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Review Of "Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, And Translated Modernity--China, 1900-1937" By L. H. Liu

Haili Kong

Swarthmore College, hkong1@swarthmore.edu

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an isolated product and henceforth a neglect of both literary tradition and historical background, which can otherwise immensely enrich our reading. For example, when Sung defines the narrative traits in *Tsai-sheng-yüan*, such as narrative agents, angles, persona, and the use of the storyteller, she does not bring into discussion how these techniques are used in the Chinese narrative tradition. Without any reference, it is difficult to prove the uniqueness of her text as she intends to. The book title defines her reading to be the explication of “narrative art,” and it seems Sung’s mission is to prove Ch’en’s work to be “good fiction” by traditional standards; however, such exclusion of questions beyond characters and points of view has probably become an unnecessary limitation of interpretation. In Appendix I Sung offers a synopsis of *Tsai-sheng-yüan*. The family trees and character list are useful to people who want to read the text.

The third appendix, “*T’an-tz’u* and *T’an-tz’u* Narratives,” demonstrates Sung’s devotion to the clarification of *t’an-tz’u* as a literary form. It also shows a switch of attention from textual analysis in isolation to a concern for the question of genre, an issue already brought up in her analysis of *Tsai-sheng-yüan* but never extensively dealt with. In this article Sung attempts to differentiate between *t’an-tz’u* as narratives for reading and *t’an-tz’u* as scripts for performance. She proposes to regard them as two separate genres. This is a very important distinction to make, yet also impossible to be clear-cut about—a question waiting for further exploration. I appreciate Dr. Sung’s call for more detailed research into the genre of *t’an-tz’u*, as this long neglected literary form is an unopened treasure box that can help reshape our notion of Chinese narratives and reconstruct the relationship between women and literary creation/reception.

Siao-chen Hu

Institute of Chinese Literature & Philosophy
Academia Sinica

Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900-1937, by Lydia H. Liu. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995. Pp. xx + 474. US \$60.00 (cloth); \$19.95 (paper).

Moving away from currently pervasive modes in Chinese studies, Lydia Liu tries to open up a new path, through her theoretically ambitious and substantially innovative research on “translingual practice,” leading toward a re-understanding and reevaluation of Chinese modernity in its role of constructing a new literary and cultural discourse during the first thirty-seven years of the twentieth century. Her proposed term “translingual practice,” provocative and engaging, plays a key role in combining the various issues concerning the formation of the May Fourth literary and cultural discourse, which actually goes far beyond the scope of pure linguistic concerns into more revolutionary issues. From the use of etymological studies of loanwords and neologisms to reexamination of some chosen literary works, and finally to a research of a broader social space, Liu attempts to apply her term “translingual practice” to venture forth three issues: the transformation of a new national literary discourse; modes of literary representation; and nation building and culture building.

Starting with a fascinating excursion of using the course of translation as a point of departure, Liu questions the validity of translation, the translatability of one language/culture into another, and the interaction between the source language/culture of the West and the target one of the Chinese. It is not too difficult to understand the simple fact that the lack of

equivalents, both in language and culture of the target country, would naturally lead to the production of a hypothetical version of the original, such as *xiandai* 現代 (modern) and *geren zhuyi* 個人主義 (individualism), to fill the gap, or shorten the distance between the two languages/cultures. However, the amazing part of this kind of “translingual practice,” as Liu illustrates, shows the unexpected transformation of the original and its lasting impact on the target culture. Among the cases of loanwords’ traveling, it seems to me, most interesting are the two translated terms: *guominxing* 國民性 [national character], a Western missionary term via a Japanese translation brought to China by Lu Xun as a crucial part of his literary mission of “national salvation,” and *guocui* 國粹 [national essence], a term borrowed from Japan by some returned American-educated intellectuals as part of their “competing voices and alternative narratives in the process of China’s nation building and culture building” (241). Liu’s elaborated analyses of both cases convincingly lead to her point that Chinese “modernity” is “translated” and “co-authored” by Western Orientalists and Chinese scholars. Liu argues, “In fact, both the National Essence group (conservatives?) and the New Culturalists (radicals?) were centrally preoccupied with the problem of Chinese national identity, a concern that renders their ideological boundaries exceedingly permeable” (241). Furthermore, as Liu concludes, “the idea of *Zhongguo wenxue* (Chinese/national literature)” (256) was invented, in a complementary way, by both the notions of national character and national essence, in spite of the conflicting elements of the two. Her investigation of the roots of the National Essence movement, both culturally and linguistically, reveals a fact that the National Essence movement, as a universally acknowledged opponent to the May Fourth Culture, should not be simply labeled as the “conservative.”

