Encounters with Cross-Cultural Conflicts in Translation

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Drawing on the distinction in translation between soft and hard conflicts, this paper contends that in dealing with soft conflicts, conflict fluency is the preferred strategy for Chinese-English translators, whilst non-interference is the favoured option for those who work into Chinese. With regard to potential hard conflicts conflict fluency is an essential. A translator requires mindful awareness of potential conflicts and cultural difference, but beyond this there are no identifiable off the peg optimal solutions, and the individual has his/her own way in tackling intercultural conflicts.

Key words**:** cross-cultural conflicts; translation

It is accepted in Translation Studies that translation is a trans-cultural project that travels between languages and cultures and brings about encounters between different values, viewpoints, and ideologies (Lefevere and Bassnett 2001; Snell-Hornby 2001, etc.). This implies that translation can be a site of conflicts and misunderstandings as well as one of communication and understanding.

This essay explores the influences of conflicts in a translational context on the production of translated versions as regards the direction of translation and the asymmetrical power relations between cultures. It examines the performance of conflict-conscious and conflict-unconscious translators by analyzing examples of contemporary Chinese-English and English-Chinese translations.

1. Culture, Translation and Conflicts

Culture, being a sense-making, viewpoint-forming and behaviour-determining system, can be defined as "a set of internalized understandings and ways of interacting with the world" (LeBaron 2003: 42). Snell-Hornby has rightfully contended that

> The concept of culture as a totality of knowledge, proficiency and perception is fundamental in our approach to translation. If language is an integral part of culture, the translator needs not only proficiency in two languages, he must also be at home in two cultures. In other words, he must be bilingual and bicultural. (Snell-Hornby 2001: 42)

In this sense, translation is regarded as a process offering "a means of studying cultural interaction" (Lefevere and Bassnett 2001: 6), and a translator is regarded as a mediator or communicator between cultures, which means that the translator must manipulate differences, whether they concern fusion, infiltration, recognition, understanding, acculturation or tension, constraints, hatred and hostility. Said (1993: xxv) has noted that in our age, "all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic". This is the natural outcome of the accumulative influences of countless translated versions on their respective target cultures, the drive for which comes from no other than the conflicts in translation because paradoxically, it is conflicts that upset the conceit of a culture in most cases. Being confronted with conflicts, a closed culture may be jolted out of its former narcissistic illusion or purposeful isolation in the end. In this respect, translators and translations play an indispensable role in manipulating conflicts and bringing about deeper understanding between cultures.

The word *conflict* conjures up negative associations - displeasure, discomfort, hurt feelings, loss of face, hostility and violence, etc. In the cultural arena "Conflict need not be openly acknowledged or named to be real", "but it must be felt and experienced before it takes on form" (LeBaron 2003: 28).

Though cultural conflict derives from cultural differences, it "does not emerge from every difference "[…] Only when some aspect of our differences becomes salient and nudges the way we hold our identity or meaning does difference translate into conflict" (*ibid.*). Once a potential cultural conflict becomes apparent then it cannot be ignored.

According to LeBaron (*ibid.:* 117-134), the management of cultural conflict involves four steps: naming, framing, blaming and taming. Naming will determine whether a conflict can be labeled as such, whether or not it is acknowledged. Framing refers to delimitation of the form, site and those parties involved in a conflict. Blaming includes all the approaches and decision processes that help to resolve the problems caused by such a conflict. Taming indicates the settlement or removing of a conflict. This four-step method is helpful in the sense that it reminds us to check the source of a conflict before we decide to do something about it when cross-cultural transmission in translation is concerned.

As LeBaron has suggested, in this global age, our world needs more than goodwill and well-meaning intentions to deal with the many kinds of conflicts which can arise. These can stem from differences in cultural tradition, system of values, ideological tendencies, and the like. Because of the cultural specificity of translation as cross-cultural communication, shapes and forms taken on by conflicts in a translational context must be analysed separately.

