

## At the Borders of Translation: Traditional and Modern(ist) Adaptations, East and West

Tak-Hung Leo Chan

Volume 54, numéro 3, septembre 2009

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/038304ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/038304ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal

ISSN

0026-0452 (imprimé)

1492-1421 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Chan, T.-H. L. (2009). At the Borders of Translation: Traditional and Modern(ist) Adaptations, East and West. *Meta*, 54(3), 387–400.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/038304ar>

Résumé de l'article

L'adaptation, évoquant à la fois la méthode et les textes en résultant, a toujours été prisée par les médiateurs du texte se désignant eux-mêmes traducteurs, et se montre particulièrement saillante en traduction intersémiotique, comparativement à la traduction interlangue. Le présent article examine les pratiques et les concepts relatifs à l'adaptation, avec une attention particulière portée à des exemples en provenance d'Occident et d'Extrême-Orient. De même que certaines périodes de l'histoire littéraire occidentale ont montré une préférence pour les méthodes adaptatives (par exemple, le xvii<sup>e</sup> et le xviii<sup>e</sup> siècle en France), il y eut des moments de l'histoire de la Chine, du Japon et de la Corée pendant lesquels l'adaptation était valorisée. La discussion portera notamment sur : 1) les adaptations modernistes entreprises par les écrivains occidentaux pendant une grande partie du xx<sup>e</sup> siècle ; 2) les séries d'adaptations romanesques qui se sont répandues en Corée et au Japon par les romans classiques chinois ; et 3) les adaptations des romans européens par Lin Shu, un prodigieux traducteur chinois du xx<sup>e</sup> siècle. Nous montrerons qu'il est souhaitable que les chercheurs en traductologie s'interrogent sur la validité, sur le plan théorique, de la dichotomie entre « traduction » et « adaptation », et qu'il est urgent de remettre en question le statut « d'infériorité » des adaptations.

# At the Borders of Translation: Traditional and Modern(ist) Adaptations, East and West

TAK-HUNG LEO CHAN

*Lingnan University, Lingnan, Hong Kong*

chanleo@ln.edu.hk

## RÉSUMÉ

L'adaptation, évoquant à la fois la méthode et les textes en résultant, a toujours été prisée par les médiateurs du texte se désignant eux-mêmes traducteurs, et se montre particulièrement saillante en traduction intersémiotique, comparativement à la traduction interlangue. Le présent article examine les pratiques et les concepts relatifs à l'adaptation, avec une attention particulière portée à des exemples en provenance d'Occident et d'Extrême-Orient. De même que certaines périodes de l'histoire littéraire occidentale ont montré une préférence pour les méthodes adaptatives (par exemple, le xvii<sup>e</sup> et le xviii<sup>e</sup> siècle en France), il y eut des moments de l'histoire de la Chine, du Japon et de la Corée pendant lesquels l'adaptation était valorisée. La discussion portera notamment sur: 1) les adaptations modernistes entreprises par les écrivains occidentaux pendant une grande partie du xx<sup>e</sup> siècle; 2) les séries d'adaptations romanesques qui se sont répandues en Corée et au Japon par les romans classiques chinois; et 3) les adaptations des romans européens par Lin Shu, un prodigieux traducteur chinois du xx<sup>e</sup> siècle. Nous montrerons qu'il est souhaitable que les chercheurs en traductologie s'interrogent sur la validité, sur le plan théorique, de la dichotomie entre « traduction » et « adaptation », et qu'il est urgent de remettre en question le statut « d'infériorité » des adaptations.

## ABSTRACT

Adaptation, as both a method and a textual category, has been a perennial favorite with text mediators who call themselves translators, appearing especially prominently in intersemiotic rather than interlingual translation. The present paper examines the concepts and practices of adaptation, drawing particular attention to examples from both the West and the Far East. Just as a preference for adaptive methods in translation can be seen in certain periods of Western literary history (e.g. seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France), there were times when adaptations were hailed in China, Japan and Korea. In the course of the discussion, reference will be made to (1) the modernist adaptations undertaken by Western writers through much of the twentieth century; (2) the sequences of novelistic adaptations spawned in Korea and Japan by Chinese classical novels; and (3) the adaptations of European novels by the prodigious twentieth-century Chinese translator Lin Shu. It will be shown that there is a need for translation scholars to question the theoretical validity of the dichotomy between the two modes of "translation" and "adaptation," as well as an urgency to reconsider the supposed "inferior" status of adaptations.

## MOTS-CLÉS/KEYWORDS

adaptation, traduction libre, réécriture, transmutation, transcréation  
adaptation, free translation, rewriting, transmutation, transcreation

Thus does Borges's utopia come to be accomplished, the utopia of Literature in a perpetual state of transfusion, a transtextual perfusion, constantly present to itself in its totality and as a Totality all of whose authors are but one.

