

Xu Jun: His Role and Contribution in Chinese Translation Studies

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Abstract: Xu Jun is one of the most outstanding scholars in the Chinese TS research field. His translational and academic achievements are multi-dimensional. This paper studies this multi-dimensionality of the major contributions that Xu has made to contemporary translation studies in China, in his role as a prolific translator of French literature, and a productive translation critic and theorist. By examining his trajectory of integrating first-hand experience as a translation practitioner with his deep understanding of translation as a theorist, it is possible to see in Xu and his TS contributions a very fitting example of how, with gift, capability, academic upbringing and diligence, good translation practitioners can be innovative translation theorists at the same time, and *vice versa*.

Keywords: Xu Jun; translating; French literature; translation studies; outstanding contribution; China

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标题: 许钧的翻译探索与译学贡献

内容摘要: 许钧是中国翻译研究领域最杰出的学者之一，他的翻译实践和理论成果是多方面的。本文就其作为法国文学丰产译家、多产译评家和译论家对当代中国译学所做的众多贡献展开研究。通过考察其将翻译实践与译论研究紧密结合的行迹，我们不难发现，在翻译的实践和理论研究中，人们除了依靠天赋才能，更通过文学和学术素养及勤奋努力的加持，即能做到兼容实践者和理论者之长，成为优秀翻译实践和理论特质兼蓄的人才。在这一点上，许钧及其在翻译实践和理论上所展现的重要贡献，无疑构成了十分具有说服力的榜样。

关键词: 许钧；翻译实践；法国文学；译论研究；杰出贡献；中国

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Introduction

To people in the Chinese translation studies (TS) field, Xu Jun is such a big and familiar name that it does not need any introduction. Yet when it comes to how one writes about the development of TS research in China since the country's opening up to the world in the late 1970s and early 1980s, it is definitely one of those names which one cannot afford not to constantly keep directing one's attention to. It is perhaps not inappropriate to say that the unprecedented progress in the study of translation in China over the past 40 years and more is heavily due to the innovative and productive undertakings by the increasingly large number of TS-minded scholars in the country, including Xu as one of those at the forefront.

My first meeting with Xu was at a major national conference on literary translation convened in the summer of 1985, at the scenic seaside town of Yantai. That conference was reportedly the first of its kind in China after the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and participation was strictly by invitation based on professional seniority. At a time when older age was given priority in social and academic life, it was certainly quite an honour for the very small number of four to five "young people" (me and Xu included), from among "the younger generation of Chinese scholars" across the country, to have had their papers accepted for presentation at the conference. In retrospect, this successful early experience in Yantai became but a marker of the beginning of a rich and eventful academic career yet to come for both Xu and myself. The second time we met was also at a conference, one that was named the First National Conference on Translation Theory and one that was to be regarded many years afterwards as "having constituted a most important milestone for the development of modern translation theory in China" (Tan, "Translation Studies in China: Retrospection, Prospection and Reflection" 7). It took place in 1987 in Qingdao, another beautiful seaside city, near Yantai, where Xu and I, still in our status as "young scholars," both spoke at the conference and took an active part in all the conference's major discussion sessions. Thereafter, we met again on many other occasions, one of which was during his invited visit to Hong Kong in September 2005 for him to receive an Honorary Fellowship of the Hong Kong Translation Society in his capacity as a distinguished professor from Nanjing University whilst I was then undertaking my new professorial duties at Hong Kong Baptist University. I was among the audiences

attending his “Recipient Address” at the Hong Kong Translation Society Honorary Fellowship Award Ceremony held on the campus of the University of Hong Kong, China. It was an inspiring speech in which Xu shared his first-hand experience as a translator and a translation researcher. Not only was I deeply impressed by the remarkable achievements he had made in the field, especially since I last saw him prior to my leaving Shenzhen University in 1996 for a Research Fellow position at the City University of Hong Kong, but I was also greatly appreciative of his unique views on literary translation and translation studies, including his ideas on “cultivating and maintaining cultural diversity in translation and, through translation, a symbiotic relationship in development between Chinese and foreign cultures;” on “integrating translation theory with practice;” and, in particular, on “the training of new generations of translators and interpreters at the university level.”

Of course, the role that Xu has played and the contribution he has made in Chinese academia are not merely confined to his translational and scholarly achievements, but they are also seen in the many administrative duties he has assumed during the various stages of his academic life, such as serving as Deputy Dean of the Graduate School of Nanjing University for many years, and in the valuable services he has rendered to teaching and education in translation for which he was awarded many honours including, among others, being recipient of the French Government-awarded *Order of Academic Palms* (*officier dans l'Ordre des Palmes Académiques*, 1999) and the Chinese Ministry of Education-awarded title of Outstanding Supervisor of Doctoral Theses (2010). However, it is Xu the translator and scholar, not Xu the administrator or service contributor, that I am primarily concerned with here in this article. So in what comes below I will mainly discuss how I see the translator-scholar side of Xu, with specific regard to his role and contribution in the field of Chinese TS research.

I. Researching Translation Both as a Translation Practitioner and a Theorist

As early back as in the 15th century, while discussing what may constitute “the correct way to translate” (*de interpretaione recta*), the famous Italian scholar Leonardo Bruni (1369-1444) commented on the distinction between a knowledge of language (and by extension, a knowledge or theory of translation—*my interpretation*) and the capacity to exercise it, by saying that “[m]any persons, for instance, appreciate painting who cannot themselves paint, and many understand the art of music without themselves being able to sing” (Bruni 57). In very much the same vein, the famous contemporary Chinese translator Fu Lei (1908-1966) emphasised the difference between the theory and the practice of translation. He

said, “Translation is a practice-oriented activity [...] Just as literary theorists are not likely to have the same capacity to write as poets or novelists, so is it the case with translation. I have seen people who talk so eloquently and persuasively about their theory of translation, and yet what they produce in the practice of translation seems nowhere at all near being good, which is indeed what I have often tended to warn myself against doing” (Fu 625)¹.

