



5TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON LIFELONG EDUCATION AND
LEADERSHIP FOR ALL

CONFERENCE PROCEEDING BOOK

TOPIC: ECONOMICAL SIDES OF LIFELONG EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

9-11 JULY, 2019 BAKU, AZERBAIJAN

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ICLEL 2019
(5th International Conference on Lifelong Education
and Leadership for ALL-ICLEL 2019)

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ISBN: 978-605-66495-7-8

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Online Publication: December 28, 2019
ICLEL Publication: ICLEL Conferences
Sakarya University Faculty of Education
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The Role of Translation Studies and Translation Theory in the Far East

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Abstract

The translation activity, which began to transform into a discipline with James Holmes's, seminal paper entitled "The Name and Nature of Translation Studies" in 1972 has increasingly established relationship with such disciplines as linguistics, literature, sociology, philosophy, anthropology, archeology, and so on. In terms of this relationship between Translation Studies and these disciplines, this academic field of study has also evolved into an inter-disciplinary branch of science over time. As a result, scholars have introduced many different theories and approaches under linguistic, cultural, sociological and technological revolutions and turns within TS. The foundations of translation studies have begun to be established in this way. Upon considering overall TS literature, one can see that most of the translation theories and approaches are actually western-centered. In fact, it may be because the West is in a sense more advanced than the East in terms of scientific developments. But did only the Western approaches have an impact on the translation in terms of its gaining a scientific status? What is the position of far eastern countries like China on translation and translation studies? What is the contribution of both west and far eastern scholars to the far east in the advancement of translation studies? Have the far eastern scholars ever put forward any theories or approaches to contribute to the translation process, its function, and production, like their counterparts in the west or have they at least conducted studies in this respect? In this geography, what kind of translation problems do scholars deal with and what are the similarities and differences between East and West? Based on these questions, the study questions the place of translation studies and translation theories in the far eastern countries such as China and makes a scrutinization on how they are received in these geographies. It is hoped that this study will contribute to the emergence of new paradigms in order to support the progressive structure of translation studies in parallel with the translation needs in the far east.

Key Words: Translation studies, translation theories, translation approaches, far east, China.

Introduction

Thanks to the American / Dutch translation scholar James Holmes's seminal paper entitled "The Name and Nature of Translation Studies" held in Copenhagen in 1972 and presented at the International Linguistics Congress the translation activity, which has become the tool of communication in at least two different nations and cultures for commercial, sociological, cultural, political and military purposes for many years, has now begun to be considered a different discipline being more than just a linguistic activity. And the name of the discipline is currently defined as Translation Studies or Translatology in some sources. At first, the translation activity was studied under the umbrella of applied linguistics and comparative literature. However, over the second half of the 20th century it has evolved from linguistic turn to cultural, sociological, pragmatic and nowadays technological turn in terms of the relations it has established with linguistics, literature and cultural studies. TS can also be called as an interdisciplinary discipline in terms of its interdisciplinary relationship with even computer technologies¹.

However, it can be quite easily observed that most of the pioneer scientists and translation theorists playing a role in the acquisition of this scientific identity of translation studies are Westerners according to the related works on translation studies in foreign languages and the scientific discourses of translation are developed within this scope. However, there have been many researches and studies in the field of translation studies, especially in the Far East countries such as China in recent years. And within this framework there are some articles, papers, dissertations, books and project-level studies on translation studies. Therefore, the following questions may

¹ See Snell Hornby, 2006; Munday, 2016; Odacıoğlu, 2017.



come to mind at this point: What is the point of view of the Far East countries in translation and translation studies? In which areas and subjects are the studies carried out? What is the impact of the Far East on the development of translation studies?² Have Far Eastern scientists ever developed or are developing theories or theoretical approaches to translation studies? Based on these research problems, the studies of the Far East scientists in the field of translation studies and the approaches of the western writers regarding the translation studies in the far east and their related studies were examined in this paper. And answers to the questions such as how the Far East's approach to translation and translation studies is and how they are defining this discipline have been tried to be found.

