

Translation – a highly specialized profession

by F. Tsai

The following is the text of a speech delivered by Mr. F. Tsai 蔡思果*, visiting fellow at the Translation Centre of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, at a luncheon meeting of the Hong Kong Translation Society on 24, September, 1977.

A highly specialized proform

Translation is so technical that it has long acquired the status of a profession. Even one who has an excellent command of the two languages, the original and the receptor, can hardly do a satisfactory job when he translates his own writing of one into the other. He still has a lot to learn about the craft, and plenty of practice to do. So far, translators are considered not as highly professional as accountants, architects, lawyers, and doctors. Why should people refer to translators as 翻譯? This tends to belittle them, if not to show contempt. In fact, as eminent a scholar as Yen Fu 嚴復 was a translator, so were poets Alexander Pope and William Cowper. A translator, a qualified and experienced one of course, has to work as hard as any of the professionals. I just mentioned before he can become efficient and competent. But those professionals are dubbed 師:會計師,建築師,律師,醫師. Some are also exalted with 大:大律師,大醫師. They even refer to themselves as such. Translators are not so fortunate as barbers, who are called 理髮師, or more prestigiously, 美容師, though formerly they were called 剃頭的, or 飛髮佬. Could translators not be 師? 翻譯師? Or simply 譯師?

Please don't think I am being so vain about such a seemingly trivial matter. What I really would like to say is: it is time now to do something so that your members will be recognized as professionals. If lawyers have to represent all kinds of people in all kinds of cases, translators have to translate all kinds of documents, ranging from a Chinese lunar calendar to Einstein's relativism. I remember when I translated Vincent Cronin's *The Wise Man from the West* I had to restore the original Chinese text written by Fr Matteo Ricci himself from the English translation by Cronin. Cronin's version was from Ricci's own translation from the Chinese into imperfect Italian (for having been in China too long the Jesuit forgot his own language a little). It required patient search and research, it was difficult to get the original books for identification, and it was also difficult to identify passages when books

were borrowed. There are terms current in the Ming Dynasty, of which we are ignorant. For instance, Fr Ricci's passport was not called 護照. No English-Chinese dictionary could help. It had to be looked up elsewhere. Cathay, mentioned by Ricci, was not 中國, or 震旦. After much agonizing research I found it equivalent to 契丹, not the ancient country known to us today.

When we translate Dickens, as I am doing his *David Copperfield* now, we have to know not only what a master of the English language he is, but also where he occasionally is impeachable or even faulty in English as the Fowler brothers have indicated. The degree of vulgarity, regional dialects, peculiarities of speech and so on, of his characters, almost defy translation.

I also remember that a friend of mine took Santayana for a Japanese, with a sound reason, I would say, for the editor who quoted Santayana's words somehow dropped the first name of the American philosopher. Some one who knows Japanese helped my friend, and the translation was 三田柳! I am sure, ladies and gentlemen, you can add many such incidents to attest how difficult translation can be.

Translators – Omniscient?

Translators are not omniscient. But they are capable of using their reference books, consult experts, and refer their clients to specialists, as all professionals usually are. There are specialists among you, I know, specialists in industrial and financial terms, in scientific technology, in literary criticism, in legal matters, and so on. We should consult them whenever we are in doubt. Usually a team is more competent than an individual. Translation of the Bible is an example. A translator's library is something that should be established as soon as possible.

There had been little formal psychoanalysis before

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Freud perfected the technique. In England and France there has been strictly speaking few really qualified surgeons before the eighteenth century. It was barbers who performed surgery as a side line. (Is that why they are called 理髮師 in China?) But medicine has advanced so much that today surgeons are as different from barbers as giraffes are from ostriches. Gone are the days when anybody could translate with an English-Chinese dictionary an inch and a half by an inch, with a smattering of English but without the ability to write a single Chinese sentence that is acceptable Chinese. Now translators like you all have many years of painstaking practice in the art and science of translation, having grappled with all sorts of difficult problems. The art and science may still be taking shape, but they will be gradually perfected in time. I have read Fr Deeney's Book List of scholarly tools for his Extra-mural Advanced Translation Course from Chinese into English, a formidable one. I don't think any dentist's apparatus could inspire more awe. And I am certain many of you must have other rare and useful books which I hope won't tempt me to disobey the commandment against stealing. More systematically-written text-books, better dictionaries for translators, and more comprehensive encyclopedias in Chinese should be prepared. The task

before us is gigantic.

