

## Reconceptualizing Translation – Some Chinese Endeavours

Martha P.Y. Cheung

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### Article abstract

This article examines, in the context of Chinese discourse on translation, a phenomenon observable in translation studies in the Euro-American world in the last few decades, namely the reconceptualization of translation. Based on historical research, the article shows that in different periods in the history of translation in China, there have been repeated attempts to respond to the realities of translation of the time by offering new (as opposed to established) conceptualizations and explications of translation (*fanyi* 翻譯). What these conceptualizations are will be analyzed with reference to a number of texts taken from different periods of Chinese discourse on translation. The article will also explore the connections amongst these conceptualizations and show how a mental frame could be produced that could serve as the blueprint of a project of international collaborative research, one in which ethnocentric bias of all kinds will have no place. In the last section of the article, the author will continue the tradition of reconceptualizing translation by offering one more definition of *fanyi* 翻譯.

# Reconceptualizing Translation – Some Chinese Endeavours<sup>1</sup>

MARTHA P. Y. CHEUNG

Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong SAR  
marthach@hkbu.edu.hk

## RÉSUMÉ

Dans le contexte du discours chinois sur la traduction, le présent article expose l'analyse d'un phénomène perceptible, au cours des dernières décennies, dans les études traductologiques du monde euro-américain, à savoir la reconceptualisation de la traduction. Sur un fond de recherche historique, l'article montre qu'il y a eu, à différentes époques de l'histoire de la traduction en Chine, des efforts répétés pour réagir aux réalités de la traduction de l'époque en présentant des conceptualisations et des explications nouvelles (par opposition aux conceptualisations établies) de la traduction (*fanyi* 翻譯). La nature de ces conceptualisations est analysée en faisant référence à un certain nombre de textes choisis à différentes périodes du discours chinois sur la traduction. L'article étudie aussi les liens simples ou multiples établis au sein de ces conceptualisations et montre comment un cadre de réflexion pourrait être élaboré et servir de schéma directeur à un projet de recherche collaborative internationale qui excluerait toute tendance ethnocentrique. Dans la dernière partie de l'article, l'auteure poursuivra la tradition de la reconceptualisation de la traduction en proposant encore une nouvelle définition de *fanyi* 翻譯.

## ABSTRACT

This article examines, in the context of Chinese discourse on translation, a phenomenon observable in translation studies in the Euro-American world in the last few decades, namely the reconceptualization of translation. Based on historical research, the article shows that in different periods in the history of translation in China, there have been repeated attempts to respond to the realities of translation of the time by offering new (as opposed to established) conceptualizations and explications of translation (*fanyi* 翻譯). What these conceptualizations are will be analyzed with reference to a number of texts taken from different periods of Chinese discourse on translation. The article will also explore the connections amongst these conceptualizations and show how a mental frame could be produced that could serve as the blueprint of a project of international collaborative research, one in which ethnocentric bias of all kinds will have no place. In the last section of the article, the author will continue the tradition of reconceptualizing translation by offering one more definition of *fanyi* 翻譯.

## MOTS-CLÉS/KEYWORDS

discours chinois, reconceptualisation de la traduction, dichotomie, concept-faisceau, recherche collaborative internationale  
chinese discourse, reconceptualization of translation, dichotomy, cluster concept, international collaborative research

In the last few decades, reconceptualizing translation has been a significant trend in the discipline of translation studies in the Euro-American world. There have been continuous attempts to broaden the concept of translation, most notably by theorists

such as Toury (1980), Sallis (2002), and, most recently, Hermans (2007) and Tymoczko (2007). The Japanese scholar Naoki Sakai has also conducted a radical interrogation of the model of communication upon which the concept of translation is built, and a critique of the notion of translation as communication (Sakai 2006).