(Genette 1982: 400)

## 1. Introduction

Drawing the demarcation lines between translation and adaptation ("loose translation" or "free translation") has persisted as a problem for translation theorists, if not to such an extent for scholars of comparative literature or film studies (see, for instance, Catrysse 1992; Granqvist 1995). At one extreme, it has even been said that adaptation is not translation (Nogami 1938; qtd. Wakabayashi 1998: 60).<sup>1</sup> All the same, it has cropped up from time to time prominently in translation research (e.g. Zatlin 2005), although theorization on the basis of prototypical translations continues to dominate, with few theorists seeking to include adaptations in their discussion, considering it a thorny problem better left untouched. The connectivity, in spite of differences, between translations and adaptations has, however, stood in the way of attempts to relegate the latter to the category of non-translations. Some works, most notably dramatic productions based on a foreign source, simply straddle the two realms, thus drawing attention to adaptation as a translational mode and category (Tam, Parkin *et al.* 2002; Cameron 2000).<sup>2</sup>

Outside of drama translation, the relegation of adaptations to a minor position as opposed to translations that adhere more closely to the originals still persists among contemporary theorists. Surprisingly perhaps, the respectability of the original text has not diminished in any way in our age, one that has already seen not only the ascendancy of postmodernism and deconstructionism, but also the impact of these on translation theories. It may even be thought that literalism (translation) can replace liberalism (adaptation) now there is better and better mastery of the foreign languages to be translated. Translations can successfully supersede adaptations where they have not previously done so. Historically it seems to be true that freer methods of translation were the mainstream in earlier times because of the lack of translators who had a thorough mastery of the source language they worked with, and so make-do translations had to be tolerated – see, for example, the European translation of the classical Chinese novels and the nineteenth-century Chinese versions of major Western literary works. Now, not even minor languages presented a hindrance (Branchadell 2005). Yet adaptation continues to be favored by text mediators who call themselves translators, and who care little for strict separation between the two categories.

I will attempt in this paper to take a look at the complexities that are inextricably bound with the concepts and practices of adaptation both East and West, treating it as more than just a "marginal" form (Wakabayashi 1998). Particular attention will be paid to examples in the last two centuries in Western (primarily Anglo-American) and East Asian literary contexts (furnished by China, Korea and Japan). We are already very familiar with the preference for adaptive methods in translation in isolated periods of Western literary history like seventeenth and eighteenth-century France, when the "unfaithful beauties" (*les belles infidèles*) tradition held sway. Less often scrutinized are the remarkable histories of adaptations produced in the Far

East, for its valorization of works of a derivative nature – reworkings of existing texts – that has constantly left its mark in the translations coming out, for centuries, from the three countries in question.

In the present article, reference will be made, first, to the remarkable study by Yao (2002) of the rarely studied Modernist tradition of adaptation, practised fervently by such pre-eminent writers as Pound, Yeats and Joyce. It is a curious fact of Western literary history that the historian somehow seemed to feel that the dabbling of these writers in translative/adaptive practices can detract from their extraordinary creative achievements. Such disparagement of adaptations has not been observed in the Far East if we survey literary histories there in the past two centuries. We shall look at: (a) the fad for adapted, domesticated or localized versions of Western literature in Meiji Japan; (b) the sequences of novelistic adaptations spawned in Korea and Japan by the Chinese classical novels, creating a deluge of fictional writings that have been a staple of the reading public even up to the present; and (c) Chinese adaptations from the nineteenth century on, especially the 100-plus adaptations of European novels by the Chinese translator Lin Shu, which have withstood the onslaught of faithful translations that have flooded the market since his time. Covering broad yet different historical periods in the three countries in question, this study hopes to be able to characterize the specific East Asian understanding of the relationship between translation and adaptation while comparing it with the similar notion in the West as evidenced over the same time-span. All this will make it possible for translation theorists to review the artificially contrived dichotomy between the two modes as currently seen in much discourse on translation theory, and to rethink how, in different cultures translation might be differently conceived.

## 2. The Great Modernist “Revolution in Translation”

As a plethora of studies have shown (e.g. Cotter 2004; Piette 2003; Clej 1997), for many Modernist writers, translation is a mode of literary production, its creativity shown in the ingenious use of the source text by the writer in an attempt to learn from a foreign counterpart. In some cases, an effort was even made to surpass the achievement of the original author. Hence it is futile to search for strict correspondence between the source text and the target text that is the conventional focus of translation researchers. What emerges is precisely a “generative” model by means of which the literary tradition can be rejuvenated and enriched. This model entails, in effect, a more broadly defined, and less orthodox, understanding of “translation” that includes adaptation and various other forms of rewriting. Hence, neither fidelity nor accuracy can be said to be the aim of the Modernist writers who dabble with translation in one form or another.

In his monograph titled *Translation and the Languages of Modernism* (2002), Yao (2002) surveys the translation methods of Modernist luminaries through the twentieth century, but especially noteworthy are the adaptive strategies applied to texts of foreign origin by writers like Ezra Pound, William Butler Yeats, Robert Lowell and Louis Zukofsky. Pound’s wildly experimental adaptations of Chinese poems in *Cathay* on the one hand, and of key texts in the Confucian canon in *The Cantos* on the other, exemplify for Yao the ingenious use of foreign materials as a means of textual construction. The original disappears – is replaced by new meanings – in the

new realm created by Pound through his well-known “ideogrammatic” method of translation. Throughout his entire career, Pound continued to manipulate his translations (especially of the Confucian classics) in order to serve his own political agenda.

Yeats’s adaptation of Greek drama took place against the context of the search for a national drama form for Ireland. As Yao notes perspicaciously, Yeats chose to freely adapt Sophocles’ masterpiece in his *King Oedipus*, even though he had in hand Richard C. Jebb’s more semantically accurate translation from the original Greek. The substantial alterations testify to Yeats’s effort to “highlight the applicability of the play to a specifically Irish cultural and political context” (Yao 2002: 138). His lifelong interest in adaptation of Greek texts is seen further in his two adaptive translations, *From “Oedipus at Colonus”* and *From “The Antigone,”* both based on the works of Sophocles.

