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DISPLACEMENT, TRANSFORMATION, HYBRIDIZATION: TRANSLATION AND CHINESE MODERNITY

Defining translation as transformation and resignification, the article argues, through the lens of the Chinese translations of Western "humanism" and "postmodernism," that translation alters, expands, and hybridizes self and Other at the same time, for at the other end of the translation process neither remains the same that has been known and both become displaced, enriched, and revised. At its every phase, Chinese modernity derives its criteria or parameters from translating Western theories of modernity. However, no Western idea or theory comes to China unmodified, untransformed or unhybridized. This is the way Chinese modernity takes its shape. The article concludes that to translate modernity in China is to translate China in a double sense. For what emerges from the processes of appropriative translation in modern China is a form of modernity different from and alternative to the hegemonic modernity of the West, and, therefore, in performatively translating Western ideas and values, the Chinese constantly engage in self-transformation and self-reinvention, eventually returning to the world a Chinese version of modernity for translation.

Modernity in China began and evolved with translation; it was not only inaugurated, but enabled by translation. In other words, translation is not merely auxiliary and instrumental to the shaping of Chinese modernity, but an essential part of it. Over the past hundred years, almost all the master writers such as Yan Fu, Lin Shu, Hu Shi, Chen Duxiu, Lu Xun, Ba Jin, Qu Qiubai, and Zhou Zuoren, to name just a few, whose work has immensely contributed to shaping the blueprint and itinerary of Chinese modernity and without whose work Chinese modernity would be totally unimaginable, have been zealously involved in translating Western works and thoughts into Chinese. While comparing Chinese culture/civilization to a never-ending river, the renowned Sanskrit literature scholar Ji Xianlin notes: "The river of Chinese civilization has kept alternating between rising and falling, but it has never dried up, because there was always fresh water flowing into it. It has over history been joined by fresh water many times, the two largest inflows coming from India and the West, both of which owed their success to translation. It is translation that has preserved the perpet-

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ual youth of Chinese civilization. Translation is hugely useful!"[1] It is in this context of translation that I will stage my discussion on the relationship between translation and Chinese modernity, and it is in this context that I venture to argue that translation not only enables and shapes Chinese modernity but contributes to bringing about a Chinese version of modernity that will eventually call for efforts to translate China. First, for the Chinese translating Western concepts and theories into their own culture is also translating the Chinese desires and anxieties in borrowed Western terms. Second, translation always alters, displaces, and hybridizes the translated and what emerges at the other end of the process of translating modernity will be an alternative modernity, which at once cancels and preserves the Western and the indigenous, the self and the Other, the modern and the premodern at the same time. Last but not least, when in the future the concept of modernity calls for its own backward translations into its place of origin from its landed homes, the world will be translating China into other cultures for the modernity it champions.

I. TRANSLATION AS TRANSFORMATION AND RESIGNIFICATION

Translation, whether linguistic or cultural, textual or theoretical, is not a mere passive or neutral transmission or transferring of images, meanings, ideas, narratives, feelings, and/or scenes, from one language into another or from one geographical space to another. Translation transforms translated and translator at the same time, for at the other end of the translation process neither remains the same that has been known and both become displaced, enriched, and revised. Translation is transformative because, as Saussurean structural linguistics has taught us, there is no necessary correspondence between sign and referent, or between word and meaning. The sign is arbitrary or culturally determined and the relationship of signifier and signified is a mere matter of convention. There is no preexisting system of concepts or ideas prior to language and different cultures cut up the phenomenal world in different ways. If concepts are culture-specific and if there is no universal language, then it goes without saying that there are no identical terms or concepts between any two languages. There is no Chinese equivalent, for example, for the English concept of "gentleman," nor is there a corresponding English term for what was known as *"wenren"* (an independent learned person with educated tastes and skills for music, poetry, painting, and chess playing) in ancient China or in classical Chinese literature. It would be a flabbergasting mistake to translate North American "cowboy" into Chinese *"mutong"* (a child cowherd) or vice versa. One of the most commonly encountered words in philosophy and literary theory is the German word "Dasein," a word Heidegger uses in his *Being and Time,* which he defines as the Being of an entity "which each of us is himself and

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[1]   Quoted from Sun Zhili, "Wenhua yu fanyi" (Culture and Translation), *Translation Quarterly* 13/14 (1999): 160; my translation.

which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being."[2] This word appears untranslated in the English translation of the text with Heidegger's approval documented in his introduction to the English translation. In much the same way, many Greek and Latin words and phrases were left untranslated by Heidegger himself. Due to the often perceived impossibility of translation, translation becomes a performative act of transformation and resignification. Therefore, to translate thoughts and experiences from one cultural context into another is not only to resymbolize them from the source language to the target language, but to displace them, revise them, and hybridize them. Because of the original's untranslatability, the process of translation is, as Paul de Man insightfully points out in "'Conclusion': Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator,'" "an afterlife, because translation also reveals the death of the original."[3] De Man compares the translator to the critic or theorist in terms of their relation to the text they deal with, for neither imitates or reproduces the original, but shows in the original mobility, instability.[4] Literal translation, translation word by word, is the death of meaning. In a sense, all translation, the translation of poetry in particular, is literal translation, for it can only transfer what the words say at the surface level and cannot convey their connotations and underpinnings inextricably embedded in their native culture. This is why translation does and has to performatively displace and transform the original.

