

CHAPTER 2

“COLONIZATION,” RESISTANCE AND THE USES OF POSTCOLONIAL TRANSLATION THEORY IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY CHINA

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Discussions of postcolonial translations have come into vogue in recent years. Originally a term used extensively in literary theory, “postcoloniality” seems suddenly to have been given a prominent part to play in research on translation in Third World countries, particularly India. Undoubtedly, postcolonial theory should have some relevance to all countries that were colonized in one way or another. That being the case, much thought ought to be given to the relevance of postcolonial translation to China. To be sure, China has not been formally occupied by a foreign power in the past century, so she has not experienced a “colonial” period as did her Southeast Asian neighbours, India and most African countries. Indeed, extraterritorial rights over certain parts of the country (like Shanghai and the Yangtze River) were claimed at certain times by foreign powers: Hong Kong was ceded to Britain (though she entered her postcolonial period with the 1997 Chinese takeover); and Taiwan was colonized by the Dutch and by the Japanese (from the end of the nineteenth century to the end of World War II). However, for mainland China, where the majority of translations are still carried out and published, the term “postcoloniality” may not mean much. What use do we have for postcolonial theories of translation in the Chinese context?

In hindsight, the influx of contemporary Western critical theory into China is among the most phenomenal intellectual events of the eighties and

nineties. The chain of events connected with the introduction of deconstructionism, feminism and postcolonialism (not postcolonial translation theory, though) into China can be briefly recounted. Other than the proliferation of translated texts on “new theory,” one can cite a sequence of academic events sponsored by China, but attended by major Western theorists. Fredric Jameson toured the major Chinese universities in 1985, and two conferences at which postcolonialism became a hot subject were held in 1995. At the International Conference on Cultural Studies held in Dalian (August 1995), scholars such as Terry Eagleton and Ralph Cohen were invited to give lectures; at the International Conference on Cultural Dialogue and Cultural Misreading (October 1995), which took place in Beijing, Douwe Fokkema, Gerald Gillespie and Mario Valdes were the principal speakers. Another international conference that served as a forum for debating the applicability of Western critical theories, including postcolonial theories, was the Conference on Critical Theories: China and the West, sponsored by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and held in the summer of 1997 in Changsha, Hunan. Jameson was again one of the keynote speakers at the conference. Thus, before the century draws to a close, postcolonial theory from the West will have been well planted in Chinese intellectual soil; this is not dissimilar to the way in which sundry kinds of commodities have successfully found a place (at roughly the same time) on the Chinese market.

That postcolonial theory has become a reality in both the fields of literature and linguistics is evidenced by the spate of articles and books on the subject by Chinese scholars in the past decade.¹ If this trend continues, translation studies in China will eventually have to face the postcolonial challenge. This article attempts to show how the new critical discourse on postcoloniality can become significant and meaningful in the Chinese context. I will consider the two “positions” that Chinese translation theorists, cultural theorists and translators have taken as a response to “colonization.” Additionally, my discussion will be guided by the following insight: though the concepts of postcoloniality in translation throw new light on the Chinese situation, the uniqueness of the Chinese case forces us to revise the parameters within which postcolonial theorizing functions. To begin with, it must be noted that the terms “postcolonial” and “colonization” are used here in their broader sense, being restricted neither geographically nor temporally. This qualification is important in view of the fact that there has never been any form of territorial colonialism to speak of in the Chinese context; rather, the Chinese have experienced, since the beginning of the century, a partly self-imposed kind of cultural and linguistic colonization. The difference between the Chinese situation and the Indian model, on which most recent postcolonial translation theorizing has been based,² is probably as wide as can be imagined.

More specifically, to explicate the Chinese case I will use the elements that are the focus of analysis by postcolonial critics: the production of (Western) forms of discourse during periods of colonial expansion, the use of universalist discourses to subjugate colonized and marginalized peoples, and the resistance to the apparently well-meaning imperialist projects. Among these, the idea of native (or nativist) resistance will engage the greater part of my attention, especially as many texts, when examined from a postcolonial perspective, reveal the degree to which the “colonized” can react, and are not simply acted upon. The discussion below will centre around the different forms of resistance over a wide historical span, beginning with the 1920s and ending in the present. I will first detail the arguments, made prior to the nineties, against translators contaminating the Chinese language through the introduction of Europeanized structures and expressions. Then a reversal is shown to have occurred in the nineties, the counter-argument being that the language itself, carrying a unique “cultural cargo,” simply cannot be contaminated. It can be said that the resistance prior to the nineties was very much an unconscious one, and by reading the statements of theorists with the benefit of postcolonial theory, we will see issues and approaches not obvious even to the writers of those statements. Subsequent to the work of those theorists, a conscious effort was made to combat “colonization” by European languages, but the still-ongoing resistance was forged in the main by cultural critics for whom translation theorizing was nevertheless of little interest.