There is one common strand running through the works of all these theorists. Whether they approach the concept from an abstract philosophical or a historical angle, these theorists have tried to take translation beyond the confines set by definitions that are primarily informed by linguistic theories of translation. Catford's definition comes immediately to mind, "the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)" (Catford 1965: 20). These theorists have also tried to understand translation not as an ahistorical and ideal notion but as one grounded in time and space, in the concrete circumstances of production, and as encompassing the diverse range and specificities of the products accepted as *translation* by their users. In the words of Toury, translation is "any target language text which is presented or regarded as such (i.e., as translation) within the target system itself, on whatever grounds" (Toury 1982: 27; 1980: 14, 37, 43-45). According to Hermans (2007, Chapter One "The End"), the existence of texts authenticated as translations by international institutions or by religious authorities in the past shows that equivalence can be declared rather than realized in the fullness of a linguistic replacement. Tymoczko (2007), taking into account products accepted as translation now and in the past, and having examined the meanings of different local terms for *translation* in different cultures, decides to introduce a new conceptualization of translation. She finds the classical concept of categorization inadequate for her purpose, even the looser boundaries set by the prototype theory of translation is too restrictive, and she argues that translation is a cluster concept, i.e., a concept with open boundaries.

In China, because of political upheavals in the 1960s and 1970s, and the lack of academic status for translation studies as an independent discipline, the situation was, and still is, different.<sup>2</sup> The main trend has been the introduction, through translation, of Western translation theories to help translation scholars become acquainted with approaches towards translation that are different from the prescriptive one represented by *xin* 信, *da* 達, *ya* 雅 (usually translated as faithfulness, comprehensibility, and elegance). That movement has been effective in undermining the importance of *xin* 信, *da* 達, *ya* 雅 and in reshaping the mindset of Chinese academics in the field. Unfortunately, along with *xin* 信, *da* 達, *ya* 雅, Chinese discourse on translation has been more or less consigned to oblivion. More often than not, it was faulted for being impressionistic, anecdotal, and lacking in theoretical vigour. But where attempts to conceptualize translation are concerned, I think that Chinese discourse on translation provides clear evidence of past efforts to respond to the realities of translation that had emerged at different Chinese historical periods by offering new (as opposed to established) explications of *fanyi* 翻譯 (translation). In this paper,<sup>3</sup> I shall focus on a number of texts taken from Chinese discourse on translation, and show how they produce different conceptualizations of *fanyi* 翻譯 (translation). I shall also explore the connections amongst these conceptualizations and show how a mental frame could be produced that could serve as the blueprint of a project for international collaborative research. In addition, I shall offer another definition of *fanyi* 翻譯 (translation) in my own endeavour to reconceptualize translation.

## 1. An Unorthodox Conceptualization

The first text I shall discuss is Qian Zhongshu's 1964 essay "The Translations of Lin Shu (林紓的翻譯)" (1979). Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書 (1910-1998) was a writer, an essayist, a man of great learning and a renowned scholar in comparative literature. Lin Shu 林紓 (1852-1924) is one of the best known translators of Western literary works in the history of translation in China. A monolingual who worked with his collaborators by turning their oral renditions into written Chinese, Lin was known for his stylistic accomplishments and enjoyed a higher reputation than his collaborators.

