Network & cooperation in translating Taiwan in English:  
With reference to translation of modern Taiwan literature

Szu-Wen Cindy Kung  
Newcastle University, UK  
s.w.c.kung@ncl.ac.uk

Abstract:

The translation of Taiwan literature has been carried out by the source culture for last three decades, mainly aiming at making its literary voice heard in the West and ultimately presenting Taiwan culturally and literally. However, such task is never easy, especially when the minor literature, such as Taiwan literature, is translated and exported into the dominant Anglo-American culture. The study pays attention to the social agents’ and network’s agency on the translation of lesser-known literature in the dominant culture. The case study of translation of contemporary Taiwan novel in the United States after 1980s is examined in order to answer the question. Two types of translation networks: translator-led and subvention networks are identified through the examination of paratexts and extratexts. It can be argued that the subvention network formed by different agents sitting in both source and target cultures and possessing individual social power can be more effective in translating and exporting lesser-known literature, particularly the text selection and the possibility of publication; however, this subvention network has its limitation in producing the translations that still conform to the target culture’s expectation.
1. Introduction:

Translation enabling cross-cultural communication becomes one of the important cultural strategies to present Taiwan. The translation activity for Taiwan literature has been carried out over the last three decades. Translation as a cross-cultural movement can take two forms: translation as both a cultural importation and exportation. The cultural exportation often takes place when the minority or lesser-known culture intends to introduce its literature and culture to the majority or dominant culture; and the translation activity of the lesser-known culture and its literature is often initiated by the source culture in order to enhance the visibility of its literary voice in the West (Liu 2003). In these contexts, the translation then acts as an ambassador or an agent, introducing writers of lesser-known languages to the mainstream literary world (Jones 2000). The translation of Taiwan literature falls into this category. However, since Anglo-American culture still remains dominant in comparison to other cultures, any translation activity initiated by the source culture is never an easy task.

Furthermore, recent translation studies scholars have begun to view translation as a meaningful social action conducted by a wider range of agents in addition to the translator (Buzelin 2005; Jones 2006). Translation is a socially-regulated activity; the translation agents, their individual social impact, and their relation can be influential upon the creation of the final translation product. Against this background, this article aims to explore the translation agents’ and network’s influence on the translation production of lesser-known literature in the dominant culture. That is, to what extent the translation agents’ and network’s agency can enhance the visibility of lesser-known literature in the major culture; meanwhile, how the agents’ and
network’s agency is reflected in the final translation production is also explored. The case study of translation of contemporary Taiwan novel in the United States after 1980s is examined in order to answer the question. Two types of translation activity in translating Taiwan novels in the United States will be identified and compared: translator-led network and subvention network. The sociological theories—Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and Bourdieu’s concepts of capital are important framework relating the discussion. It is worth pointing out here that the discussion mainly focuses on the subvention network.

2. Method

In terms of research method, the data is mainly collected from the survey of the paratexts and extratexts\(^1\). It is believed that paratexts and extratexts are the discourse formed around the translated text, which may indicate collective trends and intentions (Toury 1995:65). Through the examination of paratexts and extratexts, two types of translation networks: translator-led and subvention networks are identified. The translator-led network and its translation activity are discussed firstly. Then the emphasis is placed upon the subvention network; and in doing so, the translation series: Modern Chinese literature from Taiwan published by Columbia University Press, which is sponsored by the Chi\-\-cheng-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange (here onwards referred as CCKF) in Taiwan, is the core of the study. The analysis of the selected translated novels and the study of the translation agents involved in the production of this translation series via interviews are used to

\(^1\) The term “paratext” refers to the surface fragments that cover “all the textual material that introduces a text proper,” such as the cover, author’s name, title, blurb, table of contents, preface, introduction, publishers; literally all the material that surrounds the text and forms a book; and “extratext” refers to material outside the book, such as letters, interviews, book reviews, which in all consist of the intertextuality of any text (Kovala 1996; Pym 1998).
This article is organized into the following components: Firstly, the theoretical framework in question- ANT and Bourdieu’s concepts are discussed; then, a case study is provided to explore the dynamic agents’ and network’s agency on translation production in the United States. The final part considers the possible implications of this study.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Bourdieu’s concept of capital

Translation is the result of a meaningful social action conducted by the social agents, suggesting that it is bound up with social contexts (Wolf 2002:34). Some translation scholars have foreseen the usefulness of sociological theories and concepts to probe the impact of the translators as social agents for the translation, Bourdieu’s theory is in particular their foci. Bourdieu’s concepts: habitus, capital and field are specially explored and applied to study the translators’ social implication during the process of production (Simeoni 1998).