Keeping the Language “Pure”

A clear contribution of postcolonial theory to our understanding of Chinese translations is the new light it sheds on existing translated texts. This comes about in an act of rereading: the theory is retroactively applied to a colonial, or even precolonial, period. The body of ideas associated with postcolonial translation theory, when shorn of its temporal-historical dimension, becomes applicable to earlier eras in which postcolonial translation practices, as we know them now, were only nascent. Thus, we can look at the first position, taken by translators and translation theorists in an earlier period, which we could designate as an act of resistance: the call for using a “pure” Chinese language when translating. A dominant trend since 1919 (the year the May Fourth Movement broke out in protest against the unjust treatment given China by the Western powers and Japan in the aftermath of World War I) was to adhere closely to the formal features of source texts and to import, on a huge scale, foreign terms and expressions. For many, this was a means whereby the sterile Chinese language could be rejuvenated. There is no need at this point to pursue at length the continued (and still continuing) debate on the merits and drawbacks of using imported structures and expressions? Suffice it to say that the opponents of linguistic Europeanization

were in fact fighting against a form of colonization; they were attacking a new language emerging primarily out of translations into Chinese, with the following features:

- (1) the insertion of subjects where none was needed;
- (2) the increased use of conjunctions and other linking devices;
- (3) the proliferation of passive structures;
- (4) the appearance of affix-like morphemes like *hua* (“-ize”) and *fei* (“non-”); and
- (5) the widespread use of lengthy modifiers.

From our present-day perspective, it seems clear that the linguistic purists were fighting a losing battle. Lydia Liu has recently proven, with ample documentary evidence, that modern Chinese is a heteroglossic construction, incorporating elements from many languages—though predominantly, we must say, resulting from the aggressive cultural influence of Japanese, English and Russian.⁴ Nevertheless, the resistance efforts merit closer examination, and I will refer specifically to two of these, one in the thirties and another in the sixties.

In the “Language of the Masses Movement” (*dazhongyu yundong*) of the thirties, the target of attack was Europeanized Chinese; spoken Chinese as it was used in people’s daily lives was considered superior because, crude as it was, it was at least more “alive.” There are, however, deeper implications to the debate, for the question of the kind of language fit for use also engaged issues of ethnic and national identity. The leaders of the movement, such as Chen Wangdao (1890-1977) and Ye Shengtao (1894-1988), held that “language, being the supreme symbol of ethnic character,” would be defiled if foreign elements were admitted into it (Fang 1992, 343-48). Like these leaders, Zhao Shuli (1906-1970), a leading novelist of the era, advocated using a new language with Chinese characteristics. He was most adamant about avoiding Europeanizations; for him, every nation and every race has its own special linguistic habits, and it is precisely these habits that distinguish one language from another—and by analogy, one national or ethnic group from another. Zhao believed that Chinese is as fully capable of fulfilling its mission as other languages are of theirs. In fact, he was of the opinion that, of the two archrivals, Europeanized Chinese and classical Chinese (a language comparable to Latin of the Middle Ages, and a language which the vernacular has been trying to replace), the former is much more to be feared.

Translators and translation theorists resisted the Europeanizations as strongly as creative authors (such as Zhao and Ye) did, and as a group, they sought to launch an attack from another front. In a way, Frederick Tsai

(1918-1996) and Yu Kwang-chung’s (1928-) call to “purify” Chinese in the sixties must also be understood as a continuation of the fight against “linguistic colonization” by the West (and Japan). But this time, the alternative suggested was not the spoken language or the language of everybody; rather, it was the traditional vernacular used before the twentieth century. This vernacular was a written language first developed near the end of the ninth century. Unlike classical Chinese, which remained the standard written language through the centuries, the traditional vernacular more nearly resembled the spoken language of the past and was used to serve “low-culture functions”; it was used in popular writings, such as plays and novels, of the late imperial era.⁵ Although the modern Vernacular, having matured slowly since the beginning of the twentieth century, was developed in part from the traditional vernacular, they remain different in significant ways. Primarily, the modern vernacular has incorporated to a substantial degree European structures and expressions. For over a decade, Tsai and Yu issued repeated calls to free the Chinese language from the superimposed foreign influences; put simply, for them the modern vernacular needs to be replaced with the traditional vernacular. By so doing, they opened a new chapter in the history of resistance against Europeanizations.

