Hidden translation as academic practice: translating Xiaoshuo (Small talk) and American sinology

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Abstract
Much effort has been devoted over the past few centuries to presenting China to the West in the English language, beginning with the classical sinology of nineteenth-century Britain and reaching a climax through late-twentieth century Chinese Studies in the States, carried out mostly in departments of East Asian languages and literature/cultures. Invariably there is one shared element in these approaches: translation. In our age, the pervasive use of English as the language of academic discourse, combined with the increased hegemony of English in fields beyond those of business, recreation and diplomacy, means that the "Westernization" of forms of knowledge related to Chinese culture and tradition has become inescapable. In the new linguistic imperialism, what is prominent are the misrepresentation, distortion and manipulation carried out in connection with the translation of ideas from Chinese into English. The present article focuses on ideas rather than texts in order to understand the cannibalization of one language by another.

Keywords
fiction, sinology, transliteration
(Hidden) Translation as Academic Practice:
Translating Xiaoshuo (Small Talk) and American Sinology

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In his story, “The Analytical Language of John Wilkins” (El idioma analítico de John Wilkins), Jorge Luis Borges described a Chinese encyclopedia, entitled “Celestial Empire of Benevolent Knowledge,” in which multifarious phenomena are classified in a completely absurd fashion. The passage in question, later quoted by Michel Foucault in his The Order of Things, lists the following Chinese categories of things: belonging to the Emperor; sirens; fabulous; frenzied; innumerable; drawn with a very fine camelhair brush; and so on. The Chinese taxonomy—or, better still, its bibliographical chaos—may have been fabricated by Borges, but if one takes a look at the contents of the

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eighteenth-century classificatory system of *The Complete Library of Four Treasuries* (*Siku quanshu*) and compares it with those of Dewey or the Library of Congress, the former may appear to be just as fantastic. Though almost completely discarded today, it was accepted for centuries in traditional China as a matter of course. Foucault says, quite appropriately, that the Chinese system demonstrates the existence of an entirely different system of rationality.

To the modern mind accustomed to Western ways of classifying human knowledge, *The Complete Library of Four Treasuries* shows how deviant generic definition was in traditional China. This repository of over 10,000 texts in more than 79,000 chapters and 800 million Chinese characters, culled from the imperial and local libraries as well as private collectors, is the largest editorial effort in world history. Completed in 1782 by an editorial team of 361 scholars, this project was important not only in its preservation of some crucial texts in the tradition but also in its delineation of generic boundaries. Its four-fold division, consisting of jing (classics), shi (histories), zi (philosophy) and ji (collected works), had for centuries been in common use in China. It has been suggested that this schema corresponded to the Western quadruple system of Theology, Historiography, Philosophy and Poetics. But the resemblance is deceptive; actually it is the departure from the West that is striking. For instance, writings on mathematics, divination, medicine, agriculture, astronomy and acrobatics are found alongside the textual canon composed by Confucian, Buddhist, Daoist and Legalist thinkers in the zi (philosophy) section. Even more oddly to the twentieth-first century person, although ji (collected works) is the umbrella term for a range of literary writings including poetry and essays, *xiaoshuo*—commonly translated into English as "the novel" or "fiction"—found its place in the zi (philosophy) section.¹)
It would have boggled the mind of the eighteenth-century Chinese scholar, unschooled in Western epistemological classifications, to think of Chinese xiaoshuo as novelistic or fictional literature. 2) Here some kind of definition of the xiaoshuo is in order even though, owing to its amorphous nature, it has long defied scholarly attempts at simple and easy definition. Not only is it a loaded term about whose meaning there is little consensus, it has led a chameleon-like existence in the course of the history of Chinese literature, so that pre-Tang xiaoshuo, Qing xiaoshuo and Republican xiaoshuo, to cite some obvious examples, are vastly different things. One long-lasting debate has revolved around the issue of whether historicity or fictionality better defines this (composite) genre, and conflicting positions have been taken by an entire generation of American-based scholars like Martin W. Huang, Sheldon Lu Hsiao-peng, Ge Liangyan and Gu Ming Dong, among others. The contemporary understanding also is quite removed from pre-modern conceptualizations, especially as the term is nowadays often (mis)understood to refer only to the full-length chaptered novel (zhanguihui xiaoshuo), as opposed to the anecdotal writings, some not even narratives, that exemplify what may be called the prototypical xiaoshuo in early times.

Ban Gu, the early bibliographer, is often considered to have given the first extended definition of xiaoshuo; it is in any case the most quoted, even by those who reject it:

1) If one must draw a parallel, “literature” as understood in the Western sense might reasonably be categorized as ji, among the plethora of imaginative writings listed there.