A variety of types of cross-cultural conflicts such as cultural, social and ideological ones can be found in a translational context. These conflicts form a continuum, ranging from a minimum of inner tension of an individual involved in the process of translation to a war or an outbreak of violence. In this sense, conflicts in translation are not always explicit and conspicuous.

A conflict can be termed a *soft* conflict if resentment on the part of the receiving audience of a given translation is kept private and invisible or, even though the resentment is shown, the disagreement is not serious enough to induce formal display of displeasure by making public speeches, publicizing various forms of writing, or resorting to force. On the other hand, a conflict can be termed a *hard* conflict if it incites social reactions not only from independent individuals but also from members of one or more than one social group or power institution, or more people on a larger scale, and the negative sentiment is no longer suppressed.

If agreement on this classification of soft and hard conflicts is reached, it can be safely said that a soft conflict is more likely to be found in a translational context that involves either literary, academic, or legal texts, or in audiovisual, advertising, or other practical products such as travel brochures, documents for the local branches of multinationals, and manuals for electronic products. If the target culture is subordinate in comparison with the source, then cultural concessions are usually expected from the receiving audience, so even if a translator foresees potential soft conflicts, s/he may choose to do nothing. Explanations are provided in the endnotes or footnotes at best where the translator sees fit. If the target culture is a dominant one, the translator may attempt to minimize or eliminate possible conflicts, unless there is a good reason for him or her to leave them alone or to highlight the textual segments that might provoke conflicts. Sometimes, soft conflicts in a translational context may rouse verbal or written objection, or even invite interference of censorship, which may facilitate the transformation of soft conflicts into hard ones. But later changes in the indigenous ideological climate may tell a different story. Also, there are times when the source author is displeased with the rewriting or omitting strategies adopted by a translator to diminish, minimize or eliminate possible soft conflicts. The author may express his or her displeasure openly, and this has nothing to do with the status of a language or culture.

Hard conflicts are more likely to arise when translation concerns international affairs or diplomatic events. Hard conflicts are often easily provoked by translational misinformation or misunderstanding at press conferences, during public speeches made by national leaders, or on similar occasions. It follows that sometimes, translation plays a part in building up ill-grounded hostility towards and misconception of another country or an immigrant community as an enemy or adversary; other times, translation sends false messages of compromise or concession. Since the linguistic

competence and the political awareness of translators vary, it is possible for a translator to overlook or ignore a potential hard conflict and fail to present it properly in the translated version. Also, a translator may wish to avoid a hard conflict and choose to make changes or omissions against the wish or demand of the source author, the speaker, or the target audience. Such a choice is usually greeted by protest or objection because, generally, people wish to make potential hard conflicts known as it is one of the most effective ways to raise a problem or to display their discontent.

Even if s/he has sufficient goodwill to avoid a conflict in his or her professional practice, the translator is not always required to minimize or remove the conflict.

2. Globalization, Soft Conflicts and Translation in China

"Globalization is generally perceived as the result of the collapse of Soviet-style socialism, as well as the unprecedented expansion of transnational capitalism" (Liu 1998: 164). Against this context, the transnational flow of products, technology, capital and information has set up the site for the confrontation of different values, fashions, life styles, and ideological tendencies of different cultures, which gives expression to new forms of conflicts and frictions between the self and the other or the local and the global. It is in this sense that Fredric Jameson has claimed that "globalization is a communicational concept, which alternatively masks and transmits cultural or economic meanings" (Jameson 1998: 55).

It is unsurprising in this global age to find that China is caught between two conflicting pressures: the cultural domination of foreign elements over the indigenous on the material level and the desire to preserve traditional Chinese culture. What a translator chooses to do, no matter how seemingly trivial, may have far-reaching consequences because the intermediary role of translation activities determines the interactions between foreign and native elements on all of the three levels of culture—material, institutional, and spiritual.