Anyone who has read English translations of poems by Li Shangying, Qin Shaoyou, or Su Dongpo, or of Cao Xueqin's epochal novel, or Chinese translations of Shelley's poems or Dickens's novels, will readily agree that what emerges from translation is an afterlife, a transfigured life of the original, for most of the emotional and cultural subtleties and nuanced meanings, and most of the nostalgic memories, enchanted associations, and palatial auras, are irretrievably lost. One exemplary case can be Li Yu's poem (ci) "Yumeiren":

> Chunhua qiuyue heshi liao,
> Wangshi zhi duoshao?
> Xiaolou zuoye you dongfeng,
> Guguo bukan huishou yueming zhong!
> Diaolan yuqi ying youzai,
> Zhishi zhuyan gai.
> Wenjun nengyou jiduo chou?
> Qiaosi yijiang chunshui xiangdongliu.[5]

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[2] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* New York: Harper and Row, 1962, 27.

[3] Paul de Man, "'Conclusions': Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator,'" in *The Resistance to Theory,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986, 85.

[4] See Paul de Man, "'Conclusions': Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator,'" in *The Resistance to Theory,* 82–83.

[5] See Long Yusheng, *Tangsong mingjia cixuan* (Famous Poems Selected from Tang and Song Dynasties), Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Press, 1978, 45.

The English translation reads as follows:

> Spring flowers, autumn moon: when to end?
> The past: how much is known?
> Upon the tower last night, east winds blow again.
> Native country: unbearable to look back amidst the bright moon.
> Carved railings, jade inlays should still be there,
> Only faces are changed.
> How much sorrow do you have?
> The way a spring river eastward flows.[6]

Anyone well versed in classical Chinese poetry (ci) will be surprised how drastically hemorrhaged the English version of Li Yu's poem is of its original graceful rhythm, suggestive imagery, intertextual allusiveness, and aesthetic pleasure, so much so that the two versions almost have nothing to do with each other. In order to frame the discussion within the question of impossibility of translation from one language/ culture into another, I choose not to attend to what is unique to the poetic mode of writing such as meter, rhyme, and euphony; instead I will focus on words, imagery and their connotative associations. For what is unique to poetry not only cannot be transferred from one language into another but become lost even when it is translated or paraphrased in the same language. Words and images are different: they can be transferred in same-language translation or paraphrase without losing much but not between languages or cultures.

Let's first take a look at "xiaolou zuoye you dongfeng, guguo bukan huishou yueming zhong" for example. "Dongfeng" becomes a mere literal pointer without any poetic associations when it metamorphoses into "east winds" whereas in Chinese it recalls first of all the famous couplet from Tang Dynasty poet Li Shangying's "Untitled": "xiangjian shi nan bie yinan, dongfeng wuli baihua can" ("Partings are as difficult as reunions, flowers are withering because east winds are weak"; my paraphrase), which portrays a similar mood of sorrow and a similar desolate situation of helplessness. It also recalls Southern Song Dynasty poet Lu You's "dongfeng e, huanqing bo" ("East winds are unfriendly, happy days are short"; my paraphrase). As for "guguo bukan huishou yueming zhong," "guguo" means more than "native country" or, as encountered in another translation, "home". It means in this context the poet-emperor's lost kingdom or imperial sovereignty. "Yueming" is grievously hemorrhaged into "the bright moon" which in the English literary tradition and English-speaking culture by no means calls to mind the sedimented sentiments surrounding the word or the poetic contexts it has traveled through.[7] An informed reader of Chinese poetry quickly sees the intertext between Li Yu's "yueming" and Tang Dynasty poet Du Fu's

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[6]   Wai-lim Yip, Chinese Poetry: *Major Modes and Genres*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976, 45.

[7]   According to Mikhail Bakhtin, every word of a national language has undergone innumerable contexts, and therefore language, heteroglot in nature, constitutes a space for socio-ideological negotiation among individuals, classes, and communities.

"yue shi guxiang ming," and Li Bai's "jutou wang mingyue, ditou si guxiang."
"Yueming" also reminds one of Cao Cao's "yueming xingxi, niaoque nanfei" from
his poem "buchu xiamen xing" in which Cao Cao says that a great man in the evening
of his life is still inspired by aspirations. In all these poems moonlight is associated ei-
ther with thoughts of home or with apprehensions of belatedness. These associations
coincide well with the sentiments and thoughts residing or implied in Li Yu's poem,
for here what moonlight triggers are also thoughts of home – his own imperial court –
and a sense of belatedness. "Diaolan yuqi" is supposed to signify more than "carved
railings, jade inlays"; it is a metonymy which in Chinese culture refers to imperial pal-
aces or magnificent mansions – here again Li Yu is thinking of his lost empire.
"Zhuyan" does not mean only "faces" or "faces of youth"; rather, it is a synecdoche
standing for beautiful women and in this context imperial concubines and maids.
"Qiasi yijiang chunshui xiangdong liu," in much the same way, becomes an indiffer-
ent, irrelevant reification when turned into "The way a spring river eastward flows."
For in Chinese culture so much meaning and implication have evolved around the im-
age of river waters and it is part of Chinese literary convention to compare the endless
flow of waters and the endless thoughts of sorrow. It is only natural that Li Yu may
have had in mind Li Bai's universally cited couplet "choudao danshui shui geng liu,
jubei xiaochou chou geng chou" ("Stopping the course of water with a broadsword
only makes its current run swifter; drinking oneself out of sorrow only leads to more
sorrows"; my paraphrase). What one detects between Li Yu's and Li Bai's poems is
the shared image of ceaseless sorrow and the shared comparison of sorrow and river
waters. All these are, unfortunately, irrecoverably lost in the English translation. No
readers, Chinese or English, can go back to the original images, connotations, and
sentiments as encountered in Li Yu's poem.