Apparently, the position that Bruni and Fu seem to be advocating is something that one would probably not disagree with. After all, it is true that the knowledge or understanding of an activity such as translation (i.e., the theoretical respect of the activity) cannot be the same as the ability to do it (i.e., the practical side of the activity). This, in fact, can be said of all other human activities including, for instance, knowing and speaking about a language and the actual speaking of the language; or the knowing and speaking about the mechanism of swimming or of driving a vehicle, and the ability to actually swim or to actually drive the vehicle. However, what one may not be so sure about is whether there exists any inevitable or unsurmountable barrier to prevent good theorists from becoming good practitioners, or *vice versa*. In fact, if we look through the history of translation, both in China and in the West, we would be able to find innumerable cases where those who spoke so “eloquently” and “persuasively” about translation were also those who performed the actual task of translation so “excellently.” Examples that readily come to mind include such historical figures as Yan Fu (1854-1921) and Lu Xun (1881-1936) in China; and John Dryden (1631-1700), Johann W. von Goethe (1749-1832), Paul Valéry (1871-1945), and Benedetto Croce (1866-1952) in the West.

In other words, in the field of translation (in fact, the same is true of activities in other fields as well), there is indeed nothing to prevent one and the same person from accomplishing themselves both as a theorist and a practitioner at the same time. Not only have the above-cited historical examples shown this, but what I have in mind as an on-going living example can also convincingly prove this to be true.

As remarked at the opening of this article, people in the Chinese TS research field would very well know that Xu Jun is a theorist of translation, but what they may not know about is that Xu actually embarked on his academic career at university by first distinguishing himself as a translator, and then by his combined role as

1 My translation from the Chinese original: “翻译重在实践 (……) 文艺理论家不大能兼作诗人或小说家, 翻译工作也不例外; 曾经见过一些人写翻译理论, 头头是道, 非常中肯, 译的东西却不高明得很, 我常引以为戒。” Note also that the English translation of all other quotes in the article is my work as well, unless otherwise specified.

a translation teacher, researcher and practitioner. He received his undergraduate education in French language and literature in the 1970s at the Nanjing College of Foreign Languages (NCFL) and undertook a postgraduate degree in translation studies in the 1980s at Nanjing University. In 1976, one year after he began to work as an assistant lecturer at NCFL, he was sent by the school to pursue a language and literature programme in French at the University of Bretagne, France. An avid reader and enthusiast of French literature, Xu was deeply attracted to the great works of such literary giants as Voltaire, Hugo, Balzac and Sartre, and also to writers of the New Novel (*Nouveau Roman*). The goal he set for himself was, of course, not just to learn about those great men of letters in the French literary tradition. Having fallen deep in love, so to speak, with his “beloved” French literature, he had the urge and passion to introduce her to his compatriots back at home in China so they would be able to also see and feel her charm like himself.¹ Thus he started to earnestly search for works with which to fulfil his long-term ambition to be a translator. Despite a couple of unsuccessful initial attempts to find a fitting starter text, he eventually hit on the novel *Désert* by Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio (1940-), which he immediately undertook to co-translate into Chinese in 1982. Then subsequently in 1991 he single-handedly rendered *The Interrogation* (*Le Procès-verbal*), another novel by Le Clézio, who was yet to be the recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2008. The great merit displayed in the works of Le Clézio and the acclaim given to the author, for example, by having the French Academy awarding him in 1980 the newly created Grand Prix Paul Morand for his *Désert* and especially by his becoming a subsequent winner of the 2008 Nobel Prize for Literature, definitely served as a forever-increasing stimulus to Xu’s translational endeavours. Since his publication of the Chinese version of *Désert* as co-translator in the early 1980s, Xu has authored or co-authored up to a total of some 30 translations, the more notable ones including, in addition to those of *Désert* and *The Interrogation* by Le Clézio mentioned above, his translations of Lucien Bodard’s *Anne-Marie* (1985), Elsa Triolet’s *Luna Park* (*Luna-Park*, 1988), Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time* (*À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* Vol. 4, 1990), Honoré de Balzac’s *Cousin Pons* (*Le Cousin Pons*, 1995) and *Cousin Bette* (*La Cousine Bette*, 1999), Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Mandarins* (*Les Mandarins*, 2000), Milan Kundera’s *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (*L’Insoutenable Légèreté de l’être/Nesnesitelná lehkost bytí*, 2003) and *Ignorance* (*La Ignorancia*, 2004), and Victor Hugo’s *Toilers of the Sea* (*Les Travailleurs de la Mer*, 2005). No doubt, the publication of so many important translations by any one

1 See Xu Jun, “From Soldier to Professor: An Interview with Xu Jun,” May 2015. Available at: <https://www.translators.com.cn/archives/2012/05/4790>. Accessed 20 Nov. 2023.

translator would have been no small achievement even if they had been the products of a full-time professional translator, let alone by someone who has had a full teaching load to fulfil every semester of the year.

Needless to say, my purpose of citing the above facts does not simply lie in making a reference to Xu as an accomplished translator *per se*. The fact that, side by side with the long list of translations that he has published, there is an equally, if not more highly, impressive list of his very large number of published research outcomes, is surely a fitting on-going example with which to prove my argument that no inherent barrier exists there to prevent creative theorists of translation from becoming capable translation practitioners, or *vice versa*, to prevent accomplished translators from becoming insightful translation theorists.

The long list of publications authored/co-authored or edited/co-edited by Xu the translation and literary theorist covers a wide range of topics on literary translation, translation criticism and translation theory. These topics may be broadly grouped into three different yet mutually intrinsically-related categories, i.e.: (i) those on French literature, its translation into Chinese, and literary criticism; (ii) those on the research area of French scholarship about translation; (iii) those on the theory of translation in general terms. As the three categories of writings each involve a considerable span of research work that Xu has undertaken, it would not be doing justice to him to fill everything into any one section. It would, therefore, be more appropriate to spread out the discussion of these categories separately, each under a different heading of its own.