In China, as elsewhere, people's views on *globalization* are divided. Some regard it as an economic phenomenon connected with development of the local economy, progress towards global unification, and the narrowing of the economic gap between developing and developed districts. Others emphasise negative aspects, such as the big powers' economic exploitation, cultural domination and political hegemony over less developed nations. The position which a translator adopts can be crucial with regard to the selection of a text to be translated, the choice of translational strategies and devices, or the potential impact of the translation. Translators' choices may have ideological implications for the changes or fluctuations in the social life of a given culture.

Both soft and hard conflicts in translation pose challenges for translators

sandwiched between Chinese and Western cultures, as ideas and values in the two cultures differ widely. But nobody can deny that numerous Chinese versions of Western texts have contributed to many social changes in contemporary China, most of which have been motivated by soft conflicts foreseen yet left alone in cases of English-Chinese translation. This widely accepted strategy of inaction on potential soft conflicts, which has been followed by most translators since the reform and opening up of China in 1979, actually expects the Chinese audience to be cooperative in the cultural process of shedding its old self.

As a result, ongoing social changes can be observed in almost every aspect of Chinese culture, including customs, life styles, values or outlooks on life, moral principles, ways of thinking, legal practices, and the norms of scholarly writing. Any Chinese citizen born before the 1980s has witnessed and experienced the foregoing changes. Activated by the desire to share the same discourse as the Western world in fields such as law, science, finance and business, many changes and reforms concerning norms, practice, terminology, and so on have been initiated by professional translations in these fields. Influenced by the large number of translations of Western audiovisual products, the Chinese no longer stick to the thrifty life style which had previously been cherished as a part of the Confucian heritage. Parents of young persons no longer overreact to premarital sex, and a divorce is no longer regarded a shameful thing or scandal that needs to be discouraged at all costs by family members, close friends, or even immediate superiors of those parties directly involved. Fascinated by adaptation of translated versions of Western commercials and audiovisual products incorporated as part of the marketing efforts of local businesses ever since the 1980s, nowadays an urban bride usually wears a Western-style white wedding dress on her wedding ceremony instead of a traditional red gown and an urban resident will celebrate his or her birthday by the side of a candled birthday cake rather than a bowl of traditional birthday noodles. Acculturated by the translations of Western literary works (canonical and popular) as well as audiovisual products, Chinese people's aesthetic taste for architecture, household decoration, and even feminine or masculine beauty have changed.

One of the distinctive features of globalization is the dawning of the era of cultural consumption on a global scale which is characterized by the centralization of popular cultural products and the decentralization of elite cultural products, which overturns and disorders traditional value systems. China is undergoing wide cultural transformation, replacing the old value system with a plurality or diversification of values, and a translator has to tackle problems sensitively.

There is a notable contrast between the large number of translations of English source texts into Chinese and the small number of translations of

Chinese source texts into English. Furthermore most of the English texts which are translated into Chinese could be categorised as either having English canonical literature as their source or else stem from popular culture. By contrast the small number of Chinese texts translated into English originate, in the main, either from Chinese canonical literature or from introductory or informative pieces about China. This can be explained as a function of differences in status between Chinese culture and the Anglo-American counterparts. Though the Chinese-speaking population is large, Chinese culture is much less influential than are the cultures of English-speaking nations.

This gulf in status between the cultures determines the wide variation in the number of translations initiated in the different language directions. It can be seen that as English culture is so dominant the underlying purpose of many Chinese-English translations is to win recognition or understanding for Chinese culture. Conversely the West provides a variety of models representing dominant ideologies of the Anglo-American countries. Many English-Chinese translations are initiated to exert influences or induce change. Thus, the large number of publications of translations of English source texts into Chinese falls into two categories. Either the source text refers to popular cultural products - and thus serves as the vanguard of cultural infiltration, or else the text appertains to Western canonical literature - so serving as the vehicle of Anglo-American ideology. On the other hand, English translations of Chinese canonical texts and introductory or informative pieces are performed in the main for the exportation of Chinese cultural elements, in order to allow Western readers to obtain a wider understanding of Chinese culture.