Tsai and Yu followed nearly parallel careers: both lived in Hong Kong and Taiwan for extended periods of time; both achieved fame as creative writers (the former an essayist, the latter a poet) as well as translators; and both not only translated prodigiously, but also—as translation teachers—raised an entire generation of translators in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Most significantly, both sought to resurrect classic vernacular Chinese novels, such as *Dream of the Red Chamber* (eighteenth century), as models of language used in traditional times that ought to be emulated by translators (see Tsai 1972, 94-95). Though their views did have a lasting impact, they were not without their detractors. For instance, Frederick Tsai’s stand was criticized as impossible to maintain consistently by one of the most influential translation scholars from Taiwan (see Huang 1974). Citing copious examples from Tsai, he shows why the existence of a plural form for “it” (*tamen*) is indispensable, and denounces as impracticable all of Tsai’s suggested alternatives (like repeating the antecedent or not making a distinction between the singular and plural forms of pronouns). For him, all efforts to counter Europeanizations can be half-hearted at best. All in all, it did not seem as if the purists of the sixties were able to go very far in their attack on Europeanizations.

The Nineties: Foregrounding Chineseness

While efforts at defending the Chinese language against the onslaught of Europeanized translations have continued into the present, since the

eighties the signs of an alternative mode of resistance have become more and more conspicuous. This second “position” came into existence as a consequence of the recent introduction into Chinese critical and academic circles of new theories dubbed “post-isms”: postmodernism, postcolonialism, post-Enlightenment ideas, postcolonialism and so on. If Chinese culture in the May Fourth period (from 1919 to roughly the end of the twenties) can be said to have been “colonized” for the first time, then Deng Xiaoping’s era from the late seventies to 1997—divided by the 1989 Tiananmen Incident into the “New Era” (prior to 1989) and the “Post-New Era” (after 1989 till his death)—has witnessed a “second colonization.” Wang Jing has called this period China’s “second renaissance”; the similarities that it bears to the late 1910s and 1920s are unmistakable, for both of these eras saw a massive importation of Western ideas. In the late eighties and early nineties, in particular, large-scale translation projects were carried out on key works of Western theory; what modernity meant for China was intensely discussed, and interest in comparative studies of Chinese and Western cultures flourished.⁶ The spirit of the age was such that culture, native as well as foreign, figured prominently in any discourse of contemporary relevance. It is in this context that linguists and cultural theorists have directly and indirectly brought a postcolonial perspective to issues of translation.

What we have referred to as a second position in the reaction against Western linguistic imperialism was taken largely by linguists and cultural theorists, but not translation scholars and practitioners. It is apparent that, the current situation in China being what it is, theorizing about the cultural role that translation is to play will originate with those who grapple with Western theory, rather than those who are primarily translators. In what follows, I will discuss the views of a linguist, a cultural critic and a translation theorist. All three provide perspectives on translation (indirectly, in the case of the first two) that can be appropriately termed “postcolonialist.”

Shen Xiaolong (1952-), currently Professor of Chinese at Fudan University, Shanghai, is a staunch exponent of a new approach to analyzing the Chinese language that discards Western linguistic models (see Shen 1992; 1995a). He set out to tackle the failure of Western linguistic theory to explain adequately the peculiarities of the Chinese language in his epoch-making study *Interpreting Language* (1992). For him, the time had come to revamp the entire Chinese linguistic tradition of the twentieth century, which began with the misguided attempt by Ma Jianzhong (1845-1900) in the late nineteenth century to borrow wholesale the Western model, and impose it on the Chinese language. The experience of the last ninety years—especially the insuperable difficulties in analyzing Chinese syntax—has shown that it is futile to try to account for features in the Chinese language simply

by theories that were developed in the West with reference to Indo-European languages.