The point I am trying to make here, however, is not that Wai-limYip's translation
is poor or that someone else can do more justice to the original, but that translation
here is impossible. The untranslatability not only allows translation to displace, trans-
form, and "violate" the original, but entitles translation to the status of a performative
act of resignification. The Derridean double-bind of "translation is impossible; trans-
lation is necessary" legitimizes the resignification which displaces, alters, and hybrid-
izes the original. The untranslatable "Sovereign Other," be it a phrase, concept or a
text, by a Hegelian sleight of hand, turns into the translator's sovereignty.[8] On the one
hand, as Edward Said remarks in "Traveling Theory," translating a theory, a concept
or a literary genre from one culture into another is always uprooting it from its original
social and cultural circumstances, wresting it from its original use, and enriching and
expanding its meaning or content.[9] On the other hand, there is always some irreduc-
ible otherness recalcitrant to the translator's will, as structuralist and poststructuralist

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[8] J. Hillis Miller used the term "Sovereign Other" at the Conference on "Legacies of Theory," at
the University of Alberta, October 28–30, 2004.

[9] Edward Said, "Traveling Theory," in *The World, the Text, and the Critic,* Cambridge, MA: Har-
vard University Press, 1983, 226–247.

theories have corroborated over the past few decades. If that is true, neither can the will to assimilate the foreign completely assimilate the foreign, nor can the will to foreignize retain the foreign unchanged or undisplaced. Given that different cultures divide up the phenomenal world differently, there are no semantic or conceptual equivalents between cultures. Therefore, assimilation by no means cancels all the foreignness; foreignization nonetheless displaces the foreign from its original socio-cultural context, thus altering or diminishing its foreignness beyond the translator's control.

II. TRANSLATION AND THE GENESIS OF CHINESE MODERNITY

China had no need for modernity till mid-nineteenth century and never thought itself unmodern till its disgraceful confrontation with a technologically much more powerful West, whose weaponry, machinery, parliamentary and participatory democracy, and Enlightenment ideals of liberty, equality, and individualism all struck the Chinese as modern and superior. Imperial China had never felt any real need to learn from Others. True, from the Han Dynasty to the Song Dynasty there were numerous Buddhist scripts translated from Sanskrit into Chinese and imported Buddhism brought the Chinese a certain modernity in religious-philosophical thought, filling up a felt gap in Chinese culture. However, as André Lefevere has pointed out, Buddhism, since it did not pose a threat to the fabric of Chinese society, was readily assimilated on Chinese terms as evidenced by "the manner of translating" and by "the fact that Taoist concepts were used in translations to acculturate Buddhist concepts."[10] One major sin or virtue of Chinese translational practices is that they often revised or altered the original text or meaning at will, using ready-to-hand Chinese terms or concepts to transfer foreign concepts or terms, because the Chinese were possessed by a center mentality and did not tolerate the thought of being substantially affected by foreign cultures. In this sense, translation was indeed one effective strategy devised for dealing with the Other[11] in that it enabled the Chinese to keep the imported new in an assigned safe place, divesting them of any potential danger to the Central Kingdom under the sun. The center mentality of Chinese society was at the core of the well-maintained Chinese empire, but Sinocentrism or China-centrism, unlike modern Eurocentrism, did not go with what is called expansionism. Expansionism is a defining feature of European modernity, which maintains that man makes his own history and that the Cartesian cogito is the source of knowledge, encouraging the expansion of the self in terms of knowledge, freedom, autonomy and in terms of the ability and means to control and transform the Other. European expansionism finds best expression in Europe's scientific and technological advancement and rapid industrialization

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[10]   André Lefevere, "Chinese and Western Thinking in Translation," in Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere, *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation,* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1998, 13.

[11]   *Ibid*.

as well as in its colonialist expansions all over the world in the nineteenth century. However, it never occurred to the Chinese to expand the individual self's sovereignty and freedom or the collective self's to conquer and control the Other, be it nature or other peoples. Before Columbus claimed to discover the Americas in 1492, China in the Ming Dynasty was already able to build huge ships, but instead of sending fleets and people out to other parts of the world for territorial expansion, imperial China burned hundreds of ocean ships already built, which were the major technological means of imperialist maneuvers at the time. What the Chinese were chiefly concerned with then was how to perpetuate the inherited imperial system with its Confucianist fabric of socio-economic life and political institutions. For, with its four-thousand-year-old civilized history and its sophisticated cultural and social institutions and its highly efficient bureaucracy, why did China need to learn from others?