Therefore, the method used in this study is document review and descriptive research. It is hoped that the research will fill the gap which we believe to be incomplete in the literature and make a contribution to the field of translation studies in terms of evaluating the point of view of the far east within translation studies. In addition, a bibliography was made in this area by referring to the sources written in the field of translation studies in the Far East. Related sources were given in the references of our study.

History of Translation in the Far East, Translation Theories, Approaches, Translation Strategies and Translation Problems, An Evaluation on Translation Education and Fields: The Chinese Case

As emphasized earlier, researches on translation studies such as translation approaches, theories, strategies and problems remain relatively untouched in the far east compared to research studies in the West. In addition, most of the discourses that are dominant in the literature of translation studies are European-centered³. For example, most of the researches on the history of translation in the case of China are often placed second in new sources. However, George Steiner's 1975 work *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* and Anthony Pym's *Method in Translation History* contains some references and brief information about the history of Chinese translation. In addition, Eugene Eoyang (1993) uses the term "no man's land" to indicate that the history of translation in China has not been sufficiently addressed in Western translation studies (Xia, 2006: 147-148). Xu Hun, a renowned translator and scientist in the Chinese special issue of *Meta* magazine, divides the Chinese translation history into four different periods:

1. The period in which sutras were translated
2. The translation approach in the Ming Dynasty and Qing period
3. The translation approach in the early twentieth century
4. The translation approach during the People's Republic of China (Xia, 2006: 149).

Eva Hung breaks down the history of translation in China into three periods:

1. The period in which the Buddhist sutras were translated
2. Jesuit translation activities at the end of the Ming dynasty period
3. The period in the second half of the nineteenth century, when the Western sources were translated into Chinese, which paved the way for finding out what was happening in the West (see Xia, 2006: 149).

Luo and Lei handled the translation history in three stages in terms of translation practice:

² In this study representing the Far East, the Chinese example was used. However, even only the Chinese example can give information about the general profile of other Far East countries compared to the West, and translation studies can become a matter of interest and enable more detailed research in the case of different Far East countries. For example, thanks to the literature review in the case of Japan, some studies have been identified such as Yukari Fukuci Meldrum's article titled *Japanese Translation Studies: A New Discipline* and Ásdís E. Benediktsdóttir's study called *Japan and the West: A Journey through Time and Translation* (2012), and Judy Wakabayashi's paper titled "Japanese Translation Historiography: Origins, Strengths, Weaknesses and Lessons" and Nana Sato Rosberg and Judy Wakabayashi's book called *Translation and Translation Studies in Japanese Context* (2012).

³ According to Wang, in contrast to Western approaches dominated by European-centered discourses, translators in China conduct studies contributing to world literature in the context of literary translation (Wang, 2015: 46). In addition, European-centered discourses are frequently used by those supporting radical relativism and postcolonialists to criticize non-Western scientists (Fung Chang, 2018: 463).



1. The stage in which Buddhist texts were translated by foreign monks
2. The stage in which Chinese and foreign translators translate these texts together
3. The stage in which Chinese translators undertake the translation process alone (Luo and Lei, 2004: 20).

