

NON-TRANSLATION AND FUNCTIONAL
TRANSLATION-TWO SINOLOGICAL MALADIES

Edward H. Schafer

Among the sins of scholarly translators from the Chinese, there is one which is so prevalent as to remain unchallenged generation after generation, possibly because no one is free from its taint. I refer to the practice of leaving uncooked and indigestible lumps in the sinological puddings served up to a tolerant public. This custom, against which I wish to make the strongest possible protest, has not yet been justified or even defended by any well-argued theory, but has become widely accepted usage in the absence of overt opposition. Specifically, I challenge the common treatment of a large and poorly defined body of Chinese "names and titles" either by transliteration (an extreme kind of under-translation), or by what is sometimes known as "functional translation" (a species of paraphrase lacking consistent methodology). An obvious instance of the former would be the rendering of 自稱太上皇 by "he styled himself *T'ai-shang-huang*," and of the latter, the rendering of 爲樞密使, by "he was made Chancellor." I oppose such procedures on the general grounds that the chief if not the sole responsibility of the scholarly translator is fidelity to his text. In other words it is to convey, as precisely as he may in a different tongue, the sense of the language of the original.

The kinds of expression most commonly "transliterated" (i.e., not translated) or "functionally translated" (i.e., freely paraphrased) are appellations, epithets, names and titles, which descriptively or fancifully, officially or casually, accurately or falsely, have been applied to person, offices, associations, activities, organizations, buildings, mountains, rivers, seas and so forth. Doubtless other categories will occur to the readers, such as special names given to techniques, processes, games, and the like, which are frequently left untranslated, cloaked in the respectable obscurity of the custom-sanctioned Romanization. Thus the translator is spared one of his most thorny tasks. The custom might be understandable in the case of words whose meanings are unknown, or doubtfully understood. Fortunately, there are not many of these in literary Chinese, if we except the ancient classical books. Certainly they are not especially characteristic of the category of expression most commonly sinned against, namely "official title"; rather the reverse. If there are difficulties in finding an adequate English rendition, it is most likely due to syntactical and morphological differences between the two languages, but rarely to the absence from the English lexicon of a fairly suitable equivalent. Thus, the connotations of "official titles" are usually transparent, though *why* they are appropriate to the office and its occupant may not always be obvious.

The error of non-translation (use of Romanized forms) is the more mysterious of the two sins I am here castigating. Let us take an example: the expression 應天門, the name of a city gate, would be rendered simply as "Ying-t'ien Gate" by many translators, although

there is nothing at all enigmatic about the gate. It is called "Gate of Responsiveness to Heaven," and its name registers and praises the quality of sensitivity to divine will. To ignore this fact is gratuitously to reduce

(1) the scientific value of the translation, since something which might have been revealed to the reader about Chinese belief and custom (however little) has been concealed, and

(2) the potential literary merit of the translation, since part of the color and quality of the situation has been concealed.

It is distressing to imagine what drab and anaemic Bible translation we should get if the example of the sinologists were followed. We should rejoice not no longer in such as the following:¹

"... the entrance by the *Fish Gate*. . . (II Chronicles 33.14)

" they are written in the *Chronicles of the Seers*." (Chronicles 33.19)

". . . until you have learned the Most *High* rules.. ." (Daniel 4.32)

"... And I had two staffs; one I named Grace, and the other I named Union." (Zechariah 11.7)

". . . and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two. . ." (Zechariah 14.4)

Instead of these resounding English phrases, representing intelligible "names" and "titles," in the original text, we should have groups of senseless transliterations, without value to the scholar or to the general reader, thus "... and the Har Hazzethim shall be split in two. . ." Yet any attempt to do otherwise with Chinese translations is met by the shibboleth "proper name," which is habitually intoned, like an exorcistic formula, in defense of the failure to translate Chinese phrases which are quite analogous to the Hebrew or Aramaic phrases cited above. This dogma that titles and "proper names" are not translatable even when they are completely comprehensible, strange as it is, enjoys widespread adherence.