II. Critiquing French Literature and Translation

The first category of Xu's research writings involves his expertise as a versed translator and a French literature specialist, both in terms of his general understanding of the French literary world and in terms of his close personal connection with Le Clézio, the 2008 Nobel laureate. Some of his more representative published titles include:

1) Books: *The Translation and Reception of French Literature in China in the 20th Century*, *On Fu Lei's Translations*, and *Language, Literature and Culture: A Study of the Chinese Versions of The Red and the Black*.

2) Articles: "Translating Is a Happy Act of Encountering in History: My Story of Translating French Literature," "Literary Translation, Cultural Exchange and Academic Interaction: With Special Reference to My Engagement with Le Clézio," "Poetic Temptation and Generation: The Poetic Adventure of Le Clézio," "On the Role of Memory in Le Clézio's Novels: A Case Study of *Le Chercheur D'or*,"

and “On Exchanges and Emulations between Chinese and Foreign Cultures: The Interactions between [Nobel Laureates] Mo Yan and Le Clézio,” etc.

Reflections of Xu’s general understanding of French literature typically consist in the three book projects cited in the above list, i.e., *The Translation and Reception of French Literature in China in the 20th Century* (Expanded Edition) and *On Fu Lei’s Translations*, which are monographs both published under Xu’s name as first author; and *Language, Literature and Culture: A Study of the Translated Versions into Chinese of The Red and the Black* (Expanded Edition), which is a collection of essays with Xu being the editor.

As we know, the translation history of French literature in China, strictly speaking, started with Lin Shu and Wang Shouchang’s translation in 1898 of Alexandre Dumas fils’ novel *The Lady of the Camellias* (*La Dame aux Camélias*), followed in 1900 by the first Chinese woman translator Xue Shaohui and her husband Chen Shaopeng’s translation of Jules Verne’s *Around the World in Eighty Days* (*Le Tour du Monde en Quatre-vingts Jours*). Though this history does not seem very long, it is nevertheless true that “French literature translators and researchers in China have played an extremely important role in the country’s overall introduction of foreign literature and in the advancement of cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries” (Xu and Song 1). Divided into two parts, comprising 4 chapters for Part I and 11 for Part II, *The Translation and Reception of French Literature in China in the 20th Century* offers a comprehensive discussion of how French literature has travelled in China in the 20th century and since, from the perspective of the “ethos and ideological trends” in literary creations as displayed in the French originals (Part I) and the perspective of the “major French authors and works” that have been translated into Chinese, and how these translations have gradually and persistently influenced the development of Chinese literature (Part II). As carefully analysed and with a critical eye in the monograph, the French impact on modern and contemporary Chinese literature has mainly come from such literary trends as the French brand of Surrealism, Existentialism, New Novel, and Theatre of the Absurd (*Théâtre de L’absurde*), involving the translation of French masterpieces by Anatole France (1844-1924), Romain Rolland (1866-1944), André Gide (1869-1951), Marcel Proust (1871-1922), Marguerite Duras (1914-1996), Roland Barthes (1915-1980), Le Clézio and so on. It is owing to the unremitting efforts of such translators and translator-cum-literary critics as Fu Lei, Sheng Denghua (1912-1970), Luo Dagang (1909-1998), Liu Mingjiu (1934-2022) and Guo Hongan (1943-2023) in 20th century China that those French authors and their works became well known to the Chinese reading public, and that they still much remain on the Chinese-

language must-read list of French novels, poetry and drama today. On the other hand, elements of the French influence seem to have also found their way into the original writings by native Chinese authors in the modern and contemporary period such as Dai Shuwang (1905-1950), Lu Ling (1923-1994), Wang Xiaobo (1952-1997) and Yu Hua (1960-). In unequivocal terms, the writings by these and other Chinese authors often bear characteristics of the surrealist, existentialist, new novelist or absurdist approaches attributable to the French tradition of literature.

In a like manner but from a different perspective, *On Fu Lei's Translations*, authored jointly by Xu Jun, Song Xuezhi and Hu Anjiang and published in 2016, is an in-depth case study of Fu Lei, the undisputedly most celebrated translator of French literature that China has ever seen in the 20th century, best noted for his translations of Honore de Balzac, Romain Rolland and Voltaire. Many of Fu's translations have become as classical masterpieces in themselves in Chinese as their original source texts in French. For example, his Chinese versions of Balzac's *Eugénie Grandet* (1949), *Le Père Goriot* (1950), *La Cousine Bette* (1951), *Le Cousin Pons* (1952), *La Rabouilleuse* (*The Black Sheep*, 1962), and *The Human Comedy* (*Comédie Humaine*) series (published in various volumes posthumously in 1986, 1988 and 1989), Rolland's *Jean-Christophe* (1937), *The Life of Michel Angelo* (*Vie de Michel-Ange*, 1954) and *The Life of Tolstoy* (*Vie de Tolstoi*, 1954), and Voltaire's *Candide* (1955) and *Selective Novels* (published posthumously in 1980) have frequently served as role-model texts for what is "good" translation for general Chinese readers, and in particular for students of translation and translation studies in the Chinese classroom. However, for such a translation master as Fu, who was also such a great literary critic and translation scholar, there has not been adequate research attention directed at him, especially in terms of him being the translation and literary theorist. Public concern may have been with the masterly quality of Fu's translations, but no systematic efforts have been made in studying what he may have had in mind about how he should translate the way he did, and why so he did it. In other words, people may want to know: What is the cultural politics of Fu's translation practice? What are the underlying principles of his translations? What is his translational poetics? How is his translation practice correlated with his ethos for translation? What criteria did he use for choosing which particular authors or texts to translate, or not to translate? and why so? etc.