In our ever-globalizing world, academic research in China in the field of translation studies is now starting to gain momentum and the isolation against the West is now decreasing in this respect. Especially with the interaction of China with the outside world and different cultures, there has been an unprecedented rise in translation studies in these lands. While Chinese translation scholars and translators do not completely turn their back to the West, they tend to constantly learn from the West in the field of translation studies and also play an active role in the development of the discipline with their translation theories⁴, approaches and discourses. However, compared to the West, it can be seen that the Chinese translation scholars and translators are more interested in the translation practice and process, and the translation theories and approaches that they use and apply are mostly translation process-oriented approaches⁵. In other words, Chinese translation scholars and translators prefer to explore the field rather than exploring the different aspects of translation and rather than conducting more research on defining translation from different perspectives (Sun, 2012: 32 and 35). Because the world of Chinese translation studies has established a self-working system. In 1983, Luo published an article entitled “我国自成体系的翻译理论 (“Our Country's Translation Theory of Its Own”). In this article, he mentioned the dissatisfaction with the impact of contemporary translation theories on China. He also stated that the Chinese translation theory has a distinctive character in the homeland and their own theories and approaches are in a unique position in the world of translation and that Chinese scientists should not belittle themselves compared to the West (Zaixi, 2009: 2-3). In fact, Luo, as in the case of European-centered discourses, focused on the Chineseness of Chinese translation theories in order to create a different discourse against the West (cf. Zaixi, 2009: 5). Similarly, Gui stated in 1986 that Chinese Translation Studies should be established. Fang, Sung, and Zhang, instead, have focused on improving the existing translation studies by highlighting the distinctive features of the Chinese translation world (see Zaixi, 2009: 6).

From this point of view, the main goal in the development of translation studies in China can be stated to be the realization of scientists 'and translators' own methods and theoretical systems, and in this context to present a distinctive character of China. Thus, a cultural policy⁶ has to be created and at the same time, answers to translation problems related to cultural and political changes have been sought. For these reasons, traditional Chinese translation theories⁷ tend to have improved and go on improving by taking these points in consideration. Translation theories and approaches in China for centuries⁸ have been based on the trio of loyalty, lucidity and elegance (1889), which Yan Fu⁹ mentioned in the preface of *Evolution and Ethics*, which he translated from T.H Huxley (Sun, 2012: 36).

In parallel with this, arguments alternated between free vs. faithful translation strategies especially in the translation of religious texts in China, like the West for centuries. The arguments of the first translators on these

⁴ Chinese translators tended to produce translation theories from their translation practices (Luo and Lei, 2004).

⁵ They can also be considered as individual-centered approaches. The process is carried out by the individual (Hee Kim, 2009).

⁶ Chinese scientists conducted extensive research into translation studies in China by focusing on cultural studies, intercultural communication, and cultural linguistics. And the widespread cultural philosophy in China has had a significant impact on translation studies. In addition, traditional translation studies should be considered in a closed, synthetic and inter-disciplinary system in the case of China (see Xia, 2015: 2901).

⁷ At this point, the question can come to mind as to whether translation process-oriented Chinese Translation Theories, can become a paradigm just like the Western Translation Theories. While it is necessary to carry out a detailed research to answer this question, it can be claimed based upon the information in the text that the methods and strategies followed by Chinese translators in the translation process can be evaluated within the scope of translation theories and these approaches are a paradigm as long as they are scientific as mentioned here.

⁸ Another translator Xuan Yang (602- 664) translated Buddhist texts from the Sanskrit and contributed to Chinese culture, literature and language. Xuan Yang applied a number of approaches in the translation process such as omission, changing, splitting, joining, borrowing, adding, etc. (Mei, 2003).

⁹ What Luo and Lei stated are mentioned in the third stage of Chinese translation process.



approaches can be seen as the beginning of the translation studies (yi xue) in China. Apart from this translation phase, which was mentioned by Luo and Lei as the first stage¹⁰, Dao Ann's¹¹ reflections on “Wu Shi Ben”(the five cases in which the meaning of the original text was lost¹²) can be seen as the first approach in China within TS. By pointing out the cases when the original text should not be translated, Hsuantsang was the first to mention the issue of “untranslatability”. Fa Yun reflects his ideas on naturalization and alienation in the preface of his book *Collection of Translation of Sanskrit Names* (Luo and Lei, 2004: 20-21).

