



*China Perspectives*

# **DIALOGUES ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF LITERARY TRANSLATION**

Xu Jun



# Dialogues on the Theory and Practice of Literary Translation

This book is a collection of the dialogues between Xu Jun, a well-known expert in French literary translation and eminent “Changjiang” scholar in translation studies in China, and some celebrated literary translators in contemporary China, some of whom are also literary scholars, linguists, poets, prose writers, and editors. It is a fundamental achievement of research on the literary translation in the 20th century in China, involving multiple literary types, such as novels, poetry, dramas, prose, and fairy tales; and multiple languages, such as English, French, German, Russian, Italian, Spanish, Japanese, and Sanskrit. The dialogues are centered on fundamental issues in the theory and practice of literary translation, such as re-creation in literary translation, the relationship between form and content in literary translation, the subjectivity of literary translators, literary translation standards and principles, the gains and losses in literary translation, the principles and methods of literary criticism, and so on.

Those translation experts’ experiences and multiple strategies not only play an active role in guiding literary translators in practice but also benefit theoretical development in literary translation. Thus, the book will contribute to worldwide translation studies and get well recognized by translation studies students, teachers, and scholars in the world.

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# Dialogues on the Theory and Practice of Literary Translation

**Xu Jun**

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# Foreword to the Chinese edition

## Tradition and innovation

*Xu Jun*

In China, the earliest time of literary translation can be traced back to the Six Dynasties (222–589). In addition, it has been a century since the beginning of the systematic translation of foreign literature into Chinese. In that century, the translators of generations have provided a great number of excellent translated literary works, which have played an important role in introducing foreign literary elements, promoting the Chinese literary development, and facilitating the literary and cultural communication between China and other countries. As eminent scholar and translator Ji Xianlin points out, translation is crucial in keeping the vitality of Chinese culture. In long-term literary translation activities, the translators have not only accumulated wide translation experience but also had profound insight on various aspects of translating. They have their insights into the special nature of literary translation, the relationship between literature and culture, and so on. In the past two decades, in the Chinese translation circle, increasing attention has been paid to the collection and study of their experience and insights. Some translators and translation studies scholars have carried out theoretical exploration of literary translation and produced some theoretical monographs, such as 《论诗的翻译》 (*On the Translation of Poetry*) by Wang Zuoliang, 《翻译的艺术》 (*The Art of Translation*) by Xu Yuanchong, 《文学翻译原理》 (*The Theory of Literary Translation*) by Zhang Jin, and 《小说文体学和小说翻译》 (*The Stylistics and Translation of Novels*) by Shen Dan.<sup>1</sup> They lay a solid foundation for our further study of literary translation.

On that basis, we planned to collect and research our predecessors' invaluable translation experience by comparing and studying their translated works. Then, drawing upon the new theoretical achievements in literary studies, linguistics, and cultural studies, we can make a comparative analysis of the common, essential translation problems both synchronically and diachronically, and furthermore, describe and explain them scientifically from certain theoretical perspectives. Practically, this research will play an active role in deepening our understanding of the nature of literary translation, dealing with various relations in the translation process, and solving the essential translation problems. Theoretically, it can provide reliable documents for systematic and scientific research on the literary translation theory.

Based on the above consideration and with the support of the editorial department of the journal 《译林》 (*Yilin, Translations*), we started a column for the dialogues on the basic questions of literary translation in the journal in 1998. The column adopts the form of dialogues between me and some senior translation experts in China to share their views and experience in literary translation with a wide readership. Over the past three years, we have interviewed 20 experts and gathered abundant first-hand documents for literary translation studies. They are representative, involving such languages as English, Russian, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Japanese, etc. Among them, there are well-known masters of cultural studies, linguists with unique research, accomplished poetry translators, and literary studies scholars. In addition, some of them are also the leaders of translation publishers; some have been devoted to the editing of literary translation works; some have made deep and systematic research on translation; some are also writers and poets. Therefore, in the course of consulting those translators, we take their respective characteristics into full consideration and from various perspectives discuss with them some common problems in translation, especially in literary translation. Therefore, the book of the dialogues is the product of our dialogues and deep thinking.

Based on the dialogues and relevant documents, we analyze and summarize their translation experience. They also think that through dialogues and exchanges, especially by considering the problems we raised in dialogues, they have the chance to review and summarize their own translation practice with a new theoretical understanding and improvement. In this sense, the process of dialogues and theoretical summary is also a process from experience to theoretical thinking and a process of theoretical enrichment and innovation of the traditional thinking about translation.