The reception of Shen Xiaolong’s ideas, however, has been extremely mixed. Considered currently as the leader of one of the three main schools of “cultural linguistics,” a new field of study born of the mid-eighties, Shen is sharply differentiated from those cultural linguists whose focus is on the synchronic and diachronic study of how culture influences language and vice versa, and from those who seek to unravel the “cultural content” of a language (Chinese in this case) through an examination of how language adapts to social and communicative needs. Best known for the way in which he highlights language as a system of signs peculiar only to the culture in which it finds itself, a system understandable only by those using the language, Shen has been praised as the “hope of Chinese linguistics.” Yet at the same time, others have openly derided him, saying that he is not worthy of serious attention. The debate on Shen’s true significance (or lack thereof) reflects, in fact, an atmosphere where linguists are eager to revoke Western linguistic methods that have been applied indiscriminately over the past century, and to establish cultural linguistics as the avenue for “rejuvenating” linguistic study in China. Whether they choose to agree or disagree with Shen, there is little doubt that Shen’s system has arisen out of a unique historical—shall we say, postcolonial—situation?

Yet in stressing the need to sinicize the study of Chinese grammar, Shen is in fact furthering the cause of linguists of the thirties, like Fu Donghua (1893-1971) and Chen Wangdao, though he gives a new twist to the model being constructed (see Shen 1992, 416-17). Freely adopting terms from traditional Chinese aesthetics,* he notes the following peculiarities of the Chinese language:

- (1) the preference for economy of expression (*jian*);
- (2) the aspiration toward achieving phonological harmony;
- (3) the close attention to balance between empty (*xu*) and concrete (*shi*) words; and
- (4) the tendency to use the various parts of speech freely, so long as what is said makes sense.

He concludes in *Interpreting Language* that such peculiarities reveal the extent to which Chinese can be said to favour “associative thinking,” allow the speaker’s intentions to shape the language and generally privilege content (or “spirit”) over form. This partly explains why the language does not fare well when Western linguistic models, with their strength in formal analysis, are applied. He argues (elsewhere) that the model of “subject-verb-object” ought to be abandoned in the analysis of Chinese sentences, since

the clue to understanding Chinese syntax lies in explicating the use of “phrases” (*jududuan*), the fundamental unit of the Chinese sentence (see Shen 1995b, 37-39).⁹ The essence of Shen’s argument, which evinces a strong cultural and ethnic bias, adumbrated repeatedly in the dozens of articles and books that he has written, is that a language is inseparable from the culture in which it is nourished and that “when [Chinese] linguistics is severed from Chinese culture, the maternal source of its being, it becomes stale and lifeless” (1990, 75). At one point in *Interpreting Language*, Shen talks about Europeanizations imported through translations, but curiously, he considers them to be present mainly in non-literary writings such as those of a technical or political nature; Chinese literature has not been much affected (1992, 451-52). While Shen seems to be only tangentially interested in translation, he puts forth a theory with serious implications for translation studies.

A similar statement could be made about Zhang Yiwu (1962-), presently Associate Professor of Chinese at Beijing University, and foremost among scholars who have applied a postcolonialist approach to literary studies in China. Zhang was one of the most powerful voices in the early nineties against the Western presence in Chinese intellectual life, which, after all, has been pervasive since the May Fourth era. In contrast to the earlier opponents of Europeanizations in translations, he fights as much against cultural as against linguistic “colonization.” In the first two chapters of his book *Exploring the Margins* (1993), he describes his resistance strategy: to fight back against Western ideological encroachment on its own terms. He points out that while Derrida advocates breaking down binary oppositions, the opposition between the First World and the Third World is one that has yet to be broken down and that China can be a test-case of how a new kind of cultural theory and discourse, pertinent to a Third World country, can be fruitfully developed (Zhang 1993, 14).

In chapter three, in many ways the central chapter of the book, Zhang Yiwu elaborates on a key point that Shen Xiaolong had already made: a language must not be seen as a mere sign system, divorced from the culture in which it is embedded. Reiterated time and again by Zhang is the idea of the mother tongue (note the maternal metaphor, used also by Shen) and the ever-present, ever-powerful “collective memory” that it invokes for every Chinese. For the Chinese language carries a cultural residue, accumulated over a historical span of 5,000 years, that can never be erased in spite of overwhelming Western influence and violence done to the language through the importation of foreign words, structures and modes of expression. Like his predecessors who opposed Europeanizations in translation, Zhang sourly notes the irreparable damage done to the native tongue; for him, the impact is seen clearly in the realm of literature, for the language of literature is after

all “the distilled essence of the mother-tongue, the agent for the spread of culture” (66). Thus Chinese literature becomes relegated to a subordinate and marginalized position, and pales beside Western literatures.