2) As for the huge number of traditional Chinese short narratives, like anecdotal accounts (byil), random jottings (subi), etc., they have often been read as “short stories” in the West.
The *xiaoshuo* school probably evolved from the office of petty officials. The works were street talk and alley gossip, made up by those who engaged in conversations along the roads and walkways. Confucius once said, "Although a petty path, there is surely something to be seen in it. But if pursued too far, one could get bogged down; hence the gentleman does not do so." Still, he did not discard them. Being something upon which those of lesser knowledge touched, they were collected and not forgotten, on the chance they might contain a useful phrase or two. (Trans. in Wu 1995: 340)

Here one not only sees the provenance of the *xiaoshuo* (i.e., in backstreets and alleyways), but also observes clues to the three fundamental ontological aspects of this genre, repeatedly voiced in a range of gamut of scholarly discussions: historicity ("petty officials"), fictionality ("made up") and performativity/orality ("gossip" and "conversations"). Gleaning through the innumerable compendia and miscellanies in traditional China which contain the *xiaoshuo* ("collected and not forgotten")—in volume, it exceeds the traditional chapter novel—one can also see that the generic parameters of the *xiaoshuo* are extensive, going far beyond "narratives." Included within this genre are unofficial histories, factual reports, hearsay, random remarks, philosophical notes, self-witnessed accounts, personal anecdotes—indeed a hodgepodge, a mixed bag, of comparatively short writings with or without a narrative focus. Perhaps the literal translation of "small talk" is more accurate than most of the renditions so far attempted or purveyed. Only by some unwieldy maneuvering has the term been allowed to serve as a translational equivalent for "fiction." It involves the elimination of huge chunks of non-narrative *xiaoshuo*, the narrowing of attention to the full-length novel, and the parallels drawn to the Western-influenced modern Chinese, novel. Given that "the novel" and "fiction" have become standard translations for the
term in Sinological (or Chinese studies) scholarship for at least a century, it is of some interest for us to study the epistemological gap between the two. How has it been virtually erased through translation in academic writings by Sinologists?

1. Xiao shuo as “the Novel”

One of the most influential articles in the field of Sinology, a landmark piece in English-language research on classical Chinese literature, is Andrew Plaks’s article on “Full-length Hsiao-shuo and the Western Novel: A Generic Reappraisal” (1980). In what is tantamount to an exercise in translation of a critical term, Plaks justifies the equivalence between xiaoshuo and the novel with reference to ten parameters: socio-economic background, authorship, realist mode, the hero’s problems, rhetoric, autobiographical elements, worldview, structure, critical reception and intellectual background (1980: 166-175). To lend strength to his argument, Plaks cites ample references from Western theorists like Northrop Frye and Ian Watt. He is not unaware of the differences between the two terms and what they signify, as even a cursory closer look at the table below reveals some forced correspondences. In fact, he points out the following discrepancies: the influence on Chinese xiaoshuo exerted by traditional historiography (1980: 165); the less-than-central position occupied by the theme of love (171); its tendency to present composite groups rather than individuals (171); its deployment of storytelling devices like chapter titles and narratorial comments (172), and so on.
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<td>Cyclical; polyphonic; some non-narrative elements</td>
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A contradictory view is voiced by Janet Walker, who notes blatant problems in the application of the term “novel” as a translation for Chinese (as well as Japanese and Korean) specimens of narrative. She began by surveying a range of non-Western examples, like those from Turkey and India, which came into existence under the influence of their Western predecessors that were introduced via translation; they also served literary and social functions similar to the Western novel. For this reason, she sees the non-Western novel, at least in its early stage of development, as “a creature of the West” because “it emphasized the individual at the expense of the collective [and] emulated the Western novel form furthermore in its attempt at unity of vision, its elevation of realism to a governing principle, and its
simplicity of language" (1988: 53). However, Walker does not think that such a description applies well to the Chinese case because of the existence of many pre-modern Chinese instances of "long prose fiction" before the arrival of the Western genre. The same pertains to the Japanese shōsetsu and the Korean sawŏl (both terms directly borrowed from the Chinese xiaoshuo), instances of 'the novel' which existed well before the Western examples were translated. The joint motives of emulation and imitation, which she uses to account for the rise of the modern novel in non-Western countries, simply cannot be transferred to the Chinese, Japanese and Korean cases because of the existence of an indigenous tradition that antedated that in the West. She considers the imported novel in non-Western countries in the modern period as a direct product of Western political hegemony, and it is for this reason that Japanologists have resorted to a transliteration of the English word instead of an indigenized semantic translation. Yet in her conclusion, Walker suggests that out of expediency the term "novel" should be used as a translation for xiaoshuo: it provides a convenient means for academic discussion.3) When xiaoshuo is equated with the Western novel, it actually stands to gain: for her, the Chinese specimens can be removed from a more restrictive context and placed alongside their Western counterparts, getting accepted in general scholarly discourse (1988: 59).