In this essay, Qian cites the authority of the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century scholar Xu Shen 許慎 (ca. 58–ca. 147), who compiled the first comprehensive dictionary of Chinese characters *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (hereafter *Shuowen*),<sup>4</sup> and says that in that dictionary, there is an entry – the character 囗 (e) – which elucidates the concept *yi* 譯<sup>5</sup> (translation) and which is rich in interpretive significance: “‘é’ 囗, translate/translation ‘yi’ 譯, derived from ‘wéi’ 口, ‘huà’ 化 is phonophoric (the sound-bearing component). When the bird-catcher uses a live bird as decoy, it is called 囗, pronounced 譌 ‘é’ (囗, 譯也。從“口”, “化” 聲。率鳥者繫生鳥以來之, 名曰“囗”, 讀若“譌”) (quoted in Qian 1979: 62, translated by the author).<sup>6</sup> The connection between *yi* 譯 (translation) and bird-decoy, brought out in an annotation given by Xu Jie 徐鍇 (921-975), is also provided by Qian: “*yi* 譯 can be explicated as ‘to transmit the words of the tribes in the four quarters and those of the birds and the beasts’” (“譯”就是“傳四夷及鳥獸之語”) (Qian 1979: 62, translated by the author). It is clearly a metaphorical connection, with the transmission of the words of the tribes in the four quarters working “much in the same way as the bird-decoy (*niaomei* 鳥媒 [literally, bird match-maker]) *entices* (*yòu* 誘) birds” (好比“鳥媒”對“禽鳥”所施的引“誘”) (Qian 1979: 62, translated by the author). Qian also cites other explanations. The character 囗 (é) is pronounced as *é* 訛 (errors, misrepresentations) for ‘é’ is a common variant of *é* 譌.<sup>8</sup> This being the case, the characters *é* 譌, *é* 訛, *huà* 化 (meaning ‘transform,’ the phonophoric of 囗) and *é* 囗 are all interconnected.<sup>9</sup> From these connections, Qian then draws the conclusion that the characters

“譯”、“誘”、“媒”、“訛”、“化” 這些一脈通連, 彼此呼應的意義, 組成了研究詩歌語言的人所謂“虛涵數意 (manifold meaning)”。(Qian 1979: 62)

*yi* 譯 (translate), *you* 誘 (entice), *mei* 媒 (medium, match-maker), *e* 訛 (errors, misrepresentations), and *hua* 化 (transform), by virtue of their etymological inter-connectedness [as seen in their shared graphic components and sound-bearing elements], and by the semantic reverberations thus ensued, achieve [for this entry] what a student of poetic diction would call ‘manifold meaning.’ (Translated by the author)

In the same poetic vein, Qian remarks that it was as if these characters train one's sight on “the functions of *fanyi* 翻譯 (translation), the pitfalls that are hard to avoid, and the highest state to which *fanyi* aspires” (把翻譯能起的作用、難於避免的毛病、所嚮往的最高境界, 彷彿一一透示出來了) (Qian 1979: 62, translated by the author).

How do the Chinese characters *yi* 譯 (translate), *you* 誘 (entice), *mei* 媒 (medium), *e* 訛 (errors, misrepresentations), and *hua* 化 (transform) gain the significance attributed to them by Qian? What are the interpretive feats performed by Qian to allow him reach this conclusion?

To Qian (1979: 62), *hua* 化 (transform) is the highest state to be attained by literary translation. If a translation leaves no trace of the strain and awkwardness caused by the differences between the source and target languages, and if the flavour and feel of the source text is fully preserved, then such a translation can be said to have reached *huajing* 化境 – the state of total transformation. Qian also says that in order to reach the state of total transformation, a translation should be so faithful to the original that it would not read like a translation, because a literary work in its own language will never read like a work that has undergone translation.

This state of transformation, however, is not easy to attain (Qian 1979: 64). In Qian's view, misrepresentation (é 訛) is inevitable, due to all sorts of reasons. But instead of speaking disparagingly about misrepresentation, he says that there are different types of misrepresentations and they are not all bad. Through an analysis of Lin Shu's translations, Qian distinguishes two types of misrepresentations. One comprises careless mistakes made by Lin. The other type comprises embellishments and compensations (Qian 1979: 67-70) which can add colour, verve, drama, and humour to the translation (Qian 1979: 69). They were Lin Shu's *contributions* to the text he was translating. While Qian says that these interventions should not be encouraged in works of translation, he also remarks that they could provide inspiration for anyone interested in rhetoric and the art of composition. Qian even says that a translator who is also a writer, or fancies himself to be one, could hardly resist the urge to act as the original author's "best friend and severest critic (諍友)" when he comes across passages that are weak and need improvement (Qian 1979: 72).