Though belonging to an altogether different generation than Pound and Yeats, Robert Lowell and Louis Zukofsky are also adaptive translators, for they deliberately break the model of translating “sense-for-sense.” It is already commonplace belief that poet-apprentices learn their craft through modeling themselves on older poets; the difference in this case is that Lowell and Zukofsky have taken on foreign models. There is also more than a slight hint that the two poets are playing with the expressive possibilities of their source texts, so much so that the reader can perceive, faintly, a parodic element in their adaptations. In a way, as Reuben Brower pointed out thirty years ago, translators are parodists (Brower 1974: 5).

When considered together, the not dissimilar cases of these four writers allow us to broadly conceptualize what can be termed Modernist adaptive aesthetics:

- a) Most Modernist translators who adapted foreign texts did not have sufficient knowledge of the source language that they were working with, though this was not necessarily the fundamental reason for doing so. Pound was hardly proficient in Chinese when he translated *The Book of Odes*, *The Great Learning* and *The Analects*. Lowell did not have a mastery of Russian, nor did Zukofsky know any Latin;
- b) Partly as a consequence of the lack of mastery of the source language on the part of these “adaptive translators,” the test of fidelity or accuracy will simply not be applicable in the assessment of their translations. Lowell, for instance, was interested more in recapturing the style and “voice” of his originals than in being faithful to their meaning;
- c) There is the need to consider an expanded conception of translation, freeing it from some of the constraints advocated by, for instance, those who refuse to accept adaptation as translation. The models for most translation theories have for too long been grounded on semantically based translations. Pound and Zukofsky, among other Modernists, offer exciting examples of adaptation that refuse to be admitted to a category outside of translation proper;
- d) The Modernist preference is apparently for adaptive and more “creative” forms of translation, over and above the “scholarly” mode as adumbrated by Matthew Arnold in the nineteenth century, most notably in his essay *On Translating Homer* (Arnold 1861). In addition to the writers’ being somehow compelled to work with existing translations (for example, Pound’s use of de Mailla and Legge, and Yeats’s use of Jebb), one can discern also a desire on their part to impose their own interpretations on the source texts. Adaptive translators are, in other words, “manipulative” translators.

Indeed, the twentieth-century “revolution in translation” in the West, carried out by a number of innovative adaptations, should stimulate us to rethink the boundaries that translation theorists have set almost by convention, for it reveals the possible limitations of such delineation of “borders.” Interestingly enough, in recent years there has been much debate about translation as a metonymic process, spearheaded by Tymoczko (1999). For her, a notion of translation can be predicated upon metonymy rather than, as is usually the case, upon metaphor. The prevailing (and negative) influence of the metaphorical approach, as Yao points out, can all too readily be seen in the interest focused on translations “as replacements for, rather than supplements or additions to, original works, based on the fetishization of semantic content as the most essential aspect of a text” (Yao 2002: 232). In playing a “complementary” function, adaptation is actually a metonymic form of translation; it is also a mode of literary production “in which the source-text stands at once as the originary cause and contiguous fulfillment of the translation itself” (Yao 2002: 223).

### 3. “Reversing the Verdict” in Korea and Japan

In contrast to the West, adaptations in the Far East have for centuries been dominated by those of classical Chinese novels, especially “The Great Five,” namely, *The Three Kingdoms*, *Journey to the West*, *The Water Margin*, *Plum in the Golden Vase*, and *Dream of the Red Chamber*. The first adaptations appeared as early as the seventeenth century, and then their numbers multiplied, with variant versions appearing at various times in the course of the past three hundred years (Lee 1986; Pollack 1986). Never having been studied in any depth and generally unknown to the West, these adaptations constitute a treasure-trove of material giving translation researchers an aperture into the nature of cross-cultural traffic between countries in the Far East, particularly China, Japan and Korea (Salmon 1987).

Among the earliest and most interesting instances of textual travel of this kind is the fifteenth-century story collection, the **Kūmo sinhwa** (*New Tales from Mount Kūmo*), by Kim Sisūp (1435-93), adapted from the Chinese writer Qu You’s (1341-1427) *Jiandeng xinhua* (*New Tales of Trimming the Wick*), a collection of short pieces revolving around romantic encounters and supernatural occurrences that was immensely popular in China. Careful comparison of the source text and the adaptation shows the resemblances in theme and subject, but the locale has been shifted completely to Korea (for example, *Park of Assembled Scenery* becomes *Manbok Temple* and *Mirror Lake* becomes *Pubyök Pavilion*). The story of overseas travel does not end here, however. When Qu’s collection was transmitted, with an added Korean commentary, to Japan in 1646, it spawned a handful of Japanese adaptations, most notably Asai Ryōi’s (d. 1691) *Otogibōko* (*Hand Puppets*, 1666), reputedly the first specimen in Japanese literary history of tales of the fantastic.