Translators – Professionals

Now let me tell you that the public doesn't like professionals, especially when we present our bills. They may object and even suspect that we have taken leave of our senses. But naturally, the quality of any service of this kind depends very much on how the mental labour is remunerated; When we charge our clients a fee commensurable to the cost of our education, the books we've purchased, the equipment we use, and the pains we've taken, at least, we should have the conviction and satisfaction that they are getting their money's worth.

Lastly, I must add that professionals are jealous of their honour and dignity as much as their rights. Bar and medical associations have, for example, disciplinary boards, which would disbar their members if the latter's ethics or mental competence are found questionable. I don't think translators' societies have need for such a board, but it is a good thing to keep in mind what the public expects from professionals. ■

*編者註：

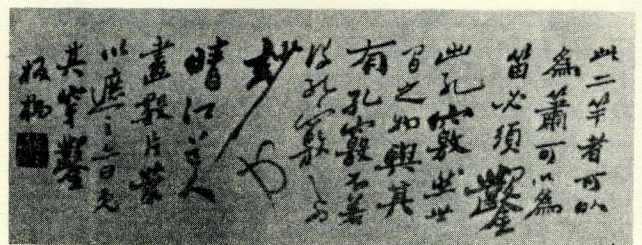
蔡濯堂，筆名思果，曾任香港工業總會和科學管理協會編輯、《讀者文摘》中文版編輯、香港聖神修院中文教授、香港中文大學校外進修部高級翻譯課程講師。現任中文大學翻譯中心訪問研究員。蔡先生譯著甚多，包括論著《翻譯研究》、散文集《沉思錄》、《藝術家肖像》、《河漢集》、《看花集》、《林居筆話》、和譯著《西泰子來華記》等廿餘冊。

出版消息

賴恬昌新書即將出版

T. C. Lai's forthcoming book *Noble Fragrance* (subtitled *Chinese Flowers and Trees*) is an anthology of poems, anecdotes, and essays on the pine, the bamboo, the plum, the chrysanthemum, the orchid, the lotus, the willow, and the lychee. The book is designed as an aid to an understanding of the symbolic significance of Chinese

flowers and trees, which is essential to a fuller enjoyment of Chinese culture, particularly literature and art. Its visual attraction consists in a large number of paintings on those subjects. The page below is taken from the new book.



Inscription by Cheng Hsieh: These two bamboo trunks can be made into a flute by drilling holes in them. But things are better without holes than with them. The painter has painted a number of leaves to shield the trunks in the hope they may be left alone.

Bamboo. Li Fang-ying, 1695-1754

《時代·生活叢書》

由本會會員徐東濱主編的《時代·生活叢書》中文版，目前已出版二十餘種，包括：

《生活自然文庫》：《宇宙》、《地球》、《原始人》、《動物行爲》、《海洋》、《南北極》、《鳥類》、《昆蟲》、《哺乳動物》、《生態學》。

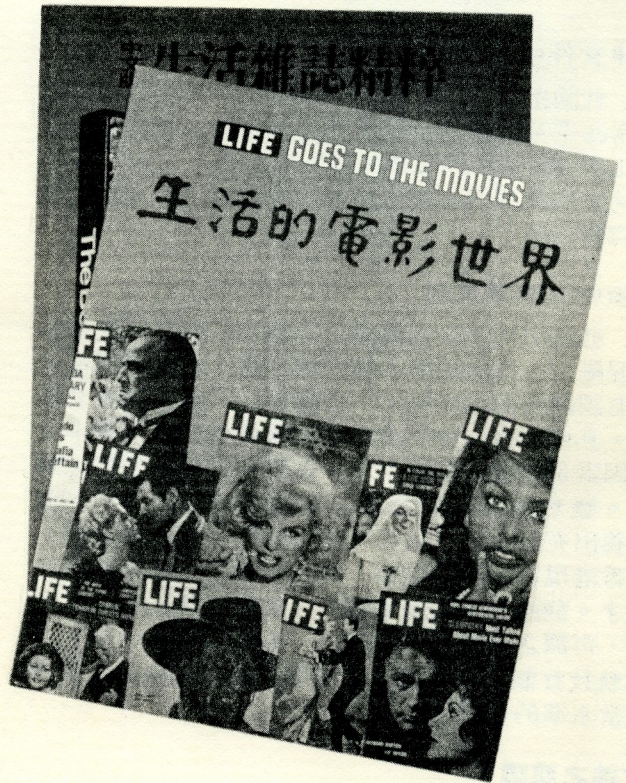
《生活科學文庫》：《頭腦的秘密》、《物質》、《時間》、《人體》、《飛行》、《導物》、《人與太空》、《輪》、《行星》、《船》。