Because misrepresentation is inevitable, the characters *mei* 媒 (medium) and *you* 誘 (entice) also take on new meanings. Generally speaking, a translation serves as the medium of transmission (*mei* 媒), bringing the foreign work to readers and enticing them (*you* 誘) to become attached to the work without having to learn the foreign language. When that is accomplished, the translation will function like a match-maker (*mei* 媒) and bring about a "literary romance between nations" (國與國之間締結了文學姻緣) (Qian 1979: 64, translated by the author). But when a translation comes to life through daring acts of misrepresentation, some readers would sense that the translation is misleading and their curiosity to know what the original is like would lead them (*you* 誘) to learn the foreign language so that they can read the original for themselves. That way, the translation will also have functioned like a match-maker (*mei* 媒), but in the sense that it makes itself redundant, just as a match-maker will retreat from the scene once the courtship begins. As for a translation that is riddled with careless mistakes (*e* 訛), it will lose the readers' interest and hence destroy both itself and the foreign work.

This configuration of characters (*yi* 譯, *you* 誘, *mei* 媒, *e* 訛, *hua* 化) presents to us a view of translation that is related to but also different from the view of translation predicated on faithfulness (*xin* 信). It is related, because the emphasis on *huajing* 化境 – the state of total transformation attained through the preservation of the flavour and feel of the source text – can be taken as an elucidation of the theme of faithfulness (*xin* 信). And yet it is also different: because although Qian upholds *huajing* 化境 (total transformation) as the ideal of translation, he is not prescriptive about it. Certainly he does not insist on faithfulness at the level of words and syntax. What is more, he accepts translation for what it often is in reality – misrepresentation, distortion, disguised composition of a parasitic nature, or enhanced performance.

He even entertains the possibility of translation as transgression, as re-writing, and as betrayal (reference is made in Qian's essay to the Italian saying "*Traduttore, traditore*," "The translator is a traitor [翻譯者即反逆者]") (Qian 1979: 63). The implicit point is that the subservience of the translator, and the concomitant notion of faithfulness, is not absolute or axiomatic. The translator can manipulate the source, betray it, play with it, display traces of his own creativity, be highly visible, and be appreciated for it.

The theoretical significance of Qian's essay has not been fully explored in Chinese translation studies, and definitely not in translation studies in other places. All too often, the idea of *huajing* 化境 (total transformation) was lifted from the essay and added to the configuration formed by *xin* 信 (faithfulness), *da* 達 (comprehensibility), *ya* 雅 (elegance). The result is, one might say, the taming of the shrewd.

