor. The seven modes identified in this book will be useful analytical tools for researchers working on the translation and dissemination of Chinese literature.

The book, however, leaves out some important issues that could be further explored, as pointed out by the author himself (356). More modes of translation and dissemination for Chinese literature, including the two mentioned but not analyzed in the book, could be examined. Other modern Chinese fiction writers like Qian Zhongshu, Jia Pingwa, Su Tong, Yan Lianke, etc. and some established translators, including Julia Lovell, Nicky Harman, Cindy Carter, etc. could be studied. Reception studies could be further conducted by eliciting general readers' feedback. Furthermore, while textual analysis is mainly done by qualitative research methods in the book, the research findings would be more objective and cogent if such quantitative methods as digital mining, big data analysis and corpus-aided approaches were adopted. But these are small quibbles for such an impressive scholarly work.

All in all, this book is the first scholarly attempt at a systematic exploration of translation and dissemination modes for Chinese literature from sociological approaches. This book presents a new research paradigm and approach, and incorporates meticulous case studies, offering insights into the translation and dissemination of Chinese literature. Therefore, this book is highly recommended for literary translators, translation scholars and students, publishers and other actors in the field of translation, publication and dissemination.

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The author declares no conflict of interest.

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