Much to our delight, Xu's co-authored volume *On Fu Lei's Translations* has provided answers to all these possible questions. Consisting of 9 chapters each addressing a separate issue on Fu, the project is undoubtedly a systematic first research attempt at Fu the theorist. It has made tightly-knit analyses and discussions

of the uniqueness of Fu's scholarship, involving his humanistic worldview underpinning his practice (Ch. 1); his reader-centred poetics of translation (Ch. 2); his translational stylistics over the idiomaticity of language use and his preference of TT-ST "resemblance in spirit" to "resemblance in form" (Ch. 3); his decision to partake in translation as a life-long career, his choices of particular texts to translate and his exercising of a particular style for a particular translation (Ch. 4); how his vision of translation is influenced or affected by his views on literary criticism, and on fine arts and music about which he was also superbly knowledgeable (Ch. 5); how he deals with the relations between translator and reader and reading space, exemplified by the chapter's five separate case studies of his most representative translations of Balzac, Rolland and Voltaire (Ch. 6); the role of paratexts in his translations such as his dedications, forewords, afterwords, footnotes, endnotes and other materials such as "family letters" or "correspondences with friends" which may relate in one way or another to his translations (Ch. 7); and the implications and lasting influences in China of his translations, and his translational and literary scholarship (Ch. 8 and 9). Clearly, all these analyses and discussions in this book project serve as a great enhancement of our existing knowledge and understanding of Fu, and through the case of Fu, there will surely come an enhanced understanding and appreciation of the dynamics of translating French literature and that of foreign literatures in China in general.

With regard to literary and translation criticism activities in China, Xu's edited collection of critical essays on various Chinese translations of the French novel *The Red and the Black* (*Le Rouge et le Noir*) by Stendhal (penname for Henri Beyle, 1783-1842) could perhaps be regarded as one of the most highly acclaimed works of literary and translation criticism over the past 30 or so years. Comprising two main parts plus an appendix, *Language, Literature and Culture: A Study of the Chinese Versions of The Red and the Black* (Expanded Edition) offers a wide span of discussions by Chinese translators and scholars across the board on how best Stendhal should be reproduced in the Chinese language. Part I, named "General Discussions" (讨论), contains general essays, dialogues and correspondences between translators and peers about their opinion on translational issues surrounding the author and the source text, and discussions of a questionnaire survey on reader reaction to chosen target texts. Part II, that on "Specialised Discussions" (专论), contains more focused, case studies on the interpretation and representation of the French novel in the context of the Chinese language and culture, and a changed, Chinese language readership. The appendix, in spite of its seemingly supplementary nature, nonetheless contains essays by important translators and literary scholars on relevant issues, such as the comparison of Chinese translators' interest in

The Red and the Black to Western sinologists' interest in the Chinese classical novel of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, both of which, quite interestingly, comprise the word "Red" in their names. The general position that Xu takes, in his role as both editor of the collection and critic on *The Red and the Black* in translation, is made clear early back in his 1996 paper entitled "Language, Literature and Culture: On 'Literal/Linguistic Translation' and 'Literary Translation'," whose first half of the title was to also become the first part of the name of his subsequently published book under discussion here. Based on his contrastive analysis of examples culled from five different Chinese versions of *The Red and the Black*, Xu concludes that the ideal type of translation of Stendhal "should approximate the original as closely as possible in its language-cultural settings; that it should handle the relation well between acts of 'sinicization' and acts of 'europeanization' in the language use for the target text; and that it should not cut apart language, literature and culture one from the other and randomly overstep the limits of 'recreation'" (Xu, "Language, Literature and Culture" 168).

In summarised form, the most important and recurrent issues covered by the collection, especially in its two main parts, involve such age-old questions on literary translation (the translation of *The Red and the Black* included) as whether translators should adopt literal or non-literal methods; whether they should seek after translational resemblance in form or resemblance in spirit; whether they should be absolutely faithful to the author or they should have the freedom to create/recreate in their own right; whether translation should be treated as an art or as a science; or whether a translation should function as a borrowing from the original or it should be a surpassing of it. Interestingly, it must be noted here that all the discussions culminating in both the first, 1996 edition and the expanded, 2011 edition of the book have come to be known as the "Big Debate" on translating *The Red and the Black* in Chinese literary criticism in the current era.

In his commentary on the main features of the book, Bai Liping points out that although the participants in the debate have displayed "different opinions on various issues, such as translation criteria, the style of translation, literal and free translation, etc., all of them are from a source text-oriented approach with a similar purpose, i.e., to achieve 'faithfulness' in translation" (Bai 325). So, like what Zhao Xifang has had to say, this seems to reflect a fact that "research in the field of translation studies in China is 'backward' because no final outcome has ever been achieved as a result of the debates on the issues of literal and free translation in the Chinese history of translation, and it is already outdated to consider the original as being central within the field of translation studies in the West" (Zhao 235-236; tr. qtd from Bai 325). But nonetheless, as Bai contends, such issues as involved in the debate "are still worth

further discussion and that some unresolved historical controversies should not be overlooked,” and that “the essays in the book may also offer valuable inspiration and insights in relation to the study of Chinese readers of translated fiction[...].” (Bai 326).

Meanwhile, the importance and impact of the collection have been even more succinctly summarised by Fang Ping’s review article entitled “History Will Give It Full Credit” (Fang 28). Commenting very positively on the diligent work that Xu Jun has put into the compilation of the volume, Fang remarked that the collection constitutes “a work of historic significance...so much as that when we look back one day at how we have moved along the road of literary translation over these past decades, we will be able to identify many of the traces left behind by history. It is also my firm belief that, with such profound significance and impact, the book will surely gain further credit in the future history of the translation of literature in China” (Fang 31).

