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6th IATIS Conference on translation and cultural mobility, July 3-6 2018. A conference report.

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Conference report

6th IATIS Conference on translation and cultural mobility July 3-6 2018

IAITIS keeps on roaming the globe, putting the internationalizing of Translation Studies into practice. Following editions in Seoul (2004), Cape Town (2006), Melbourne (2009), Belfast (2012) and Belo Horizonte (2015), the *International Association for Translation and Intercultural Studies* landed at the Baptist University of Hong Kong last Summer for its 6th grand conference. Years of preparation came to a close on July 3rd for the organizing committee, which four days later was able to look back on yet another successful conference. In line with its tradition, and the intrinsically international theme, *translation and cultural mobility*, the conference was a forum for young and established scholars from five continents. Reflecting the accelerated popularity of the subdiscipline in recent years, translation history had a distinctive share in many of their papers, over two hundred in number.

Nonetheless, a quick look at the book of abstracts might not suggest a ubiquity of presentations on the past (or Past). The word 'history' appears in only three titles, the word 'historicity' in one. The expression 'translation history' is mentioned in exactly one abstract, and the keywords of one other paper. However, these facts are more telling of the diffusion of the term 'translation history', than of the popularity of the study of translation in history as such, or *the history of translation*. This last concept was put into question by Prof. Naoki Sakai (Cornell University, USA), at the offset of his keynote lecture: "Translation in history: On Modernity in Translation". "Is there such a thing as the history of translation?" "Or are there just unique and isolated instances of translation, embedded in a particular context, from which they cannot be abstracted (hence the need for a historical view)?" he asked. Is the history of translation anything else than the juxtaposition and comparison of all these instances and the different forms of translation? Questions that are as puzzling as they are central to historical Translation Studies and are likely to be to *Chronotopos*.

Going beyond the few papers explicitly labeled as translation histories, we counted some 40 to 50 presentations (about one fourth) concerned with historical events. A majority of these dealt with the political background against which the translations (typically of literature) discussed by the presenters had come about. The nation-state still figures as default framework of analysis, despite the international setting, focus on mobility and postcolonial pleas for alternative perspectives, repeated several times over at the conference itself. However, obvious reasons explain this choice for many of the research papers, being set in the nineteenth century of nationalism and colonization. The most prevalent time frame was the most recent one: the post-war years and second half of the twentieth century, witnessing processes of political and cultur-

al decolonization. Only a handful of presentations dealt with times prior to the 18th century, including four on ancient Chinese texts. Though scholars from around the world came down to Hong Kong and the conference was diverse above average, Asia (mainly South-East Asia and especially China), together with Europe (particularly Western Europe) stood for the large majority of speakers. The African continent and South America in particular remained well underrepresented, as were to a lesser extent North America, Russia and the Middle East, in as far as these categories make sense.

Apart from literary history (Celik, Rattanakantadilok, Uchiyama, Klitgård, Stowe, Lai, Cohen, Lin, ...), a broad variety of fields were visited, including theatre translation (Hee Choi, Marinetti, Karsky, Tatlow), museum translation (Kim, Deane-Cox, Hou), queer history (Bear, Spurlin, Guo, Gillet), philosophical and religious traditions (Tsuboi, Zhu, Saito, Hanna, Ling-Chia Wei, Choi), military and crisis translation (Heydel, Luo), medical translation (Ji-Hae Kang), translation of travel accounts (Banerjee, Heijns, Saha), eco-translation (Kundu), audiovisual translation (Fuentes-Luque), iconographic translation (Shuttleworth) and historical press translation (Jia Ye). (References are not exhaustive.) Whereas Interpreting Studies were semi-integrated at the conference, with about 35 presentations, they were vastly outnumbered among those with a historical scope (only three out of forty/fifty). For two of these presentations, eyewitnesses and methods from oral history were used, indicating why Interpreting Studies tend to be limited to research on a rather near past.

“I was not interested in History of translation but now I am I guess” someone said in reply to Vicente Rafael’s keynote speech on the politics of English in Southeast Asia and the US. It was the unconscious but perfect summary of the part played by translation history in the conference. While few speakers had set out primarily to write a piece of translation history, many ended up doing so, sensing the inevitability of historical context and the need to explain it, especially for an international audience. Is this not also the faith of translation history in Translation Studies in general, or maybe its fortune? Should we forget that we are doing translation history for the field to be naturalized in Translation Studies? Or rather should we be aware of a tradition when we do historical translation research, and explicitly position ourselves in it? Formulating an answer to these questions is challenging, perhaps worth a Martha Cheung Award. This new award from the *Baker Centre for Translation and Intercultural Studies* (Jiao Tong University, Shanghai) for early career scholars was launched on the first night of the conference, in honor of Prof. Dr. Martha Cheung, who dedicated her life to the internationalization of Translation Studies, writing Chinese translation history, theorizing translation history, and teaching numerous young translation scholars research and life lessons.

The book of abstracts of the conference in Hong Kong is available at https://www.iatis.org/images/stories/6thIATISConference_BookOfAbstracts.pdf. In 2021, IATIS is moving to the University of Nicosia, Cyprus for its 7th International Conference.