We believe that literary translation has its particularity. Literature is the art of writing and a component of culture, and in writing, there is certain cultural precipitation. Therefore, literary translation is not only translating between different languages but also an artistic recreation and cross-cultural communication. In this complex activity, any translator will inevitably face some problems related to the above three aspects of the translation process: writing, literature, and culture. Although different translators may have different views on literary translation, they cannot avoid the basic problems in linguistic and aesthetic appreciation and in the social and cultural functions of literature, such as the problems of how to deal with the original; whether the translation is imitation or re-creation; whether the translation should be equivalent to the original literal forms or to its artistic effect; how to use foreignization or domestication; how to mediate between the original author's style and the translator's own style; how to give play to the role of the subjects of the translation and meanwhile maintain certain objectivity; how to understand the purpose, function, and artistic essence of literary translation; and how to measure and evaluate the success of a translation. On the basic problems, the translation experts have their own insights

in their long-term translation practice. They have a deep understanding of the obstacles encountered in literary translation and have accumulated wide experience. They have tried various means to overcome these obstacles in the textual, literary, and cultural aspects. Their theoretical thinking and translation methods and skills provide invaluable suggestions, enlightenment, and guidance for young translators. Therefore, in the following sections, based on the concerns of the translation circle, I make a brief summary of their experience and insights according to the content of our dialogues. (More details can be seen later in my dialogues with them in the body of the book.)

### **“Translation is crucial!”**

What is translation? Those who are engaged in translation studies cannot neglect the question. The reasons lie in two aspects. First, answering the question of “what it is” seems to be the fundamental starting point for all scientific research. Second, it is only when the question is very clear that it is possible to define the range of “translation” and relevant issues involved in it and to discuss them theoretically. To answer the question, we can at least consider from three angles: first, ontologically, we can focus on the nature of translation; second, teleologically, we can define what kind of activity translation is; third, formally, we can find how many types of translation there are. In my dialogues with the senior translators, I find that they tend to answer the question teleologically. As Ji Xianlin points out, the translation will be indispensable as long as there are contacts and communication between different countries. Otherwise, the cross-cultural communication would be impossible and human society would not move forward. Here, we can see that translation arises from the need for human communication. In the sense, facilitating communication is the purpose or task of translation.

Knowing the purpose of translation will help us explore the nature of translation theoretically. From the history of human development, translation has been playing an important role in promoting cultural progress. Taking Chinese culture as an example, Ji Xianlin stresses the significance of translation in the keeping the vitality of Chinese culture in a very long history of its development. Indeed, the role of translation in the exchange of human thoughts and cultures is beyond doubt. Translation can not only promote the continuation of a national culture but also expand its life. Understanding translation activities at the higher level of cultural exchange undoubtedly can deepen our thinking about their essence, which is a recognition of the status of translation and also an affirmation and encouragement for the people engaged in the translation industry. It will help us more actively and carefully deal with the translation practice and the practical problems in translation.

Having a good understanding of the translation experts’ views on the purpose, task, and function of their translation, we can more easily understand their translation activities. In my talk with them, I feel deeply that they regard

translation as a sacred task. For the question of why they engage in translation, they answer differently from the present younger translators. In that special era, they had different ways of understanding translation and special motivations to engage in translation. Cao Ying, a translation expert on Russian literature, explains the point with the story of his translating Russian-Soviet literature. In addition, Tu An, an expert in poetry translation, explains that his translation of Whitman's poems is not just out of his love for their powerful and free styles but also a support for the Chinese revolution at that time.

From the motivations of those translation experts, we can see that translation activities in different times have different purposes and bear distinct stamps of the different times. Through their conversation, we can also better understand why the Chinese literary master Lu Xun compares the translator to Prometheus.