But in fact, Qian's essay has radical energy. One can use the view of translation conveyed by his configuration of terms to overthrow the view of translation as an act of linguistic exchange predicated on faithfulness, which has been the dominant view in China, especially since the beginning of the twentieth century. But that would be replacing one dogma with another. A better way to release the radical energy of Qian's essay is to interpret it as affirming the possibility of alternative views of translation and of alternative ways of theorizing about translation. Earlier on I asked the question of what interpretive feats have been performed by Qian. Apart from those described in the above paragraphs, Qian's greatest interpretive feat lies in the way he theorizes translation from the entry *e* 囗 in *Shuowen* and the accompanying annotations. To fully appreciate this feat, let us first analyze the logic of Qian's argument. The basic premise of Qian's argument is that since *e* 囗 means *yi* 譯 (translation), what has been provided in the explications and annotations of *e* 囗 is equally valid for *yi* 譯 and Qian can thus select from this lot of material the key points for theorization. Interestingly, however, one piece of information given in one of the annotations has not featured in Qian's discussion, even though that annotation is included in the source cited by Qian, *A Compendium of Annotations and Exegetical Commentaries on Shuowen Jiezi* (說文解字詁林). In that annotation supplied by Wang Yun 王筠 (1784-1854), it is pointed out that even though *yi* 譯 (translation) is the original meaning of *e* 囗, that meaning has been lost and *e* 囗 has functioned as a phonetic loan to refer to the use of bird decoys (quoted in Ding 1966: 2737). It is also significant that the Qing dynasty scholar Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (1735-1815), who collated what even now is considered to be one of the two most authoritative annotated editions of *Shuowen* (the other one being the one used by Qian), did not even include the meaning *yi* 譯 (translation) under the entry *e* 囗 in his edition, *Shuowen Jiezhizhu* (說文解字注). The omission of these two points by Qian shows that his interest in the *Shuowen* material pertaining to *yi* 譯 (translation) is less philological than literary. Qian might have identified the etymological link between *e* 囗 and *yi* 譯 with the sharp eye and detective instinct of an erudite scholar, but the reading and discursive strategy he applies to that dictionary entry reflects the imaginative sensibilities of a student of poetic diction. Rather than dismissing the character entry *e* 囗 and the related annotations because *e* 囗 has already lost the meaning of *yi* 譯 (at least since the Qing dynasty), and rather than focusing his attention exclusively on the meanings of *yi* 譯 as listed in Chinese dictionaries through the ages, Qian allows himself to be enticed, as it were, by the word-decoy; he turns this piece of etymological curiosity



into material for theorization, and produces a conceptualization of translation that is intellectually exciting not only for its content but also for the mode of thinking that underlies it. As I shall show in the following pages, it is a mode of thinking which can help us read historical records of Chinese discourse on translation with a new pair of eyes, build fresh connections amongst texts, tap unexpected interpretive possibilities and reach a new understanding of past endeavours to make sense of the concept of translation

## 2. The Earliest Attempts to Conceptualize Translation<sup>10</sup>

If, in addition to examining the definitions and elucidations of *yi* 譯 given in historical discourse on translation, one also exercises one's associative logic and applies it to a study of what other characters/terms have been used to designate the activity now called *fanyi* 翻譯 (translation), one would notice that the kind of echoes and reverberations noted by Qian in his essay analyzed above are audible in the following passage. Taken from the canonical text *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記), the passage provides what could well be the earliest documentary evidence of attempts to make conceptual sense of the activity we now call *fanyi* 翻譯 (translation):

五方之民，言語不通，嗜欲不同。達其志，通其欲，東方曰寄，南方曰象，西方曰狄鞮，北方曰譯。(Dai n.d.: 195)

*The people living in the five regions spoke different languages and had different customs, likings and preferences. In order to make accessible what was in the minds of different peoples, and in order to make their likings and preferences understood, there were functionaries for the job. Those in charge of the regions in the east were called ji 寄; in the south, xiang 象; in the west, didi 狄鞮; and in the north, yi 譯. (Cheung 2006: 46; translated in this article by the author)*

Down the centuries, the terms *ji* 寄, *xiang* 象, *Didi* 狄鞮, *yi* 譯 have always been taken as the official titles of government functionaries whose job was to maintain communication and diplomatic relations with the neighbours of China in ancient times. They are just titles. And it was probably due to frequency of usage that *yi* 譯 became the Chinese word for the activity now known as *fanyi* 翻譯 (translation). This is how the Buddhist monk Zan Ning 贊寧 (919-1001) explains it:

今四方之官，唯譯官顯著者，何也？疑漢已來多事北方，故譯名爛熟矣。(Zan Ning 1993b: 22-23)

*Today, among the officials in charge of the four regions, the yi are the best known. Why is this the case? The reason could be that since the Han Dynasty [206 BCE–220 CE], serious trouble always came from the north, and so the name “yi” has come to be known throughout the country. (Cheung 2006: 177; translated in this article by the author)*

Zan Ning's account has been cited, almost routinely, in subsequent discourses on translation. As a result, what started as a speculation became shared knowledge.