The second phase, which Luo and Lei indicated, began with the arrival of the Italian missionary Michael Ruggieri in 1580 on the Canton coast. This period lasted 200 years and the translation of Buddhist texts has been replaced by the translation of texts of Christianity¹³, and texts of science and technologies. While the missionaries were in China, a total of 300 works were published, of which 120 were on science and technology. Chinese translators who work with foreign missionaries to translate technical and scientific texts include Xu Guangqi (1562-1633), Li Zhizao (1565-1630) and Li Tianjing (1579-1660). Xu Guanqi is an important translator who introduced Western science to China. According to him, one must be informed about Westerners in order to catch up with them. Therefore, the works of Western writers need to be translated. However, translations have failed due to the traditional understanding of that time (Luo and Lei, 2004: 20-21).

The third stage began with the opening of China in the middle of the nineteenth century against the imperialist Western powers. The intellectuals in China, a country which was invaded by the West have understood that their country was no longer the only central kingdom in the world, and they therefore began to obtain information from the Western countries in order to strengthen their nations. The first translations included social and military texts to this end. Then the literary translation began to develop. In this way, Chinese intellectuals have had easily access to Western culture and new ideas. Famous translators of this period include Lin Shu (1852-1924), Yan Fu (1853-1921) and Lu Shun (1881-1936). Lin Shu, who lacks a foreign language competence, has written countless literary texts in Chinese, based on what he heard from the interpreters having rendered the western sources for him. Thus, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, Alexander Dumas' *a Dame and Cornelias*, and Miguel Cervantes' *Don Quixote* were translated into Chinese (Luo and Lei, 2004: 21-22).

In the twentieth century, Yan'an Foreign Languages School was opened in 1944 to train translators and interpreters in the fields of political, military and foreign relations. This school is the first of its kind in that the first official translation courses in China are given there (Luo and Lei, 2004: 23).

However, it was only in the 1950s that it became mandatory for translation studies in China to realize a theoretical breakthrough. Dong Qiusi¹⁴ suggested in his article titled “Lun fanyi lilun de jianshe” (“On the construction of translation theory”) that translation studies could be a discipline and claimed that China had a long history of translation practices despite its systematic lack of theoreticalization., Tan Zaixi also stated that China was not at all behind other countries in the 1950s during the first structuring of translation studies. In fact, Qiusi's claims have attracted everyone's attention, and the idea that translation research in China might be even

¹⁰ These stages are briefly mentioned in three steps above in order to see the translation process in Chinese translation history.

¹¹ Dao Ann is a cleric and translator who translates Buddhist texts into Chinese through translation (<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Daoan>)

¹² These five cases are as follows: translation should not be done on condition that the original text is a text that should remain confidential (for example magical books), and that the word in the original text is vague, that the equivalence of word in the source language does not exist in the target language, and there is already any transliterations that have already been rendered and accepted in the target language and there is no formal equivalence between the source and the target text, (Mei, 2003: 61).

¹³ An example from the current literature on this is: Toshikazu Foley' in *Biblical Translation in Chinese and Greek* (2009)

¹⁴ In China he is the first person to consider translation as science (Luo and Lei, 2004).



more advanced than the West has emerged. However, as China has entered into a major social, political turmoil¹⁵ and due to the break-up of intercultural links that have begun to develop recently, developments in translation studies have decreased and China has lagged behind the West. From the 1980s onwards, a period of self-criticism has begun and some of the leading sources of both linguist and translator scholars such as Nida, Newmark, Catford were introduced to the world of Chinese translation studies by adopting a modest approach to translation studies in the West. With this process, works have been started to establish an independent discipline in China. In 1987, accordingly, *the Chinese Translators Journal* launched a heated debate on the status and importance of translation studies. (Sun, 2012, 36-37).

Following the introduction of Nida, Catford, Newmark in Chinese translation studies, the translation theories and approaches of Bassnett, Lefevere, Hermans, Even Zohar and Toury, who are among the other famous translation scholars (e.g. polysystem theory, manipulation theory, norms, feminist criticism, as well as the post-colonial translation theories) entered into Chinese translation studies. Most of these theories, however, have not been applied in practice and criticized in China. The reason for this is that some of the translation theories and approaches would not work in the real-time translation process (cf. Sun, 2012: 38-39).