### **The factors influencing translation**

In the translation process, the motive and purpose of translation have a direct influence on the choice of works to translate. Based on the study of the translation history at home and abroad and of the practice of those translation experts, it is not difficult to see that there are many factors that restrict their choice of writers and works. In an early period of the new China, the clear purpose of translating foreign literary works was "serving the revolution and literary writing." So, translating and introducing the literature of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries got special attention. At that time, the choice of works to translate had two aspects of criteria: political and artistic. The political criteria were the most important. For many translators, political and ideological factors were vital for their choice of works to translate. Cao Ying spent twenty years systematically translating and introducing Tolstoy's works to Chinese readers because of the rich humanistic spirit and the artistic appeal of his works. Ye Junjian translated Andersen's fairy tales because Andersen expresses his concern for the human world, his respect for human dignity, and his celebration of the progress of mankind with great passion in his works. Tu An explains the great influence of the ideology on his choice of works to translate and on the publication of translated works in the historical period from the 1950s to the 1980s in China. In addition, Fang Ping, a productive literary scholar and translator of Shakespeare's dramas, also talks about his own experience of doing translation furtively in the Cultural Revolution period to explain the negative influence of the political factors on translation activity.

China's reform and opening-up have ushered in the spring of literary translation in China. The older generation of translators has become even more enthusiastic. In pursuit of truth and beauty, they pay more attention to the cultural connotation, aesthetic value, and artistic quality of their translated works. Xiao Qian emphasizes that the works to translate must be his favorite

ones. Wen Jieruo likes those works with strong artistic charms, which can give readers a sense of beauty in language and mood. In the new historical period, Tu An also has his two clear standards: one is the first-rate poems with a well-established reputation in literary history; the other is his collection of some favorite and touching works.

In summary, the choice of works to translate is not just a matter of the translators themselves. The publishers, in a sense, have the power to make decisions. In our time, economic factors often control publishers' choice. What we now call "social benefits" and "economic benefits" have become the most important criteria. Although those translation experts were influenced by some uncontrollable factors, some of their views and selection criteria are still enlightening for us today.

### **The standards and principles of translation**

In the field of translation, especially in literary translation, there has long been a popular view of the futility of translation theory. Many people believe that literary translation as art depends entirely on the translator's individual ability, comprehension, and expression. There is neither theory nor any standard or principle. However, we always believe that literary translation as a practical and artistic activity cannot be completely blind. It should have some rules to follow. With this idea, in our dialogues with the senior translation experts we summarize the principles or viewpoints they follow in their translation activities. Through the dialogues, we can see that in their long-term literary translation practice, the translation experts have their own ideas on how to convey the original spirit and reproduce the original style. They believe that they have gradually accumulated translation experience and found some rules in practice.

In the dialogues with the translation experts, we find that the triple principle of "faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance" put forward by Yan Fu in 1898 guides them in their translation practice. There have been different opinions about Yan Fu's triple principle in the past century. As we know, when Yan Fu translated *Evolution and Ethics*, he deeply felt his own limitations and expressed his feeling about the three difficulties of "faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance" in the translation and made a detailed analysis of them. It is true that Yan Fu did not propose the triple difficulty as a translation criterion. However, over the past one hundred years or so, the triple principle has been striking a chord with many translators and has demonstrated its strong vitality. It has also been playing an active role in translation practice, as argued by Luo Xinzhang. Ye Junjian even thinks that the triple principle is universal for the translation in different languages and nations. Tu An also has a strong belief in it and explains the meanings and relationship of its three aspects. In addition, Li Mang gives special attention to "elegance" and reviews its meaning from the present social perspective. In Guo Hongan's view, Yan Fu's triple principle is operable and has touched on the prominent

problems of literary translation. We can give renewed vitality to it if only we give it new explanations in new eras.

Yan Fu's triple principle, as mentioned by Guo Hongan, is brief and operable. But there have been different views on the "elegance." Xu Yuancong, an eminent translator being well versed in both English and French, regards "elegance" as the origin of the translation theory of Chinese literary school. Based on it, he puts forward his theory of triple beauty, which refers to the beauty in the meaning, prosody, and form. In addition, Guo Hongan's new interpretation of "elegance" as "literariness" is so remarkable.

From the translator experts' views on the principles and standards of translation, we can draw a conclusion that translation should not be blind and instead should follow certain principles or standards. Over the past century, despite different views, Yan Fu's triple principle has gradually been well accepted. With the times going on and the continuous enrichment of translation practice, more generations of translators will continuously inject new vitality into the ideas put forward by Yan Fu.