《瀕臨絕種的動物》：《生活的電影世界》、《生活雜誌精粹》。

以上二十三種叢書之中，有十一種譯稿是由在台灣的學者供給，有一種譯稿是由在美國的學者供給。其餘十二種多由本會會員擔任翻譯。

目前，《時代·生活叢書》中文版正進行《人類的偉大時代》文庫的編譯工作。此外，亦正在把日本講談社《少年知識文庫》英文版十冊編譯為中文。本會會員參加了這些書籍的編譯工作。

本會會員如有興趣索閱《時代·生活叢書》中文版目錄，請用八吋半乘十一吋信封，寫上自己名字地址，貼上二角郵票，付寄：香港希慎道一號901室時代·生活叢書徐東濱。如欲購買書，請賜電3-661281 Mrs. Dihna Ho (Sales Manager, Life-Time Publications Ltd.)。



《小笑話》

一個忠實的翻譯師 徐東濱

一對中國夫婦請一位外國朋友吃飯，由一位會英文的朋友擔任翻譯。他們的對話如下：

客：Your wife is very beautiful.

譯：他說你太太很漂亮。

主：那裡，那裡。

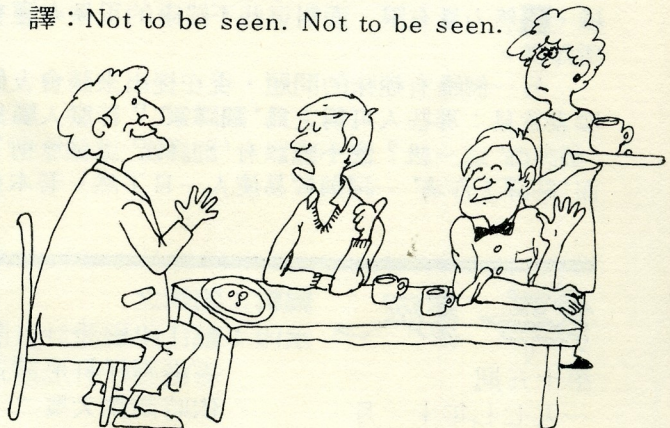
譯：Where? Where?

客：Oh... From head to toe.

譯：他說，從頭到腳都很漂亮。

主：不見得，不見得。

譯：Not to be seen. Not to be seen.



新、舊詞新義

本刊第十一期（一九七六年六月出版）曾報導有關本會計劃小組計劃出版《英文新字彙編》之消息，迄今該小組仍然在搜集、編纂近年來在英美各大報刊出現的新詞和舊詞的新義。下面的是這本《彙編》所收集的十個詞名，由本會執行委員金聖華女士提供。會友若另有高見，請惠函編輯。

ambivalent 兩性人，陰陽人

flackery [俚] 宣傳，宣揚

girlcott 參加反歧視婦女示威

knee-slapper [美] 令人捧腹的笑話

kvetch [美俚] 發牢騷、挑剔、吹毛求疵

paraphernalia 吸毒道具

quick-and-dirty [美俚] 小吃店、快餐櫃台

samizdat [蘇] 秘密出版的書刊

waltz [俚] 易事

wrongo [俚] 不法之徒

培養翻譯人才的條件

華僑日報於十一月二日以“培養翻譯人才的先決條件”為題發表社論，泛論本港之翻譯問題。社論提出幾點建議，以改進本港之翻譯水準。現將社論之主要內容概述如下。—編者

法律文件中譯不夠

社論指出：‘在一九七二年，中文管理委員會主席馮秉芬建議政府將本港法律分四期翻譯成中文，工作可於六年內完成。但至目前止，三十項最重要的法例只譯得八項，而不太重要的二十多項法例只譯得一項’。

