

HPEN7022: BUILDING SMALL WORLDS

THE SHORT STORY IN ENGLISH



Translating from Chinese

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon the successful completion of this module, the student should be able to:

- To examine the provenance & meaning of the short story in English;
- To understand the significance of the short story as a vehicle of cultural expression in minority cultures within the UK & former colonies;
- To explore the proliferation of short stories in translation;
- To demonstrate this understanding of meaning & technique in the translation of a short story from the students' home language(s) into English, or from close readings of translated short stories.

THE STORIES

1. Early 20th Century stories
 - eg Lu Xun, selection of stories translated Julia Lovell
2. Contemporary stories
 - A Yi, 'The Curse', translated Julia Lovell
 - Wang Anyi, 'Ah Fang's Lamp', translated Helen Wang
 - Chen Danyan, 'Snow', translated Paul Harris
3. Questions of cultural capital

TRANSLATION

- DISCUSSION OF PRACTICE
 - GUIDELINES

Because of the genre's formal properties and its popularity in China, the short story is key to achieving the goal of integrated learning. Averaging 1500 characters in length, the selected stories have proven particularly effective for classroom study. ... the active cross references between Chinese and English also accelerate the learning of how to use terms properly in context. A combined Glossary and usage guide is also provided for each story to define in context verbal idiomatic and local or colloquial expressions that resist interpretive mastery. The selection of words and expressions is based on their uniqueness of usage and pronunciation and the possibility for ambiguity rather than on the frequency of their appearance.

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This volume is based upon the conviction that the learning of culture complements mastery of language. The selected stories are all original works by contemporary Chinese writers. They offer authentic glimpses of Chinese society and address issues of common concern. However, these stories provide more than convenient access to everyday life in China. They are also pathways to China's past and traditions, in that China's 5000 years of culture and tradition are best conveyed by the lives of its people.

The reality of the world today has shown us that globalisation cannot and will not iron out the fundamental differences between peoples and cultures. As teachers of language and culture, we often face 'impasses of non-communication.' Borges makes this point : ' the first audience appreciated the fact that the whale died when it heard the man's cry; the second, that there had ever been men who lent credence to any fatal capacity of such a cry' (Borges, 2000, 40). Valid as the second audience's response is, no comparison of values ' in reflective fashion' happens, which does little to help us understand the first audience,(ie, the audience of cultural origin) brought to facilitate communication between the 1st and 2nd audiences.

...

What do we do when issues of interest to American students are at odds with the concerns of audiences of cultural origin? In Pierre Bourdieu's opinion, ' foreign readers are bound to perceive the text in different ways' due to their presence in ' different fields of production'; the creations of ' fictitious oppositions between similar things' or 'false parallels between things that are fundamentally different' are but a common phenomenon in reading (Bourdieu, 1999, 225).

Introduction and discussion of translating contemporary Chinese short stories

Helen Wang on Translation

Walker Books sent me a copy of the book in late June or early July 2013. It was published in the UK at the beginning of April 2015, and in the US by Candlewick in March 2017. Walker Books hadn't published a book from Chinese before, and they didn't have anyone in the company who could read Chinese (but they had read the French translation of *Bronze and Sunflower*).

I suggested that I translate the first chapter very directly (what some people call a literal translation), that the editor edit it, and that I follow her style of editing when translating the second chapter, and so on until we found the right balance. This also enabled us to establish a working relationship at that early stage. I did the translation, sent it in, a few months later the editor sent it back to me marked up and I went through the edits.

Then the editor and I met in person, and went through all of the highlighted areas. Doing that in person is much easier than doing it remotely over time. You can make most of the decisions there and then, and agree to work on anything that's really tricky.

<https://www.wordsandpics.org/2018/10/translation-helen-wang.html>

Do you think Chinese is harder to translate into English than say, French, because the language and culture are further from English than a European language would be?

When I started translating again about ten years ago, I went to an evening course in French translation at City Lit in London (there wasn't a Chinese one). Translating one piece a week meant that you were constantly moving on to the next piece. It was liberating to be able to experiment in that way and to see how other people translated. In Chinese, as in French, sometimes a text will lend itself to an almost word-for-word translation, and other times that approach doesn't work at all.

But language isn't the only concern. Cultural knowledge is important too. For example, if an English person reads that Amelie ate a croissant in Avignon, the chances are that they will have come across the girl's name Amelie before, that they have eaten a croissant, and that they have at least heard of Avignon. There will be some resonance. Whereas if they read that Li Jingrui ate a *guokui* in Zigong (something I was translating last month!), can the translator assume the reader will know that Li Jingrui is a contemporary female writer, that a *guokui* is a savoury snack, and that Zigong is a city in Sichuan famous for dinosaurs, salt wells and the eponymous lantern festival (and, being in Sichuan, spicy food)? If not, the translator (and editor) must decide whether to leave it as it is, however sterile, or, write in a way that will prompt at least some familiarity and response.

A. IF YOU ARE TRANSLATING A SHORT STORY, YOUR COMMENTARY SHOULD COVER

1. Why you have selected this particular text for translation

This might include

- form and content: a similarity or dissimilarity to the stories we have looked at in English
- cultural capital: a sense of the cultural importance of this writer or this particular text in China
- poetics: the particular interest of the individual story or writer

2. What criteria determined the strategies that you employed in your translation

This might include

- questions of faithfulness to the original text (the Jerome model)
- questions of accessibility to the target reader (the Horatian model)
- an accommodation of the cultural context of the source text
(possible expansion of certain details – not footnotes)

3. any particular problems you encountered and how you managed them

4. (Finally) how you hope the text will be received by your target readership.

- understanding of difference, understanding of similarity, a broader interest in China, pleasure in the story.... (anything else?)

B. IF YOU ARE COMMENTING ON A TRANSLATION OF A SHORT STORY, YOUR COMMENTARY SHOULD DISCUSS

1. Why you have selected this translation

you might consider

- form and content: a similarity or dissimilarity to the stories we have looked at in English
- cultural capital: a sense of the cultural importance of this writer or this particular text in China
- poetics: the particular interest of the individual story or writer

2. The strategies employed by the translator and how they affect the final text

This might include

- questions of faithfulness to the original text (the Jerome model)
- questions of accessibility to the target reader (the Horatian model)
- an expression of the cultural context of the source text

3. Any particular problems you see in the translation

4. Any particular strengths in the translation

5. Anything else of interest