Unlike his anti-Europeanization predecessors, however, Zhang does not propose ways of further moulding the vernacular to serve **as** a medium of expression **as** effectively **as** Europeanized Chinese does. The attempt to enrich the Chinese language through the incorporation of elements from “real” spoken language is, for him, **as** ill-advised **as** the belief—first voiced by scholars like Hu Shi (1891-1962)—that this same language can be improved through the incorporation of translated foreign models. **As** a method of resistance, Zhang advocates using a new kind of written Chinese, for which he coins the term “post-vernacular” (*haobaihua*). Drawing upon examples from works by major authors on the Mainland and in Taiwan since the eighties, he discusses the possibility of re-introducing elements of the classical language, denigrated since the May Fourth period, into contemporary written Chinese. It is his opinion that the classical language, the more refined, terse and compact language of the traditional literati that served high-culture functions for two millennia (from the second century BC to the end of the nineteenth century), should be given a greater role to play. Zhang sums up the postmodern view of language (with a Derridean touch) embodied by the postvernacular thus:

[It] recognizes the fissure, the cleavage between the signifier and the signified, between language and reality. Language is no longer subordinate to the object of signification; it does not connect with reality; it is simply a moving and free-floating signifying system. (71)

Zhang takes pains to point out that his advocacy of the postvernacular does not amount to a rediscovery of (or a return to) the classical language, or the defeat of the vernacular language in the competition for ascendancy. What he stresses is the potency of the classical language **as** a carrier of cultural residue and its possible contribution to the emergence of a new mode of expression. Furthermore, Europeanizations are accepted, if only because it **is** no longer possible, in these *fin de siècle* times, to talk of completely purging them from the Chinese language. But Zhang is far from **arguing** for Europeanizations, as a wave of translation theorists in the twenties and thirties, such **as** Lu Xun (1881-1936) and Zhou Zuoren (1885-1968), did. The latter two did not think that the Chinese language was adequate for its purposes, whereas Zhang holds the opposite view and revalorizes the classical language, saying that it is more than adequate. Zhang’s position is also different from those who suggested that the Chinese language should be completely romanized (see Qu 1989, 3: 280-309)

or replaced with Esperanto, the “World-language.”¹⁰ He restores dignity to the Chinese language while recognizing the difficulty of keeping it pure.

The postvernacular, then, is to be a hybrid language that admits elements of diverse sorts. It is reminiscent of the “in-between” language that Samia Mehrez describes in her study of Francophone North African texts in the postcolonial period—a “newly forged language” that is capable of “exploding and confounding different symbolic worlds and separate systems of signification in order to create a mutual interdependence and intersignification” (1992, 121-22). Seen from this perspective, a postcolonial critic (or a “nativist semiotician,” as he has been called in China) such as Zhang Yiwu can be said to have moved to the other end of the spectrum on the issue of the proper language to be used for translations; as opposed to linguistic purity, he favours hybridity. In fact, the position that Zhang assumes is postcolonial in two senses: his recognition of hybridity¹¹ and his refusal to accept the modern vernacular—very much a “colonial product”—as a replacement language for classical Chinese.

The views of Shen Xiaolong and Zhang Yiwu furnish a context for better understanding the recent work of Liu Miqing (1939-), our third perspective. A graduate of Beijing University and currently Associate Professor of Translation at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Liu has written prodigiously on Chinese-English translation and to date has authored five books, which, taken together, present a systematic and coherent body of ideas on translation unmatched by any other theorist in this century. His earlier full-length studies deal variously with the translation of different genres, slurs for translating from English into Chinese, and contrastive study of the two languages.¹² However, *Present-Day Translation Studies* (1993) (a Taiwan reprint of a mainland version published in 1990) is by common consent the most representative of Liu’s works; it proffers a comprehensive re-examination of issues pertinent to translation theory and summarizes Liu’s positions on certain aspects of translation theory, such as the basic operating mechanisms in translating, translation as a mode of thinking, the stages in the translation process, translatability and untranslatability, and the translation of style. This work was followed in 1995 by the publication of *Aesthetic Studies of Translation*, in which the aesthetics of translation (already touched upon in one chapter of *Present-Day Translation Studies*) are singled out for separate and detailed treatment.