This model of transmission underlies the appearance of variant adaptations of the great classical Chinese novels in the Far East. Kim-lan Ha explains the particular nature of translations in the region with reference to the Vietnamese adaptations and imitations of a Chinese short story *Jin Yunqiao zhuan* (*Story of Jin Yunqiao*), noting in particular the issue of transmissibility (Ha 2001: 24-26). To her transmissibility is a factor as important as those of “readability” and “scriptability” – notions for which we are indebted to Roland Barthes – when we study translations in the Asian context,

and Chinese cultural artifacts are eminently transmittable, though subject to local adaptations of one kind or another. I would like to add that the proliferation of adaptations in the region, based on a body of Chinese texts, is a cultural phenomenon with unique characteristics. For the similar yet different cultural backgrounds, socio-political realities, and literary sensibilities of the East Asian nations in question have made possible variant readings of the same source texts, giving rise to adaptations that are properly acclimated to local or regional cultures.

Indisputably, the most frequently adapted novel in Korea is Luo Guanzhong's (dates unknown) *Sanguozhi yanyi* (*The Three Kingdoms*), a historical novel probably written around the end of the fifteenth century in China. Among the translations using the Korean alphabet introduced in 1446, some were plainly adaptations, and others took the form of complete or partial rewritings, departing very substantially from the original. There is evidence that the adaptations were carried on over a long historical span, and did not cease until the twentieth century. They peaked during periods when there was a strong desire for war tales, as in the seventeenth century when Korea was invaded by the Chinese Qing army. In explaining the appeal of the adaptations, Dong-uk Kim says that the novel could have shown "the imaginary victory looked for in the Koreans' consciousness of life [...] a consolation for their own philosophy of dedication to a great cause" (Kim 1987: 69).

In his doctoral thesis devoted exclusively to the subject, Tae-bum Kim advanced a theory to explain the abundance of Korean adaptations of *The Three Kingdoms* – one that can apply equally well to adaptations of the other classical Chinese novels. Since *The Three Kingdoms*, consisting of 100 chapters, is simply too lengthy to be translated *in toto*, Kim argued, adaptation became the preferred method. In some cases the alterations turned out to be rather substantial because of the incorporation of content that would supposedly interest Korean readers. One Korean word for *adaptation* or *rewriting* (**bun-an**), it ought to be noted, is actually legal terminology and means, literally, /reversing the verdict/ or /overturning an established theory/ (Kim 2000: 24). The many Korean adaptations of *The Three Kingdoms* need to be carefully differentiated from strictly "translational" versions because they have been given local color through the insertion of the Korean way of life (customs, place names, and proper names) into the text. The decision to play havoc with the original is tantamount to an attempt to reverse the original judgment.

A tradition of adapting classical Chinese novels in Korea is also found in Japan: both had come under the same Chinese cultural influence, being in the same "*Han* (Chinese) Character Cultural Sphere." Once again, translation co-existed with, and was also differentiable from, adaptations in the Japanese tradition. The first Japanese readers of Chinese novels read them using the *kundoku* method, a strategy that rendered Chinese texts comprehensible to Japanese readers by adding return marks and declensional kana endings to the original text, so that readers could decipher the word order and figure out the meaning accordingly. It has been examined as a form of translation in recent scholarship (see Wakabayashi 2005: 121-135). But in the final years of the seventeenth century, a spate of adaptations followed, very much along the same lines as in Korea. They were undertaken by such eminent literary personages as Okajima Kanzan (1674-1728), who gave Japanese readers *The Water Margin* in 1758.

Yasushi Ōki and Ōtsuka Hidetaka have compiled an exhaustive listing of adaptations during the Edo period from the seventeenth right up to the nineteenth cen-



ture (Öki and Hidetaka 1987: 135-38). In their lists, adaptations are placed against translations, showing a clear awareness of the two different categories that are nevertheless closely, perhaps inextricably, related. Like the Koreans, the Japanese term for *adaptation* – *hon'an* (Nakamura 1968) – connotes, too, /reversing the verdict/. Looking over the centuries, what is evident is the Japanese enthusiasm about adapting classical Chinese fiction for readers of their own country. It reached a peak in the latter half of the eighteenth century; the era saw adaptations appearing of not just *The Three Kingdoms*, but also the pornographic novel *Jin Ping Mei* (*The Plum in the Golden Vase*). Of the “Great Five,” it is Cao Xueqin’s (c. 1724-1764) *Dream of the Red Chamber*, the realist novel of the eighteenth century – the novel considered to be the greatest of the five – which was not so eagerly adapted. Incidentally, when one takes into account the situation in Southeast Asian countries (like Malaysia, Vietnam, and Indonesia), where it was largely fantastic swordsmen fiction (*wuxia xiaoshuo*) that got adapted and translated into the indigenous languages (Salmon 1987: 263-656), one may well question why the realist novels somehow did not get “transmitted” just as well.

With the opening of the country to the West after the Meiji Restoration (1867), the history of adaptations in Japan took a new turn, with attention turning to source texts from a Western repertoire. Yet the tradition was strong as ever. This gives the lie to the widespread observation that adaptation is an antiquated method of the past, and that it has been superseded by the more literal, source-text-oriented translation method of the present-day world. The drastic difference between adaptations and literal translations is recognized in Japan, if the terminology can be considered a reliable guide. In Western translation studies, it is captured basically through the oft-repeated, paired terms of *literal* versus *free* translation, *literalism* versus *liberalism*, and so on. In the Japanese tradition, as J. Scott Miller has pointed out (Miller 2001: 9-21), the antithesis is expressed in the terms *hon'an* and *hon'yaku* – counterparts of varying formulations in different cultural traditions like the Chinese, the English, and the French, to name just a few. On the one hand, *hon'an* is similar to *adaptation*, the rewriting of source texts – even the extensive manipulation of these texts. On the other hand, *hon'yaku*, denoting a method used mostly with scientific and medical texts, is a term similar to *literal translation*. The former connotes transmutation whereas the latter, correspondence. Since an attempt is often made in adaptations to minimize the cultural shock and make the translated text conform to the expectations of readers, adaptations often turn out to be “domesticating translations.” By contrast, literal translations are “foreignizing” in nature.