In a similar token, this article likes to emphasize on the concepts of “capital” here. Bourdieu’s “capital” is not confined to the traditional sense of economic capital; his concept of capital can include “immaterial” and “non-economic” forms of capital, such as cultural capital, social capital and symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1990; Browitt 2004). Cultural capital refers to the educational background or professional position of the social agent; social capital means that this social agent has a network of valued relations with significant individuals and institutions; symbolic capital can be the
social agent’s prestige or social honour (Wolf 2002:37-38). The concept of capital is particularly useful in examining the impact of the agents on the translation production process.

3.2 Actor-Network Theory

One of the disadvantages of Bourdiesain approaches is that it tends to reduce the agent to the translator, and only consider the agency from the individualistic perspective (Buzelin 2005:215). When more mediators are included within the research, Bourdieu’s theory lacks the clear link required to connect people together and the strength to examine an agency consisting of multiple agents. This missing link, the author argues, can be supported by Latour’s Actor-Network Theory (ANT), which has been applied in translation studies only until very recently (Abdallah 2005; Buzelin 2005; Jones 2006).

ANT provides a theoretical model to examine how a network of contacts links different actors and produces a project (Latour 1987). ANT allows the researchers to observe an ongoing process of how each of the influential factors is connected and thus forms a network while an artifact is being produced. In ANT, the “actors” can be both people (such as the translator, the editor, the publisher) and artifacts (e.g. the original text and the translation). In the network, the existing actors “recruit” or “introduce” new actors into the network; the more powerful actors can recruit more actors. It may be argued that ANT provides a useful framework for the examination of the production as a process of negotiation and tension between actors.

4. Case Study
This section aims to explore the translation agents’ and network’s influence on the translation production of lesser-known literature in the dominant culture, in particular, the translation of Taiwan novel in the United States or Anglo-American culture. As mentioned earlier, since Anglo-American culture still remains dominant in comparison to other cultures, any translation activity initiated by the source culture is never an easy task.

4.1 Translated book in the United States

By and large, the translated foreign literature has a small market and low reception in the United States. This issue has been raised by Venuti in that very few translations are published in English, for example, in 1990, while American publishers brought out 46,743 books, merely 1380 are translations, around 3%(Venuti 1995:12). According to Publishers Weekly in 2001, only 6% are translated from foreign languages into English of all the translations worldwide, and this figure is still considered to be a generous estimate. Contrarily, the number of translations from English is in contrast to the situation in America. For instance, 50% of all the translations worldwide in 2001 were from English into other languages (Wimmer 2001). As Venuti points out that “English has been the most translated language worldwide, but it isn’t much translated into” (Venuti 1995:14), and signals a narrow market for translations in America.

The low reception and limited readership result in modest profit, which means that there is even less encouragement for the publisher to translate and publish foreign literature. The profit-oriented trade publisher lacks interest in little-known foreign
authors whose work cannot stimulate profitable sale figures. In a similar fashion, the university press is cautious of the non-profitable market of translations (Wimmer 2001). This situation demonstrates the difficulty faced by the translation agents and network attempting to translate and publish Taiwan novel.

4.2 Translator-led network in translating Taiwan novel

In this type of network, the translation of Taiwan novel is generally initiated or led by the translators themselves, who are often the experts in Sinology, such as Göran Malmqvist, Howard Goldblatt, and John Balcom. The text selection and translation are mainly based on personal interest or enthusiasm for the original work. For example, Goldblatt, who has translated over 30 novels from both Taiwan and China, points out in the interview that he selects and translates the works based on two factors: the work that he likes and the books recommended by acquaintances for translation or co-translation. Above all, the work has to be of interest to him (Goldblatt 2007). In terms of text selection, it goes with saying that the novel, the author and the literary genre translated are generally more limited in the translator-led network.

Apart from text selection and translation, the translators have to contact the publishers that are interested in publishing the translation. According to the translators’ statements in the news articles or interviews, this process can be both effort and time consuming; it is a common situation where the translators have to translate a few chapters or the entire book as sample before approaching the publishers. The publishers would reject the translators’ request when they are either not interested in the sample translations or they do not see the profit-making potential in these
translations, which means that the translators’ time and effort spent could have been in vain (Balcom 2007; Goldblatt 2007; Yen 2003).