But these titles are not just sounds; they do carry meanings, as can be seen from the annotations provided in subsequent works on the *Book of Rites*. To quote from the annotations of the authoritative Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574-648),<sup>11</sup> who was entrusted by Emperor Taizong 太宗 of the Tang dynasty to form a committee of scholars to prepare a commentary on the Five Classics, *ji* 寄 meant “entrusted with the languages of the east” (寄者，寄付東方之言) (*Liji Zhengyi* 1982: 1338, translated by the author). In addition, Kong also explained *ji* 寄 as “officials who comprehend

and transmit the languages of the east.” Furthermore, he took *ji* 寄 as a verb meaning ‘transmit.’ (通傳東方之語官謂之曰寄, 言傳寄外內言語) (*Liji Zhengyi* 1982: 1338, translated by the author). The two meanings of *ji* 寄, i.e., ‘to entrust’ and ‘to transmit,’ when taken together, suggest that *ji* 寄 was a government official entrusted by the King to transmit His words/message to the tribes in the East, and to bring their messages back. *ji* 寄, in short, is a trusted transmitter. And ‘trusted transmission’ would certainly be considered a distinctive feature of *fanyi* 翻譯 (translation).

The character *xiang* 象 is even richer in meaning. As a noun, it means “elephant” (an explanation provided in standard Chinese dictionaries). It also means “officials who comprehend and transmit the languages of the south.” As a verb, it means ‘to imitate’ (通傳南方語官謂之曰象者, 言放象外內之言) (*Liji Zhengyi* 1982: 1338, translated by the author). A further explanation provided by Kong Yingda is “render in likeness the languages of the south” (象者, 象似南方之言) (*Liji Zhengyi* 1982: 1338, translated by the author). The connection between “elephant” and “the languages of the south” is to be traced to the relation between the Zhou dynasty (c. 11<sup>th</sup> century-771 BCE) and her southern neighbours, one of which was the country of Jiaozhi 交趾 (present day Vietnam). Because Jiaozhi used to present elephants and elephant tusks as tributes to the Zhou kings, *xiang* 象 could well have been used as a metonymy for “officials who comprehend and transmit the languages of the south.” As a matter of fact, *xiangxu* 象胥 (*xiang*-functionaries) was the collective name for these minor officials. In *Zhou Rites* 周禮, there is a passage describing their duties:

象胥, 掌蠻、夷、閩、貉、戎、狄之國使, 掌傳王之言, 而諭說焉, 以和親之。若以時入賓, 則協其禮與其辭, 言傳之。 (*Zhouli* n.d.: 195)

*The xiàngxū [象胥, interpreting-functionaries: xiàng 象, likeness-renderers; xū 胥, minor government officials] are responsible for receiving the envoys of the tribes of Man 蠻, Yi 夷, Min 閩, He 貉, Rong 戎 and Di 狄. They are charged with conveying the words of the King and explaining his meanings to the envoys so that harmonious relations with these tribes may be maintained. At regular intervals, when the heads of these states or their representatives come to court to pay tribute, the xiàngxū are responsible for overseeing matters relating to protocol; they also serve as interpreters...* (Cheung 2006: 43, translated by Martha Cheung)

The reason why at that time *xiang* 象 was used as the collective term and not *ji* 寄, or *Didi* 狄鞮 or *yi* 譯 can be found in another explanation provided by the annotators: it was because “the benevolence of the Zhou dynasty first reached the south” (今總名曰象者, 周之德先致南方也) (Jia 1983: 620, translated by the author). This explanation carries great significance. It suggests that whether in the Zhou dynasty or later, it was frequency of usage rather than inherent meaning that had determined the naming of the activity now called *fanyi* 翻譯 (translation).