### **The translation process is also a research process**

Translation studies are no longer confined to the pure linguistic comparison between the original and the translated text and the evaluation of the correctness of a translation. The specific questions, such as how the translation process works, how to set about a translation, and what are the important steps in translating a book, are all related to the translation process. In the past twenty years, translation theorists have paid more attention to the translation process and explored it from different perspectives. For instance, the school of French interpretive theory, starting from the research on the process of interpreting, puts forward the "three stages" of the translation process: comprehension, deverbalization, and reformulation. The research on the translation process can help reveal the ways of thinking in translation. Further progress in this area depends on the development of other disciplines, such as neurolinguistics and psycholinguistics. On the other hand, as a practical activity, summarizing and sorting out the various aspects of translation experience is also a process of theorization. Therefore, in the dialogues with the translation experts, we discussed the above-mentioned specific questions.

Theoretically, translation can be clearly divided into two main stages: comprehension and reproduction (re-expression). However, in practice, the two stages are not categorically separate. They are overlapped in some way and mutually influenced. Jiang Feng, an expert in poetry translation, puts more emphasis on the full comprehension of the original, including the original poet's thoughts and aesthetic values. In addition, most of the translation experts mention the necessity of in-depth research on the original. Lü Tongliu, a translation expert on Italian literature, particularly talks about the relationship between translation and research. He maintains that literary translation and literary studies are inseparable and can be mutually

facilitated. The translation process is, in fact, a process of research on the original literary works. In addition, Li Mang emphasizes that a translator must reflect on their translation methods and translations from time to time and correct anything inappropriate. In their practice, the translation experts all realize that the process of understanding the original is a continuous process of learning, understanding and looking deeper into the original. Moreover, as argued by Ye Junjian, in the comprehension of the ST, the translator can be influenced by such factors as his own personalities, cultural knowledge, and artistic interests. Thus, their understanding of the original may not necessarily fully conform to the original. The problem raised by Ye, in fact, is the limitation of the translator as the subject of reading and interpreting. Understanding and interpretation of the original text is by no means a once-and-for-all work for the translator. In particular, the original works with strong artistic personality often have relatively larger space for interpretation, which may need to be explored by translators of generations. That, perhaps, is why a literary work can have more than one version in a period, and new versions can appear from time to time.

### **Translation is not copying but re-creation**

For many people who know little about translation, translation is nothing but the conversion of a language into another with the purpose of meaning transfer. However, it is not so simple for experienced translators, especially for those engaging in literary translation. What is the relationship between a translation and its ST? Is the translation an imitation of the original or a re-creation? Based on their own practice, the translation experts express their own views on those issues, which not only guide us in translation practice but also have very high theoretical significance.

When it comes to the relationship between the ST and the TT, it must involve the relationship between the writer and the translator and between translation and creation. On this issue, most experts we interviewed have their own theoretical views. Fang Ping emphasizes that translation is re-creation with a certain dependency on the ST, and so a literary translator must have a keen understanding of the original and change it into a creative passion. Ye Junjian, stressing the translation's dependency on the ST, thinks that the translation process is a process of re-interpretation and re-creation, which leads to different styles or features of the translation. In addition, Xu Yuanchong, placing a special emphasis on the creativity of literary translation, maintains that literary translation must be enhanced to the status of creative writing. Li Mang argues that translation is a re-creation, which should respect and reproduce the original in the content, structure, characterization, and language expression. From the perspective of hermeneutics, Yang Wuneng, a translation expert on German literature, argues that literary translation is an interpretation in a global and fundamental sense. It is a special way of literary and artistic interpretation, which is different from a normal sense of

explanation or a theoretical sense of interpretation. Yang's view, in a sense, deepens the literary translation studies.

### **The translator's subjectivity**

In previous translation discussions, the awkward status of the translator has often been involved. The most popular view is "one servant with two masters." As a servant, the translator serves both the original author and the target readers. If we observe and analyze the translator's activities objectively, we can find that whether in the comprehension of the ST or in interpreting and re-expressing it, the translator always plays the most important role in the process of re-creation with the prerequisite of reproducing the original. In our communication with the translation experts, we discussed how to give a full play to the translator's subjective role in the limited space of creation. We should see that in the achievements made in translation studies, the study of translation methods and techniques accounts for a large proportion. But this kind of research mainly focuses on translation techniques and seldom involves the roles of different subjects in translation. As a matter of fact, the translator's subjectivity, personality, temperament, psychological endowment, knowledge, language performance, and even the translator's stance and moral factors, all have a direct and important influence on the translation activity.