Let us next consider the second type of custom-sanctioned error widespread among sinologists; instead of completely avoiding translation by offering a phonetic transcription, the translator gives a rough paraphrase, preferably an English title which does not require a great deal of erudition for its comprehension. This approach is typical of the method now most generally approved for handling official titles, and the version produced in this manner are frequently known as "functional-type translations." Actually they are linguistic swindles, and the present writer shudders to think of the great number which he has himself perpetrated in the past, and for which he must be held ultimately accountable before the Rhadamanthus of sinologues. The unchallenged acceptance of this method seems to be due in part at least to the fact that the sinologist is simultaneously philologist-translator-exegete and historian-ethnologist-sociologist, or is expected to be. In the latter of these concurrent roles he attempts to discern the functions of the office whose name he translates. But when he assumes his philologist's hat, it is all too easy for him to ignore what the text says, and put his politico-sociological conception in lieu of the linguistic facts. So, for 太守, instead of "Grand Protector," or

¹Selected from the Revised Standard Version. Italics are mine. In the original text the forms referred to are respectively: *š'ar haddāghīm*; *dibb^e re?? hōzay*; *s'allit*. *'illa''E. nc?'am, ~6bb'Em; har haxxe.PQthfn*. For these I am indebted to Leon N. Hurvitz.

something of that kind, he set down "Prefect." Such judgements of actuality should be put in a footnote, a "Brief Communication," or a monograph. "Prefect" is an interpretive gloss, rather than a rendering of the language of the text, and might properly appear (for example) in a footnote to the translation of "Grand Protector" reading "Chin, t'ai-shau _kq, the title of an office which, in the 5th century, was somewhat analogous to that of a French departmental prefect."

Granted that to the student of comparative institutions, or the political historian, the proposed analogue "Prefect" may be more satisfying than the literal "Grand Protector." Nonetheless, the philologist (that is, the expert on linguist and textual matters whose business it is to produce faithful translations) must not slant his translations for the benefit of any particular learned community, but insofar as it is possible, produce a version which will be valid for any user. He must, for example, consider the possibility that his translation may be consulted by a graduate student doing thesis research on the subject of "Defenders and Protectors of the People in various Ages and Societies." Finding "Prefect" as the rendering of 太守, our hypothetical researcher will never know that the Chinese at one time style a type of magistrate "Grand Protector."

Most of us are familiar with the stereotyped expression "Shepherd of the Hosts" from rendering translation of the the *Iliad*. I am fond of the expression: it seems to me that it is poetic, and at the same time reveals something interesting and significant about early Greek ideas. The phrase is a rendering of Greek *poimēnen latin*. Doubtless a translator of the "functional" school would reason as follows: Agamemnon was not "really" a shepherd, but a kind of petty chieftain from Mycenae. Therefore (he will allege) we would not to employ a difficult and exotic expression as "Shepherd of the Hosts" in our up-to-date version of the *Iliad*. Rather we should "translate functionally" by substituting "Chief" or "Captain" for the noxious phrase. Maybe even "Gauleiter" or "Boss."

To sum up: this pernicious and heretical doctrine of "functional" translation is wisely supported in these days of intellectual pap-feeding. Readers and students and scholars of various interests and persuasions are not to be permitted to make independent judgements about early Chinese thought and culture based on their examination of and comparison of accurate translations of surviving textual materials, but must be provided with capsule theories masquerading as translations. The supporters of this doctrine (who would certainly not describe their beliefs in this language) imply, in short, that the names given by the Chinese to their institutions and officials have little or no interest or significance for a foreigner. At the same time, they give the stamp of eternity and universality to concepts familiar in Western Europe and America-places which notoriously provide all the touchstones of politico-linguistic intelligibility. The same dreary reasoning would, I am afraid, eliminate all metaphors in the process of translating, on the theory that they distract the reader from the facts. Let me state my conception of a fundamental axiom for translators again: the responsibility of the translator is to convey the *linguistic* content of the text. A corollary of this proposition is: comments, theories and interpretations of the relevance of this linguistic material to the actual situation (the "facts" of Chinese society, for instance), ought not to find any place in the translation, but only in

the glosses on it. By "linguistic content" I mean "connotation," and by "actual situation" I mean "denotations." It is necessary therefore to distinguish carefully between "denotation" of a word and its "connotation."