As Liu Miqing himself has noted, his complete oeuvre forms a closely knit system that attempts to formulate a translation theory for modern China.¹³ As early as 1987, at the first Conference on Translation Theory in China, he expressed the need for “a Chinese translation theory,” and this issue is brought up again in his *Present-Day Translation Studies*. Stating at

the outset that there are no global translation theories and that all theorizing can only proceed from knowledge of a pair—or a very limited number—of languages, Liu advocates developing translation theory from the actual experience of translating from or into the Chinese language:

Undoubtedly, the basic model for translation theory in China should begin and end with our *mother-tongue*... We neglect at our own peril the distribution of lexical meanings and functions of the Chinese language. With this consideration in mind, we can summarily call this basic model a “descriptive semantic-functional model.” (my emphasis) (1993, 30)

The maternal metaphor may or may not have been intended, but we already have here the basic ingredients of a counter-discourse. To be sure, Liu proceeds to expatiate on the specificity of the Chinese experience of translation by discussing the special features of the Chinese language in terms similar to those used by Shen Xiaolong.

Most notably, Liu stresses the idea that the Chinese language, unlike Indo-European languages, is composed of “sentence sections,” which are the primary building blocks (*bankuai*) for clauses, sentences and even paragraphs. These sections are strung together rather loosely, as aggregates or conglomerates, and cohere around the “topic” or the thought to be expressed. It is in this sense that “spirit controls form” (to borrow Chinese terminology). By contrast, in Indo-European languages formal features play a significant role in sentence making, and instead of building blocks, a language like English is structured by means of “chain connections” (Liu 1993, 33-35). While clearly an oversimplification, this mode of describing the difference of the “language of the colonized” from the “colonizer’s language” is gaining popularity in the discourse of societies emerging from the colonial yoke. Basil Hatim has noted how the Arabs—like the Chinese, perhaps—have been described as tending “to fit the thought to the word... rather than the word to the thought”; for them, “the words become the substitutes of thought, and not their representative” (1997, 161). One may add that, besides this, the vagueness of thought that linguists have identified in Arabic is almost comparable to the so-called “expressive” nature of the Chinese language, which is prone to present ideas in a cinematographic manner. Elsewhere in the same book, Liu also opposes the form-oriented and analytical features typical of the English language against the thought-oriented and synthetic power of Chinese. Such overgeneralizations about languages are, of course, quite dangerous, but one notices readily the “strategic” function they can serve in postcolonial discourse. Indeed, Liu’s presentation of the Chinese language as different, but distinct, from other languages contrasts remarkably with the denigration of the language as inferior and inadequate by men of letters in the twenties, such as Lu Xun.

Seen in a broader context, Liu Miqing's desire to theorize about translation on the basis of an assumed "equality" between Chinese and Western languages can be understood as the cumulative result of decades of thinking "positively" about their mother tongue on the part of translators. On the question of the perniciousness of Europeanizations also, Liu stands closer to his postcolonial contemporaries (such as Zhang Yiwu) than to the harsh critics of Europeanized Chinese (such as Frederick Tsai) of earlier decades. In a brief section on translationese in *Present-Day Translation Studies*, he calls the introduction of foreign terms and structures through translation an "alienation" process through which languages can reach even higher planes of perfection. This seems to point toward the more radical position that he takes in *Aesthetic Studies of Translation*. In this, his most recent book, Liu initiates a completely new view of translation as an activity, developing a discourse on translation that can be seen as almost counter-hegemonic. He blends traditional Chinese aesthetics with Western approaches to translation in order to rewrite translation theory from a Chinese perspective.

In striking contrast to his earlier works, which testify to his familiarity with Western translation theory, *Aesthetic Studies of Translation* is sprinkled everywhere with references to seminal texts by Chinese aestheticians, from Laozi and Liu Xie (c. 465-522), Zhong Rong (c. 465-518), Sikong Tu (837-809) to Wang Guowei (1877-1927). Among these figures, Laozi is raised to an eminent position. His dictum, from *Daodejing* [*The Classic of the Dao*], that "beautiful words are not truthful; truthful words are not beautiful" is cited time and again to clarify the debate between fidelity to the original and artistry in translating. Concepts corresponding to modern Western reception/semiotic theory are sought from Liu Xie and *The Book of Rites*—the latter, it is said, addressed two millennia ago the methods by which the translator "decodes the feelings" expressed in a literary text (Liu 1995, 200). In a lengthy section on the rendition of the source-text style, ten different styles of writing—reserved, bold, refined, natural, adorned, diluted, light-hearted, forceful, solid, humorous—are expounded with reference to at least one example of Chinese-English or English-Chinese translation in each case (see Liu 1995, 213-38). In line with the sinicizing approach adopted throughout the book, the "Chinese" origins of each style are documented with quotations from traditional Chinese aesthetics texts.

