

**[Translation Studies]**

A Translator Working for National Strategic Goals: An Interview with Prof. Zhang Wei

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Abstract: At present, Translation Studies in China should take as its primary concept to take the initiative in fulfilling the national strategic programs and benefiting Chinese social and economic development. For this purpose, social awareness and contribution should enjoy priority by highlighting such key research topics as translation policy consultation, translation management, translation theorizing with Chinese characteristics, and translation education reform, thus further advancing Translation Studies in China.

Keywords: national strategic goals; social awareness; translation studies

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Wang Zuyou (shortened as Wang thereafter): Hello, Professor Zhang! It's my pleasure to have a written interview with you on behalf of the *Asia-Pacific Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. In the new era, humanities, philosophy, and social studies, including translation studies, should be actively connected to national strategic development and actively meet the needs of social development. You have studied a lot in this regard. Will you please talk about it specifically?

Zhang (shortened as Zhang thereafter): Thank you, Mr. Wang! I am grateful to the *Asia-Pacific Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* for providing this communication opportunity. On May 17, 2016, at the symposium on philosophy and social science work, President Xi pointed out that philosophy and social science workers should put social responsibility first and attach great importance to the social effects of academic

research. Therefore, as a unique cross-linguistic and cross-cultural communication phenomenon and research field, translation studies should also seriously consider the importance of relevant exploration in supporting national development strategies and promoting social and cultural development. Specifically, in the new situation, the overall development of translation studies in China should adhere to the following main principles and directions.

First of all, we should correctly evaluate the value of translation and translation studies and avoid the two wrong orientations—the “instrumental orientation” and “utilitarian orientation”.

Secondly, we should emphasize the maintenance of cultural diversity in translation ethics, respect cultural ecological balance, promote mutual learning of civilizations, and promote the harmonious coexistence of different cultural traditions.

In addition, to strengthen the public service awareness of translation research, China’s translation research should go out of the comfort zone, aim at the needs of national development strategies, solve the urgent problems in the current society, and provide theoretical support, consulting services or data evidence for the national cultural construction and development strategy, language policy, translation industry standards, and market norms.

Finally, adhere to the innovation of translation theory, fully tap the scientific connotation of inheriting Chinese traditional translation theory, rationally draw on foreign translation ideas, and strengthen the originality and uniqueness of Chinese translation theory in the new era.

Wang: Thank you, Mr. Zhang. You have just explained that China’s translation research should strive to support the national development strategy. Could you talk specifically about the areas or issues that should be explored intensively?

Zhang: Yes, as mentioned above, being active in meeting the needs of strategic, economic, and social development should be the focus of current and future long-term Chinese translation studies, which can be concentrated in the following two directions.

First of all, taking the national strategic direction and focus as the object, strengthening policy consulting research, such as the systematic investigation and analysis of the translation and dissemination of Chinese discourse, the translation and introduction of Chinese literature and culture, the cultural exchange and dissemination between China and neighboring countries, and the development of translation resource library serving the “the Belt and Road” strategy.

Secondly, with the translation market management as the guidance, strengthening the standardized management of the construction industry, such as the translation legislation, the construction of the modern management system of the translation market, the integration of modern technology-oriented translation practice, teaching and management.

Wang: Thank you for your explanation, Mr. Zhang! I am enlightened. You just mentioned the innovation and development of Chinese translation theories, which may involve the characteristics of Chinese translation theories or ideas. However, there have been different opinions on translation theories with “Chinese characteristics”. May you share your views on this?

Zhang: Thank you, Mr. Wang. You are right. For a long time, Chinese translation studies, especially translation theory studies, have been studying the innovative development of Chinese translation theories, which



is mainly reflected in the thinking or controversy about translation theories with Chinese characteristics. In short, the concentrated discussion on translation theories with Chinese characteristics appeared in the 1990s, when the focus of the debate was whether there were translation theories or ideas with national characteristics. Finally, the universal view of translation theory, that is, although translation practice involves a specific language and cultural system, translation theories or ideas are universally applicable, seems to prove the upper hand. However, that discussion largely ignored an issue, that is, translation practice took place in a specific social and historical context, and translation practice often has a more obvious or even more powerful driving role, constantly enriching and even subverting previous translation concepts and ideas, such as machine translation, fan translation, crowdsourcing translation and other behaviors and phenomena in the modern technological environment cannot be effectively explained by previous translation theories.

