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### About the Review

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## Book Review

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### ***Translating China as Cross-Identity Performance* by James St. André**

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Ever since the renewal of interest in metaphors prevailed in the mid-20th century, related research has empowered metaphors to possess more theoretical implications rather than to function as mere linguistic representations. The following decades bear witness to how metaphors are integrated into contemporary academic discussions and what roles the metaphor theory, having been continuously practised and enriched, plays in dealing with cognitive, linguistic, and sociocultural issues. Relevant works of importance are not only limited to more classic ones, such as *Metaphor and Thought* (1979) edited by Andrew Ortony, *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) written by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, but also those more recently published, such as Stern Josef's *Metaphor in Context* (2000), and Denis Donoghue's *Metaphor* (2014). Given this academic context, St. André's *Translating China as Cross-Identity Performance* is another worthwhile attempt in venturing the frontier of metaphor theory by conceptualizing translation with metaphors, during which an academic model is set for employing metaphors to theorize a particular discipline and to investigate specific disciplinary cases.

James St. André is the Chairman and Associate Professor of the Department of Translation at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. His research mainly focuses on the translations from Chinese into English and French between the 17th century and 20th century. His early contribution in combining translation with metaphors could be traced back to the 2010 book he edited entitled *Thinking Through Translation with Metaphors*. A variety of metaphors are adopted in this book to reconceptualize translation, and the chapter contributed by St. André, titled "Translation as Cross-Identity Performance", is tellingly the pilot study of the book that is the subject of this review.

*Translating China as Cross-Identity Performance* builds upon and departs from the 2010 book chapter in which some theoretical issues between translation and metaphor have been foregrounded. By developing the methodology initiated in the chapter, St. André in the book further testifies it by applying it to the translation issues that surfaced in the historical Sino-Western interactions. A judicious thoroughness is carried out in elaborating the mythological

taxonomy inspired by the typology of cross-identity metaphors, i.e., blackface, whiteface, passing, drag, mimicry, and masquerade. This taxonomy not only showcases another academic route to overcome the problem of theoretical compatibility between translation studies and gender studies but also unravels its pertinency and qualification to examine relevant Sino-Western translations between the 17th and 20th centuries.

This taxonomy also serves as the structure of the book by treating individual metaphors as a conceptual lens to chronologically look into relevant translations. The translations of St. André's enquiry are mostly those translated by Westerners before China and Western countries had large-scale interactions. Translations of this period did not serve to enhance communication, the function that translations commonly perform by following faithfully the source text; rather, they legitimized themselves by gloating over the suspicious achievements they made in overcoming the linguistic barriers and therefore enjoyed the plausible privilege to betray the rules of being faithful, inviting different forces to achieve varied goals of their concern. In this sense, as the connection between the source text and the target text has been largely disconnected, a new space is opened to metaphorize translations of this period as acts of changing identities. Under this observation, this book's theoretical building and research scope are tightly tied up, and the content, as shown below, is appropriately situated.

In the book, the author begins his investigation with the 17th and 18<sup>th</sup> century Oriental tales prevailing in the West by proving those tales as meaningful others to ridicule (blackface) or compliment (whiteface) the Western self. Oriental tales, in the name of translation, are thus argued to be the yardstick to which the Western countries were self-measured. In the second chapter, the earliest Western translations of *The Sorrow of Han* are considered as passing, through which the author argues that both the French and English translators employed Chinese characters and pronunciations to justify their translations as authentic against the reality that the demand for authentic translations was escalating. The next chapter moves to translation as drag, emphasizing the more radical alteration entailed by relevant translations. These translations are found to convey a kind of Chineseness to their Western readers, and this Chineseness, as St. André argues, was accessorized and dragged by the Western conventional concepts about China. The next part of translation as mimicry unravels how the Western sinologists attempted to mimic the sight and sound of Chinese, during which the Chinese was plausibly more thoroughly perceived by the West in terms of linguistic differences. In the final part of thinking translation as masquerade, two Chinese translators, i.e., Gu Hongming and Lin Yutang, are argued to follow but also derail the Western conceptions about China to establish their own Chinese identity. Compared to the previous chapters, this chapter concentrates on the Oriental side which ponders anew the issues of how the Oriental translators could masquerade themselves for innovating Orientalness while conforming to the Western conventions.

As reviewed above, translation, as a practice of linguistic shifting, has been compared to behaviours of changing make-ups, costumes, and accessories in the field of gender and performance studies. The value of this comparison is not a mere similarity between linguistic shifting and appearance changing but the commensurability between these two practices of reconsidering relevant identity issues brought forth by the act of crossing. While in this book crossing undeniably refers to the linguistic switch from Chinese to Western languages, its underlying meanings are more closely related to the agents who enacted the behaviour of

crossing and the contexts in which translations as cross-identity practices happened. The agents and contexts, as told by the book, were mostly Western; therefore, the emphasis of this book is on how China was conceptualized by the Western. In doing so, it elucidates not only how the discourse of China was developed in the West through translation, but also how the West projected Western values and purposes on translation to cater to the Western imagination of China as the other. In this sense, the novelty of this book is its embodiment of how the Oriental was more Orientalised and the Chinese became more Chinese in the Western perspective, and how the Western identity was constructed and reinforced through translations of Chinese texts, even though many parts in the translation were fabricated.

Conceptualizing translation as cross-identity performance does not confine its discussion at the linguistic level; instead, it attempts to metaphorize these linguistic features as performative techniques which impose great influences on identity-shaping. What matters in thinking translation as cross-identity performance is who initiates the performance under what contexts for what audience. This approach is more about the way translation functions in the target area for target readers, which neatly avoids some clichéd discussions resulting from the overwhelming concerns about the source text. But, meanwhile, the deficiency of this tendency is admittedly obvious. The way of emphasizing the target end and therefore including those texts which are not authentic translations but are accepted as translations would be easily trapped in the danger of diluting the nature of translation.

Overall, this book offers insights into the translation issues of translating China for the West and should be considered as a meaningful practice of integrating translation with metaphors and of moving both metaphor theory and translation studies further. Not only the practitioners of translation studies, but also the students interested in Chinese literature, language, and history are potential target readers of this book.

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