Xu Yuanchong emphasizes that literary translation should be enhanced to the level of literary creation. Insisting that the translators should make full use of their creativity, Xu puts forward his principle of triple transformation. In addition, Luo Xinzhang believes that literary translators should have a higher goal, especially in the pursuit of artistic quality of writing. Ye Junjian stresses the importance of producing high-quality translations and meanwhile maintains that the individualized translations should be encouraged. In his view, to express the original spirit and charm in translation lies in the combination of the ST and the translator's learning, thoughts, and emotions, and literary attainments as well. This combination per se is a re-creation. From the characteristics of literary translation, Yang Wuneng makes a dialectical analysis of how to give play to the translator's subjectivity. He stresses that the translator's subjectivity is necessary but must be regulated by the thoughts and artistic styles of the ST.

### **The reproduction of the original style**

In literary translation, the translator cannot neglect the reproduction of the original style. In our discussion, almost every translator mentions their understanding of literary style and the importance of reproducing the original style. For them, the style is the most important embodiment of the original artistic life. If literary translators ignored the original style and its reproduction, it would be tantamount to cutting off the original artistic life.

The translation experts clearly express their own viewpoints on that issue, which demonstrate their theoretical awareness and valuable experience.

In literary theory in China, the style is defined very broadly. It seems to cover everything, including the styles of the times and the nation at the macro level as well as the author's choice of a chapter, a word, or a sentence pattern at the micro level. They are all the embodiment or symbols of the author's style. In short, the style is embodied in the various elements of the content and form of literary and artistic works, reflecting the artistic and creative characteristics of different writers and artists. In literary translation, translators should pay most attention to the original writing style.

The translation experts point out that we should not understand the style too narrowly. For them, to produce the original style is the prime task of the literary translator. In reproducing the original style, every translator feels that there are limitations and obstacles. But in the face of the obstacles, whether the translator steers clear of it or tries to overcome it indicates his attitude toward the problem. Li Wenjun, a translation expert in Faulkner's works, has a very positive attitude toward the obstacles. In his eyes, Faulkner's works are rich in styles and language expressions, which brings about translation difficulties and great challenges to translators, yet meanwhile provides opportunities to display one's translation ability. He believes that the translators should have multiple strategies and master the languages in different styles, from the elegant to the colloquial.

While the translators emphasize the reproduction of the original style, they also believe the existence of the translator's style. So how to deal with the contradiction between the original author's style and the translator's style? Most translation experts have their own answers to this question and their feasible principles in practice. Cao Ying argues that the translator should translate those works whose styles are similar to his own writing style. In addition, Tu An, Wen Jieruo, Fang Ping, and Ye Junjian all hold a similar view. Their viewpoints can be summarized in three points: first, the original style should be reproduced in the translation, but the translator's style will be inevitably more or less presented in the translation due to change of languages and the involvement of the translator's personality; second, the objective existence of the translator's style does not presuppose the weakening of the original author's style. Third, in order to achieve the harmony of the original style with the translation style, the translator should try his best to integrate his own style with the original author's style so as to transform the translator's creative personality into the favorable factor of reproducing the original style.

### **Thinking in images and the image reproduction**

Both translation and creative writing are the art of language(s) and require thinking in images. In literary creation, writers often fully employ their own thinking in images for their characterization. Many immortal literary works are characterized by the distinctive and unique images of their characters, which has moved readers for generations. In literary translation, the translator

should grasp the original images through the text and try to reconstruct it through their own imaginative thinking in translation. Cao Ying emphasizes that characters are the soul of a literary work. In his view, the writers' level lies in their ability to shape characters and the translators' level in their re-shaping of them in another language.

To translate a work, it is very important to comprehend its aesthetic features and artistic conception and grasp the original images. One of the criteria for measuring the success of a literary translation is whether the characters in the translated text can equally attract readers. Therefore, the translator should not only know the SL and the TL but also have literary talent, especially the ability of thinking in images in order to analyze the process of literary creation and get the accurate images of original characters. The formal elements of a literary work, such as the words, pace, rhythm, and structure, are the aesthetic elements that the translators first perceive. The translators with good artistic attainments and literary appreciation ability can grasp the artistic images and recreate them in another language. To get readers to like the characters in the novel, the translator should first like the characters recreated in their translation. Lü Tongliu has a strong feeling about it. He said that he was so deeply immersed in the translation of Edmondo De Amicis's novella *Carmela* that he seemed to fall in love with the beautiful and unfortunate girl Carmela when the translation was finished.