Moreover, the discussants at that time often consciously or unconsciously believed that the foreign (especially Western) translation theory system was more explanatory than Chinese translation theory, especially that Chinese traditional translation thought was not as systematic as Western modern translation theory. In fact, it should be noted that Western translation theories or ideas are also based on specific language and cultural practices. Translation concepts, including dynamic equivalence and multi-system theory, have obvious particularity or even limitation in terms of text types, language materials, translation purposes, and objective evaluation of effects, and do not have universal explanatory power. Therefore, Tymoczko, Toury and other internationally renowned scholars have called for that translation studies, especially theoretical construction, should pay attention to the direction of “discarding the European center” and emphasize the development of diversified translation theories.

During the investigation at Renmin University of China on April 25, 2022, President Xi pointed out that to accelerate the construction of philosophy and social science with Chinese characteristics, in the final analysis, is to build a Chinese independent knowledge system. Personally, I believe that the “independent knowledge system” for translation research is mainly manifested in independent translation thoughts and theories. Without theoretical summary and distillation based on Chinese translation practice, it is difficult to form the autonomy of the knowledge system of translation research, and it is difficult to reflect the uniqueness of Chinese translation practice and theoretical thinking. Naturally, it will lose the basis for equal dialogue with international peers. For this reason, Chinese translation scholars are constantly exploring the new era and have the courage to make theoretical innovations, among which the historical view of translation culture, translatology, corpus translatology and ecological translatology are the representatives. Of course, it should be noted that what we emphasize here is the “Chinese characteristics” of translation research or translation theory construction, especially the rational thinking of translation with the theme of translation and communication of Chinese culture, which does not negate the universality of translation theory in interpreting cross-language and cross-culture, and ultimately contributes to the original Chinese translation theory based on Chinese translation practice, forming an independent knowledge system of Chinese translation research, building a discipline system, academic system and discourse system of translation studies with Chinese characteristics.

Wang: Thank you, Mr. Zhang. Regarding translation research to serve national strategic needs, you have just specifically mentioned the research on translating Chinese into foreign languages. Will you please elaborate more on this topic, such as specific contents and main methods?

Zhang: As we know, there were three climaxes in China's translation history: the translation of Buddhist scriptures from the Eastern Han Dynasty to the Tang and Song Dynasties, the translation of science and technology in the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties, and the translation of Western studies from the Opium War to the May Fourth Movement Period. At present, we are witnessing the fourth translation climax with the opportunity of realizing the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. In the first three translation climaxes, the translation of foreign (especially Western) advanced ideas and culture into China was the mainstream, but now, in the fourth translation climax, foreign translation under the influence of the national strategy of Chinese culture's "going out" has become the dominant one, and translating from Chinese to foreign language has become the pioneering force in promoting Chinese culture and strengthening Chinese cultural soft power. In this regard, based on the national practice of Chinese translation, studies concerned should focus on the description and analysis of basic data of Chinese translation, the assessment of the effect or quality of Chinese translation (such as book sales, collection and circulation, reader acceptance survey, mainstream poetic evaluation, social "capitalization" process, etc.), the general principles of Chinese translation and the "precision communication" model. "There are many gaps in this research. There are many research gaps in this area, such as the dynamic database of overseas translation of Chinese literature (including information and systematic research on the mutual translation of literature in specific languages and regions), empirical research on the acceptance of readers in the target language of Chinese to foreign translation, and so on. All the above-mentioned can be explored in the future. Finally, as General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized at the symposium on the work of philosophy and social sciences, a nation that despises, abandons, or betrays its culture will not only fail to achieve long-term development, but may even end in tragedy. Therefore, the foreign translation and dissemination of Chinese culture and Chinese literature should always adhere to cultural self-confidence and evaluate the current foreign translation of Chinese culture and literature systematically and comprehensively. The uniqueness of Chinese culture and literature should not be obscured or even damaged in order to deliberately meet the expectations or habits of foreign readers. Instead, cultural self-awareness and cultural discourse awareness should be highlighted, and Chinese literature and its representative be distinctly maintained and highlighted. This should be the basic principle that Chinese translation practice and research should especially adhere to.