At the 1987 symposium, Zhou Qingbo, Li Ding, Chu Xiao, and others discussed how to build Chinese Translatology in a psychological and philosophical way. In another symposium held two months later after the symposium in 1987 Liu Miqing, Tan Zaixi, Fang Mengzhi and others dealt with the same topic by using linguistics, social semiotics, communication researches etc. and they tested their findings in terms of theoretical applicability of translation to be accepted as a science. In 1990, Liu Miqing published a work titled *Studies on Translation Today*. However, it can also be stated that Chinese scholars have benefited from linguistic theories in the theory and practice of translation. Wang Bingqin (1987) also published the first academic article related to this. The aim of Bingqin was to investigate and uncover the rules about the internal structure of a text under the light of text linguistics. All samples of Bingqin, who analyzed many texts through textual analysis, were depictions and quotations from the books of famous scientists. As he did not analyze such texts as dialogue and so on, Bingqin could not find more examples for his research, and his research was largely limited to the Classical Chinese rhetoric approach (Luo and Le, 2004: 26).

Scientists like He Ziran have also conducted pragmatic research in translation. In his article published in 1992, Ziran proposed concepts such as pragmatics- linguistics and sociopragmatics to investigate the pragmatic effect and use of language in the field of translation. Discussing the possibility of applying a pragmatic approach between the source and target text, Ziran's aim was to create a pragmatic equivalent effect between the two texts. Ke Wenli (1992) also carried out a wide range of research into semantics and pragmatics. Only in this way, understanding and explanation in the translation could be provided and problems in the translation process could be solved. In addition, it can be said that Luo Xuanmin's research on the textual level of translation is an important effort in dealing with translation problems. According to him, there are two translation units. The first is transfer; the other is for analysis. Thanks to this approach, an efficient response can be given to the question of "What is the translation unit?". In fact, linguists / translation scholars such as Nida and Barkdurov could not find an answer to this problem (Luo and Lei, 2004: 27).

In parallel with these, it is also observed that some scientists state the integrated use of Chinese and Western translation theories¹⁶ in order to increase the developmental potential of translation studies. According to this,

¹⁵ Cultural Revolution (see also Luo and Lei, 2004).

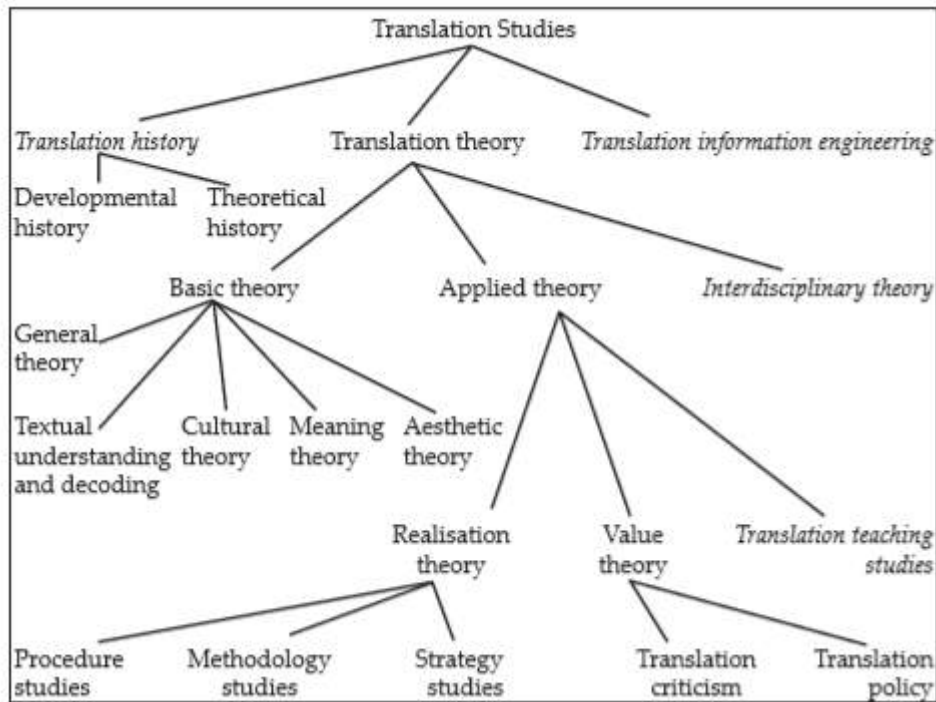
¹⁶ Pym's (2014) book entitled *Exploring Translation Theories* discusses in detail the Western translation theories and approaches.