Things changed drastically in the mid-nineteenth century. Thereafter the Chinese suffered humiliation after humiliation that came with the Sino-Japanese war, the Treaty of Shimonoseki, the Eight-Power Allied Forces' invasion of Beijing, Boxer Indemnity, and a series of ceded territory treaties. Apprehensively aware of the other world systems threatening the safety and sovereignty of imperial China, the Chinese began to take the *xiyi* (Westerners) seriously, starting to voraciously read about and introduce the West. Among the pioneers was Lin Zexu (1785–1850), who was not only actively involved in initiating and organizing several translational projects but did actual translation as well. The first systematic introduction of Western countries' geography, *Encyclopedia of Geography,* was translated by Liang Jinde into *Sizhouzhi (Geography of Four Continents)* on Lin's request. Later this volume along with other works was combined into *Haiguotuzhi (Illustrated Geography Overseas),* Volume 83 of which, entitled *Westerners on Chinese Affairs* (including Thelwall's "Pamphlet Against Opium" and J. F. Davis's "Chinese People") was translated by Lin himself.[12] After Lin, scholars and intellectuals such as Yan Fu, Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, and Zhang Taiyan, whose work triggered an anguished desire in their countrymen for modernity, were all preeminent writers and translators. The most influential Western works were perhaps those translated by Yan Fu, among which were T. Henry Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics and Other Essays,* John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty,* Adam Smith's *Inquiry into the Nature and Cause of the Wealth of Nations,* and Montesquieu's *The Spirit of Law.* As for literary modernity, Lin Shu's translations of European literature were too important to be neglected. All his life, Lin in collaboration with others translated into classical Chinese 160 fictional works from European literature and the best received were Alexandre Dumas's *La dame aux camellias,* H. B. Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield, The Old Curiosity Shop,* and *Nicholas Nickleby,* Watt Scott's *Ivanhoe,* Charles Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare,* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*.[13] Later on, leaders of New

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12 See Ma Zuyi, *Zhongguo fanyi jianshi: "wusi" yiqian bufen* (A Brief Chinese History of Translation Before May Fourth), Beijing: China Translation Company, 1998, 328–330.
13 See Guo Yanli, *Zhongguo jindai fanyiwenxue gailun* (The Modern Translated Literature of China: An Introduciton), Wuhan: Hubei Educational Press, 1998, 278.

Culture Movement around May 4 1919 such as Chen Duxiu, Hu Shi, Lu Xun, and Zhou Zuoren all made great contributions to translating Western works and ideas into Chinese with a view to constructing a Chinese modernity.

Roughly speaking, there were two different attitudes towards Western modernity and its translation into China from the mid-nineteenth century to May 4 1919, which respectively championed two different kinds of translation theory and strategy. Most of the pre-May 4 intellectuals were still of the mind that what China needed to import from the West were basically technology and economics, and that Chinese culture must remain the substance of the projected reformed Chinese society. This group in translation practices did not aim at accuracy but at turning out a familiar Chinese version of the translated thought or experience, and in rendering the source text into *wenyanwen* (classical Chinese), they translated feelings, experiences, and ideas encountered in the source text into handy terms and expressions readily available in Chinese instead of creating new terms to transfer the unfamiliar Western concepts and thoughts into Chinese culture. The second group believed that a rejuvenated China had to undergo a radical change and cast away its traditional culture and social custom. And for them the first thing that was necessary to trigger the birth of a New China was a totally new or renewed language linguistically, culturally, and discursively. Therefore they in their textual practices, both critical and translational, started using what was called *baihuawen* (vernacular Chinese). They had to create new terms out of Chinese characters to convey Western thoughts and themes. Translated into vernacular Chinese accessible to the average man and woman, the influx of new thoughts and values exerted an unprecedented impact on Chinese society. It is this group of writers-translators that set on foot the project of Chinese modernity. And it is this group of intellectuals who advocated a wholesale repudiation of traditional Chinese culture. In *Xindalu youji* (Travels in the New Continent), Liang Qichao said, "our standard of civilization falls a long way below [the Americans']. When I compare our nation with theirs, I can only sigh and weep."[14] In Hu Shi's view, China then was in every way inferior to its Western Others, inferior not only technologically and materially but "politically, socially [and] morally." The Chinese "must give up all hope and study others. Speaking frankly, we must not be afraid of imitating."[15] Echoing Hu's Eurocentric remarks was Wen Yiduo, who wrote, "Compare Chinese and Western styles? What do you have to compare Western styles with? Are you good enough for any comparison?"[16] Lu Xun's much cited "grabbism" (nalai zhuyi) outdid all the above-mentioned comparisons of China and the West in blunt frankness. What informs the May 4 intellectuals and their translational principles and projects are the anxieties to mould China into a modern power that is strong enough to rival the West. It is their writings and translations that laid the groundwork for Chinese modernity.