If we understand postcolonial discourse broadly and see it as essentially a question of positionality—that is, where one places oneself in relation to existing modes of interpreting reality—then Liu can be seen as standing alongside Shen and Zhang in denying hegemonic narratives of what the Chinese language is like, and how translation should be understood.

The basic strategy of resistance deployed by all three is to foreground Chineseness; by pointing out alternative (read "nativist") modes of understanding and contesting prevailing (read "Western") paradigms, they have effectively intervened into and altered perceptions of what the language of translation should be. Insofar as they have voiced similar oppositions to the epistemic violence done to the Chinese language, the earlier theorists can be regarded as postcolonialist, though they may have worked in the "colonial" period. One phenomenon worth pondering is that the resistance efforts were strongest at precisely those times when "colonization" proceeded most ferociously—first in the twenties, immediately after the May Movement, then in the eighties and nineties, when China was again opened to the outside world in the era of Deng Xiaoping's reforms. Though the occurrence of resistance is surely determined by many factors, the history of cultural resistance in China suggests that feelings for sinicization are most intense where Westernization poses the greatest threat (in the first case) and the impact of postcolonial thought is seen most powerfully not in the place of its origin, but in its place of destination, at which it arrives with all its colonial appendages (in the second case). Or there might even be a paradoxical love-hate relationship between the colonizers and the colonized, rendering it necessary to rethink the myth of the inevitable confrontation—or opposition—between the two.

Conclusion: A Third Position?

It may be worth our while, in our concluding remarks, to consider the possibility of a third position of resistance that we have not examined because it, paradoxically, is tantamount to a position of non-resistance. The proponents of Europeanized Chinese came close to endorsing this position, though none said so explicitly, and I will call this the "culturalist" argument for Europeanization/colonization. In her brilliant essay on postcoloniality in Hong Kong in the run-up to 1997, Rey Chow denounces the tendency on the part of some scholars to dilute the specificity of the term "postcolonialism" by allowing it to be construed as synonymous with "postmodernism." She stresses that postcolonialism as a body of ideas has its special value in cultural analysis, a value which is revealed through postcolonialism's application in individual cases (see Chow 1992). If Hong Kong is one such case, then China must be another. The uniqueness of the Chinese situation needs to be taken into consideration if one is to talk about postcoloniality in the Chinese context.

In the first place, with the exception of Hong Kong, China has—strictly speaking—never been territorially occupied by a foreign power. As a consequence, though Western imperialism did indeed have an impact on

Chinese life for the greater part of the twentieth century, colonization can only be conceived in cultural terms. Unlike India and most Southeast Asian countries (e.g., Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, Malaysia and the Philippines), mainland China has never come under French, British or American domination; thus, postcolonial theory may seem to furnish a less-than-perfect “tool” when extended to the Chinese case. Second, it must be admitted that China was (and still is) a cultural colonizer herself. Through the centuries Chinese culture has penetrated deeply into Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia; this is borne out by the huge amount of translation of the Chinese classics as well as popular Chinese literature into Vietnamese, Thai, Malay, Makassarese and Madurese.¹⁴ How does one apply postcolonial theory to a colonized country that is at the same time a colonizer?

The actual situation seems to be that the majority of Chinese translators today use Europeanized structures and expressions almost unthinkingly; this goes against what the translation theorists and cultural critics mentioned above have proposed as “proper.” Of course it is true that in China as elsewhere, nations are losing their battle against the “linguistic colonization” by English (already on its way to becoming our *lingua franca*) and against the cultural dominance of the West. But the complicity of Chinese translators with Western colonizers can be looked at from a different angle. Among the Chinese there has always been an acute consciousness of China’s positional superiority vis-à-vis the West. It is well known that, through the centuries of China’s history, loanwords (from Mongolian, Pali, Sanskrit and Tibetan, to name just a few) have been ceaselessly absorbed into the Chinese language—just as non-Chinese ethnic groups were assimilated by the Chinese—and linguists have demonstrated that lexical items from diverse languages (such as Hindi) entered the Chinese lexicographical stock via translations. What is linguistic is also cultural. The culturalist viewpoint is precisely that Chinese culture is all-inclusive, and other cultures contribute to it like tributaries to the mainstream. (Similar arguments have been advanced by countries other than China. Of India it has been said that “the amazing capacity to assimilate alien cultural, linguistic, and literary elements is a unique and essential feature of Indian history” [Dev 1997, 4001].)