For the purposes of this paper, and for the sake of argument, I will use the words "denotation" and "connotation" approximately as they are used by Susanne Langer in her stimulating book *Philosophy in a New Key*:

Denotation is, then, the complex relationship which a name has to the object which bears it; but what shall the more direct relation of the name, or symbol, to its associated conception be called? It shall be called by its traditional name, connotation, the connotation of a word is the conception it conveys.²

In the sense of this passage, names and titles may denote a single individual or his role, but they normally connote ideas more or less inapt to that individual or his various enterprises. Thus, in a certain context, 補闕 denotes Mr. Wang Chia, a rascal enjoying a sinecure obtained through patronage, but it connotes "Suppletor of Defaults," which is an official title conveying a conception which may or may not be appropriate to the individual who bears it and to his private and public activities. Actually, there are various degrees of semantic communication independent of direct denotation, that is, various degrees of connotativeness. Thus:

Schafer-(a) denotation: a specific teacher with some sinological training (or, in another context, another person).

(b) connotation: (1) to an average citizen, same as denotation, i.e., no meaning other than "reference to the person so-named." (2) to a German-speaker, or well-educated person, also "shepherd."

Oakland—(a) denotation : a specific city in California (or, in another context, a different city).

(b) connotation: "a land with oaks, now or formerly, or in imagination." To a child, or to a dim-witted citizen, the relation between denotation (*Oakland*) and connotation (*oak-land*) may never occur. An average person may think of it several times during his life. A future scholar, performing his exegetical labors on a 20th century MS about the history of the San Francisco Bay area, will not fail to point out the appropriateness (or reverse) of the relation, and will translate the term into whatever language he happens to be writing in.

Ocean Beach-(a) denotation: a popular beach in San Francisco.

(b) connotation: "a beach of the ocean." Even to the least sophisticated person, the connotation is perfectly clear, and inseparable from the denotation.

It is my contention here that the vast majority of Chinese institution titles, book titles, era titles, toponyms, etc are of the "Ocean Beach" type, and that a conscientious philologist, or a sincere historian or biographer ought to make a minimum effort to reveal the connotations of the title in his translation. Of course, there are some names in Chinese whose connotations are far from obvious, though a

²Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite and Art* (New York: New American Library of World Literature, Inc., Mentor Book 5th printing May, 1953), 52.

philologist may strive to uncover them, and may be successful. Contrast *huai* 淮 (name of a river), connotation obscure, with the *Huang* 黃 (name of a river), connotation “yellow”; and in fact the latter is frequently called the “Yellow River” by non-Chinese. In other words, even for a person of high literacy, 淮 has a denotation, but no connotation worth mentioning.

“Translate connotation, not denotations”- this ought to be axiomatic. In so saying, I do not touch on many basic problems of translation which have been competently discussed and treated by sinologists and others. For instance, it is probably impossible to find an English expression whose connotations will correspond precisely, without residue on either side, to a given Chinese expression. This is the meaning of the proverb “Traduttore traditore.” Since a choice among nuances of connotation must be made by the translator, the theory of their selection becomes an important consideration to him. How shall he decide what connotation or connotations to single out for conveyance to his audience? Many aspects of this problem have been dealt with by abler pens than my own, and I do not propose to discuss it here. I do say that the sinologist, in his role of philologist (even though he does not choose to call himself that) and translator, should not “translate” the denotative situation to which, he surmises, his text refers. He may certainly discuss these denotations, and in fact, if he is primarily a social scientist of some variety, he will probably discuss them at length. But the sinologist who takes upon himself the serious responsibility of publishing his version of potentially useful source material should not presume to elevate his private opinions as to the essential political significance (let us say) of the officer denominated “Grand Protector” by the Chinese of a given epoch to the status of “translation.” He may feel that the officer so entitled was at that time a “Governor” in the American sense, but at best he ought to keep this opinion (and its alternatives) in a modest footnote to his translation. If a competent political scientist wishes to refer to this office as the that of a “warlord” or “governor” or a “prefect,” certainly he is privileged to do so. But the translator is duty-bound only to reveal the sense of the expression 太守. *Comments on the function of a Chinese official at any given moment of Chinese history belong in a gloss, footnote, or commentary.* This procedure is no white different from the hypothetical one in which a translator, encountering the sentence 飛龍在天, translates “a flying dragon is in the sky.” He does *not* argue: “Dragons are mythological creatures. Thus must have been some strange sort of cloud. I will translate ‘A moving cloud is in the sky’.” He is duty-bound to register “dragon” in his translation, however inappropriate, in his belief, the conception is to the reality. Furthermore, he may not omit the dragon (or the Grand Protector) on the grounds that the information is useless or irrelevant for a particular purpose or audience. He *does* register the *language* (i.e., connotation) of his text in the translation, though he may comment separately on its probably real denotation.