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[14] Qtd. in Jerome Chen, *China and the West: Society and Culture 1815–1937,* London: Hutchison of London, 1979, 78.
[15] *Ibid.,* 89.
[16] *Ibid.*

Between May 4, 1919 and the 1940s all kinds of Western modernism were introduced to China through translation: Darwinism, Schopenhauer, Rousseau, Nietzsche, Proust, Mallarmé, Flaubert, Baudelaire, Goethe, Marx, Freud, Sartre, Woolf, Eliot, Wilde, Bergson, etc., etc. These were the decades which marked an epochal rupture in the history of Chinese thought and culture. Hundreds of Western terms and concepts such as kexue (science), minzhu (democracy), geming (revolution), ziyou (freedom), qimeng (Enlightenment), and renwenzhuyi (humanism) flooded into China and took root in the fabric of Chinese social life as well as Chinese language and thought.

III. "RENWENZHUYI" (HUMANISM) AND "HOUXIANDAIZHUYI" (POSTMODERNISM): DISPLACEMENT AND HYBRIDIZATION OF THE TRANSLATED

There is no doubt that Chinese modernity began and developed with translating the modern West. But there is no reason to take Chinese modernity as a replica of its Western forerunner, because translation is not transmission but transformation, whether it is linguistic translation or cultural translation. Just as the more conservative intellectuals' assimilative translation ushered into China a world of foreign values, thoughts, and perspectives, despite its insistence on "domesticating" foreign ideas and concepts, so the more radical intellectuals' "foreignizing" translation against its intended goal ended up sinicizing or indigenizing imported ideas and theories. One prominent theme of Chinese modernity over the past hundred years is *qimeng,* which is the Chinese translation of "Enlightenment." But between Chinese "qimeng" and English "Enlightenment," there occurs a pronounced shift or change in meaning. Enlightenment for Europeans is a historical process but it has been translated into "a spectrum of different themes" in China, due to completely dissimilar interpretations of the European historical movement which are motivated or necessitated by varying historical situations.[17] As Wang Hui has pointed out, the concept of qimeng among the May 4 intellectuals had for its content a relentless break with traditions; during the Second World War, *qimeng* came to metamorphose into a triple movement of patriotism in China; then in post-Mao China the theme of *qimeng* pointed to a critique of orthodox Marxism. A more interesting case of translation as transformation is the rendition of "humanism" into renwenzhuyi, rendaozhuyi, and renbenzhuyi, respectively meaning in English "humanism," humanitarianism," and "anthropocentrism." Anyone informed of the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s definition of "humanism" will see that its reifications in Chinese not only shrink its rich connotations, but alter its culture-embedded meaning. "Humanism," according to *OED,* refers to 1. belief in the mere humanity of Christ; 2. the character or quality of being human; devotion to human interests; 3. a system of thought or action which is concerned with merely human interest (as distinguished from divine); 4. devotion to those studies which promote

[17] Wang Hui, "Humanism as the Theme of Chinese Modernity," http://www.pum.umontreal.ca/revues/surfaces /vol5/hui.html, 16 May 2003, 3.

human culture, especially the study of the Roman and Greek classics.[18] A rediscovery and re-evaluation of classical civilization, humanism in Renaissance Europe designated an intellectual and social movement which, emerging as a reaction against scholasticism, the dominant intellectual school of the Middle Ages, championed a system of beliefs about humanity which excludes God from reality and makes man the judge of his own world. At the very core of European humanism is the attempt to place man at the center of the universe, upholding humanity as the measure of all things. This sketchy delineation of the historical context and the discursive thrust of European humanism is already evidence enough for its untranslatability and its necessary hybridization when transferred into the Chinese cultural context. For *renwenzhuyi* in China did not emerge as a break with the social, intellectual, and ideological climate instituted in the Middle Ages and China had not been exposed to centuries of subjection of the spirit to rigid, tyrannical Christian institutions. Religion was never a substantial part of Chinese social life and the oppressive social hierarchy and institutions in China were imposed upon its people not in the name of God but in the name of Man. In other words, China was primarily a secular society from the beginning. It is only obvious that there is not even a near-synonym in Chinese for European "humanism." "Renwen," the two key characters used to translate "humanism," originally came from the Section of *Ben* in the *Book of Changes:* "To observe heavenly culture (tianwen) is to realize the changes of times; to observe human culture (renwen) is to educate the whole world."[19] *Renwen* in ancient China had nothing to do with an idea of modernity, whereas the humanities in Europe bespoke a yearning for modernity via turning to ancient Greek and Roman classics. True, because the term *renwen* comes from ancient classics in China, as Wang Hui has noted, the Chinese New Culture intellectuals seem to have shared a common position with the Renaissance intellectuals of Europe in resorting to ancient classics and culture for an emancipated, rejuvenated present. However, this apparent similarity, on closer examination, only betrays a fundamental difference in that European Renaissance scholars turned to ancient Greek and Roman classics for literary and intellectual resources to mould a modern society whereas the Chinese intellectuals looked to the West instead of their ancient past for the spiritual, intellectual, and social resources in building modernity though they had to borrow characters from the ancient past to translate modern Western terms. The genuine structural parallel between Chinese *renwenzhuyi* and Western humanism, however, consists in that each used a distant Other, an elsewhere, as the norm for modernity and each had to fight with a repressive and oppressive tradition of thought and representation. This structural similarity is the reason for the Chinese embrace of humanism. In mobilizing social energy to emancipate humanity from the secular forms of tyranny, the Chinese version of humanism certainly displaces the

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[18] See *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971, 1345.

[19] See Wang Hui, "Humanism as the Theme of Chinese Modernity," http://www.pum. umontreal.ca/revues/surfaces/vol5/hui.html, 4.