While Walker has correctly highlighted the different provenances of the East Asian genres in question, one wonders whether expediency can be an excuse for mistranslation. The case in question constitutes, as Ming Xie puts it, an act of "appropriative translation" (Ming 2011: 32) which, in failing to take into account the conceptual differences from culture to culture, persuades

3) Andrew Plaks makes the same point, calling it a "label of convenience" (1980: 163).
us to accept a different linguistic code as workable and equally effective. In the discourse of translatability, as wielded by Plaks and Walker (for different reasons), the gaps between cultures are obliterated while commonality or sameness is constructed or imposed. In the discourse of untranslatability, by contrast, distinctions are not to be ignored at will, for they clue us to the divergent frames of cultural understanding. Incommensurability between languages reveals the irrefutable fact that there is no shared epistemological framework between the two cultures—particularly so in the past.

2. Xiaoshuo as "Fiction"

In discussions of Chinese narrative by Sinologists, another translation of *xiaoshuo* is “fiction,” and it is on the assumed equivalence that academic writing in the field has been undertaken for some time. *Xiaoshuo* originates as “chit-chat of back alleys and bypaths” dating back to very ancient times, as Lu Xun has noted in his definitive history (1976). The first specimens, totaling 943 in number, were composed by Yu Chu, a writer of the Western Han dynasty. Before the appearance of the full-length *xiaoshuo*, accounts of hearsay dominated the genre, for which it has been condemned for its unreliability, vulgarity and obsession with the supernatural. The oral nature of the stories and their quasi-historical character are thus two key features that distinguish them as a genre. While the facts narrated in *xiaoshuo* often cannot be verified—for this they were discredited by Chinese historians—they are a far cry from Western fiction in that they do not incorporate an imaginative (as opposed to factual) reality (see Ma 1986:31). Despite this, academic discussion in English has continued to be conducted on the basis of the
forced equivalence, ignoring the difference between the earlier and later instances, and the shorter and longer variants. The analogy established between the two terms has allowed some Sinologists working in the West (or ethnic Chinese scholars writing in English) to apply with facility Western narratological criticism to their analysis of Chinese works.

Often, such epistemic violence is viewed not just as harmless, but as beneficial. It is said that Western methodological tools enrich and expand the appreciation of traditional Chinese narratives. Another view—which still justifies the linguistic sleight of hand—has it that the translation makes possible an escape from the narrowness of a purely Western conception and allows fruitful comparisons to be made to “world” examples. The first is a Westernization argument; the second, an internationalization argument. Even scholars who are alert to the differences between the two narrative traditions somehow work in total disregard for the terminological slippage. There is scant awareness of the fact that academic writings on China in English are actually grounded in a translational mode. It is only on certain occasions that misgivings have been expressed. Lin Shuen-fu, for instance, remarks that traditional Chinese novels are structured differently than Western ones, often making use of linear, episodic plots and doing without climaxes or resolutions (Lin 1977). Some have focused attention on the amazing preponderance of historical and oral material in Chinese “novels.” Others have aired doubts as to how much in xiaoshuo is fiction, and how much history. Questions have also been raised as to how much of xiaoshuo is recorded oral narrative of authentic events. As Y.W. Ma (1986) has pointed out, Sinologists tend to both denigrate oral storytelling conventions in xiaoshuo and downplay the indebtedness of xiaoshuo to anecdotal historical material. This is perhaps a problem caused indirectly by a faulty translation.
In a recent study of a major collectanea of folk narratives from the Song dynasty, Hong Mai’s *Yijian zhi* (Record of the Listener), Alister D. Inglis surveys a number of scholars who seem united in querying the applicability of the “fiction” label to the *zhiguai* (accounts of anomalies), a major sub-genre of the *xiaoshuo*: Robert F. Campany, Glen Dudbridge, Leo Chan and, to a lesser extent, Rania Huntington. One might add to the list by citing others like Victor Mair who disputes the “birth of fiction” hypothesis. Like his predecessors who somehow prefer to read their stories as unofficial histories or authentic accounts, Inglis argues that Hong Mai’s voluminous collection is a far cry “from what contemporary Western-trained scholars conceptualize as ‘fiction’” (2006: x). He musters support for his argument by recourse to the twin factors of the story-collector’s intention and the reader’s reception of the collected *xiaoshuo*. And not only does he not restrict his observations to narratives of the Song period. He believes a broad gamut of similar works in earlier and later periods of traditional Chinese history fit uncomfortably within modern Western notional of “fictionality.”