The image reproduction of characters also applies to poetry translation. There are also images in poetry, which are more condensed and enriched. The image of a poem is often created figuratively, so how to deal with it in translation? Jiang Feng has an insight into the translation of poetic images. In his view, the figurative expressions cannot be changed in translation. Otherwise, poetry translation will become meaningless. In the translation process, how should the translator reproduce the image? In Tu An's translation experience, he first goes deep into the original images of those characters to sense their personalities, talents, temperaments, as well as their ways of speaking and postures and then re-shapes them in proper Chinese expressions.

For different translators, the same original characters often appear in different images, and sometimes the difference is even very large. The complexity of the original character's personality and the levels of the translator's literary ability may lead to some distortion in reproducing the image of the character, which sometimes makes people wonder whether the translators are describing the same person. For the faithfulness of their translation, the translators should research on the original author's character and temperament to understand more deeply the characters they created.

### **Content vs. form, spiritual conformity vs. formal conformity**

The translation should not only convey the original content but also attach importance to its form. Some people even think that a text can be called a

literary work only when its form moves the reader more than its content. In a sense, this indicates the importance of formal elements in literature. A theme can be expressed by various forms. In contemporary foreign literature, a work is often admired mainly because its form of expression, rather than its content, is novel or unique, or because of the perfect combination of its content and form, such as the works of Albert Camus and of Marguerite Duras. The translation of their works has undoubtedly generated a new impetus for our own creative writing.

However, the more perfect the combination of content and form is, the greater the obstacles to translation will be, especially in poetry translation. Poetry translation often failed to preserve the original content and form simultaneously, which often put the translators in a dilemma and led to the idea that poetry is untranslatable. According to Jiang Feng, the poetic form highly fitting with its content, especially the language structure and the figures of speech for shaping something, is all the language material that crystallizes the composition into aesthetic objects. In addition, the poetic forms are not just the appearance of certain content and the carrier of a certain message. In many cases, a form is of the content and the carrier per se the message, which has been clearly demonstrated in modern poetry. Therefore, Jiang advocates for both formal and spiritual conformity in poetry translation. As for the metrical pattern, he maintains that rule-breaking should be allowed in translating poetry. For the original patterns, we try to reproduce them but cannot be too confined by them. In poetry translation, Jiang Feng's viewpoints are representative.

The issue of content and form is directly related to the issue of formal conformity and spiritual conformity. The translators, of course, want to preserve both the form and the spirit. However, in fact, some subjective and objective factors drive them to make a choice between the two aspects. Luo Xinzhang thinks that the translation will inevitably present some changes after the translator's operation. In his view, when the longer English sentences were cut into shorter ones in Chinese translation, the translation may present a spiritual, rather than formal, conformity. Li Wenjun maintains that translation should not only transfer the original meaning but also present the original flavors. In Xiao Qian's view, the literary translation should focus more on the transfer of the original spirit.

In the process of translation, the translator should try to preserve and embody the original images and spirit in both the content and form. When it is impossible to keep both, the translator should consider which is the priority. The spiritual and formal conformity in translated works affects not just the target readers' understanding of the original works but the literary critics' study of them. An inappropriate decision on the choice between the two aspects may lead the literary research to a wrong direction and mislead people in their interpreting the original ideological content and artistic form. It is a problem worth discussing.

## **Translation criticism**

Literary translation needs translation criticism, just as the audience's responses are necessary after the performance of a drama. Without criticism, you do not know why a translation is good or not. Translation criticism is a recipe for improving translation quality and promoting the development of the translation industry. Especially today, retranslation is so common that many shoddy translations not only hurt the readers' interests but also sully the reputation of the translation circle partly due to the lack or inefficiency of translation criticism. In my discussion with the senior translation experts, I can deeply feel their care about the cause of translation and their strong sense of responsibility in translation. Ji Xianlin stresses the importance of translation criticism in the healthy development of the cause of translation and Chinese civilization. Li Mang also criticizes the problems with translation and translation criticism and demonstrates the necessity of proper and efficient translation criticism.

Translation criticism is not only of great practical value but also an indispensable aspect of the construction of translatology. But how does translation criticism work? What methods can be adopted? And how is the role of translation criticism given a full play? In those aspects, most of the translation experts put forward practical suggestions and the focus of translation criticism. For instance, Fang Ping argues that literary translation criticism should not focus on what is lost in translation but on what is gained through translation.