Her analysis of the publication of the *Compendium of Modern Chinese Literature* in the mid-1930s obviously expands “translingual practice” to a broader historical, social, and political scope. Liu’s meticulous examination of this often neglected historical event shows that the birth of the *Compendium* not only reinforces but also, more importantly, canonizes the legacy of May Fourth literature and culture, so as to legitimize the “translated modernity.” Her notion of the editorial role in the formation of the new culture fosters in the reader an interest in going beyond the literary texts to a better understanding of the social milieu in which literature is produced.

The greatest contribution of the book, after all, is Liu’s particular perspective of analysis, the “translingual practice,” which includes at least three elements: language, its transformation and (the language loaners’) practice. Certain loanwords and neologisms, especially the history of their traveling from one country to another, have become an interesting lens through which the reader can see the fascinating metamorphosis of the target culture as a result of such a “translingual practice.” As a vehicle for alien thoughts, the “translated” new words have a transforming power, not only enriching the host language but shaping its culture. Liu’s etymological studies of some key concepts of the May Fourth movement are eye-opening and effective. The term “translingual practice,” therefore, will appear in our contemporary critical vocabulary to enhance our comprehension of the “translated” modernity in the confusing twentieth century.

Always tracing the roots and historical linkage of “new” words/ideas and demonstrating their gradual metamorphosis while being transported to another country is the basic methodology Liu adopts. We are, from the very beginning, conducted on a comprehensive tour through the evolution of the theoretical understanding of “translation,” which amazingly involves quoted references from at least fifty-six theorists and scholars, from Heidegger, Haun Saussy, Charles Taylor to Jakobson and Derrida, from Yan Fu, and Lu Xun to Pierre Bourdieu,

Leo Lee and Grayatri Spivak. This proves Liu's solid preparation for the subject and helps the reader follow the formation of Liu's conception of "translingual practice." Almost without exception, Liu consistently uses the same method to treat each sub-topic in her book.

A more than one hundred page appendix provides comprehensive lists of loanwords, neologisms, and transliterations carefully classified into seven different categories, which clearly show the itinerary of the word traveling, and inter-relationships between the source and the target. This is no doubt the base for the study of "translingual practice." It is very useful and handy to have it available in the book, not only as a support for Liu's own study but also as a helpful resource for anyone interested in the subject.

Besides some minor errors in the book (such as misspelling, the word "era" misspelled as "ear" on p. 96, and the writer's name "Shi Zhecun" consistently as "Shi Zhicun"), some inaccurate information provided in notes may cause unnecessary confusion, for instance, in n. 81 for Chapter Two on p. 400, the quotation of Lu Xun should be from p. 144 instead of p. 114, of the fifth volume of *Complete Works of Lu Xun*, in the 1981 edition. As indicated in her "Preface," Liu makes it clear that the research goal of her idea of "translingual practice" is "to raise the possibility of rethinking cross-cultural interpretation and forms of linguistic mediation between East and West" (xv). Then, the reader may indeed wonder if the author consistently keeps her text on this proposed track coherently without going astray. Or if all the different issues the author raises can be tightly and effectively bound together to serve the theme, "translingual practice." Overall, I don't think Liu ever loses her focus. The only exception, it seems to me, however, is her re-reading of Xiao Hong's work which can hardly fit in to the "translingual practice" category. I completely agree when Liu points out that Xiao Hong's first novel *Field of Life and Death* (1933) "provides a powerful counterstatement to nationalist discourse on the questions of homeland, nation, woman, class, and literature" (195), and "represents primarily the experience of the female body; specifically, two areas of experience relating to peasant women: childbearing and death from suicide, sickness, or abuse" (201). Liu refuses to interpret this novel "as a national allegory . . . initially framed by the views of Hu Feng and Lu Xun" (201), which is "a practice of a nation-oriented and male-dominated literary criticism responsible for the appropriation of her work for national purpose" (200). However, Liu's re-interpretation of the significance of Xiao Hong's novel remains within the scope of sociological, political and feminist concerns. It is obviously not concerned with the mode, but the content and purpose of literary representation. How, or why is this an example of "translingual practice?" This remains puzzling and unanswered.

In her last chapter entitled "Rethinking Culture and National Essence," Liu's argument makes perfect sense as I mentioned earlier. But, after reading this chapter, I feel a kind of "hurriedness" in her wording and argument that makes her concluding remarks less strong theoretically than her Introduction. It would be more effective if she could have added a short chapter to summarize the validity of her proposed term "translingual practice" and to provide further questions for the reader.

In spite of minor reservations, I enthusiastically recommend this inspiring and insightful book for anyone interested in twentieth-century China in general, particularly in the formation of the May Fourth cultural and literary discourse.

Haili Kong
Swarthmore College