In the translator-led translation network, although it is the translator initiating the activity, without the participation and support of other agents from the source culture, the influence of the target culture agent- the publisher, especially its profit-making orientation is at the maximum. In other words, the translation of Taiwan novel could be published in American culture; nevertheless, when the lesser-known literature is translated into the dominant culture, it is claimed that the translator-led network is subject to the agent situated within the target culture. In other words, the pattern of translator-led/-initiated translation activity in translating Taiwan novel sided more towards the target culture agent, mainly the publisher, for which the important purpose of the translation is to achieve the commercial value - the marketability. Without the participation of other agents from the source culture, the effect of enhancing the visibility of the translated Taiwan literature in the United States via the translator-led network is only minimum and far from effective.

4.3 Subvention network in translating Taiwan novels

Let’s turn to the focus of this article: the subvention network of the translation series-Modern Chinese Literature from Taiwan published in the United States. The establishment of translation series Chinese Literature from Taiwan subsided by CCKF has improved the situation of translated Taiwan novels in the United States. The formation of this network was initiated by the source culture agent and involved more agents situated in both source culture and target culture. The agents studied in this network are the translators, editorial board members, the publisher and the sponsoring
organization.

The network formation began in 1997; as one of the important organizations making effort to support the studies and researches of Taiwan, particularly in America (Brown 2004:2), CCKF decided to distribute a budget to launch and support a translation series of Taiwan literature in English in order to promote the literary voice of Taiwan². The coordinator and also the editorial board member of the translation series, Professor Wang teaching in Columbia University then, pointed out in the interview that he was invited by CCKF to preside on the project of the translation series; since he is from Taiwan and therefore appreciates the abundant repertoire of contemporary Taiwan literature, he agreed to take the responsibility for running the translation series project (Wang 2007).

The establishment of the translation series project means that it is important to have a publisher in America that can publish a series of translations. According to Wang’s statement, Mr. Crewe, the associate director and editorial director responsible for the Asian Humanity section of the Columbia University Press (CUP), agreed to Professor Wang’s request of joining this translation project (Wang 2007). CUP’s decision to participate in the translation project and establish a series for literature from Taiwan was not straightforward. The capitals of the agents- Professor Wang’s social capital and cultural capital, and CCKF’s financial capital were important to the CUP’s decision.

² CCKF was established in 1989 and headquartered in Taipei. It has four regional review committees in America, Europe, and Asia Pacific. Currently, it has two international centres for sinological research: the CCKF center for Chinese Cultural and Institutional History at Columbia University; and CCKF International Sinological Center at Charles University in Prague (Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange).
After the translation project was set up, Wang expressed the idea of establishing the translation series to Ms. Jennifer Crewe. Wang stated that apart from teaching in Columbia University during that time, he has served on the publication committee of Columbia University Press (CUP) for a number of years, and it trusts his judgment (Wang 2007). In addition, Crewe claimed that Professor Wang was able to secure the funding for the series from CCKF (Crewe 2007). Wang’s cultural capital and social capital, that is, his professional experience and working relation with CUP, as well as his connecting role between CUP and CCKF ensures CUP’s participation in this translation project. The financial capital of CCKF further reinforces CUP’s willingness to publish the translation series; for the university press, the profit may not be a priority, yet seeking financial support from other organizations is crucial to the business of the university press (Givler 2002:112).

Wang’s social capital further enabled him to recruit more people or agents with different types of social power to form the network. For example, the interview and other articles indicated that Wang has invited other professionals to form the editorial board; having had a good personal relationship with Professor Pang-yuan Chi, an important figure in promoting the translation of Taiwan literature over last three decades in Taiwan, Wang invited her to join the editorial board. In addition, the Sinologist Göran Malmqvist was invited to join the team; Wang claimed that Malmqvist’s cultural capital: the academic reputation of Chinese literature could enhance the credibility of the series. The editorial board mainly works on the early stages of the translation production process, that is, the text selection and the seeking of suitable translators. In terms of text selection, under the CCKF’s sponsorship, the editorial board members claimed that they are given the freedom to select the text for translation (Wang 2007). The most important stated criteria directing editorial
members’ text selection is to consider the wider possibility of the literary works including more diversified groups of writers and literary genres of Taiwan literature (ibid).