#### 4. The Enigma of Lin Shu’s Popularity

I now turn to the Chinese tradition – in particular, to the strong currents of adaptation activity from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, a time roughly contemporaneous with the Western High Modernism as discussed above. A cursory overview reveals a great number of adaptations that are of historical significance. The first of these is Jiang Qizhang’s translation of *Night and Morning*, which according to Hanan is the “first novel translated into Chinese” (Hanan 2004). This work evinces certain of the characteristics of the adapted text as observable in Chinese adaptations of the era, most notably the weird admixture of Western personalities,



metaphors, manners, and customs with the Chinese one in the same text. This is a consequence of the translator's failing to be thorough in his domesticating approach to the original text. How would the reader feel, for instance, when reading a story in which Napoleon and a Chinese immortal (Li Tieguai) appear, or are mentioned, together? Discernible features of the original are left when the adaptation is not thorough (as it can never be).

Without doubt, the representative figure of the period is Lin Shu (1852-1924), who, with his collaborators, turned out over a hundred adaptations in the last two decades of his life.<sup>3</sup> His repertoire consists of a great number of masterpieces of Western literature: Aesop's fables, Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*, Ibsen (*Ghosts*), Shakespeare's plays (like *Julius Caesar* and *Henry IV*), and the novels of Charles Dickens (*David Copperfield*, *Oliver Twist*), Sir Walter Scott (*Ivanhoe*), Alexandre Dumas fils (*La dame aux camélias*), Daniel Defoe (*Robinson Crusoe*), and Harriet B. Stowe (*Uncle Tom's Cabin*), among others. In terms of quantity, his translations are unequalled as well as unprecedented, East or West. In terms of genres, Lin translated a wide range of literary forms, including full-length novels, dramas, novelettes and children's literature. He occupies a singularly prominent place in the Chinese history of translation, not just of translation, but also of adaptation.

Lin Shu's *Aesop's Fables* furnishes one characteristic case of his adaptation of Western literature. While the earlier translators like Zhang Chishan aimed at greater accommodation of foreign elements, using so-called "localization" strategies, Lin Shu went one step further, and played with the very form of the Aesopian fable itself, adding extensive commentaries of his own at the end of the stories. Such commentaries were well-known to the Chinese reader, for they appeared in histories and story collections. The rough equivalent is the epimythium in the Western fable, the conventional formula found at the end to convey the moral message. Lin chose to appropriate this formal feature and incorporate it in his translation, creating not just special effects but also a chance for him to express his opinions on a multitude of subjects, not the least those on the turbulent fin-de-siècle political situation. Thus, in using the adaptive method, Lin is intentionally manipulating the text for an ulterior purpose – namely, that of exhorting the Chinese readers to take action to save their country (Chan 1998: 70-72).

The departures from the original, as well as the infiltration of personal views, are just as evident in the novels Lin translated. In a detailed analysis of a passage from Lin Shu's translation of H. Rider Haggard's *Montezuma's Daughter*, Robert Compton lists some of the characteristics of Lin's text, which lend support to our classifying it as an adaptation (Compton 1971: 206-214):

- a) Words and phrases do not have equivalents in the source text;
- b) Images replace commonplace expressions found in the original;
- c) Extra words and phrases are added to enhance the flow of the text and to elaborate the original;
- d) Many details are omitted, including proper names and background information (transliterations are kept to a minimum);
- e) Paraphrase is used where descriptions cannot be rendered in their entirety; and
- f) Surface correspondence with the source text is altogether absent.

The liberty that Lin Shu takes with the original is nothing less than blatant and shocking. One explanation has it that Lin's textual maneuvers were meant to create

a smooth readable version for the readers. Another explanation, advanced by biographers, is that Lin translated at great speed most of the time, in order to meet deadlines. He was even said to be in desperate need of the money derived from the sale of his translations. More likely, perhaps, is the fact that because Lin did not have a mastery of the foreign languages he was translating from, including English, French, Spanish, Japanese, and Russian, he relied on the oral, vernacular translations of his collaborators (who sometimes had to work with intermediary translations in English and not with the original). According to one count, there were as many as eighteen collaborators. A literal translation was thus extremely difficult to achieve, and adaptation was the result.

How can adaptations be evaluated in terms that we are already familiar with in Translation Studies? To my mind, it is useful to envisage a continuum between the two poles of naturalization and foreignization as far as adaptive strategies are concerned, just as we do for translation strategies. Individual translations of the nineteenth and twentieth century, like those by Lin Shu, can be placed at different points on this spectrum. As Hanan (2004) has argued – and perhaps unexpectedly for some Lin Shu scholars – Lin’s translations take up spots near the “foreignization” end, especially when compared with other adaptations from the same period. In fact, it is important that we reconsider the long-held misconception that all adaptations necessarily aim to eradicate culture-specific references in the source text and replace them with slipshod equivalents in the Chinese context. For not even in adaptations do we find perfectly sinicized or acculturated renditions of a foreign text. All in all, adaptations display a range of strategies that await further investigation.