The link between *xiaoshuo* and “fiction” has been thoroughly exploited, although the grafting of the meanings of “fiction” onto *xiaoshuo* took place over several decades. In perusing the history of American Sinology, one notes a few crucial historical moments when the translation became etched in stone.4)

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4) The present discussion is limited to the post-Second World War phase of American sinology. Chen Runcheng (2007: 3-49) has made a useful distinction between three phases: up to the end of the nineteenth century, Phase One was dominated by the missionaries, and from then on till the 1920s, there was Phase Two, in which European Sinologists who moved to the US (like K.B. Lauffer) played a crucial role in importing the methodology from Europe. The 1950s marked a drastic change of direction when scholars like John K. Fairbank and Knight Biggerstaff began the shift away from microscopic textual research. With the establishment of East Asian departments at the time, American Sinologists played, to a certain extent, the role of
In a standard reference anthology on classical Chinese literature, *Studies in Chinese Literary Genres* edited by Cyril Birch (1974), a spate of essays on poetry, drama and fiction classics make concerted use of the translational equivalents for key Chinese literary terms. Needless to say, most are problematic.5) Hans H. Frankel, drawing on his knowledge of the European tradition, translates  yüefu as “ballads” (despite the substantial differences in form) while James J.Y. Liu renders *ci* as “lyrics” (although the term can in fact be a translation for many other subgenres of classical Chinese poetry besides the *ci*). In discussing the military romance, which plays fast and loose with history even while presenting historical figures and events, C.T. Hsia laments that the genre has “failed to explore fully its possibilities as fiction” (Birch 1974: 343).6) In measuring the Chinese *xiaoshuo* against Western generic criteria, Hsia deploys Western generic categories to evaluate the Chinese example. The “comparative approach” by means of which western counterparts are referenced in the evaluation of Chinese literature, in many ways, typifies the Sinological approach. And ever since Birch, generations of scholars doing research on Chinese literature in English have followed suit.

5) One can also question whether *xiqü* should be translated as “drama.” It may actually be closer to “theater” because of the presence of elements of song, music, dance, acrobatics and swordplay in dramatic performances in China. While transliteration can be the better solution, the recent furor over the adoption of an English name for a newly-built theater in West Kowloon (Hong Kong), in which the translation of “Chinese Opera Center” edged out its competitor (“Xiqu Center”), shows how “popularity” and “politically correctness” can be determining factors, even though the translation is very imprecise and inaccurate.

making use of the handy translational tools introduced by the earlier terminological trend-setters.

Other evidence can be adduced to show how the translation of *xiaoshuo* as “fiction” steadily made progress toward full acceptance. The four monumental classical Chinese “novels,” usually dubbed in Chinese as *sidamíngzhù—The Three Kingdoms, The Water Margin, The Journey to the West and Dream of the Red Chamber*—are simply designated as “masterworks of Chinese fiction.” The correspondence is facilitated by the English translation of *xiaoshuo* in the canonical study by Lu Xun—*Zhongguoxiaoshuoshi* (1925). Dan account of the evolution of pre-modern Chinese narrative literature from (i) the early myths and legends, through (ii) the tales of the supernatural, (iii) prompt-books of the storytellers in the medieval period as well as (iv) vernacular short stories, to (v) the full-length novels from around the sixteenth century onward, this monograph was translated into English as “A Brief History of Chinese Fiction.” This further establishes “fiction” as the authoritative translation. Of course standard bibliographical tools, like *Classical Chinese Fiction: A Guide to Its Study and Appreciation* (Yang, Li and Mao 1978), also help popularize the translation among students of Sinology.

The latest and most sustained attempt to draw parallels between the Chinese *xiaoshuo* and Western concepts of fiction occurs in Gu Ming Dong’s recent monograph, *Chinese Theories of Fiction: A Non-Western Narrative System* (2006). The most revolutionary aspect of Gu’s book is his revisionist reading of practically all the major *xiaoshuo* theorists in traditional China and—based on this—his use of psychoanalytical psychology, Western theories of aesthetic creation and postmodernist conceptions of language use,
to re-conceptualize the genre. A close examination of the first two chapters bears out the modalities of Gu's approach. 7) While at the beginning of the first chapter Gu concedes that "fiction" is only a rough equivalent of *xiaoshuo* (2006: 19), he slowly makes the two terms interchangeable: "*xiaoshuo* or fictional works" (34). Gu contests the commonly accepted view that there was a shift from historicity to fictionality in the evolution of the genre through the centuries; for him the fictive element has always been an intrinsic part of it.