Western concept from its original socio-historical content, but, at the same time, it expands and enriches the concept.

Another intriguing instance of transformative translation of the West-embedded concept or theory into China is *houxiandaizhuyi* (postmodernism) which did not become known to the Chinese till the 1980s.[20] Postmodernism emerges in the post-Second-World-War West as a cultural and intellectual movement against the principles and assumptions that have underpinned the Western thought and social life for the past few centuries. Postmodernism as such relentlessly decenters the sign, the subject, the world, and history, and the assumptions it questions and challenges, "which constitute the core of what we call modernism, include a belief in the inevitability of progress in all areas of human endeavor, and in the power of reason, as well as a commitment to originality in both thought and artistic expression."[21] Postmodernism as such is expressed in developments in arts and culture, in new forms of social and economic organization, and in various designations of poststructuralist theory, which can be respectively distinguished by postmodernism, postmodernity, and the postmodern.[22] In its philosophical and aesthetic aspects postmodernism is best articulated by the Lyotardean war on totality and on grand narratives and by the cultural logic of late capitalism, which Fredric Jameson defines in terms of pastiche, depthlessness of meaning, eclipsed history, the loss of critical distance, and the split sign. When postmodernism as such began to be translated into China in the 1980s, it only pointed to its groundlessness in China as many critics have discussed. If postmodernism is the cultural logic of late capitalism, it is certainly a catachresis to apply the term to a 1980s China when capitalist modernity was something that remained to be (re)inaugurated in China. Instead of striving beyond the modern, the Chinese decidedly considered themselves not modern enough. One has to agree that during most of the 1980s postmodernism in China "as a discourse preceded postmodernism as a reality and that the intense experience of change, similar to that of the West on a macro-historical scale, did not give rise to the Euro-American feeling among the Chinese that "the modern was over."[23] It is no surprise that at a historical moment when the Chinese were anxious to break out of the forbidden space of Maoist ideology and social life, postmodernism was groundlessly translated in China into postsocialist and post-revolutionary energies, sensibilities, narratives, images, and theoretical formulations. To say that postmodernism was groundless in China in the mid-1980s and the early 1990s is not, however, to preclude certain significant psychical or psychological parallels China bore with the West. Due to their different traumatic historical experi-

[20] As for detailed descriptions of postmodernism translated and received in China, cf. Wang Ning, "The Mapping of Chinese Postmodernity", *Boundary* 2, 24.3(1997): 19–40.

[21] Stuart Sim, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism,* London: Routledge, 2001, 339.

[22] Stevens Connor, "Postmodernism," in Michael Payne ed., *A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory,* Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, 428.

[23] See Arif Dirlik and Xudong Zhang, "Introduction: Postmodernism and China," in Arif Dirlik and Xudong Zhang eds., *Postmodernism and China,* Durham: Duke University Press, 2000, 8.

ences, both China and the West were disillusioned with an exhausted utopian modernity project; both were impatient to turn from public to private, from depth to surface, from spirit to body, and from rational to irrational. What the Chinese were looking for, in the course of translating postmodernism, was an expedited entry into the modern in Lyotard's sense of the word. They incorporated postmodernism, among other things, to forge a new modernity, a capitalist modernity, instead of a postmodernity. When Lyotard said that the postmodern is "undoubtedly part of the modern," and that "postmodernism is not modernism at its end, but in a nascent state," for "a work can become modern only if it is first postmodern,"[24] he can be interpreted as saying that to be modern is always to be post a certain achieved modernity or modernism be it realism, impressionism, or modernism, or a Thackeray, Césanne, or T. S. Eliot. This idea implicitly gives rise to a concept or reality of modernity or postmodernity that is relational or relative in kind, that is, a nation's or a community's modernity or postmodernity may not be a merging into a spatial Other, but a break with its own past. This well accounts for the explosion of postmodern thoughts and representations in literature, visual and plastic art, and cinema in the mid-1980s and 1990s China, which can certainly be theorized in terms borrowed from Western postmodernism, but which more often than not point to a postmodernism displaced from its Western social context. Indeed, when the Chinese translated the concept of postmodernism into Chinese language and culture, they consciously and unconsciously displaced and expanded it from its Western social, historical and intellectual content, and in this way China returns an enriched concept and practice of postmodernism to the world.

The translation of a concept or theory from a source culture into a receptor culture always hybridizes it, and as such the translation always points to a future moment when the concept or theory, when called upon to revise its identity, will gather new or added meanings from its various reifications abroad. And this will be the moment when the concept will, as previously mentioned, call for its own backward translations to its place of origin from its landed homes. Translation as transformation or hybridization as we have discussed so far certainly has much to do with translators' anxieties, preferences, and decisions, but more importantly, it is to a large extent effected by something that is beyond translators' conscious will or decision. In his 2004 essay on "Xiandaixing, minzu he wenxue lilun" cultural critic Nan Fan names that almost unnamable something as "indigenous or Chinese experience."[25] Despite the looseness of his vocabulary, Nan Fan's insightful remarks on translation as transformation or hybridization are extremely useful to the present discussion and are worth quoting at length:

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[24] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992, 12, 13.