All such peculiarities notwithstanding, adaptations can exert an immense appeal. This can best be illustrated by what an admirer of Lin Shu’s has said of his adaptations. Quoted at some length here is what Qian Zhongshu, considered by many to be the most erudite Chinese scholar of the twentieth century, said of his response as a reader to the translated novels of Lin, in a well-known passage from his 1963 article *The Translations of Lin Shu*:

Recently, I happened to be flipping the pages of one of the novels translated by Lin, and to my surprise it had not lost its attraction. Not only did I read the book through, I went on to read another, and still another, until I had re-read a major portion of the Lin translations. I found most of them to be worth re-reading, notwithstanding the omissions and errors encountered at every turn. When I tried reading a later – and doubtless more accurate – translation of the same book, it gave me the feeling that I would rather read the original. This is most intriguing. Of course, for one who is capable of reading the original, to check through a deficient translation might be an amusing pastime. Some say that the more outrageous the translation the more fascinating it reads: when we check it against the original, we see how the translator lets his imagination run wild and how he uses guesswork to fill out the blanks in his comprehension, freely inventing and distorting, almost in the manner of a surrealist poet. But my interest in the Lin translations emphatically does not lie in any searching for boners to make fun of. Nor are the infidelities and “misrepresentations” in Lin’s translations due entirely to linguistic deficiency on the part of his assistants (translated by George Kao; Chan 2004: 107).

What ought to be noted here is not just Qian Zhongshu’s decided preference for Lin’s versions of foreign fictional works, over and above other renditions, but also his unmitigated fondness for precisely those parts where Lin departs from the original

text. Even checking against the source text does not lessen admiration for Lin; hence the paradoxical statement, “the more outrageous the translation the more fascinating it reads.” Placed in context, Qian here inadvertently provides personal testimony to the allure of adaptations, of a degree that exceeds literal, and faithful, translations.<sup>4</sup>

### 5. Countering Some Misconceptions about Adaptations

The foregoing specimens of adaptation as they evolved in the West and the Far East make it clear, first, that the “free” adaptations did not necessarily precede the more source-text-bound translations, and that there was no tendency to denigrate adaptations in earlier times. Further, the assumption that the lack of linguistic competence gave rise to a preference for the adaptive method simply does not hold water. This simply cannot be substantiated. The fact is that both translations and adaptations appeared for different reasons and often simultaneously. Even readers of today can marshal evidence proving the co-existence, as well as co-proliferation, of the two equally vibrant forms.

In his discussion of the adaptive mode of translation in nineteenth-century Japan, Miller delineates the dichotomous views from the Germans and the French – literalism versus liberalism – that can serve as epitomes of a fundamental theoretical contrast (Miller 2001). The insistence on literalism was indeed a product of the Romantic Movement in Germany, and in the twentieth century the literal method was eulogized most notably by Walter Benjamin, best-known for his stated preference for interlinear translation, the extreme form of literalism. On the other hand, the adaptive method had its influence during crucial periods in world translation history too. In Europe it was associated for some time with the French – it was the preferred method of translators during the French enlightenment. For Miller, the era of unfaithful translations in France was only concluded with “the French turn towards literal translation following the example of the German Romanticists” (Miller 2001: 141). But the question of why these changes in method or taste occurred is still unanswered. All one can say is that the two trends co-existed through history, with each taking center stage at different epochs. Why, too, did literalism rear its head in China in the early years of the twentieth century, so that Lin Shu was subject to some harsh criticisms and his translations denigrated for their inaccuracy? Are the two modes locked in perennial conflict, while the pendulum of taste swings constantly from one to the other, and then back?

What Translation Studies needs at this juncture is an expanded concept of translation which incorporates the possibilities of its performing other functions – those of transmutation and appropriation – in addition to the often stressed ones of communication and transmission of information. We need greater awareness of the attitudes toward being unfaithful to the original in a translated text. The existence of infidelities, however, allows us to confront, and question, the apparently incontestable view of translation as mimesis. In a broader, macroscopic conception, the translator can be seen to play many other roles than those traditionally ascribed to him: he is an adapter, an imitator, a rewriter, a manipulator – not just the mechanical decoder, the unerring mouthpiece and the faithful stand-in that he is often made out to be. Despite the special characteristics of adaptations, they ought to be viewed as still falling within the ambit of translation as broadly conceived. By considering

adaptation as a component worthy of study, we can enrich Translation Studies and disentangle it from the over-emphasis on the literal or faithful translation.<sup>5</sup>

In pondering the viability of the macroscopic approach, we can readily see the relevance of intertextual studies. One central feature of intertextual criticism is that it belittles the human agent (the author or the translator) because of its preoccupation with the text as a “mosaic of quotations,” a phrase coined by Julia Kristeva (Kristeva 1980; see also Draine 1991). Just as authors become submerged under an array of pre-texts, counter-texts, paratexts (parallel) that enter into dialogue within the frame of their own textual productions, translators are constantly haunted not just by the specter of a precursor text; they are also working in the context provided by other translated texts, untranslated texts from both indigenous and foreign traditions, as well as an array of cultural texts. With all of these they enter into dialogue. A major difference between authors and translators – namely, that the former exhibit originality and the latter are essentially reiterative – is erased under the terms of exposition of intertextual critics, because neither can lay any claim to being the originators of their works. The intertextual framework gives the translator free rein to modify and adjust, play with and manipulate, as well as tease out the meanings, apparent and latent, in the source text. He can assume a diversity of roles as he handles a text given to him for translation.