translation studies in China may be more possible by reinforcing both Western and Chinese translation theories¹⁷ (Sun, 2012: 40)¹⁸. For this purpose, researches on post-colonial translation theories and approaches were introduced to the world of Chinese translation studies. The translations of the works of Western translation scholars such as Michael Foucault, Gayatri Spivak, Sherry Simon and Lawrence Venuti were published in 2001 in an anthology called *Yuyan yu fanyi de zhengzhi (Language and the Politics of Translation)*. From the 2000s on, trending topics such as feminist translation theories, gender in translation¹⁹ and so on have begun to show a great reception in the literature of Chinese translation studies. There are more than 200 books in the literature of Chinese translation studies including the translations of foreign sources²⁰. Some of these are translations of Western sources. (Sun, 2012: 44-45).

In addition to these developments, Zhang Meifang also commented on Holmes's Translation Studies in the light of translation studies in China and expanded his research on Descriptive Translation Studies and Applied Translation Studies. In addition, Liu Bgqin published a work called *Translation Teaching: Practice and Theory* (2003), making Holmes's current map more detailed:

Figure 1: The reinterpreted version of Map of Holmes by Liu (Youlan: 2005: 190)



It is to say map

possible that this was

¹⁷ In the literature, there is a specific theory of translation put forward by Qian Zhongshu ("Theory of sublimity"). This theory provides specific tools for achieving this goal by providing an ideal aim in the field of literary translation against the theory of loyalty, which is the traditional Chinese paradigm. Zhongshu has developed a solid / comprehensive theoretical basis by examining the theory, nature, function, practice, and artistic characteristics of ideal literary translation, based on Chinese translation theories and practices, in the context of comparative research. Thus, he broke the classical loyalty approach by aiming the literary translation to follow the artistic one. For detailed information about the theory, it can be referred to the articles included in the references (Chengfa, 2007).

¹⁸ In 1996, the first symposium on Translation Education was held. More than 100 trainers and translation graduates gathered to discuss how translation studies could be improved (Luo and Lei, 2004: 23).

¹⁹ An example from the current literature: Mengying Jiang's article entitled "Female Voices in Translation: An Interrogation of a Dynamic Translation Decade for Contemporary Chinese Women Writers, 1980–1991" and Zhongli Yu's book called *Translating Feminism in China: Gender, Sexuality and Censorship*.

²⁰ Roberto A. Valdeon's study called *Chinese Translation Studies in the 21st Century* (2017), an example of translation studies in China, was published by Routledge.



reinterpreted by Liu in the light of the history and the needs of the Chinese translation studies and also the translated fields. In addition, according to Luo and Yei, China has nowadays been rapidly modernizing and opening to the outside world and adopting an economic reform policy. In this respect, as in other disciplines developing in China, the importance of translation studies is also rapidly increasing, because it is not possible to communicate across cultures in a globalizing world without the presence of translation. For these reasons, translation courses are very popular in Chinese universities, and translation is a process that many scientists and graduate students constantly apply (Luo and Lei, 2004: 20).