Wang: Thank you, Mr. Zhang. Speaking of translation research serving national strategies, I noticed that you are chairing a major project of the National Social Science Foundation, the theme of which is the foreign translation and dissemination of Chinese characteristic discourse.

Zhang: Since the 18th Party Congress, strengthening international communication capacity building has become a major national strategy. On May 31, 2021, General Secretary Xi Jinping, while presiding over the 30th collective study of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, emphasized the importance and necessity of strengthening and improving international communication work in the new situation, especially pointing out that great efforts should be made to strengthen international communication capacity building and to form an international discourse that matches our comprehensive national power and international status. To this end, we have actively prepared and joined forces with different disciplines, such as journalism, communication, and translation, and in 2019 we were granted a major project by the National Social Science Foundation of China to comprehensively review the development of Chinese foreign discourse over the past 70 years since the founding of the country. The project

will profoundly summarize the foreign discourse expression system with Chinese characteristics, comprehensively grasp the translation status of foreign discourse with Chinese characteristics in the English-speaking world, and actively explore the overseas dissemination of Chinese foreign discourse. This is not only a major fundamental topic for philosophical and social science research in the new era, but also an important initiative to serve the development strategy of national cultural soft power. In addition, this study fully integrates corpus linguistics, corpus translation, critical discourse analysis, sociology and communication, and highlights the methodological design of “quantitative combination and multiple argumentations”, which can effectively promote the coordinated development of multiple disciplines with foreign discourse translation as the core and is a new growth point for the future development of Chinese translation research and related disciplines. It is a new growth point for the future development of Chinese translation research and related disciplines.

Wang: Thank you, Mr. Zhang. Regarding academic research serving the goals of social and economic development, it is true that some researchers are too much lopsided in the pursuit of “academic ontology” and lack care for social practice. Will you please tell us how translation research can reflect social values and promote the comprehensive development of translation practice, teaching, and social application?

Zhang: You raise a very good question that involves the evaluation of the value and significance of academic research. President Xi Jinping specifically pointed out at the symposium on philosophical and social science work that academic research should adhere to and promote academic democracy, respect differences, and tolerate diversity, but also recognize that special attention should be paid to doing great scholarship and true learning while avoiding reality, working behind closed doors and sitting on the fence in academic research also exist to varying degrees. As I personally understand, under the current situation, the “great learning” and “true learning” of translation research are mainly manifested in the social service value and practical teaching role of translation research, in addition to the relevant issues mentioned above.

First of all, we should strengthen the practical application research to meet social needs, such as the development and application of a multi-type translation service resource base, the construction and application of a translation talent base, and the market-oriented translation talent cultivation mode and system, etc., so as to give full play to the role of translation research in serving the goals of social and economic development.

Secondly, we should strengthen the systematic and specialized research of translation teaching, reduce the “big and general” research ideas, and carry out breakdown in-depth research of translation education links, such as objective determination and dynamic evaluation of translation ability, systematic design and comprehensive evaluation of translation test, design and application of translation learners’ corpus, and reform of translation teaching in a modern technology context, etc., so as to actively promote translation teaching reform. The research should actively promote the systematic exploration of translation pedagogy. In addition, it should pay attention to translation teaching and research in multilingual and composite languages, and actively serve the national strategy of peace diplomacy and the development strategy of diversified international patterns.

Wang: Thank you, Mr. Zhang. When it comes to the role and value of translation studies, the relationship between translation theory and practice is inevitably involved, but the relationship between translation theory and translation practice is entangled and complex. What’s your idea in this respect?