The traditional approach to translation, which puts a premium on the semantic relationship between source and target texts, is characterized by an inevitable bias against adaptations by its very nature. Inaccuracies in translation and departures from the originals have for long been singled out by translation commentators for censure or ridicule. However, the current privileging of concepts like //appropriation//, //transposition//, //transmutation//, and //transcreation// means that a subtle shift has occurred, as a result of which adaptations can be rethought and re-evaluated. Together with this, some older views about adaptation should be debunked. For example, it may be thought that, since adaptations are oriented toward the target culture and target audience, they necessarily make for smooth and effortless reception, and are therefore less challenging. All attempts to smooth over the fractures that could have appeared in translation are suspect in this view. In the light of the varied examples of adaptation cited above, it is perhaps time that we reviewed individual cases of adaptations to see ways in which they can be subversive and resistant, rather than merely tame and conformist. May we not see adapters as active interventionists of whom the postmodern translation theorist speaks with such approbation?

To conclude, an approach to translation that places it in the context of other relational forms of writing has the advantage that it highlights links and connections among textual categories, and is not as reductionist or exclusivist as the more conventional approach, which emphasizes discontinuities and separateness. In line with this approach, the door can be opened to considering not just rewritings and adaptations of foreign source materials, but all literature employing multilingual registers and mixed cultural perspectives, as “translational.” Timothy Weiss (2004) speaks of the three-pronged advantages of this perspective: its ability to resist the imposition of meaning, counter fundamentalisms and ideology, and allow for movement and openness. For him:

The translational approach, which takes a subject matter and changes it from one place, state, form, or appearance to another, recomposing it in other registers, involves three

linked processes: (1) resistance, (2) identity shedding and identity making, and (3) possibility seeking (Weiss 2004: 204).

It is in adaptations that we can see the working of these revolutionary processes, although much work remains to be done to unravel the amazingly complex “networking of languages and literary and cultural imaginaries” (Weiss 2004: 123) embodied in the amazing varieties of adaptation, both East and West.

#### NOTES

1. It must be noted that the categories of adaptation and imitation create equally troubling problems of definition. One possible (though debatable) way of differentiating between them is to say that the latter is more “writerly” in orientation, and the former, more “readerly.” Ben Jonson opines that the imitator is “able to convert the substance, or riches of another poet, to his own use” (see Parfitt 1973: 344). In contrast, Kirsten Malmkjaer thinks that adaptations “result from a clear orientation towards a group of recipients of the text” (Malmkjaer 2000: 2).
2. In some of the theoretical discourse adaptation is viewed as a method; in others it is discussed as a category. The present article conflates the two, seeking to situate adaptation in a broad translational framework, and putting aside adaptations that do not involve interlingual transfer.
3. To be sure, Lin Shu’s status as the “most important translator in modern China” has never been questioned. Few, too, have referred to his works as “adaptations” (e.g. Compton 1971).
4. For an East Asian example outside of China, Korea, and Japan, the reader is referred to Dilokwanich’s study (1983) of a Thai adaptation.
5. In particular, it is in theorizing film translation that we have seen the most exciting application of the concept of adaptation. Gambier (2003) suggested using the term “tradaptation.” An alternative term proposed is “transadaptation” – used for the international conference on “Transadaptation, Technology, Nomadism” held in March 2007 at Concordia University, Canada.

#### REFERENCES

- ARNOLD, Matthew (1861): “On Translating Homer: Three Lectures Give at Oxford.” Visited on January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2009.  
<[http://www.Victorianprose.org/texts/Arnold/Works/On\\_Translating\\_Homer.pdf](http://www.Victorianprose.org/texts/Arnold/Works/On_Translating_Homer.pdf)>.
- BRANCHADELL, Albert (2005): Introduction: Less Translated Languages as a Field of Inquiry. In: Albert BRANCHADELL and Margaret WEST, eds. *Less Translated Languages*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1-27.
- BROWER, Reuben (1974): *Mirror on Mirror: Translation, Imitation, Parody*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- CAMERON, Derrick (2000): Tradaptation: Cultural Exchange and Black British Theatre. In: Carole-Anne UPTON, ed. *Moving Target: Theatre Translation and Cultural Relocation*. Manchester: St. Jerome, 17-24.
- CATRYSSSE, Patrick (1992): Film (Adaptation) as Translation: Some Methodological Proposals. *Target*. 4(1):53-70.
- CHAN, Tak-hung Leo (2004): *Twentieth-Century Chinese Translation Theory: Modes, Issues and Debates*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- CHAN, Tak-hung Leo (1998): Liberal Versions: Late Qing Approaches to Translating Aesop’s Fables. In: David POLLARD, ed. *Translation and Creation: Readings of Western Literature in Early Modern China, 1840-1918*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 57-78.
- CLEJ, Alina (1997): The Debt of the Translator: An Essay on Translation and Modernism. *Sympløke: A Journal for the Intermingling of Literary, Cultural and Theoretical Scholarship*. 5(1-2):7-26.
- COMPTON, Robert (1971): *A Study of the Translations of Lin Shu, 1852-1924*. Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University.
- COTTER, Sean (2004): *Living through Translation: Lucian Blaga, T.S. Eliot, and the Cultural Politics of Translation in Modernism*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan.