A more fundamental reason for the glaring discrepancy between the number of translations which take place in each language direction lies in the difference in the distribution of cultural and educational attainment between the populations of the two cultures. If the readers of a given culture are grouped by their level of education (i.e. low, medium, or high), the shape of the cultural distribution mode of China can be compared to that of a pyramid - those with low levels of education are positioned at the bottom, medium levels in the middle, and readers with high levels of education on the top[1]. China has only had a modern educational system for little more than 100 years[2]. This pyramid shape to a Chinese model of cultural distribution means that translations must be adapted to the cultural needs of the majority of readers, who have relatively low levels of education. Most of the texts themselves are connected to commercial or recreational cultural products.

The shape of the mode of cultural distribution in Anglo-American countries can be compared to that of an olive or oval. The relatively small number of readers with low levels of education are positioned at the bottom, the majority of readers with medium levels of education are in the middle,

and the minority who have high levels of education are on the top. This 'olive' shaped model means that the translations of Chinese texts can be targeted at Anglo-American readers with medium levels of education. Professionally accomplished, satisfied with their social status, and well-educated, they turn to translations of foreign texts out of sheer curiosity or for professional ends.

The so-called Chinese situation of 'cultural deficit' as regards the dominance in production of English-Chinese translations over Chinese-English ones will be difficult to change because both the Chinese 'pyramid' shaped model of cultural distribution and the Western 'olive' shaped model are relatively stable and help to consolidate the cultural mentality on a national scale. Besides, the imbalance of translation production is further guaranteed in English-speaking countries because the olive-shaped model is more resistant to external pressure. China could not hope to balance the cultural deficit of its ill-educated masses in the near future. This implies that translations of canonical literary texts must cater for the prevailing tastes of Western readers, whilst the selection of Western popular cultural texts to be translated should consider the impact of possible cultural domination on ideological tendencies.

3. Soft Conflicts and Chinese-English Translations

In a translational context, soft conflicts often derive from cultural differences in value systems, social conventions and ways of thinking. If the target culture is dominant, then the translator will have to handle the target text carefully to minimise potential problems of miscomprehension, cultural discomfort or resistance on the part of the receiver. Notwithstanding the fact that the source text may appear to be purpose-free, the translating act and target text are purpose-bound, and any translation must fulfill specific functions. Cultural discomfort, uneasiness or misunderstandings and unnecessary hatred or enmity are to be minimized in the target version.

In most cases translators who work from Chinese to English normally attempt to bridge or eliminate soft conflicts, but in contrast their peers who perform English-Chinese translations tend to maintain soft conflicts for Chinese culture to digest. I wish to discuss the challenges, possibilities and opportunities of the removal of soft conflicts, and consequently the present section will only deal with Chinese-English translations.

In 2002 I was asked by a friend to translate her application form for immigration to Canada. She hoped to join her husband there, who had been a Canadian citizen for several years by that time. The problem was that their case bore little resemblance to the Western concept of marriage for love's sake, if the translation was 'faithful', as required. I would like to cite a 'truthful' presentation of her answers to some of the questions on the form:

> Q1**:** Did anyone introduce you to your sponsor? Describe the circumstances of this introduction.
> A1**:** She was an old friend of our parents, and had been their colleague for more than 30 years. She knew the two families very well so that she introduced my husband in person to me with our parents' permission.
> Q2**:** Was there a formal engagement ceremony?
> A2**:** China has no tradition that requires a formal engagement ceremony. When our parents learned of our marriage plan, they arranged a gathering of the two families on September 22nd (photos are enclosed). But we did celebrate our engagement and went out with his parents on October 22nd (photos are enclosed) when my husband flew in from Canada in October.
> Q3**:** Was there a traditional/customary marriage ceremony?
> A3**:** Since my husband was too busy and only had two weeks for holiday, we did not have enough time to prepare for a traditional marriage ceremony, which should be held both at my husband's hometown—Tai'an, Shandong Province, and at my hometown—Shanghai. Besides, my husband's brother, who lives in Singapore, and my sister, who lives in Australia, wish to attend our wedding ceremony. Therefore, we decided to withhold the ceremony until September, next year, since our brother and sister will be able to come back then, and my husband will get a long holiday at that time.
> Q4**:** Did you and your sponsor live together?
> A4**:** We took our marriage certificate on November 1st, 2002 to become a lawful married couple. But because my husband had to go back to Canada on November 3rd, we didn't have much time to live together. But we do wish to be together again as soon as possible.

