



Translation and Time: Exploring the Temporal Dimension of Cross-cultural Transfer

Presentation Details

Title of Paper:

Nostalgia, Literary Chinoiserie and the Temporal Locality of Chinese Poetry in English Translations, 1902–1913

Abstract:

The early twentieth century was a time when literary interest in China became more fully awakened and English translations of Chinese poetry proliferated. This paper examines the works of three poet-translators in this period: Launcelot Cranmer-Byng, Clifford Bax and Helen Waddell, who avowed intuitive intimacy with the poetic spirit of Cathay without possession of first-hand knowledge of Chinese, and whose works illustrate a distinctive form of literary chinoiserie, different from the more widely discussed works of Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell and the scholar-poet translator Arthur Waley.

Translation is here considered as the relocation of temporalities – in the interplay between different languages, cultures and diverse poetic traditions, a transhistorical dimension is also inscribed, and a translator’s choice of content and style engenders temporal implications. The poet-translators included for discussion here valorized the antiquity of the Chinese poetic tradition; discursive continuities with Western conceptions of the Chinese language and the still, unchanging nature of Chinese civilization can be perceived in the works of these poet-translators, and their visions of China centre around the temporal distance and contrast between the progressive, modern West and the peaceful, old China. The temporal locality that Chinese poetry comes to inhabit in these translations is realized in the recurrent themes and motifs in the pieces selected for translation and furthermore, in the style and form in which the poems were recast. The pervading atmosphere of these renderings is nostalgia, and the ways in which China figures as a chronotopic motif in the works of these poet-translators bespeak their aesthetic attitudes and a sense of disenchantment with modernity, resonating with the writings of Laurence Binyon and Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson.

Author's Biography:

Lin Qingyang (林青楊) is a PhD student in the Department of Translation, Lingnan University. Her thesis is on Arthur Waley's translations of classical Chinese poetry and the discourse of English conceptions of Chinese literary culture.