- DILOKWANICH, Malinee (1983): *Samkok: A Study of a Thai Adaptation of a Chinese Novel*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington.
- DRAINE, Betsy (1991): Chronotope and Intertext: The Case of Jean Rhys's Quartet. In: Jay CLAYTON and Eric ROTHSTEIN, eds. *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. 318-337.
- GAMBIER, Yves (2003): Introduction: Screen Tradaptation, Perception and Reception. *The Translator: Studies in Intercultural Communication*. 9(2):171-189.
- GENETTE, Gérard (1982): *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*. (Translated by Channa NEWMAN and Claude DOUBINSKY) Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- GRANQVIST, Raoul (1995): *Imitation as Resistance: Appropriations of English Literature in Nineteenth-Century America*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.
- HA, Kim-lan (2001): Text, Translation, Readability, Scriptability and Transmittability. *Hanxue yanjiu tongxun*. 20(3):16-26.
- HANAN, Patrick (2004): *Chinese Fiction of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- HUANG, Yunte (2002): *Transpacific Displacement: Ethnography, Translation, and Intertextual Travel in Twentieth-Century American Literature*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- KIM, Dong-uk (1987): The Influence of Chinese Stories and Novels on Korean Fiction. In: Claudine SALMON, ed. *Literary Migrations: Traditional Chinese Fiction in Asia*. Beijing: International Culture, 55-84.
- KIM, Tae-bum (2000): *Hanguo dui Sanguo yanyi de xishou he zhuanhua* (The Absorption and Transmutation of *The Three Kingdoms* in Korea, translated by Taifan JIN). Ph.D. thesis, Tung-hai University.
- KRISTEVA, Julia (1967/1980): Word, Dialogue, and Novel. In: Leon S. ROUDIEZ, ed. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. (Trans. Thomas GORA, Alice JARDINE and Leon S. ROUDIEZ.) New York: Columbia University Press, 64-91.
- LEE, Peter H. (1986): Chinese Literature in Korean Translation. In: William H. NIENHAUSER, Jr, ed. *An Indian Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature*. Vol.1. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 305-306.
- MALMKJAER, Kirsten (2000): Adaptations. In: Olive CLASSE, ed. *Encyclopedia of Literary Translation into English*. London: Fitzroy Dearborn.
- MILLER, J. Scott (2001): *Adaptations of Western Literature in Meiji Japan*. New York: Palgrave.
- NAKAMURA, Yukihiro (1968): Hon'yaku, chūsaku, hon'an. In: Mizuta NORIHISA and Rai TSUTOMU, ed. *Nihon kangaku (Chūgoku bunka sōsho)*. Vol. 9. Tokyo: Taishukan shoten. 260-274.
- ŌKI, Yasushi, and HIDETAKA, Ōtsuka (1987): Chinese Colloquial Novels in Japan – Mainly During the Edo Period. In: Claudine SALMON, ed. *Literary Migrations: Traditional Chinese Fiction in Asia*. Beijing: International Culture, 106-139.
- PARFITT, George A. E. (1973): The Nature of Translation in Ben Jonson's Poetry. *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*. 13(2):344-359.
- PIETTE, Adam (2003): Introduction [to Special Issue on Modernism and Translation]. *Translation and Literature* 12(1):1-17.
- POLLACK, David (1986): Chinese Literature in Japanese Translation. In: William H. NIENHAUSER, Jr, ed. *An Indian Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature*. Vol. 1. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 302-305.
- SALMON, Claudine, ed. (1987): *Literary Migrations: Traditional Chinese Fiction in Asia*. Beijing: International Culture Publishing Corp.
- SENN, Fritz (1984): *Joyce's Dislocations: Essays on Reading as Translation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- TAM, Kwok-kan, PARKIN, Andrew, and YIP, Terry Siu-han, eds. (2002): *Shakespeare Global/Local: The Hong Kong Imaginery in Transcultural Production*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.



- TYMOCZKO, Maria (1999): *Translation in a Postcolonial Context: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*. Manchester: St. Jerome.
- WAKABAYASHI, Judy (2005): The Reconceptualization of Translation from Chinese in Eighteenth-Century Japan. In: Eva HUNG, ed. *Translation and Cultural Change: Studies in History, Norms and Image-Projection*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 119-145.
- WAKABAYASHI, Judy (1998): Marginal Forms of Translation in Japan: Variations from the Norm. In: Lynne BOWKER, Michael CRONIN, Dorothy KENNY, and Jennifer PEARSON, eds. *Unity in Diversity? Current Trends in Translation Studies*. Manchester: St. Jerome, 57-63.
- WEISS, Timothy (2004): *Translating Orients: Between Ideology and Utopia*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- YAO, Steven G. (2002): *Translation and the Languages of Modernism: Gender, Politics, Language*. New York: Palgrave.
- ZATLIN, Phyllis (2005): *Theatrical Translation and Film Adaptation: A Practitioner's View*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.