Translation criticism is not a judgment of the right or wrong in a narrow sense. One of its main tasks is to open the space for interpretation and bring more possibilities to translation. For this reason, many translators have talked about the rationality of retranslation. In translation criticism, we must guard against the idea that a literary work has only one translation. In fact, there is hardly the best translation. One version may be superior to another in one respect. By comparing different versions, the translation critics can recommend better ones to the target readers. Yang Wuneng believes that the multiple versions of a literary work are not only inevitable but also beneficial. Xiao Qian and Wen Jieruo think that translation criticism should facilitate the improvement of the translation quality. They, with the truthful spirit, welcome the criticism of colleagues and the target readers and expect more versions better than theirs.

Translation criticism should be objective. To belittle or raise the value of any translated work is not beneficial to the development of the translation industry. There should be ethical and poetic standards in the measurement of translated works. A translator can be a critic of his own or others' translation. But there is a basic principle: to respect the translator's work. Tu An has certain requirements for his own translation and meanwhile a certain standard to evaluate his own translated works. But he does not intend

to impose his own standard on others or submit to certain standards he cannot accept.

Translation criticism should be constructive, focusing on expanding the feasibility of translation, guiding readers' interest in translation, attracting more people's attention to the cause of translation and intercultural communication between China and the world.

The dialogues lasting for three years, for us, become a process of continuous learning, discussion, and exploration. In addition to their various opinions on the main issues discussed above, the translation experts, with their broad vision and profound thoughts, have also expressed their views on many other issues related to translation, such as Chen Yuan's discussion of the relationship between language and translation as well as his analysis of translatability and bidirectional translation. In addition, Lin Yian's original views on translation and the study of Latin American Literature is of great value in guiding us in translation studies and translation practice. We believe that the wealth they have left us will play an active role in promoting the cause of translation, literary studies, and cultural exchanges between China and other countries.

## **Note**

- 1 In this book, in referring to a Chinese book or paper, the translator of the book keeps its original Chinese title for the readers' knowledge of the original and meanwhile provides its corresponding English or Pinyin for English readers' convenience of reading and searching for relevant information. In addition, the translator uses the Pinyin of Chinese people's names and provides their corresponding Chinese characters for reference in Appendix.

# List of abbreviations

ISIT	Institut Supérieur d'Interpretariat et de Traduction
LA	Latin American
LTC	literary translation criticism
PRC	People's Republic of China
SL	source language
ST	source text
TL	target language
TT	target text



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**Part I**

**On the importance of  
literary translation**



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# 1 Translation is crucial!

*Ji Xianlin and Xu Jun*

**Xu Jun** (as **Xu** below): The delegates from Japan, South Korea, India, and Arabic Countries attended the Asian Translator's Forum in Beijing. They discussed the main translation issues, including the function of translation in ideological and cultural communication, theoretical research on translation, and translation strategies in modern society, among others. Today, I feel grateful to have this opportunity to ask you some questions on translation. The first question is about the function of translation. Nowadays, some people have a prejudice against translation. They think that translation is easy, and look down upon it. What do you think of this view?

**Ji Xianlin** (as **Ji** below): Some people do have quite a few misunderstandings of translation and some even belittle it. But for me, translation is not easy. Instead, it's quite difficult. I have my personal experience. Take my translation 《罗摩衍那》 (*Ramayana*) as an example.<sup>1</sup> The translation of the book title alone involves many problems to consider seriously. The first problem is the translation of pronunciations. In the history of the translation of Buddhist scriptures, the monks in both China and abroad were all cautious about the pronunciation translation in view of the religious divinity. They strove to translate pronunciations accurately. The four Chinese characters “罗摩衍那” (*luó mó yǎn nà*), whose pronunciations were closer to the original ones, were finally selected in consideration of accurateness. But in fact, that was not enough. I must also consider the style. Some of the four Chinese characters are not commonly used. Is it necessary to replace them with other commoner ones? I thought then that the book itself was antique and thus it might be workable to use characters with antique beauty, from which readers might read special meanings. Would that be much better? So, you see, translating only a book title involves so many considerations, not to mention more complex aspects of translation. So, translation is not easy at all.

**Xu:** Mr. Ji, you mentioned the style of translation. I remember that you have a paper included in 《翻译论集》 (*Anthology of Translation*) edited by Luo Xinzhang. In that paper, you discussed the style of