The details she was asked to provide gave the impression that they had only been together for a very short period of time before they got married, and the marriage was the result of mutual approval on the part of her and her husband's parents. Though this marriage may be understood by an immigration officer as a marriage of convenience, the case is anything but a rarity for a young Chinese person.

Lin Yutang (2000: 173), a famous writer of the 1920s, wrote about the traditional Chinese view of marriage as follows:

> It [The traditional sense of family honour in China] takes the right of contracting marriage from our hands and gives it to those of our parents; it makes us marry, not wives but 'daughters-in-law,' and it makes our wives give birth, not to children but to 'grandchildren'.

A marriage in China is not a matter concerning just two people: it also involves both families. Chinese young people have had the final say about marriage since 1949, but to marry against their parents' will is still regarded by the majority of the population as unblessed and unnatural. This fact simply reflects what is considered natural and acceptable in a culture where the word *love* had been almost always replaced by *like* until a little more than two decades ago. Those born since the 1980s react differently to the word, and are no longer too shy or conservative to avoid its usage. But there are many who stick to tradition and shrink from explicit expressions of love. My friend does love her husband, despite the fact that they haven't known each other for

long, nor have been together long enough in the eyes of Westerners, and she believes that the permission and support of their parents legitimises their love. Parental opinion regarding marriage is highly regarded, as both wise and reliable, taking into account character, disposition, and background.

Given the difference between the Western and Chinese views about love and marriage, I realised that there would be much less chance of her fulfilling her dream of a reunion with her husband if the translation was performed 'faithfully'. So I explained the situation to her, discussing the conflicts in values and ideas between the two cultures, and I rewrote her answers according to Western style. This was the final version:

> Q1: Did anyone introduce you to your sponsor? Describe the circumstances of this introduction.
> A1: Yes. The introducer was a family friend, and she thought we were made for each other. Then we met as arranged and I was deeply impressed by him at the first sight.
> Q2: Was there a formal engagement ceremony?
> A2: No, there wasn't. For most Chinese young people leading a city life, a formal engagement ceremony is not necessary or indispensable. But we did go on a tour of Jiuzhai Valley, a famous scenic spot of China, to celebrate our engagement.
> Q3: Was there a traditional/customary marriage ceremony?
> A3: No, there wasn't. But we've decided to make up for it in September, next year, since our friends and relatives insist that a ceremony will brighten up our married life.
> Q4: Did you and your sponsor live together?
> A4: I don't think that there's any logical connection between living together and a happy marriage. There are married bedfellows who mean nothing to each other, and there are people who cannot be separated from their beloved ones even by death. But if my application for immigration is granted as soon as possible, my husband and I will be spared the torture of a life without each other's presence.

One day in June, 2003, my friend let me know that she had been allowed to join her husband in Canada, and thanked me for my strategy. Of course, my translation is more a piece of rewriting which eliminated potential soft conflicts that could arise from different cultural values regarding love and marriage, and tilts completely in favour of the predetermined function of the translated version rather than being an accurate translation in the widely accepted sense of the word.

In real life, practical calculations demand various degrees of rewriting. Several years ago, an Osmanthus-Flower Festival was held in Shanghai, and its promotion leaflet read:

> *Manshu jinhua, fangxiangsiyi de Jingui; huabai ruxue, xiangqipubi de Yingui; honglitouhuang, huaduo weinong de Zishagui; huase siyin, jiji youhua de Sijigui, jingxiangkaifang, zhengyapimi. Jinru Guilingongyuan, zhenzhen guihuaxiang pubi erlai.*