Once the texts are selected, the editorial board members then recruit suitable translators. Similar to the formation of an editorial board, the agents’ social capital plays a part in inviting the translators to translate. For example, the interview showed that Goldblatt, with whom Wang has been acquainted before the establishment of the series, was invited by Wang to translate (Goldblatt 2007). Similarly, Chi invited other translators to participate based on her personal relation with the translators (Du 2007; Liu 2007; Wu 2007). It can be argued that the agents of the editorial board have a major power in enabling the formation of this subvention network. In addition, some of the translators who participated in the translation project are known and experienced; both the editorial board and the publisher believed that the participation of these translators may also enhance the credibility or reputation of the series (Goldblatt 2007; Wang 2007).

Since the translation series has been supported by a secure fund and established as a plan to promote contemporary Taiwanese literature, the publication of the translated Taiwan novel has become steady and consistent since the launch of the translation project in 1997. The press has been continually publishing one to two translations with quality book presentations annually or biannually (Columbia University Press Website). In other words, Taiwanese literature has a more stable and better opportunity of being published and received in the United States. The higher frequency of publishing indicates a greater probability for the works to draw the target culture’s attention.
For instance, the *Three-Legged Horse* by Ching-wen Cheng, has not only been reviewed by several major publications, like the *New York Times Book Review*, *Publishers Weekly* and the *Kirkus Review*, but also won the 1999 Kiriyama Book Prize (Cheng 1999); *Notes of a Desolate Man* was reviewed by the *San Francisco Chronicle*, as Best Book by the *Los Angeles Times Book Reviews*, as a Notable Book by the *New York Times Book Reviews*, and in addition, its translation won the National Translation Award of the American Association of Literary Translators (Chang 2000; Columbia University Press Website). *Frontier Taiwan: An Anthology of Modern Chinese Poetry* has been reviewed as Best Books by the *Los Angeles Times Book Reviews*; *Indigenous Writers of Taiwan: An Anthologies of Stories, Essays and Poems* has won the 2006 Northern California Book Award for Translation (Balcom 2007). Some of these publications receive over a hundred new books awaiting review, that is to say, it is not easy to have the chance of being selected and reviewed; hence, the examples given can be viewed as a fairly fruitful result produced by the translation network; it also implies a certain breakthrough for the translation exportation activity of modern Taiwan literature in America.

By and large, the case study of the subvention network and its translation agents reveals the translation as a result of social causation, as Wolf points out, “Translation is the result of cultural, political and other habits of the social agents who participate in translation and of the various forms of capital involved” (Wolf 2002:41). In addition, it shows that the translation production is a process of conversation, influence, and cooperation or complicity (Jones 2006; Pym 2007). The financial capital of CCKF is crucial to the network formation, yet without the social and cultural capital of other agents, such as the editorial board members, it might not be
easy to locate the translators and the publisher.

In Bourdieu’s theory and Actor-Network terms, the effectiveness of this network is mainly underpinned by cooperating the individual social power, or in Bourdieu’s term, the capital. In other words, the network could not have yielded the fruitful results without the influence of any one of the main agents; however, the individual agent’s capital can only be brought into full play by working together within the network. As Jones points out, “Who holds more or less power within the network is less important than whether the network forms and performs efficiently and effectively” (Jones 2006:22).

4.4 Subvention network’s and agents’ agency on translation

The discussion so far indicates that the subvention network and agents with different capitals work in a cooperative way to translate and export Taiwan novels more effectively; nevertheless, this subvention network and their associated agents still aim to produce readable translations that can be more acceptable by the target culture. Venuti has pointed out the general requirement towards the translation in American culture:

A translated text, […], is judged acceptable by most publishers, reviewers, and readers […], when the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities makes it seem transparent, giving the appearance that it reflects the foreign writer’s personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text – […] (Venuti 1995:1).

The transparency is an elusive effect endeavoured by the translation agents to ensure the easy “readability” is achieved by applying current usage, maintaining continuous
syntax, and fixing a precise meaning (ibid). The study of meta-textual material demonstrates that the target-reader is one of the main translation agents’ top considerations while translating, and a readable translation that is accessible to the readers is the main concern for most of the translators. The translators tended to apply the target-oriented translation, that is, to bring out the meaning and the spirit of the story or novel in the language that is familiar to the readers rather than stick to the form or style of the source text (Balcom 2007; Chang 2000; Du 2007; Goldblatt 2007; Hsiao 2000; Wu 2007).