After revamping Ban Gu's theory of the origin of the Chinese term by making its fictional nature explicit, Gu Ming Dong proceeds to note that *xiaoshuo*'s historicist (and, to a smaller extent, its philosophical) nature was deliberately reinforced by a succession of theorists from Hu Yinglin through Liu Zhiji and Zhang Xuechang, to Lu Xun. To Gu, the denigration of the imaginative, fabricated aspects of *xiaoshuo* through the ages can be understood in the context of a Confucian order in which history occupied a central position while fiction became marginalized. With In Chapter Two, Gu situates the *xiaoshuo* in relation to modern Western theories that have been derived from European and world fiction. Disputing the relevance of Ian Watt's sociological theory of the rise of the Chinese novel, Gu dissects the "mature" novel of the Ming and Qing periods, which stands at the pinnacle of the development of Chinese fiction, with reference to Freud's and Marthe Robert's views on the need for fantasy and daydreaming (2006: 57), as well as postmodern concepts of the self-referential use of language (42).

7) Tellingly, the second chapter is entitled "The Nature of (Chinese) Fiction," with "Chinese" bracketed—effectively erased in favor of the Western, supposedly universal category.
To Gu, in aesthetic terms, *xiaoshuo* is nothing less than fiction, most prominently seen in the two full-length novels, *Jin Ping Mei* and *Honglou meng*, instances of self-conscious attempts at fictionalizing. Drawing a range of comparisons with Western fictional masterpieces by Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Jane Austen... Emile Zola, Guy de Maupassant, Leo Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and other European masters (Gu 2006: 202), Gu concludes that, even while acknowledging inevitable differences, "the similarities in the Chinese theory of fiction prompt [him] to claim that the history of Chinese fiction has moved steadily towards the internationalization of fiction" (182). The circle is complete: *xiaoshuo* as fiction is Chinese but at the same time also Western, universal, and translatable (in name as in concept).

3. To Translate, Or to Transliterate?

It can be argued that the term "fiction" is a perfectly adequate translation for contemporary Chinese works. Indeed, since the beginning of

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8) Interestingly, Gu is not unaware of the pitfalls that result from the unmindful application of Western literary theory to the study of Chinese fiction. In his more recent, illuminating study of Sinologism—a system of knowledge about China and Chinese civilization—he recounts how some Western and Chinese scholars evaluate classical Chinese fiction with reference to "Western concepts, terms and theories, and refuse to examine Chinese texts on their own terms" (Gu 2013: 116). Quite correctly he points out that the notion of an "ethnic divide" does not account for the complexity of the positions taken by the many scholars involved (140-143). What is especially worth noting is Gu's historical account of Sinologism covering the Western and Chinese perspectives (66-91), central to which is what he calls "epistemic ideologization" (105)—something that can also explain the distortions that the word *xiaoshuo* has been subject to in English translation.
the twentieth century, Chinese novelists have turned out what is akin to Western fiction, thereby justifying the label. But the re-designation of pre-modern xiaoshuo specimens in accordance with the modern Western classificatory system is pure anachronism. Violence is done when the past is re-categorized and re-incorporated into a modernized, Westernized present. By way of translation, a universalizing—or Orientalizing—effort is exerted to recast a Chinese artifact in the Western mold, its original identity denied under the guise of an equivalent translation. And given the fact that historicity figured so powerfully in “small talk,” its erasure—or its displacement by fictionality—cannot be without consequences. The question is why, in any case, history and fiction should be placed in diametric, irreconcilable opposition, or why one has to be valorized over and above the other.

Given the fact that fiction is literature’s most influential genre, its re-classification in the light of a makeshift translation, carried out almost imperceptibly, bears looking into more closely. Admittedly, a genre can have some universal characteristics, and possibilities for classifying genres trans-culturally do exist. Problems occur when the categorical distinctions are not made descriptively, through close attention to concrete, analyzable examples, or prescriptively, and when standards derived from other cultures are applied or superimposed. The categorization of genres is important not just in that it reflects a culture’s view of the world; it also provides the groundwork upon which criticism and interpretation can proceed. The bibliographers and bibliophiles of pre-modern China constructed a special taxonomy relating to Chinese forms of cultural expression which differed from those of the West, working under the influence of a distinct tradition. Besides, ideological significances and economic parameters also enter into
generic classifications (cf. Hitchcock 2011: 354-355). Undeniably, Sinologists have vested interests in subscribing to certain taxonomic models. They understand the power of genre and its usefulness as cultural capital. In fact, other than in literary scholarship, artificial equivalences were drawn between Western religious terms and Buddhist-Taoist ones in the seventeenth century by the Jesuit missionary translators in China. One might wish that the divergences can lead to a productive frisson between the Chinese and Western genres, and perhaps even to re-categorization of the latter. The fact, however, is that the erasure of the traces of incommensurability has not encourage much paradigmatic re-examination, if the publications of the last few decades are anything to go by. 9)

