

INTRODUCTION

The present volume brings together seven articles by scholars from the Czech Republic, Italy, Latvia, and Poland. Some were recently presented at two conferences organized by the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation International Sinological Center at Charles University in Prague held to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of its existence. The article by Barbara Bisetto was first presented at a conference organized by Ca'Foscari University in Venice in collaboration with Beijing University, in which Charles University was also involved as a partner to both institutions.

The first four articles deal with translation issues associated with ancient Chinese texts, approaching them from different perspectives and with different further agendas. In doing so, the authors attempt to mediate a better understanding of ancient Chinese culture. The starting point of these explorations is the awareness of the limits of our present knowledge. Contextualized close reading is employed as the main tool for exploring the possibility of translating ancient Chinese culture into our current conceptual frameworks and making better sense of ancient China today.

Lukáš Zádřapa, translator of the complete *Hanfeizi* and *Xunzi* into the Czech language, outlines a vast lexical field of terms within the broadly defined concept of 'norm' in his exploration of the (un)-translatability of ancient Chinese texts. The author dubs this study an "introductory survey," even though it is highly detailed and draws from a vast amount of material. In it he indicates directions for further research, gathers basic material, and outlines a broadly based complex methodology rooted in the methods of cognitive linguistics as well as in classical philology. The author uses rich data from a variety of sources important for the history of Chinese thought and society, which enable him to present a broad picture of the distribution of the "norm-words" under investigation and their different usages in different textual contexts. On this basis he also proposes a tentative typology reflecting different streams of early Chinese thought. In the appendix he provides all relevant ancient Chinese 'norm' terms with a translation and brief explanation.

Kateřina Gajdořová's research adds to the ongoing debate about the nature of "philosophy" in ancient China. She sides with those who have recently challenged the assumption that ancient Chinese thought is "acosmotic" and somehow radically different from Western philosophy. Through close readings of relevant passages in excavated manuscripts she offers a microstudy of cosmological inquiry in early Chinese thought and juxtaposes it with Greek pre-Aristotelian traditions. She demonstrates the analogous points between

early Chinese and Greek thought and in doing so implicitly suggests the possibility of translating between these two cultures.

Questions related to understanding and translating ancient Chinese concepts are also at the core of the second article by Dušan Vávra. His exploration, however, is much narrower; it concentrates on the much discussed first chapter of the *Laozi* and its key concepts. The main argument here is that proper understanding of a concept can be arrived at only by its proper contextualization. This means going beyond the usually adopted framework of a sentence, a chapter, or a book. For Vávra the syncretic nature of the *Laozi* is the point of departure for his inquiry, and he theorizes that given the presumed discursive diversity of the *Laozi*, specific passages have to be interpreted in relation to different discourse traditions presented in a variety of other ancient texts. Thus, he aligns the passage under discussion with the *Guanzi* and the *Hanfeizi*, and through comparison he arrives at a possible innovative understanding of the meaning of the key concepts in this chapter. He also critically examines existing translations and eventually proposes his own English version of this proverbially enigmatic text.

Marcin Jacoby also proposes innovative translations of the word *yuyan* 寓言, which is both an ancient term encountered in the *Zhuangzi* and a concept that emerged in modern Chinese literary history. Jacoby approaches Chinese *yuyan* from a comparative perspective and uses Ruben Zimmermann's study of the parables of Jesus as his point of reference. By examining the contents and function of *yuyan*-type narratives in early Chinese philosophical texts within this framework, the author proposes that a more suitable translation of this term is "parable" instead of the more common "fable." A closer look at the "parables" in the *Zhuangzi* follows, in which their content, the embedding of *yuyan* in wider literary structures, and the systematic construction of the central persona of the presumed author, Zhuangzi, are all analyzed. This study reveals the book's literary and philosophical achievements.

These four probes into ancient Chinese philosophy, each with a relatively well-developed comparative dimension, are followed by two articles addressing the phenomenon of translation within Chinese language and culture itself. Barbara Bisetto explores a fourteenth-century explicatory commentary on the poetry of eighth-century poet Du Fu as a case of intralingual translation. She places her discussion informed by general theories of intralingual translation within the context of the Chinese commentarial tradition. Examining in detail the commentaries that explain the meaning of Du Fu's "Qiu xing ba shou 秋興八首" or "Autumn Meditations" cycle, she observes two main tendencies: either a direct explanation with mainly pedagogical aims, or a kind of translation of the poetic original into prose, where also new literary preoccupations are involved. In the end, she also assesses the impact of these tendencies on the way they make the original understood.

Frank Kraushaar's article discusses a recent Taiwanese film adaptation of a medieval Chinese story about the female assassin Nie Yingniang 聶隱娘. The author offers a new interpretation of the film informed by intimate knowledge of the original story (or rather stories, because the film adopts motifs and themes from at least two sources) and its historical background. Unlike Barbara Bisetto, Frank Kraushaar does not ponder theoretical translation issues, although his comparative reading of the source texts and the film in fact also presents a special type of translation that is made within the same language

space between different artistic forms and much more distant moments in time than the commentaries in Bisetto's article.

The last contribution to this volume by Ondřej Klimeš turns to contemporary China and explores the cultural soft power of the People's Republic of China and its national image-building project. The author engages in a close reading of Chinese texts as the basis for further analysis. Working mainly with official sources from the period of Xi Jinping's leadership, the author presents the rationale, values, and instruments of China's cultural soft power strategy. He details how the explicit subordination of culture to political goals has so far undermined the CPC's efforts to present China as a major cultural power.

In the addendum to this volume an article by Leo Ou-fan Lee dedicated to Jaroslav Průšek is included, in which the author offers a rereading of groundbreaking research on modern Chinese literature by Jaroslav Průšek whose theoretical insights have made profound impact on the discipline and have remained a constant source of inspiration for Chinese literature studies. This essay is based on the author's presentation during a gathering in Prague organized by the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation International Sinological Center to commemorate Jaroslav Průšek's anniversary in 2016.

Olga Lomová