In addition to the evaluation of these points in translation studies in China, it can also be argued that translation education has reached a different dimension than in the twentieth century. To this end, Lei provides up-to-date information on the status of translation education and discusses the importance of translation, teaching materials, and training of the trainer. As a teaching method, Lin Zhang distinguishes translation from translation as a teaching goal, suggesting that students should know about translation theories and translation strategies. Similarly, other translation trainers also work on testing, teaching materials, and interpreter education (see Luo and Lei, 2004: 24). It should also be noted here that Dong mentioned the Chinese translation competencies that shape the translation training. These can be listed as follows: 1- Language-discourse-pragmatic competence 2- Cultural competence 3- Strategic competence 4- Instrumental competence 5- Thinking competence and finally 6- Personality in systematic coordination (Dong, 2017: 39, cf. Wang and Wang, 2008). This model has been developed based on Western translation skills and is similar to the PACTE model (2005). Jiang and Quan (2002) also refer to a sub-competence known as aesthetic competence. According to this, an individual with an aesthetic sense has the capacity to achieve image perception, perception of integration and other psychological mechanisms in relation to aesthetic thinking power. The idea of aesthetics competence is based on the work of Liu in 1987 (Dong, 2017: 39-40).

Another point to be mentioned about translation training is the discussion of issues related to translation education and theories and the discussion on issues such as the translation training program design, the content of textbooks, and the training of trainers in the translation education symposium held in Hong Kong in 1997. The result is that the theories of translation education in China were still far from philosophical thought and practically weak. Translation studies should be carried out on a descriptive, theoretical and practical basis for these reasons. In addition, the research conducted should be carried out on a scientific, artistic and analytical synthetic level. It is also necessary to make detailed research on translation rules and translation skills and to make new researches in order to reach new findings in terms of translation method and translation history, only in this way the translation practice can be improved and the quality issue, which is one of the biggest problems of today, can be improved (see also Luo and Lei, 2004: 24).

Upon taking a look at the articles, books, papers and projects of Chinese translation scholars and translators, in which they work as a coordinator or as a researcher, as mentioned above briefly, it is also observed that the translation fields encompass feminism, postcolonialist period, literary translation (such as poetry translation, rhetoric), computer technologies, machine translation technologies, localization (especially game localization²¹), etc²². All these movements, as Chesterman has pointed out, contribute to the development of translation studies in a universal level as well as the situation and reflections in the West (see Chesterman, 2014: 83).

²¹ Minako O'Hagan and Carmen Mangiron's book (2013) titled *Game Localization Translating for the Global Digital Entertainment Industry*.

²² Sin Wai's article called "Approaching Localization" (2013) and his book entitled *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Technology* (2014)



Conclusion

In this study, the status of translation theories and translation studies in China and the different views of the Chinese world on this issue have been handled through examples of translation practices, approaches, strategies and theories. And it is observed that although the world of Chinese translation studies has not completely turned its back to the West, it follows the literature of Western translation studies, but it also reflects its own theoretical and individual approaches in translation. In other words, some scientists and translators have criticized the reception of only the western translation theories among the contemporary theories of translation, emphasizing the 'Chineseness' of Chinese translation theories. Some have also adopted approaches to integrate the West and the Far East, while others have exhibited their experience in the translation process. At the end of this study, it can be stated that answers to the questions such as what is happening in the world of translation studies in the Far East?, what is the status of translation studies in these lands?, is there a contribution of Chinese translation studies and translation theories to general translation studies? Etc are thought to have been given. In fact, in order to maintain the inter-disciplinary structure of translation studies and to keep this field dynamic, it is better for both the Western and Far Eastern translation scholars and even translators to work together and also to share the theories and approaches they produce with each other in the conferences and symposiums rather than to impose them on each other. Last but not least they also need to make discussions about the results of which theories should be employed and in which context.

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