Following this line of thinking, Europeanizations need not be feared. The language, as much as the culture, is powerful enough to absorb alien influences. The recent arguments for the superiority of the Chinese language must be read against this background of linguistic confidence, asserted in the face of the irreversible trend toward incorporating Europeanizations. The paramount concern for many linguistic researchers since the eighties has been to prove that the Chinese tonal system is better

(than the non-tonal system of Western languages); monosyllabic characters lend themselves more readily to computerization; the flexibility in Chinese word-formation is an advantage; the absence of inflections is a positive feature, as is the presence of words serving as more than one part of speech; and the use of ideograms is preferred to that of phonetic or alphabetic writing. Not unexpectedly, against such arguments, the “colonizers” have fought back: recently Wm. C. Hymes debunked the myth of the usefulness of the character-based Chinese writing system, along with much fallacious reasoning accrued around Chinese as a language.¹⁵ In spite of that, however, such rediscovered confidence has continued to grow in China, reflecting what for one critic is a “giant consciousness”—“a deeply seated superiority complex... that dictated the sovereignty of China’s cultural subjectivity even when it was conscious of its debt to the Western discourse” (Wang 1996, 169).

This is, then, the “colonizer’s position,” never explicitly presented as such, but perhaps always lurking somewhere in the Chinese subconscious as a viable position to be taken. The unspoken faith in the power of the Chinese language is reminiscent of what Goethe said in regard to German: “The force of a language is not to reject the foreign, but to devour it” (qtd. in Berman 1992, 1). This is also tantamount to a third position of resistance. Diametrically opposed to the first, it is similar in certain ways to the second. It is founded on an unshaken belief in the superiority of Chinese culture, and in China’s ability to emerge as the host of the cultural exchange process that we call translation.

Notes

1. See Wang (1995) for a summary of these trends.
2. See, in particular, Niranjana (1992).
3. See Chan (1996) for a survey of the Europeanization debate.
4. For examples of Japanese, English, French, German and Russian terms that have entered the Chinese language in the past two centuries, see Lydia Liu (1995), 284-301, 343-78.
5. For a description in English of the differences between classical Chinese, the traditional vernacular and the modern vernacular, see Chen (1993).
6. Wang (1996), 48-52, depicts at some length the intellectual atmosphere of the eighties, calling it a “culture fever.” The impact of the West is clearly observable in this “second colonization.”
7. This is an aspect of “culture fever” that Wang (1996) has not considered; her emphasis is on the literary scene. In the main, the reaction against Western linguistics takes the form of a refusal to continue using the analytical methods of the structuralists and an attempt to highlight the “humanistic” study of the Chinese language.

8. Shen makes abundant reference to Liu Xie's *Wenxin diuolong* [*The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*], but other masters of Chinese aesthetics from traditional times are also called upon—among them the ancient philosopher Laozi and the Song dynasty poetry critic Yan Yu (fl. 1180-1235).
9. Shen ends this article by stressing the need “to develop a linguistic theory with Chinese characteristics,” 41.
10. The promotion of Esperanto was most fervent during the early twentieth century; among the better known advocates were Ba Jin and Cai Yuanpei. For some time there was a craze for learning Esperanto among Chinese intellectuals in Shanghai. An abundance of literary works were translated from Esperanto by Zhou Zuoren and others, and an exchange of views concerning the use of this “World-language” that lasted for two years was documented in the 1917-1919 issues of the journal *Xin qingnian* [*New Youth*]. See Hou (1926) for a contemporary account.
11. The leading spokesman for the link between postcoloniality and hybridity is Homi Bhabha. See Bhabha (1994), 212-35.
12. These are *Wenti yufanyi* [*Genre and Translation*] (1985), *Ying Han fanyijineng xunlian shouce* [*Training Handbook for English-Chinese Translation*] (1987) and *Han Ying duibi yanjiu yufanyi* [*CE-EC Contrastive Studies and Translation*] (1991).
13. Liu Miqing (1989), 12-15, also stresses the importance of building a Chinese translation theory. Another theorist making the same point is Luo Xinzhang; see Luo (1984), 1-19. For a recent discussion of Liu's research, see Lei (1993).
14. For an indispensable reference work on translations of Chinese works in East Asian and Southeast Asian countries, see Salmon (1987).
15. For arguments in defence of Chinese superiority, see Xu (1992), 26-41. For the Western response, see Hannas (1997), 174-204.

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