> [Golden Osmanthus is covered with golden flowers that scent the air with their fragrance; Silvery Osmanthus has snow-white flowers that greet people's nostrils with sweet smell; Zisha Osmanthus has the color of red tinged with yellow, and is thick with blossoms that give out heady perfume; Siji Osmanthus has silvery flowers that bloom every season. All the osmanthus flowers are in full bloom and vie for each other for

> supremacy in beauty. When you enter Guilin Park, you will be met with the aroma of osmanthus flowers.][3]

The exaggerated and verbose style of writing was adopted to highlight the rich colour and fragrant smell of the osmanthus flowers. The Chinese language is perceptual, relatively tolerant of original variations in style and grammar and can accept exaggeration and redundancy. English prefers logic and concision, which makes a word-for-word translation from Chinese look like a combination of broken and ill-organized sentences. Because of the differences between the English and Chinese languages, a conservative translator may do some minor rewriting in his or her translation by omitting unnecessary modifiers and intensifying the logical structure in this way:

> All kinds of osmanthus flowers vie with each other: there are the golden and fragrant Jingui, the silvery and sweet smelling Yingui, the Zishagui thick with flowers characterized by the red color tinged with yellow, and the white Sijigui blooming every season. Guilin Park is perfumed with these flowers.

But a more adventurous translator may perform a significant degree of rewriting, focusing on relevant and important elements:

> Guilin Park is perfumed with all kinds of sweet smelling osmanthus flowers: golden Jingui, silvery Yingui, white Sijigui and Zishagui whose color is red tinged with yellow.

Of course, nothing in translation is absolute, and there are times when potential soft conflicts are too trivial to be dealt with. What must be noted is that the translator often plays the role of the dog wagged by its tail and succumbs to practical calculations in order to achieve the expected function of his or her translation.

4. Hard Conflicts and Translation

Generally speaking in a translational context, hard conflicts usually arise from differences in political positions or ideological tendencies. In most cases concerning political or ideological elements, the author or the speaker would not thank the translator for his or her rewriting, for fear that the translator should come up with a distorted version. The situation is often complicated if the translator is insensitive to potential hard conflicts and has created a translation that misuses strategies and induces ideologically significant miscommunication. In fact, a translator or an interpreter must be politically or ideologically sensitive or s/he may fail or commit mistakes in translating written or oral texts carrying political or ideological implications.

In 2001, the former Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji presided over a press conference. During the press conference, a Taiwanese reporter suggested that

> *…huozheshi xiang qunian xiaban'nian qianfuzongli shuode na'yang, dalu he tanwan tong shuyu yige zhongguo, jiushi yong geng you tanxing de fangshi lai jieshi*

yigezhongguo

> […or to adopt a more flexible way to explain the concept of one-China just as Vice-Premier Qian said in the second half of last year that mainland and Taiwan are two parts of China]

What the Taiwanese reporter implied by "a flexible way to look at the one-China principle" is to regard mainland and Taiwan as two parts of equal importance, which may be viewed as another presentation of *two-China* proposed by the provincial government. The political division is that the Chinese government views Taiwan as a province of China, but not a geo-political counterpart, while the provincial government of Taiwan insists that Taiwan is a sovereign or an independent nation[4]. The interpreter failed to perceive the implication in the original question, and missed the target in interpretation:

> Or, could you explain and interpret the one-China principle more flexibly to bring about the breaking of the deadlock? For instance, in the latter half of last year, Vice-Premier Qian Qichen has stated that there is but one China in the world, mainland and Taiwan are parts of one China and China's sovereignty and integrity brook no division, could such moves help solve the problem?

This translation failed as it expressed goodwill that was not in the original, such as in the phrases "to bring about the breaking of the deadlock" and "could such moves help solve the problem". Furthermore the translator obscured hidden meaning in the question—would Zhu accept "a more flexible way to look at the one-China principle"? This would, if it were to be confirmed, be a considerable political concession on the part of mainland China. This kind of mistake is diplomatically disastrous and politically unforgivable[5], but Zhu denied that there was any difference between Qian's words and those of other Chinese leaders.