[25] The "indigenous or native Chinese experience" discussed in Nan Fan's essay can be taken as made up of lived and historically embedded traditions, lifestyles, cultural and intellectual habits, social customs, and modes of feeling and expression.

> The unique structure of Chinese experience alone can resist the forceful reproduction of Western literary theory, undermining the established relationship of knowledge and power, destroying the illusion of universalism. That is why the encounter between Chinese experience and Western literary theory often results in a dramatic transformation of both. Through various appropriations, extensions, misreadings or distortions, Western literary theory undergoes alteration or hybridization, thus losing its consistency and authority. ... Indigenous Chinese experience is of course perpetually in the process of (re)construction, rejecting any essentialist interpretation. The unique lived experience continuously challenges theory, forces theory to renew itself. Chinese experience is the inexhaustible content of Chinese literature as well as the basis for theorizing the relationship of literature and modernity. This is a necessary component of Chinese version of modernity. If modernity is plural in number, then the Chinese version of modernity must provide a modernity project other than the familiar Western one.[26]

There are three key points on translation and hybridized modernity derivable from the quoted passage. First, indigenous Chinese experience does not admit any Western theory translated into China unchanged; instead, it resists and transforms it. Second, the resistant and transformative indigenous experience always remains to be changed. Third, translation-inaugurated and translation-mediated Chinese modernity has to be differentiated and displaced from hegemonic Western modernity. If literary or cultural translation changes or displaces self and Other at the same time due to a perpetually changing indigenous experience of history, then translation-mediated interactions among different cultures and nations indeed result in what Roland Robertson terms the universalization of particularism and the particularization of universalism.[27] This two-fold process happens simultaneously throughout the history of international or global contact. The implications of Robertson's theory of globalization are not only that globalization is neither a centripetal process of homogenization nor a centrifugal process of fragmentation, but that translation itself can prevent cultural homogenization from happening.

IV. CONCLUSION: TRANSLATING MODERNITY TOWARDS TRANSLATING CHINA

Ever since their first contact with the modern West, the Chinese have always aspired for an alternative modernity though the doctrine of whole-sale Westernization has never lacked a strong following (e.g. at the turn of the nineteenth century and in the 1980s and 1990s). The idea of alternative modernity appeals to its various advocates in China at different historical moments. As Fengzhen Wang and I have put elsewhere, the Chinese have always been ambivalent towards the kind of modernity championed by the West. Such ambivalence finds expression "in a mind split between opening up a path of modernity on its own and following the Western itinerary

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[26] Nan Fan, "Xiandaixing, minzu he wenxue lilun" (Modernity, Nation and Literary Theory), *Wenxue pinglun* (Literary Review), 1 (2004):145; my translation.

[27] Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture,* London: Sage, 1992, 109.

of modernity, or a compromise in-between."[28] This is especially true today when China is being fully globalized into the world's economic system. On the one hand, the Chinese are vehemently embracing and importing everything Western from free-market, consumerism, urban space, spatial language, cinematography, food, theory, and advertising to fashion, sex, body politics, violence, commodity fetishism, and commodified education and publication. On the other hand, they want to be modernized technologically and economically without losing their cultural heritage and sovereignty. One of the most engaging ongoing debates on globalization in China today concerns the survival and identity of local or indigenous cultures under the impact of global flows of capital, information, ideology, values, and technology. There is a general anxiety behind the debate, the fear that the ongoing processes of globalization are threatening to level or erase various historically formed local cultures. Each side in this particular debate seems to be apprehensive of the perceived prospects of disappearing indigenous or local cultures. However, critics seem to have neglected or underestimated performative-transformative translational agency. If transformative translation alters the self and the Other or the translated and the translator at the same time as has been evidenced by the past four thousand years of global interaction and exchange, then what emerges at the end of the translational process is always a hybridized product which at once cancels and preserves both self and Other and allows neither full sovereignty.[29] This fact in no way changes the lived reality that West-centered capitalism with its consumerist culture-ideology is penetrating every corner of the world, but it opens new ways of imagining alternative routes of modernity as well as theorizing and mobilizing counter-hegemonic agency in opposition to global capitalism.

Historically, modernity is a European reality, and if we talk about modernity in terms of European or Western modernity's parameters, then there seems to be no modernity elsewhere, for in historicity those places and Western countries have little in common. Therefore, the modernity developed in countries and areas other than the West owes its existence to its relation both to a simultaneous spatial Other and to a temporal Other which is the non-Western countries' own pre-modern anteriority. When Lyotard collapses the rigid opposition between the modern and the postmodern, he is not only talking about the dialectic of modernity and postmodernity, but is disengaging the modern and the postmodern from their European or Western context, making the ideas of modernity and postmodernity applicable elsewhere. For, when the modern is and has to be postmodern, it means, as previously discussed, that

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[28] Shaobo Xie and Fengzhen Wang, "Introduction," in Shaobo Xie and Fengzhen Wang eds., *Dialogues on Cultural Studies: Interviews with Contemporary Critics,* Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2002, xvii.