Among the handful of articles dealing specifically with the problematic translation of Chinese generic terms from a translation studies perspective is Robert Neather’s “The Translation of Generic Designations” (2011). Neather delves into the range of problems arising from the use of “rough cognates” derived from the Western tradition to translate the word fu, a genre which reached its height of popularity in the Han dynasty but continued to be written in China till the end of the imperial period. After taking a look at the various rather strained translations, like “prose-poetry,” “rhymed prose” (Cyril Birch) and “rhapsody” (David Kuechtinges), from the parameters of genericity and cultural appropriateness, he enumerates the failure of these terms to facilitate East-West comparison. Instead of “help[ing] to mediate difference”

9) For a checklist of the generic characteristics of the novel, see Madsen (1998: 465-466): its valorization of individual experience, its newness (the word novel is derived from the Italian novella), the fictional elements that underline its presentation of the narrative world and events, etc. Viewed in these terms, innumerable Chinese instances of pre-modern xiaoshuo simply do not quite qualify; those that do can only do so partially.
(2011: 166), they fail to highlight the special generic characteristics which developed historically in China through the centuries. Notwithstanding the limitations of cross-cultural mapping, Neather comes down in favor of Stephen Owen’s translation, “poetic exposition,” a general term which he deems superior; Owen’s strategy is much preferred to defining the Chinese genre as a single class of works in the West. The problem, nevertheless, is that even Owen’s coinage exhibits a universalizing tendency, and local cultural specificity is lost.

Neather also proposes one other strategy—transliteration. He notes the advantage of its being a method that can usefully bypass several insurmountable problems. Much favored by Chinese scholars, this term reveals an effectively “nativizing” strategy. 小说 is xiǎoshuò. Understandably, there is ample resistance to transliterating the term, even to transliteration in general. According to one argument, some standard terminology is necessary for comparative China-West studies, and its absence makes it impossible for discussions in comparative literature in particular to be conducted. Whether that is so, of course, is open to question. In a gargantuan effort to introduce critical terminology in the English language, supported financially by the Chinese University of Hong Kong, National Taiwan University and Tamkang University in the 1990s, John J. Deeney worked on the compilation of an encyclopedic dictionary of classical literary terms in English. In eight short essays which tackle the theoretical issues pertaining to 12 key terms in the Chinese literary tradition, transliterations are used, although a make-do literal translation is provided after the first, or second, appearance of the term (see Deeney 1994). The subjects of the essays are: tongbian (tradition and change), shiyanzhi (“the poem articulates what is on the mind intently”), yuanching (heartfelt feelings), fu (narrative-descriptive mode; rhyme-prose), bi
(similaic or analogical mode), xing (evocative-associative mode),
wenroudanhou (gentleness and kindness), jingjie ("a state of free and
unlimited imagination"), fenggu (wind and bone; forceful and affective power
in literature), yan (word), xiang (symbol) and yi (meaning). The undesirability
of translating the literal meaning into English is bodied forth by those
instances where alternative translations are possible, and in one case by an
awkward word-for-word translation ("wind and bone"), whereas the articles,
taken together, show how academic discourse is not necessarily impeded by a
substantial use of transliterations.\(^{10}\)

A second argument against transliteration is that it is a sign that the
translator has given up, reflecting an inability to render a particular term into
the target language. It is, in short, a last resort, used when all else fails. For
some it falls outside the realm of translation: since the original meaning
remains opaque, transliteration is no more than a form of non-translation.
While it can be debated whether meaning transfer is at the core of the
translation act, there has been a long tradition of transliterating Chinese
philosophical terms like *Dao* and *ren* (humaneness), at times accompanied by
rough translations, given in brackets, that are understood by the reader to be
far from inaccurate (see Chan 2011:178-192). In recent translation studies
research, transliteration as a means of preserving cultural specificity, as the
ultimate "foreignizing mode," has been much vaunted, while practicing
translators engaged in the "outward translation" of Chinese texts—into
English primarily—consider it as particularly effective. Incidentally,
translating into a second language (English) is a movement that is drawing

\(^{10}\) Also scattered through the articles is an abundance of other transliterations, like *cai*
talent), *dan* (daringness), *shi* (knowledge), and so on.
much attention in the China field, its ideological strengths having been studied by a handful of Chinese theorists (e.g. Yu 2008; Wang 2009), while its potentials as an alternative or a counter-strategy, are keenly explored.