Zhang: You are right. The relationship between translation theory and practice is a long-standing and unresolved topic. The communication between scholars of translation research, especially theoretical research,

and translation practitioners is not sufficient, and often each expresses his own ideas, as if the “gap” between theory and practice is difficult to be bridged, especially the questions or challenges such as what the use of translation theory is and can translation theory guide translation practice still exist.

Theory and practice are inseparable in essence, and they are interrelated and influence each other. In the same way, it is difficult to separate translation theory from translation practice. Any translation theory is a summary and abstract representation of the behavior and phenomena of specific translation practice, and any translation practice is executed under a specific translation theory or concept (though sometimes unconsciously or vaguely). In brief, the relationship between translation theory and practice has to be considered in the following ways.

First of all, the nature, levels, types and functions of translation theories should be clarified. Some theories (such as ideology, normative theory, manipulation theory, psychological cognition, etc.) mainly explain the social and historical background or psychological mechanism in which translation activities take place and their influence on translation behavior, and do not directly or obviously relate to translation practice operations, and these theories play more of an ontological and epistemological role. On the other hand, some theories (especially those based on comparative linguistics) mainly explain the methods of linguistic and cultural transformation in translation operations, which have a more overt guiding role in translation practice and mainly play the methodological value of translation theories. In conclusion, in order to objectively evaluate the relationship between translation theory and practice, it is first necessary to systematically understand the nature and type of translation theory itself.

Secondly, the reason for the gap between translation theory and practice is largely due to the fact that the scholars or practitioners concerned have not well-integrated theory and practice, either by attaching importance to theory and neglecting practice, or by emphasizing practice and ignoring rational summaries, with the result that it is difficult to reconcile the two sides, each sticking to its own argument. I personally believe that translation researchers should place special emphasis on translation practice and have rich translation practice experience themselves, so as to ensure that their research is not detached from practice, and only then will translation practitioners not question the practical value of specific research. Of course, translation practitioners should also strengthen their sense of rational reflection based on practice, sublimating their empirical and perceptive individual experiences into systematic norms and standards, so that translation practice can become a more regular operational behavior. In conclusion, I personally always believe that the coordinated development of translation practice, teaching and research should be the principle that translation researchers and practitioners should adhere to, and it is also the basic path to effectively resolve the contradiction between translation theory and practice.

Wang: Mr. Zhang, you have long served as a reviewer of the National Social Science Foundation’s project applications and project evaluation. Can you tell us how to serve the national goal while avoiding duplication to increase the success rate of project applications or paper publications? This may be a matter of great concern to everyone.

Zhang: Yes, paper publication and project applications are always hot topics for schools and teachers. Today we mainly illustrate the development idea of translation research serving national strategies, but in fact, research selection should also fully consider other factors, such as personal educational background, research tradition, school discipline layout, regional economic and social development, etc. Taking the declaration of the National



Social Science Foundation as an example, I suggest that you pay attention to the following factors.

Firstly, it is important to read and analyze the project guidelines carefully, taking into account one's research interests or strengths, and to discover from them the specific requirements or expectations of the state for academic research. For example, the project guidelines in previous years repeatedly mentioned research on the translation and dissemination of Chinese literary theory, indicating that tapping into traditional Chinese literary ideas and promoting the dissemination of Chinese literary theory to the outside world should be a research priority. As a result, a number of projects on the translation and interpretation of Chinese literary theory were approved in those years. Last year I read a similar study, which was also well-argued, and as a result, it was also eventually approved.

Secondly, we should actively focus on national development strategies and hot spots of social and economic development and explore research that responds to the urgent needs of the state and society. For example, artificial intelligence, big data, and corpus are all current focuses in the development of digital humanities. Humanities and social sciences research, including translation research, should make full use of these modern technological tools to explore research topics or directions in an innovative manner. For example, in the course of supporting the development of foreign language subjects at Xinjiang University, I assisted a local teacher in exploring the dissemination of the concept of “a Community of Shared Future for Mankind” in Russian-speaking countries, and the project was eventually granted the regular project of the National Social Science Foundation of China in 2021.