This kind of breach with traditional translation-dodging here advocated, especially when it has reference to “official titles,” has sometimes met with the crafty objection that it is a kind of “etymologizing.” Persons who seek to uncover etymologies are nowadays widely looked on as eccentric nonentities, impractical busibodies, or subversive confusion-mongers. I should not be very upset by the reproach, but I do not, alas, deserve it. If I advocated the notion that a trans-

lator should search for the archaic meaning of 淮 (for instance), and having discovered it, render the word with some English neologism created for the occasion, the charge might be justified. The idea is worthy of consideration, but I do not here and now recommend it. But translation of the non-functional type, which I shall recommend below, are definitely not “etymologizing.” They do not dredge up buried and obscure meanings which had no significance to the writer of the text undergoing translation. They state simply what is transparently there in the text. In support of this “anti-etymologizing” position, I have heard it argued that the Chinese title might be translated boldly by English “Marshal” (from OHG *marah* “horse” and *scalc* “servant”), if the translator were really dissatisfied with the more usual term “Ssu-ma.” The assumption made here is, of course, that the connotation “horse” in 司馬 is as faint as it is in “Marshal.” This is not true. 司馬 retains the connotations “administer, etc.” and “horse, etc.,” plainly and unambiguously for any reader in any Chinese literary text; “Marshal” has no “horse” or “servant” connotations, unless possibly for a student of Germanic philology. There is no question of looking for the “etymology” of 司馬, which, in literary Chinese, is a construction of two words with fairly obvious meanings. Here it may be necessary to add that I do not at present have a definition of what I mean by “word” when speaking of literary Chinese which would be completely satisfying to a linguistic scholar. I hope readers of this article will accept a rough-and-ready definition, which I believe to be basically sound: “a free form, such as 馬,太,州,下, 東, 琵琶, 踟躕.”

This discussion leads inevitably into the shadowy realm of European and American personal names, “proper names” in the narrow sense, i.e., names conventionally applied to single individuals, which Susanne Langer discusses in these terms.

It is a peculiarity of proper names that they have a **different connotation for every denotation**. Because their connotation is not fixed, they can be arbitrarily applied. In itself, a proper name has not connotation at all; sometimes it acquires a very general sort of conceptual meaning—it connotes a gender, a race, a confession (e.g., “Christian,” “Wesley,” “Israel”)-but there is no actual **mistake** involved in calling a boy “Mation” a girl “Frank,” a German “Pierre,” or a Jew “Luther.” In civilized society the connotation of a proper name is not regarded as meaning applying to the bearer of the name; when the name is used to denote a certain person it takes on the connotation required by that function. In primitive societies this is less apt to be the case; names are often changed because their accepted connotations do not fit the bearer. The same man may in turn be **named** “Lightfoot,” “Hawkeye,” “Whizzing Death,” etc. In an Indian society, the class of men named “Hawkeye,” would very probably be a subclass of the class “sharp-eyed” men. But in our own communities ladies named “Blanche” do not have to be albinos or even platinum blondes. A word that functions as a proper noun is excused from the usual rules of application.³

I have no immediate proposals with regard to personal names in Chinese, but the problem certainly deserves thought. Unfortunately Langer has not been able to indicate whether Chinese personal names belong with the “civilized” type or with the “primitive” type. In my present opinion Chinese “given names” (*ming, tzu* and *hao*) are anal-

³ See Susanne Langer, *Philosophy on Language*, p. 122.

ogous to Langer's "American Indian" names. At least, they are composed of living words in the Chinese literary languages, carrying with them, possibly, a hope, an ambition, an omen or a potentiality. It may well be that an unlettered person, hearing the name "Wen-chin," would be unaware of its connotations. A tenth century literatus, confronted with a textual reference to 文進, was almost certain aware of the meaning "cultural advance." Chinese given names differ from familiar "civilized" ones (i.e., West European and American) in that they are not selected from a rather small set of traditional tags with obvious connotations, such as John, Henry, Elizabeth, etc.+footnote But we also have our "Victors" and "Pearls," and a period in our recent history when names like Charity, Prudence, and Fidelity were living commonplaces. Rather they are constructed specially for each individual out of meaningful linguistic units, and overlooking coincidences, are all different. However, personal names have a kind of life of their own: their very *sound* is an important part of them, at least to their owners. "Wen-chin" may mean "cultural advance," but the man Chu Wen-chin would not have thought that the English translation was in any sense his name. Therefore I am inclined to think that the translator of Chinese literary texts ought to leave personal names in phonetic symbols (Romanization), but that it is one of his duties to explain these personal names in footnotes, just as translators of the Bible are accustomed to gloss "Ishmael," for instance, with "God hears."