[29] For examples of hybridization, see Wang Ning, "Xiandaixing, fanyi wenxue yu zhongguo xiandai wenxue jingdian chonggou" (Modernity, Translated Literature, and the Reconstruction of Modern Chinese Literary Classics), *Wenyi yanjiu* (Literature and Arts Studies) 6 (2002): 32–40.

the postmodern in question is actually a "modern" post an existing or hegemonic "modern." Lyotard's theorizing on modernity can be taken as an effort to emancipate the concept of modernity into a relational one. The relationality of modernity frees non-Westerners from the domination of the Western discourse of modernity, alleviating them of their political anxieties and their fears of being reduced to the status of subalternity. It is well arguable that there are three phases to Chinese modernity, which can be respectively designated as the cultural, the political, and the economic. At its every phase, Chinese modernity derives its criteria from translating Western theories of modernity. With the May 4 Cultural Revolution intellectuals, the model of cultural modernity, synchretic and ambivalent in nature, comes from translating works by Rousseau, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Marx, Spencer, Weber, Smith, Dewey, Hugo, Shelley, Stendhal, Joyce, Babbitt, Lenin, Turgenev, Chekhov, Tolstoy, Emerson, etc. One certainly has to acknowledge the "naiveté and confusion" of those intellectuals[30] and the unfulfilled nature of their modernity project judged in terms of Western modernity, but the fact is, after their anguished desires and efforts to translate Western ideas and works, there did emerge a new literature, a new culture, a new social formation, a new educational system, and new ways of thinking and representation, which laid the foundation of Chinese literary, intellectual, scientific, and cultural modernity, although much of the country at that time remained unaffected by the modern. The second phase of Chinese modernity openly declared itself as counter or alternative to hegemonic Western modernity, translating Marxism into a socialist theory whose terms were indigenized and made accessible to the average worker and peasant. The Maoist project of modernity experimented with what had been unimagined and unforeseen in the history of Western modernity in attempting to remake humanity, rebelling "against all that is normative."[31] The third, economic phase of Chinese modernity is postsocialist in kind. This is the moment when the Chinese, displaced from their traditional ethnoscapes, technoscapes, financescapes, mediascapes, and ideoscapes, are undergoing a nation-wide geographical, social, cultural, and institutional deterritorialization and reterritorialization. The desire of capital is penetrating into every Chinese social and political space and, confronted with the perceived superiority of the West in technology, economy and ideology, the Chinese unhesitantly cast off the Maoist politico-cultural legacy for the eternal now of consumerist jouissance and fulfillment. They choose pragmatism over idealism, development over stability, efficiency over equality, space over place, cosmos over hearth, and freedom over security.[32] China is now becoming fully globalized and the

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[30] See Shaobo Xie, "Rethinking the Problem of Postcolonialism," *New Literary History,* 28.1 (1997): 13.

[31] Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity Versus Postmodernism," in Jeffrey C. Alexander and Steven Seidman eds., *Culture and Society,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, 344.

[32] According to I-fu Tuan, space and cosmos are associated with freedom whereas place and home give the peasantry a sense of security. Moving into the city, into the space of freedom, one gives up one's place-rooted customs, habits, and ways of life. For more discussion of space and place

world is becoming fully China-affected. All kinds of ideas, modernist and postmodernist alike, are imported through translation – one can hardly name a single Western concept or theory, modern or postmodern, that has not been translated into Chinese. However, no Western idea or theory comes to China unmodified, untransformed or unhybridized. This is the way Chinese modernity takes its shape. A nonsynchronic gathering of temporalities and a differential collectivity from the West, Chinese modernity asserts its presence in the world as an alternative modernity. This should be no surprise in a world alive with projects of alternative modernity. For, as John Gray writes in *False Dawn,* "There are many modernities and as many ways of failing to be modern."[33]

Whether Chinese modernity is a camouflaged socialism or a masquerading capitalism, it will be an alternative to the currently hegemonic form of capitalism, as long as linguistic, conceptual, and cultural translation performatively transforms the self and the Other at the same time, resignifying and hybridizing the imported or globalized concepts, habits, fashions, customs, or practices for various reasons previously discussed. Economic analysts have remarked that China will develop faster than many other areas in the world, and that in a few decades it will in important aspects catch up and even overtake the USA, the universally acknowledged paragon of modernity. Such optimistic predictions are based not merely on statistical figures so far published in and outside of China, but on the fact that the Chinese regard their modernity as far from complete and that their anxieties and energies for modernity are far from being exhausted. They will for decades remain euphorically enthusiastic about modernity or capitalism and they have huge untried space for expansion in their mind and in their market. If China will, like Japan, return an alternative model of modernity to the world after its century-long endeavor to modernize itself, translation will be a key factor. Translating modernity sounds impossible, like translating poetry, but it is what has happened in real history. Translation brought China and the West into contact; it transformatively imports Western ideas and values; it constantly rejuvenates China's national energy and identity. Translation makes an imagined future increasingly nearer and more tangible when the translated West will be admiringly translating the non-West. It is in this sense that translating modernity in China is towards and even synonymous with translating China because every translational project displaces China from where it was, and because at the other end of the translational process the world will be translating China, not for its ancient glories, but for the glories of its modernity.

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and their differentiation and significance in Chinese culture, see I-fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977, 3; *Cosmos and Hearth: A Cosmopolite's Viewpoint,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, 1–2.

[33]   John Gray, *False Dawn,* New York: The New Press, 1998, 195.