In contrast with discussions contained in the above books, Xu’s paper publications in his capacity as translator and literary specialist are characterised by a twofold presentation of his views and theoretical reflections. Firstly, there are papers based on some of his public lectures at universities and academic interviews, where he shares his points of view with his audiences on such issues as what it is that he sees in translation, what it is that he translates, why it is important to translate, and so on. The most representative in this respect is the first item listed in the above cluster of his selective papers, i.e., “Translating Is a Happy Act of Encountering in History: My Story of Translating French Literature.” In that article, he tells how he has translated and, most interestingly of all, how he has grown from a French language enthusiast in his early days as a college student, to an ardent and productive translator of French literature, and further to how he has effectively integrated his role as a translation practitioner and that as a translation researcher.¹ Surely, this last point is of particular relevance to students who plan to specialise in translation and foreign languages, and to embark on a career path in the academia like Xu.

Secondly, there are papers that go beyond his personal experience and growth story as a translator, to specific research topics on Le Clézio, with whom he has maintained close contact both as one of his Chinese translators and as a personal friend. Standing out most conspicuously in this connection are two essays from among the above list, i.e., “Literary Translation, Cultural Exchange and Academic

1 See Xu Jun, “Translating Is a Happy Act of Encountering in History: My Story of Translating French Literature,” *Foreign Languages* 2 (2017): 97-105.

Interaction: With Special Reference to My Engagement with Le Clézio” and “Poetic Temptation and Generation: The Poetic Adventure of Le Clézio.” The former essay is based on a lecture delivered at Beijing University, in which he adeptly used examples of how he translated Le Clézio and how he has drawn insights from his over thirty years of contact with the Nobel laureate, in elaborating on the essence of literary translation, and on how translators and academics in the humanities can better develop themselves through the practice of translation, active participation in language and cultural exchange activities, and informed skills training in academic research. By contrast, the latter article, i.e., that of “Poetic Temptation and Generation: The Poetic Adventure of Le Clézio,” probes into the poetic adventure of the Nobel laureate in his writing of novels. It examines how Le Clézio’s descriptions and narrations range “from the relationship between language and existence, to poetic expressions and generation, with his view of literature as being life generation in a dynamic continuation” (Xu, “Poetic Temptation and Generation” 12). By offering in-depth discussions of major points of concern, the article has succeeded in helping Chinese readers of Le Clézio gain a clear understanding of the poeticality and musicality of his works, with regard to their rhythms and colours in language expression, the romanticism in both his thoughts and texts, as well as the resonance of his thoughts and texts with nature.

III. Sinicizing French Translation Scholarship for a Chinese Audience

The second category of Xu’s researches involve his endeavours to introduce French scholarship about translation for the benefit of non-French language researchers on the Chinese arena. Three types of work are published in this connection. The first is straightforward translation of contemporary French thinking about translation. Three works were produced in Xu’s early stage as an academic, in the form of a selective translation of parts of *Theoretical Problems on Translation* (*Les Problèmes Théoriques de la Traduction*) by Georges Mounin (1910-1993). Published as journal pieces in *Language and Translation*, i.e., in Issues 1, 3 and 4 respectively of the 1991 volume of the journal, and under the separate titles of “On Translation and Cultural Diversity,” “Translation and ‘World Mapping’ Theory” and “Translation and ‘World Mapping’ Theory (continued),” these three translated texts are among some of the early efforts in China to acquaint Chinese readers with Mounin’s linguistically-oriented approach to translation, with special regard to his focus on linguistic diversity and the crossing of cultural “barriers” through translation. As a result, in addition to what Chinese TS researchers already knew about non-Chinese (mainly Western European and Russian), contemporary ideas on translation, such as

Andrei Fedorov's (1906-1997) "Principles of Translational Equivalence" (Pan 58-61; Tan, *A Short History of Translation in the West* 285-290), Eugene Nida's (1914-2011) "Science of Translating," "Dynamic Equivalence" and "Reader Reaction" (Tan, "Introducing Eugene Nida's *Towards a Science of Translating*"; "Nida on the Nature of Translation"; "Nida and His Translation Theory"; *A Short History of Translation in the West* 271-283; Tan and Nida, "Approaches to Translation"), Peter Newmark's (1916-2011) "Semantic vs. Communicative Translation" (Wang 11; Tan, *A Short History of Translation in the West* 258-263), John Catford's (1917-2009) "Linguistic Theory of Translation" (Bao 68; Mu 1; Tan, *A Short History of Translation in the West* 249-256), Leonid Barkhudarov's (1923-1985) "Linguistic Solutions to Translation Problems" (Cai 11; Barkhudarov 1; Tan, *A Short History of Translation in the West* 290-298), and George Steiner's (1929-2020) "Hermeneutic Motion of Translation" (Zhuang, "Introducing George Steiner's *After Babel*" 45; *Studies on Literary Translation Theory: George Steiner's After Babel* 1; Tan, *A Short History of Translation in the West* 263-267), they now had the opportunity to read in Chinese how Mounin, as one of the most important contemporary French translation scholars, has had to offer on translation theory.

This initial effort of translating Mounin then leads on to the second type of Xu's involvement in disseminating French theory of translation in China, for example, by sharing his theoretical reflections on French points of view on translation matters. Among the more noticeable are the thoughts he expressed in one of his many published interviews. Entitled "The Experience of the Foreign: An Interview on Translation Ethics," the interview, conducted in 2016 by young Chinese scholar Liu Yunhong, chiefly involves how Xu views the issue of "ethics of translation," especially in relation to what Antoine Berman (1942-1991) has stipulated in his seminal work *The Experience of the Foreign: Culture and Translation in Romantic Germany* (*L'Épreuve de l'étranger: Culture et traduction dans l'Allemagne romantique*).