4. Sinology and the Translational Approach

What does the translation of xiǎoshuō as “the novel” and “fiction” tell us about Western Sinology? Sinology is, of course, the study of China, although more specifically it was associated with the investigation into things Chinese begun as early as the late sixteenth century, when Jesuit missionaries based in Macau (most notably Nicolae Milescu) explored the possibilities of making Christianity compatible with Chinese culture in their Latin translations. Its ties to the English language were established through major English Sinologists in the nineteenth century, most prominently James Legge, who was not only a prolific translator of Chinese classical works but also a leading figure in the school known as “classical Sinology.” Such a way of (re)presenting China to the West reached a new climax in the mid-twentieth century when it crossed the Atlantic, and renamed “Chinese Studies,” which was eagerly promoted in departments of East Asian Languages and Literatures (or Cultures), or departments of Asian (or Oriental) Languages. In the 1970s and 1980s, leading Sinologists from these institutional bases—Andrew Plaks in Princeton, Cyril Birch in Berkeley, James Liu in Stanford, C.T. Hsia in Columbia and Hans Frankel in Yale—built the terminological base for

11) One might also ask the same question with regard to Chinese-Western comparative literature studies, but in view of the disagreements between scholars of the two “camps” and the complications arising therefrom, that will have to be left to a separate occasion.
extensive research on Chinese literature in English, through removing the incommensurability between Chinese and Western literary concepts. Compared with the likes of Legge, much greater advances were made by a generation of American Sinologists in the study of the full-length vernacular novel.

As is generally understood, East Asian area studies (a branch of which is Chinese studies) was instituted in universities in the US in the post-War period for strategic reasons: behind their establishment was the aim of collecting information on the region, analyzing it and giving the necessary interpretation in order to serve the political, diplomatic and military needs of the American administration. This explains the engagement with politics that has been an integral part of the area studies agenda. For this reason, the Chinese, Japanese and Korean studies carried out in the programs concerned are essentially non-theoretical and non-disciplinary—in distinct contrast not only to the humanities departments but also to the social sciences departments. However, facility with an East Asian language is a fundamental requirement for scholars in these departments, as is the ability to translate into English. In the field of Chinese studies, for instance, translation has been deployed in two ways: in rendering Chinese texts studied wholly or in part into English, and—more covertly—in presenting research findings in English.\(^{12}\)

In the post-Cold War period, particularly in the 1990s, with the power relations on the international scene having shifted—and with globalization on the rise and localization on the wane—a crisis occurred: the continued usefulness of some of these programs was queried. Considering the abundance

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\(^{12}\) British academics may not espouse "Cold-War" concerns to as great an extent, though they essentially used the terminology coming from the other side of the Atlantic.
of resources poured into the programs in Chinese, which did not attract a
great number of students, it became hard to justify their existence.13) The
support for the continuation of area studies programs voiced by Alan
Tansman, a Japanologist at the University of California at Berkeley, is worth
noting in this regard. He emphasizes the value of the translational approach in
East Asian area studies. Such studies, to Tansman, represents a branch of
scholarship that "seems least theoretical and least engaged with politics and
power" (Tansman 2004: 208). Though Japanese (rather than Chinese) studies
is his subject, he discusses area studies as a whole, confronting the charges of
critics who view it as not sufficiently theoretical, and notes how Asianists
excel in handling primary sources in the original language. He counters
denigrations of area studies as having limited utility except in training foreign
language teachers for the universities, and takes issue with those who
crime the distortions the Eastern subject. While he does not altogether fail
to see the way in which East Asia becomes Orientalized, he nevertheless errs
in his judgment that translations are effective in revealing East Asia as it is.
Betraying a die-hard belief in the fidelity of the translations, he apotheosizes
translation as a means of enabling scholars to "grapple with foreign materials
in their own terms" (2004: 209; italics added).

Under the guise of "equivalence," translation is the tool utilized in
American Sinology to produce knowledge—or perpetuate an image—about
China that can serve a post-Cold War. Recently, Daniel F. Vukovich has
expatiated on the "Sinological Orientalism" that is prevalent in Western—
predominantly American—academic discourse. Apparently disinterested, such

13) The Japanese studies programs, with better student enrolments, did not face as serious
a challenge to their rationale for existence.
a discourse displays a blatant ignorance of the reality and complexity of China, choosing to interpret it in its own way and to its advantage. Surveying a plethora of academic publications from the 1980s on, he avers that the production of Orientalist knowledge is aimed at the demonization of China while reflecting both the superiority of Western global culture (2012: xiv) and the humanism of American academe. Among the many examples that he cites throughout his book, Vukovich devotes close textual attention to the monographs and articles written by a range of American historians on the Mao and reform eras (like G. William Skinner) and by scholar-critics of Fifth Generation films (like Esther Yau). None of these scholars are translators in the narrow sense of the word, but they quote extensively primary sources in Chinese in English translation, and they then interpret these for a Western audience. The mediated nature of their textual interpretations is covert but still highly evident. Not differing much from the approach to the xiaoshuo as discussed above, this “translational” methodology is revealing: it tells us much about the anti-China, Cold-War perspective of the Western Sinologists, whose objectivity and political impartiality are doubtful. This predominant approach is genealogically linked to the century-long tradition of Sinology, beginning with the early missionary-scholars. Ming Xie, whom we have referred to above, has characterized this in even more blatant terms: Sinology is a form of anthropology, a Western discourse about non-Western cultures (2011: 58). For Chen Kuan-hsing, it is “the study of China without China” (2010: 253), and Asian Studies is, in reality, American Studies. The need for a neutral language for academic discussion remains an ideal unfulfilled.
5. Conclusions