A brief examination of the *Wintry Night*’s English translation is provided as an example to show the translation agents’ methods of translation. Chiao Lee’s *Wintry Night* is considered a classic epic novel in the form of a trilogy. It contains three books: *Wintry Night, Desolate Village* and *Lonely Lamp*. The author draws on the historical material and reality of Taiwan, and depicts the fortunes of the Pengs, a family of Hakka Chinese settlers, across three generations, from the 1890s to around the 1940s, that is to say, from just before Taiwan was ceded to Japan as a result of the Sino-Japanese war through World War II (Lee 2001).

This novel is embedded with historical and cultural material; it goes with saying that it poses difficulty for the translation agents because the original work is distant to its target recipient both historically and culturally (Kovala 1996). The consideration of the target reader is firstly reflected in the translator’s introduction as the following:

Because Li Qiao’s saga is so imbued with the culture and history of Taiwan, the series editorial board felt that an introduction to explain its cultural and historical background for readers with little or no knowledge of Taiwan was essential. The editors also felt that adding an introduction was preferable to
encumbering the text with footnotes (Balcom 2001).

The first function of this introduction is to construct the context, in Gutt’s word, “A crucial part of the context is the audience’s expectations” (Gutt 1996). Secondly, it aims to avoid excessive footnotes in the translation which would disturb the reading reception of the readers.

In addition to the translator’s introduction, we now look at examples of the translator’s agency on the culture-specific items, which can include the following items: proper nouns, such as the name of the character and toponym, historical and religious figures, traditional festival, food, organizations, customs, and material artefacts, etc (Aixela 1996; Newmark 2001). Due to space limit, only one example is examined here.

(1) 另外也到關帝爺和萬善爺那邊求取兩張「平安符」給產婦
燒灰服用。

Back translation:
They also went to Guan Ti Temple, the God of War and Temple of Myriad Benefits, to ask for two “talismans” which are burnt; and the pregnant woman is expected to drink the ashes with water.

Translation:
They were also charged with obtaining from the temple there two paper talismans of the kind that are burned and the ashes swallowed by women in labour.

The example here is the translation of deity figures. The more generic term temples have replaced Guan Ti Temple, the God of War and Temple of Myriad Benefits. These cultural specific terms are somewhat neutralized through the universalization strategy. The replacement of the cultural specific term by a more generic term reduces the
foreignness in the translation.

From the translation examples above, contrary to what has been advocated by Venuti (1995) that the extreme foreignization strategy\(^3\) should be adopted to maintain the source linguistic and cultural peculiarity in the translation in order to enhance the visibility of the translator and the lesser-known literature in the Anglo-American culture, the case study has shown that such contention is too ideal to implement in the real world practice. While attempting to bring its literature to the Western audience through the source culture initiated and subvention translation network, it is more realistic and practical for the translation agents to produce the translation that can reduce the unfamiliarity of the source text and become more readily acceptable by the target culture.

5. Conclusion

This article sets out to explore to what extent the translation agents’ and network’s agency can enhance the visibility of lesser-known literature in major culture; meanwhile, how the agents’ and network’s agency is reflected in the final translation production is explored. It can be argued that the subvention network formed by different agents sitting in both source and target cultures and possessing individual social power can be more effective in translating and exporting lesser-known literature, particularly in terms of the text selection and the possibility of publication; however, this subvention network has its limitation in producing the translations that still conform to the target culture’s expectation.

\(^3\) A term used by Venuti (1995) to designate the type of translation in which a translation is produced which deliberately breaks target conventions by retaining something of the foreignness of the original(Shuttleworth & Cowie 1997).
Furthermore, the case study suggests that the translation has the potential to enable the internationalization of the internal literary and cultural experience by translating literature into the global language – English (Jones & Arsenijevic, 2005:87). Literary translation has become a useful tool for identity recognition and cultural transmission, especially when a culture that is perceived as weak or small attempts to export its literature to the dominant culture (Cronin 2003; Even-Zohar 2000; Tymoczko 1999; Venuti 1995). That is translation can be a manipulative tool used by the translation agents sited in the source culture to translate its literature into the major language, which may create a channel through which other cultures may be reached (Zauberaga 2000:51).

Finally, the article shows that when a lesser-known culture wishes to translate its literature and promote its image more systematically and effectively in the dominant culture, sufficient financial support, overseas connection, good interpersonal relations as well as cooperation are particularly important to achieving the objective. It can be argued that the multiple agents and translation network working cooperatively in the globalized era may typically “extend domestic structures of literary power into the international arena” (Jones & Arsenijevic 2005).
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