調要改進這方面的工作，‘需要採取有層次與精細方法，將法律內容向不懂英語或祇懂少許英語的居民解釋。’張議員主張：‘政府的行政和司法機構派出更多中文主任參加翻譯課程，將更多常用法律文件加以翻譯。’

公事中文質素欠佳

社論引用黃夢花議員之評論：‘中文的翻譯非常混亂，一部份距離“信、雅、達”的水準很遠，更有誤譯至傳為笑柄。’社論說：‘除了法律文件外，其他公事上中英文兼用亦未做得澈底，其中主要因素是適當的翻譯人才，在質與量兩方面都感缺乏。雖然兩間大學都設有翻譯訓練課程，但不能培養出充份人材。這是香港教育的一個基本缺點。以香港現行的教育制度，實難以產生大量的翻譯好素才。翻譯人才的基本條件，必要中英文有相當造詣，再濟之以充份的常識…由於本港的中英文之雙軌教育制度，早播下香港學生難具有中英文都有相當水準的種籽。’

社論建議：

- 一. 香港政府應成立一個臨時性的法例翻譯處專司法律文件之翻譯，既不必抽用有經常工作的翻譯人員，又可羅致有法律相當根底的翻譯負責，譯出來該比較普通翻譯員較為準確，俟香港法例分四期譯竣後，即可將該單位解散。
- 二. 社論支持立法局非官守議員利國偉有關公事上中英文兼用法案的提議：‘我們必須進行基本上的改革，此舉不獨需要重新檢討翻譯的待遇及訓練設施，而且要檢討目前的教育制度。’
- 三. 社論最後說：‘提高一種語文的水準，不能偏賴於教育當局獨負其責，還有待於整個政府、學校、教師、出版界及輿論界的合作與提倡。’ ■

改進之建議

社論引用張有興議員在立法局發表的言論，強

編者的話

蔡思果先生之譯著，已出版二十餘種，其質與量均足以使本會及會友們引以為榮。相信為數甚多的翻譯從業人員在聽畢或讀畢蔡先生的演講詞後，必引起不少感慨。事實上，只有從事翻譯的人，才深切體會到翻譯之難、之苦、之吃力不討好、之不受重視。這種情形到處如此，不過在香港情況更糟而已。究其原因頗多，包括當局的政策、學術界的態度、香港人的閱讀習慣、翻譯人員之語文能力和修養等等。我們作為香港唯一翻譯工作者的專業組織，雖然力量有限，面對這些不健康的現象亦應有所作為。

另一個饒有趣味的問題，現在提出來請會友們發表意見：那些人可稱之為‘翻譯家’？什麼人屬於‘翻譯師’這一級？應不應該有‘翻譯匠’這個尊稱？而‘翻譯工作者’一詞則較易使人一目了然。若本會

能提出原則性，政策性的參考提綱，協助區分翻譯工作者、‘翻譯師’、‘翻譯家’的履歷、資格、經驗、譯著等方面之不同要求和條件，亦不是毫無意義之舉罷！我們既處在一個劃分階段，層次分明的社會，有見習工程師、實習醫生、見習律師、實習教師、實習護士等，那麼我們是不是亦要有實習翻譯、助理翻譯、註冊翻譯，然後是翻譯[專]家呢？讀者如有高見提出，本人無任歡迎。

至於華僑日報十一月二日的社論與蔡先生演講詞，內容不無關係，故特撮要節錄刊載於本期第四頁。本刊將繼續摘錄其他報章的有關文章。會友如有意見發表，本刊亦樂意提供‘讀者來函’一欄將來函刊出。

本期另介紹兩則出版消息，一則新、舊詞新義，以供各讀者參考。

譯訊

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編輯。本刊編輯對來稿有刪改權。如不願刪改者，請在稿件上註明。