As for the term *Didi* 狄鞮, Kong Yingda had provided an annotation that is cited by Chinese translation scholars to this day. He said that due to phonological similarity between the character *di* 鞮 and the character *zhi* 知, *Didi* 狄鞮 meant “know the language of the *Di* tribes and transmit it for the purpose of communicating between them and China” (狄鞮者 [...] 謂通傳夷狄之語與中國相知) (*Liji Zhengyi* 1982: 1338, translated by the author). In recent decades, however, Kong’s annotation has been challenged. Another interpretation has been offered: due to phonological borrowing and other reasons, *Didi* 狄鞮 was probably the Chinese transliteration of the word *tilqi* in the Uighur language, and *tilqi* was similar in meaning and structure to the



Chinese term *sheren* 舌人 (literally “tongue-men,” meaning “interpreters”) (Maitiniyazi 1994: 12). Irrespective of which is the correct meaning of *Didi* 狄鞮, the point to note is that the two meanings complement rather than contradict each other. They also complement rather than contradict the meanings of the other characters just discussed.

We now come to the character *yi* 譯, which gained currency and displaced the other three terms in the course of the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) and subsequent centuries. According to Kong Yingda’s annotation, it means “to state in an orderly manner and be conversant in the words of the country and those outside the country” (譯, 陳也, 謂陳說外內之言) (*Liji Zhengyi* 1982: 1338, translated by the author).<sup>12</sup> Another annotation, provided by Kong’s contemporary Jia Gongyan 賈公彥 (7<sup>th</sup> century annotator), “‘to translate’ means ‘to exchange,’ that is to say, to change and replace the words of one language by another to achieve mutual understanding” (譯即易, 謂換易言語使相解也) (Jia 1983: 620, translated by the author).

Since all the four terms have meanings, very rich meanings, it is necessary to affirm the validity of a reading other than the one enshrined in Chinese scholarship. All through the centuries, the passage from the *Book of Rites* has been read as a historical record of the official titles of government functionaries responsible for communicating and maintaining diplomatic relations with the neighbours of China in ancient times. There is no denying the accuracy of this reading, but I would argue that the passage can also be read as the earliest recorded Chinese attempt to conceptualize *fanyi* 翻譯 (translation), even if there is no way of ascertaining how conscious that attempt had been. Viewed from this angle, the passage has enormous theoretical significance. It presents an interesting picture of four terms (*ji* 寄, *xiang* 象, *Didi* 狄鞮, *yi* 譯), used simultaneously to denote the activity now called *fanyi* 翻譯 (translation). In the form of a mindmap, there is an empty space, with the four terms occupying the four cardinal positions, as if to circumscribe its boundary. The visual immediacy of this picture reminds us that there was no fixed designation for translation at the time when the activity first became important enough to be institutionalized as a government post and mentioned in historical documents. And it was most probably due to frequency of usage that *yi* 譯 eventually came to stand for the activity now called *fanyi* 翻譯, or translation in English. Rather than dismissing *ji* 寄, *xiang* 象 and *Didi* 狄鞮 and their related annotations as false trails, I would argue that they are as instrumental as *yi* 譯 in helping to illuminate what, in the days before Buddhist sutra translation became the dominant mode of translation activity in China, could be singled out as the distinct traits of translation as a concept.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. To Translate ‘*yi*’ is to –: Buddhist Attempts at Conceptualization

During the long stretch of time that saw the growth, development, and decline of Buddhist sutra translation in China (i.e., from the mid second century CE until the early twelfth century), discourse on translation again reveals similar attempts to grapple with the meaning of the concept *fanyi* 翻譯 (translation). Perhaps because Buddhist sutra translation is very different from the kind of diplomatic translation performed by government functionaries, the empty space that had been filled by the character *yi* 譯 gradually came to be occupied by a number of other characters as well, and one can see another configuration. These characters are *chu* 出, *shi* 釋, *yi* 易, and *fan* 翻.