Broadly speaking, Xu is in full agreement with Berman's view on the ethics of translation, as Berman maintains that though the translator performs his translational task as a "writer," he is but a "re-writer," though he is an "author," he is never "The Author;" though the translated work is a "work," it is never "The Work" (Berman 5-6). In other words, the basic ethical behaviour of translators that Berman advocates is that they should show respect to the "foreign/strange" or to what is "different" in the ST that they are translating. Indeed, as Xu sees it, "the necessity of translation lies in the differences existing between languages and cultures," and the fundamental goal of translation "is to break the cultural barriers blocking mutual understanding and integration of different cultures. Therefore, many important issues

involved in translation are ethical in essence, namely about how to interpret and deal with the relationship between self and the other” (Liu and Xu 71)¹. Logically, in spite of the notion of ‘fidelity’ “constantly being questioned and deconstructed” in the field, one cannot really do without striving to retain and communicate the in-built “heterogeneity” of the ST in the translation process because such “retention and communication” must surely be a “requirement of translation ethics,” and even a “pre-requisite” for interlingual and intercultural communication in the first place.

Important as Xu’s reflections and his prior translations of Mounin may be, they are but two separate examples of how Xu has tried to introduce to the Chinese TS research field contemporary French thinking about translation. However, Xu’s most important contribution to the Sinicization of French translational scholarship comes from his third type of work on the subject, i.e., the overall research endeavour that he has made in co-authoring and publishing the book *Contemporary French Translation Theory*. The volume was first produced in 1998 on a textbook grant from Nanjing University, published by the Nanjing University Press. Two years later, with permission from the Nanjing University Press and as an effort to support disciplinary development, a revised edition was published by the Wuhan-based Hubei Education Press. In 2003, the book won recommendation from the Postgraduate Education Office of the Chinese Ministry of Education for it to be used as a Coursebook for TS Postgraduate Students, which led to the publication of a new edition, again by the Hubei Education Press. The latest, substantially expanded fourth edition was released in November 2023, by the Yilin Press in Nanjing. Needless to say, such a successful trajectory of publication of the book over the past 24 years is a clear indicator of its firm impact, and it is largely to the credit of the publication of this volume, though, of course, not excluding other efforts or efforts by other scholars as well, that the contemporary French school of translation theory has been travelling quite successfully in the Chinese field of translation studies.

Composed of 11 chapters plus an Introduction, *Contemporary French Translation Theory (Expanded Edition)* provides Chinese readers with a comprehensive picture of the development of contemporary French translation scholarship. Its Introduction, written by Xu as lead author and editor of the book, is an overview of how TS research has evolved over the years, especially since the early 1960s when Georges Mounin first published his *Les problèmes théoriques de la traduction* (1963). Chapters 1 and 11, and part of Chapter 4, which are also under Xu’s authorship, discusses the topics respectively of Mounin’s unique contribution to the development of French translation theory in the new era (Ch. 1), of Henri Meschonnic’s (1932-2009) position

1 These lines are a direct quote from the English abstract of the article.

on the poetics of translation as presented in his *Pour le poétique, Épistémologie de l'écriture, Poétique de la traduction* (Ch. 4), and of Xu's own reflections on the French tradition of translation theory and the historic insights that can be drawn from the study of French translation theory and from that of Western translation theory at large (Ch. 11). Highly interesting and informative also are the discussions by the other six authors of Xu's writing team who are each responsible for their own topics, including those on Jean-René Ladmiral's three-stage development of his *traductologie* (translatology) from *traductographie* (translatography) to *traductologie* and further to *traductosophie* (translato-philosophy) (Ladmiral 1994; Ch. 2); French-speaking Canadian scholar Robert Larose's, and French-speaking Spanish scholar Amparo Hurtado Albir's adherence to the old concern of "fidelity"/"faithfulness" in translation (Larose 1989; Hurtado Albir 1990; Ch. 3); Yves Bonnefoy's (1923-2016) theory of poetic translation of (Bonnefoy 1981, 2000; Ch. 5); Danica Seleskovitch (1921-2001) and Marianne Lederer's interpretive translation theory (Seleskovitch and Lederer 1984; Ch. 6); the teaching theories of translation proposed and practised respectively by Élisabeth Lavault (1987), Michel Ballard (1984, 1993) and Karla Dejean le Féal (1993) (Ch. 7); the sociolinguistic approaches to translation advocated by Maurice Pergnier (1978), Jean-Marc Gouanvic (1999) and Jean Peeters (1999) (Ch. 8); the cultural studies approaches to translation represented by Antoine Berman (1984; Ch. 9); and the various constructive or interventional perspectives at translation criticism in Berman (1995) and in Meschonnic (1973; Ch. 10).

All this Sinicized information and discussion provided in *Contemporary French Translation Theory*, especially in its *Expanded Edition*, serves as a great enhancement of its Chinese audience's existing knowledge and understanding of TS developments in France. As has always been a major performer on the Western stage of translation and translation studies, the French school of translation and translation thinking carries many distinctive features of development, which in the contemporary times, according to Xu¹, are characterised by the following:

1) Researchers in the French domain of translation theory do not seem to rush at any basic framework for developing translation studies. Their research methodology does not seem to lie in the ambition to design what can be called a systematic theoretical model, but rather, it lies in their probing into the field of translation studies step by step, by starting from the basic problems of translation and by exploring issues from various perspectives.

2) A second characteristic feature of French TS research is its emphasis on the

1 See Xu Jun, ed, *Contemporary French Translation Theory* (Expanded Edition), Nanjing: Yilin Press, 2023, First edition co-edited by Xu Jun and Yuan Xiaoyi, Nanjing: Nanjing UP, 1998, 16-17.

integration of theory with practice. Whether it is Ladmiral's "essential elements of translation theory" and his emphasizing the experience of teaching in translation, or Seleskovitch and Lederer's "interpretive translation theory," there is always a place for translation and interpreting practice in their theory.

3) There is also a special emphasis, particularly in more recent years, on researches into the theory of translating between specific language pairs such as between English and French or German and French, and on the rules and techniques of translating by means of making rhetorical and structural contrasts between the language pairs involved.