Another question raised at the press conference went as follows:

> I noticed in your work report that you included several elements of Jiang Zemin's theories, including the "Three Represents" and Rule by Virtue. Since you are famous for very plain and easy-understanding language, can you explain to us what the Three Represents means to the man on the street and also what Rule by Virtue means as you plan to practice it?

Political awareness can help one to detect a note of challenge hiding behind a seemingly moderate request (i.e. "can you explain to us what the 'Three Represents' means to the man on the street and also what 'Rule by Virtue' means as you plan to practice it") that has been preceded by a compliment (i.e. "you are famous for very plain and easy-understanding language"). The political implications of the question are: Since one of the Three Represents mentions the essential rights of the people, how will the government protect and ensure these rights? In addition, how will you meet the demands of Rule

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by Virtue in your office?

The Chinese version did not present the challenge to its full because of its simplification of the latter part of the reporter's words—

> … *qingwen duiyu putongren lai jiang, "sange daibiao" dui tamen yiwei zhe shenme, "yi de zhiguo" dui tamen you yiwei zhe shenme*?

> […can you explain to us what the Three Represents and Rule by Virtue means to the man in the street?)

But Zhu was sharp enough to get the challenging note in replying

> … *danshi ni rang wo zai zhege difang lai chanming zhege sixiang, woxiang bushi shihou, yexu wo'men xuyao kai yici yantaohui.*

> But if you want me to explain it at here, I don't think the time is right. Maybe we need to organize a seminar to make things clear.

The interpreter took the edge off the answer once again, by rendering it as "But I don't think today is the fitting occasion for me to give you a thorough elaboration. Perhaps it will need an international seminar for a thorough discussion about the question you have raised". In fact Zhu's "bushi shihou" (literally: "it's not the time") is rather cutting, whilst the interpreter's "I don't think today is the fitting occasion" is too polite to serve as a close equivalent. The following translation would be more accurate: "I'm afraid that at present any attempt to explain is ill-timed and maybe we need to hold a seminar for clarification of ideas."

A more recent example is the Chinese version for Hillary Rodham Clinton's memoirs *Living History* published by Yilin Press in 2003. The changes and omissions made by that version as regards political problems or ideological disagreements displeased Mrs. Clinton considerably, who demanded that the American publisher of the original, Simon & Schuster, should protest to Yilin Press and make them buy back copies which had been sold. The protest was presented as she wished – a translator occupies a space between conflicting political or ideological positions of different cultures, can hardly please all but s/he cannot afford to be insensitive all the time.

Conclusion

This essay contends that in a translational context, conflicts can be categorized into soft conflicts and hard ones. Based on this, the influences which conflicts have on the production of translations are explored with reference to the direction of translation and asymmetrical power relations between cultures.

By examining examples of contemporary Chinese-English or English-Chinese translations by conflict-conscious and conflict-unconscious translators, this paper contends that in dealing with soft conflicts, conflict

fluency is the favoured policy for translators who work from Chinese, whilst translators who work into Chinese prefer not to interfere.

A conflict-unconscious translator is more likely to commit mistakes or convey misunderstanding, a fact which indicates that awareness of conflicts and cultural differences is an important quality for a translator.

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1 Statistics show that, until 1997, 2.53% of China's population had received higher education, 9.59% had gone to senior high school, 29.62% to junior high school, 37.56% to elementary school, and 12.11% were illiterate or semi-literate. Since that time Chinese Universities have increased their enrolment levels but the overall picture has not changed.

2 The modern Chinese education system began in 1895 when Tianjin Beiyang College of Western Thoughts (*Tianjin Beiyang Xixue Xuetang*) was established. This became the University of Beiyang in 1896.

3 All translations, unless otherwise attributed, are my own.

4 See "Powell: Taiwan not Sovereign", http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,136711,00.html (consulted March 06).

5 "Explanations on Draft Anti-Secession Law" Online at:

http://service.china.org.cn/link/wcm/Show_Text?info_id=122118&p_qry=opposing%20and%20the%20and%20division%20and%20of%20and%20country (consulted August 2006).

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