With the rise of China in the two past decades to become a viable economic and political power, it can be expected that arguments should arise in academia concerning whether one should champion an “international approach” like that suggested by Gu Ming Dong (2013), or prioritize a more “Sinicized” approach.\textsuperscript{14} Unfazed by the fact that the term “Sinology” has been disparaged by a generation of post-colonialist critics, Geremie Barmé, speaking from another part of the Anglophone world, has recently spoken of the need to reinvigorate Sinology. In an article published in connection with the launching of the online journal China Heritage Newsletter (later renamed China Heritage Quarterly, of which he is currently Editor) in 2005, he advocates a “new Sinology” which nevertheless declares its integral links to classical Sinology and contemporary Chinese studies in the US. Even though Barmé reiterates the “newness” of his project, his methodology does not in actual fact depart substantially from established practice, what we have called “the translational mode.” The emphasis on critical engagement with the Sinophone world, the deployment of textual analytical methods (\textit{kaozheng}), and the “embodied involvement” with China, characterized as “an ‘Other’ that haunts us from within” (2005: para. 8)—these reflect what has been done by James Legge and Co. The only conspicuous change made by Barmé is his inclusion of research concerning the “Sinophone world,” which includes

\textsuperscript{14} The denigration of the “local” vis-à-vis the “global” (read: American) is underlined by the under-representation of the former in major academic associations in the US, as pointed out by John Lie (2012). For him, “anyone studying a society besides the United States or the West is regularly consigned to the label of a ‘comparatist,’ a non-existent field” (2012: n.p.). According to Lie, there is little interest in the Chinese economy, for instance, except as a manifestation of so-called universal principles.
Taiwan and overseas Chinese communities as well. The outsider perspective and the issue of practical relevance ("knowing about the enemy") are still there, although the political agenda is perhaps a little muted. "Area studies" rhetoric is transferred to Australia: "It is obvious that the buzzwords that attract attention in Australia are 'national security' and 'economic benefit'; and applications to national funding bodies are invariably couched in terms of scholars providing a 'better understanding of our region'" (2005: para.12).

Translation as the methodological tool for Sinologists, both old and new, needs to be problematized. The realization that a piece of published research has been mediated by translation makes all the difference. There is no problem with the translation of terminology and expressions, even the structure of thinking, but such translation should be made explicit. Knowing that certain terms have been used as expedient measures when exact equivalents are not available is the key to unraveling the practices that enable the local to be subsumed under a global or international framework, and erase cultural or regional differences that are reflected in language. In the case of our critical examination of the translations of xiaoshuo into "the novel" or "fiction," the crucial point is not that mistranslations have come into being, but that inadequate translations can play into the hands of the scholar presenting a "global" interpretation of a Chinese term that refuses to be translated. The untranslatability of xiaoshuo underlines the Orientalizing discursive maneuvers that have been carried out, unannounced as it were, in academic publication. Translation criticism is not used here to show that comparative literature is an impossible undertaking, but to uncover the gaps, fissures and incompatibilities that lie hidden in what gets translated. In not being identified, undercover translations serve to advance the agenda of the advocates of monolingualism and the defenders of linguistic inequality,
participating in what amounts to an act of epistemicide.

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**Abstract**

Much effort has been devoted over the past few centuries to presenting China to the West in the English language, beginning with the classical sinology of nineteenth-century Britain and reaching a climax through late-twentieth century Chinese Studies in the States, carried out mostly in departments of East Asian languages and literature/cultures. Invariably there is one shared element in these approaches: translation. In our age, the pervasive use of English as the language of academic discourse, combined with the increased hegemony of English in fields beyond those of business, recreation and diplomacy, means that the “Westernization” of forms of knowledge related to Chinese culture and tradition has become inescapable. In the new linguistic imperialism, what is prominent are the misrepresentation, distortion and manipulation carried out in connection with the translation of ideas from Chinese into English. The present article focuses on ideas rather than texts in order to understand the cannibalization of one language by another.
that has occurred in translation. The example chosen is the translation of a key literary term—xiào xiāo (literally “small talk” but often translated as “fiction”)—which appears in academic writings published by American Sinologists in the past few decades, in which the epistemological gap between the Chinese and English terms is artificially bridged.

Keywords: Sinology, translation, fiction, transliteration, globalization, terminology, orientalism, equivalence

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