Finally, we should hold on to complementary development and highlight our differentiated advantages, especially taking into full consideration the social and cultural traditions of our region and identifying specific research topics based on our own research. In addition, in recent years, the National Social Science Foundation has set the category of “unusual and lost knowledge”, which particularly encourages the exploration of history, philosophy, non-common languages, and other related foundations, from which you can also choose your own research topics.

Wang: Thank you for your suggestion! Mr. Zhang. Regarding the strategic development of translation research, in fact, translation teaching and teaching material construction are also very important factors. Could you please introduce the situation in this regard?

Zhang: Your judgment is very accurate. The construction of teaching materials is a national affair, and currently, the government attaches great importance to the construction of teaching materials and related teaching activities because it is directly related to the specific implementation process and actual effect of talent cultivation. At present, the foreign language sector is seriously implementing the requirements of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Publicity and actively promoting the introduction of Xi Jinping's thoughts of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the campus, teaching materials, and classrooms, and is preparing a series of teaching materials on “Understanding Contemporary China” for foreign language and literature majors in higher education. I have the honor to participate in and edit “Understanding Contemporary China—Chinese and English Translation Course”, which will be generally used in foreign language majors nationwide in September this year. This textbook adheres to the basic educational goal of educating people for the Party and the country, implements the principle of cultivating people with moral character, organically integrates the socialist thoughts of Xi Jinping in the new era with translation skills, and devotes itself to cultivating high-quality translation talents

with national sentiment, global vision, and professional skills. In a word, the preparation of this set of textbooks reflects the purpose of innovating China's knowledge generation system and should be a major change in the preparation of Chinese foreign language textbooks and even in the history of Chinese foreign language education, with far-reaching effects.

Wang: Thank you, Mr. Zhang. Finally, the sustainable development of any discipline should be based on the cultivation of research teams. What advice do you have for young people who want to engage in translation research?

Zhang: Yes, "As the wave in the Yangtze River pushes the wave before it, and the new people in the world catch up with the old ones." Translation disciplines and related research need to be constantly replenished with fresh blood to strengthen the backup. For students in translation-related disciplines, I have a few personal experiences to share with them.

First, they should stick to their academic interests, believe that "I am born to be useful", fully understand and actively promote the cultural, social, and historical values of translation, and enhance the social influence and appeal of translation research.

Secondly, we should adhere to an open and tolerant academic mentality, objectively evaluate different or even opposing views, and learn from all sides to make use of them, to gradually form a personalized and distinctive research field and become real experts.

Thirdly, we should insist on interdisciplinary thinking, refrain from working behind closed doors and sticking to the old ways, but keep in mind "seen horizontally, mountain ridges presented; vertically, mountain peaks come into sight", fully and rationally draw on the ideas and methods of other disciplines, look beyond translation, and knowledge translation, understand translation and appreciate translation in a comprehensive and systematic way.

Fourthly, we should insist on the awareness of the scientific method, actively embrace modern technology, make full use of modern tools to obtain diversified translation data, optimize the design of argumentation, and improve the quality of research.

Fifthly, we should insist on the integration and development of theory and practice, truly realize the researcher and practitioner as one, and realize the positive interaction between translation theory and practice to unite knowledge and practice.

Wang: Thank you, Mr. Zhang. Your answers to the relevant questions are very strategic, and I believe readers will be able to benefit a lot from them and effectively improve their practice and research. Thank you!

Zhang: Thank you, Mr. Wang, and thanks to the *Asia-Pacific Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* for providing a platform for communication. The above views are only my personal opinions, and time is limited, so I can't expand them specifically. You can refer to the published related papers for details, and welcome your criticism and correction, and then fully communicate through other forms. Let's learn from each other and jointly promote the healthy development of translation research in China. Thank you.

(Editors: LENG Xueyuan & Bonnie WANG)