



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

Presentation Details

Title of Paper:

Translating “Period” into “Moment”: the Absence of Temporality in the English Discourse on Chinese Calligraphy

Abstract:

Theories and commentary traditions of Chinese calligraphy have lasted for over 1,000 years, and different eras witnessed different social-cultural milieus, mainstream aesthetic pursuits and certain poetics for fine writing. Therefore, discourses on calligraphy have undergone several transformations through time. Since the early twentieth century, Chinese calligraphy culture has been introduced to the English-speaking world, which synchronizes the advancement of calligraphy studies as a branch of Sinology. However, we should note that modern English, via which calligraphy culture inter-culturally transfers, can hardly accommodate a thousand-year long yet transformative tradition. For example, the aesthetic pursuit of “*fenggu*” of the Jin Dynasty and “*yiqi*” of the Tang Dynasty have been rendered into “vitality” connoting no difference, thus there emerges a grand temporal gap which cannot be fully bridged even words are intermittently added to remind readers of different times.

English discourses on Chinese calligraphy, which should have signaled multi-dimensions of temporality, were compressed and canceled into a mono-time system where readers and sinologists alike are deprived of a sense of varieties and historicity. The reasons behind it firstly go to the decades-long Western academic tradition of regarding everything Chinese as complete otherness, secondly to the expediency sinologists prefer to employ so as to conform to the current academic disciplines under which sinological studies can be comfortably conducted. This article finally concludes that translating a time-honored culture within a very short period of time is running the risk of cramming multi-temporal complexities into single-moment simplicity.

Author's biography:

SONG Ge is currently a full-time PhD candidate at the Department of Translation at Lingnan University, Hong Kong. He obtained his MA degree in English Language and Literature from Shanghai International Studies University in 2015. His research interest mainly lies in translating Chinese aesthetics into English, inter-cultural communication, and translatability.