Indeed, by drawing on what can be described as characteristically French features such as the above, Xu has the following to say in his endeavour to Sinicize the contemporary French experience in TS research for a Chinese audience:

In order for a true discipline of translation studies to eventually establish itself, it is essential for it to be based on a research methodology that puts theory into practice; a research vision that is multi-dimensional; a research reservoir of means that are complementary to one another; and a spirit and effort in the researcher that never diminish. (Xu, *Contemporary French Translation Theory [Expanded Edition]* 17)

IV. Advancing a Holistic and Panoramic View of Translation and Translation Studies

Having examined Xu's researched topics in the preceding sections, discussion of what constitutes the most essential part of Xu's contribution to contemporary translation studies in China is in now order. As I see it, this third category of Xu's work—and there is a substantial amount of it that he has accomplished through the publication of a large number of books, journal articles and book chapters, either authored, co-authored, edited, or co-edited—all jointly comes to crystallise itself in his advancing of a comprehensive general view on translation, a view that I would venture to use a term of my own making to designate, namely a "Holistic and Panoramic View of Translation."

For sure, what has been discussed in the previous sections must have all contributed to the overall formulation of this view. However, especially from a theoretical TS research point of view, the more revealing part of his thinking on translation and on the study of translation is found in such major works as *Introducing Translation: A Textbook for MTI* (2009), *Starting from Translation: On Translation and Translation Studies* (2014), *Introducing Translation Studies*

(2009/2021), *Introducing Chinese Translation Studies since the Country's Opening Up to the World (1978-2018)* (2018), and *On Translation (Revised Edition)* (2023). Of these, the last piece can be regarded as the most representative, from which we may get a deep insight into the dynamics of Xu's "Holistic and Panoramic" view on translation, i.e., how this view is formulated and how it functions in impacting our understanding of translation in China. Therefore, our discussion in the remaining part of the current section will be mainly focused on this monograph.

But before proceeding to the work in greater detail, it may also be meaningful to take a quick look into the other four books on the above list, which are considered to have each contributed in their own way to the crystallization of Xu's general theoretical stance. As the name suggests, the first one, *Introducing Translation: A Textbook for MTI* (2009), is written for the purpose of teaching postgraduate students on the professional MTI (or: Master of Translation and Interpreting) programmes in China, which were initiated in 2007. But it is not a textbook in the ordinary sense, not in the sense of mere practice-oriented taught programmes. It is a textbook aimed to address both basic facts-related and theoretically/critically challenging questions, including: What is translation? What is it that we translate? Who translates? What are the functions of translation? What factors are there that affect the act of translation? What problems are there that the translator may encounter in the process of translation? How do we evaluate or assess the quality of a translation? How do we understand the meaning and the nature of translation and translation studies, especially in multi-cultural communication contexts, and so on? The second book, titling *Starting from Translation: On Translation and Translation Studies*, released in 2014, arises from some of Xu's published research papers. The topical areas that the book covers include: (i) the relations between translation and the original, different levels of the act of translation, and the translator's choices; (ii) translational subjectivity, cultural differences, the cultural perspective of translation studies, motivations of translation, "creative treason" in translation, and the space and limitations for understanding and interpretation; and (iii) translation criticism, translation value, translation assessment, the mission of translation, the tasks of translation research, and future possibilities of translation studies. The two volumes that come next on the list, i.e., *Introducing Translation Studies* (2009/2021) and *Introducing Chinese Translation Studies since the Country's Opening Up to the World (1978-2018)* (2018), are both collorative book projects with Xu as first co-editor for one and chief editor for the other. To some degree, these volumes are the Chinese kind of *Translation Studies Readers* like the various English TS book projects, for example, those edited and published by Chesterman (1989), Venuti

(2021) and Baker (2010). Although the chapters of each of the two books are separate contributions from a team of well-known TS authors in China including Xu himself, covering an important range of translation studies topics (10 for the former and 12 for the latter), it is nevertheless also much due to the meticulous work of organization, coordination and overall structuring by Xu the project initiator and editor/co-editor that makes both projects so significant and influential that they became prize winners from the Chinese Ministry of Education, with one in 2013 and the other in 2023. In large measure, such prizes do not mean a simple honour granted to the specific publications concerned, but they serve as a general recognition of the work that has been going on in the Chinese TS research field, i.e., the kind of work in which Xu has played a leading role in accomplishing over these past years.

Now back to our primary interest in the aforesaid monograph, i.e., *On Translation*. In Xu's own opinion, this is his "most important work as far as translation theory is concerned" (Xu, *My New Reflections on Translation* 2), or, as I have described above, it is the most representative work that Xu has written from which we can obtain an understanding of his philosophy of translation. In other words, this is where we find all the major points of view that Xu has delivered throughout the years on issues of the theory and practice of translation.

Its first edition published in 2003, second in 2014 and latest revised in 2023, the book comprises 7 chapters and an introduction. A careful reading of the introduction and the various chapters and sub-sections of the book would reveal the "Holistic and Panoramic" nature of Xu's general theory of translation. As expected, the Introduction provides a broad overview of what the author has had to offer by the writing of the book. More specifically, it explains the why, how and what issues relating to his writing, i.e., why he is writing the book, how he writes it, and what he intends to put into it or what breakthroughs he has got in store for it, and so on. Chapter 1, entitled *On the Nature of Translation*, addresses the basic issues of translation involving our general understanding of translation, translation history, the growing importance of translation research, the necessity of maintaining self-identity for translation and translation studies, etc. Chapter 2, *On the Process of Translation*, discusses the practical as well as the theoretical aspects of the translation process, the space and limitations for interpretation in translation, the life span of translated texts and its possibility and mechanisms of extension. Chapter 3, *On Meaning and Translation*, tackles such issues as the philological perspective for the handling of meaning in translation, Saussurean linguistics on meaning, the issue of determinacy and objectivity of meaning, how meaning can be classified, and how

meaning is reproduced in interlingual communication. Chapter 4, *On Influencing Factors in Translation*, concerns itself with such elements in translation as the cultural and social context, the ideological and political dimensions of translation, translational motivation and conception, and the role of linguistic relations and translation competence. Chapter 5, *On Translational Conflicts*, examines the dialectics of translational relationships such as between translatability and untranslatability, differences and similarities, and form and spirit. Chapter 6, *On the Subjectivity of Translators*, looks into the translator's identity, translational fidelity and treason, creative treason vs. the translatorial subjectivity, and inter-subjectivity and the fusion of horizons. Chapter 7, *On Translation Value and Criticism*, discusses such issues as the positioning of translation, the value of translation, the practical needs of translation criticism, the approaches to translation criticism, the principles and methods of translation criticism, and the importance of regarding translation criticism as a for ever on-going necessity in the discourse of translation. In sum, by bringing all these issues into discussion, Xu strives to make a whole series of 11 points of view, which, as presented by himself in the Introduction, can be described as follows:

1) Translation is a practice-oriented activity, but its phenomenon is becoming more and more complex and more and more diversified, and so our understanding and definitions of it must keep ahead with the times;

2) Translation is a historical happening, and with it our purpose of translation and our ways of how to translate, and because of this for ever developing nature of translation our approaches to it must also change and develop;

3) Translation is communicating involving complex cross-cultural exchanges, of which the mediating role of the translator is pivotal, and so researching into how best the translator fulfils this mediating role remains one of the central tasks of translation studies;

4) Translation is a multi-layered activity, and so in order to fully understand the true nature of translation it is imperative for researchers not to stay one-sided in viewing translation, but to adopt a comprehensive approach to it, embracing the good elements from all sides, be they literary, linguistic or otherwise;

5) The study of translation must be a scientific endeavour but its scientificity primarily lies in that of its methodology; whereas efforts must be encouraged to apply scientific means to solving translation problems such as hypothesising about the possible mechanisms of translation, it is nonetheless also important to exercise prudence in the hypothesising and theorising process;

6) Translation can be approached from two levels of reference, i.e., a static

level of reference and a dynamic one, with the former pointing to the product of translation and the latter the process; currently, it is the dynamic facet of this referencing, i.e., the process of translation, that requires research attention all the more;

7) Translation is not a from-text-text, close-end process, but an activity that requires understanding from beyond a narrow-minded perspective to a perspective involving history, society and culture; it is an activity that requires thinking not only about “how to do it,” but more about “why doing it;”

8) The training of translation talent depends on development of the theory of translation teaching, which constitutes an important part of the theory of translation at large; and in this connection we need to draw upon the research outcomes from colleagues abroad, especially those in the research field of translation quality evaluation and assessment;

9) Translation research should go out of the ivory tower to concern itself with cultural and social phenomena, hence to draw attention directed at translation from such people as philosophers, sociologists, linguists, writers and so forth; and also to carry out research on readers’ responses, and their aesthetic expectations and cultural values;

10) It is important to find proper, dialectically-balanced solutions to the potential problems of trying to delink translation theory from practice, so that theories of translation come from practice and are put to the test of practice; but the practical value of translation theory must not be overemphasised, for translation is not mere practice at face value but it has a higher goal to meet, the goal of serving human communication and development;

11) The disciplinary construction and development of translation studies are a long-term task that cannot succeed without the joint efforts by fellow researchers, and, especially in terms of the undertaking of major research projects in the field, disciplinary success largely depends on enhanced collegial collaboration within the professional TS communities both at home in China and on the international arena.

Clearly, by examining these 11 specific points of view, and by reading through the entire volume and absorbing the theoretical points that Xu has made on all other occasions, it is not difficult to see why I have described Xu’s view as of a “Holistic and Panoramic” nature. This is a view that he has been advancing throughout his scholarly trajectory in translation and translation studies. As we have seen, it is a “Holistic” view because it emphasises the interdependence of the various points that he has been making through the chapters and subsections of the monograph, so that these individual points become coherent and cohesive parts of an organic whole; and

it is also a “Panoramic” view because, being comprehensive in its argumentation, it has covered all major discursive issues on translation, ranging from the practice to the theory of translation, from the principles to the methods and skills of translation, and from the functions and values of translation to translation criticism, and further to the teaching of translation as well as to education in translation and translation studies as an important discipline in academia.

Concluding Remarks

Produced across a broad span of some 40 years, i.e., from the time he and myself first met and each made our first major paper presentations as emerging young scholars at the Yantai national conference on literary translation back in 1985 up to the very present, Xu’s plentiful ideas over varied topics involving his personal experience and theoretical thinking about translation have firmly placed him as one of the most outstanding figures in the study of translation in China. He is particularly celebrated for his achievements as a translation practitioner and a theoretical thinker on the translation of French literature, and as a resourceful literary and translation critic and translation studies researcher.

This above comment, then, helps bring us back to the very premise that I have made at the onset of our argument that, though translation theorists are not automatically capable translation practitioners at the same time, there exists no inevitable or unsurmountable barrier to prevent good theorists from becoming good practitioners, or *vice versa*. On this point, I quite agree with the position maintained by Ye Li in his article on “the scholarly writer vs. the writerly scholar,” in which he holds that, with gift, capability and experience, writers can certainly also be scholars, and scholars also writers at the same time, and that this is particularly true in cases where one’s scholarly and writerly trajectories of interest and talent coincide and overlap.¹ As I see in Xu, his dual role as translator and translation theorist first began with his strong interest in the practice of translation; and then it continued productively throughout his life-long career as a university teacher with concurrent interests in both the theory and practice of translation. He has not only been an ardent translator but also a trained translation scholar, a scholar who translates and teaches, critiques and researches translation, all with equal enthusiasm and devotion. It is with this multi-dimensional enthusiasm and devotion that he has contributed in remarkable and significant ways to the development of contemporary

1 See Ye Li, “Further Thoughts on ‘the Scholarly Writer’ vs. ‘the Writerly Scholar,’” 20 Feb. 2024. Available at: <https://www.chinawriter.com.cn/n1/2022/0322/c404033-32380876.html>, 2022. Accessed 20 Nov. 2023.

translation studies on the Chinese arena.

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