Chinese "surnames," on the other hand, resemble English surnames, in that many of them are unintelligible, and those which have a connotation independent of their denotation seems to similar to "Smith," "Weaver," "Longafellow," etc., since one does not *ordinarily* think of this connotation ("metal-worker," "cloth-maker," "tall-person"), such is the strength of personal denotation. No doubt textual glosses ought to be provided wherever possible, e.g., for 司馬, "Note: 'Administrator Equestrian,' an official title transformed into a surname."

So much for the general theory. But what of practice? I advocate translations of the following types in the following several categories. My versions are far from final and my categories far from exhaustive. I hope, however, that the novelty of seeing concrete proposals for English renditions of Chinese expressions commonly not translated at all, or at best very loosely paraphrased, will provoke other sinologists to try their hands at fitting Chinese conceptions of the type here discussed into appropriate English phrase-constructions.

(1) "official titles" like

貴妃 <i>kuei fei</i>	"Precious Consort"
太宗 <i>t'ai tsung</i>	"Grand Ancestor"

(2) informal titles, nicknames, etc., like

金鳳 <i>chin feng</i>	"Golden Phoenix" (a girl's sobriquet)
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(3) institutional titles, like

靜海軍 <i>ching-hai chün</i>	"Army of the Quiet Sea"
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(4) landscape feature, natural and artificial, like

梅嶺 *mei ling* "Plum Range"

文殊臺 *wen-shu t'ai* "Manjusri Estrade"

(5) era titles,⁴ like

永隆 *yung lung* "Perpetual Eminence"

大寶 *ta pao* "Great Treasure"

(6) titles of books and sections of books, like

天文志 *t'ien wen chih* "Tractate on Celestial Configurations"

閩都記 *min tu chi* "Record of the Metropolis of Min"

At present, however, if there is any controversy over these matters, its real center is occupied by "official titles." They do not always come out so neatly as "Grand Protector." Take for instance the title 侍中. The expression is not difficult of comprehension, but it is not easy of translation. In actual practice, it has up to now been left untranslated in the Wade-Giles (or other) Romanization as "Shih-chung," or else rendered by some form palatable to western tastes, such as "President" or "Secretary," with its burden of un-Chinese political associations. One method of dealing with the term is as follows:

(1) syntactically it is a "verb-object" construction, functioning as a unit, analogously to English "catchall" or "pinchpenny."

(2) lexically it consists of two words

侍 "officiate, office, official (or something like that)"

中 "center, central; penetralian, penetralia (or something like that)."⁵

The whole construction might be barbarously interpreted as "he who officiates in the (sacred) inner-parts (of the imperial palace)." This will hardly serve as a usable rendition. An alternative is to attempt a construction syntactically identical with the original, but I am personally not satisfied with anything like "Servemiddle" as an official title. My present preference is "Officiant Penetralian," which has a nice bureaucratic ring to it, as do all constructions similar to "President Elect," "Consul General," "Mother Superior" and "Lord Paramount." In this and other instances, then, I sacrifice syntactical fidelity for the purpose of conveying a measure of the connotations of the original Chinese expression. No doubt improvements on this version can readily be imagined. To object to "officiant" or "penetralian" on the grounds that they are separately uncommon words, and together resemble no well-known English title, is, I believe, irrelevant. I do not personally like to go beyond the limits of a good abridged dictionary (*Webster's Collegiate*), but I do not think it unlikely that I may, like other academics, be obliged to do so from time to time in search of just the right word for my purposes. As for the

⁴The question of the translatability of these epithets has already been raised in my "Chinese Reign-names-Words or Nonsense Syllables?" in *Wen-t'ün* 3, July 1952, Far Eastern Publications, Yale. Their semantic characteristics were discussed even earlier by Arthur F. Write and Edward Fagan in "Era Names and Zeitgeist," in *Asiatische Studien* 5.113-121 (1951).

⁵See *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (Fifth Edition) for *penetralia*, "the innermost parts esp. of a temple or palace."