*Chu* 出, in discourse on Buddhist sutra translation, is often used interchangeably with *yi* 譯 (translate). But there are also instances of usage that suggest a broader meaning, as for example in *Chusanjang jiji* 出三藏記集 (*A Collection of the Records on the Emanation of the Chinese Tripitaka*) – the title of the oldest extant bibliography of Buddhist texts collated by the fifth century Buddhist monk Seng You 僧祐 (445–518). There, *chu* 出 retains its usual meaning (i.e., “bring forth,” “help something to come out,” “contribute to the emanation of,” or “make available”) and functions to acknowledge the effort of every person who had worked as part of a team to make the Buddhist sutras available for dissemination in China. This act of acknowledgement was considered necessary because Buddhist sutra translation was characterized by teamwork, with the participants ranging from a few in the early stages to several hundred at the height of the translation movement.<sup>14</sup>

There is another character that was often used, not interchangeably with *yi* 譯 (translation) but to elucidate the meaning of *yi* 譯. In his scholarly study of the Chinese translations of Buddhist sutras, Seng You says, “Translation is exegesis *shi* (釋). If in the course of exegesis there are errors, then there will be a distortion of principles” (是以宣頌梵文, 寄在明譯。譯者釋也, 交釋兩國, 言謬則理乖矣) (Seng You 1995: 13; Cheung 2006: 121, translated by Martha Cheung). The relation between translation and exegesis is one which any translator will appreciate.

“Translation is exegesis” (譯者釋也). This elucidation is different from the annotation of *yi* 譯 (to translate) provided by Kong Yingda cited earlier – “to state in an orderly manner and be conversant in the words of the country and those outside the country” (*Liji Zhengyi* 1982: 1338, translated by the author). It is different, too, from the annotation of *yi* 譯 (to translate) provided by Jia Gongyan, also cited earlier, “to translate’ means ‘to exchange,’ that is to say, to change and replace the words of one language by another to achieve mutual understanding” (Jia 1983: 620, translated by the author).

Interestingly and significantly, the annotation, “to translate’ means ‘to exchange’” (譯即易) has been given another explanation by the tenth century monk Zan Ning 贊寧 (919–1001): “To translate [*yi* 譯] means to exchange [*yi* 易], that is to say, to exchange what one has for what one does not have.” (譯之言易也, 謂以所有易所無也。) (Zan Ning 1993a: 3; Cheung 2006: 174, translated by Martha Cheung). Such an explanation has rich theoretical significance. The phrase, “To exchange what one has for what one does not have,” is a direct quotation from Mengzi 孟子 (327–289 BCE): “In antiquity, the market was for the exchange of what one had for what one did not have” (古之為市也, 以其所有易其所無者, 有司者治之耳) (Zhu 1987: 43; Cheung 2006: 174, translated by Martha Cheung). In that passage, the sage Mengzi tells the story of how in ancient times, the state initially played a supervisory role in the markets, only introducing a tax on traders because of the despicable behaviour of a man overcome with greed. The story highlights a notion of trading motivated by the spirit of exchange in its most civilized sense, and that is, exchange which is based on need rather than greed, and which results in mutual enrichment, fulfilment and contentment. By quoting directly from Mengzi, Zan Ning invokes this spirit of exchange as the defining feature of translation. He is trying to move away from the linguistic dimension to the cultural dimension of *yi* 譯 (translation). He is stressing the value of cultural exchange.

Equally significant theoretically is that the Chinese character *yi* 易 does not simply mean “exchange” but also “change,” and Zan Ning clearly thinks that “change” is an integral part of the process of exchange. By a happy coincidence, the English word *exchange* embodies the word *change* and can easily convey this point. This point, moreover, is brought out in another piece of writing by Zan Ning, in which he talks about the meaning of *fan* 翻 – the remaining term in the configuration:

懿乎東漢，始譯《四十二章經》，復加之為翻也。翻也者，如翻錦綺，背面俱花，但其花有左右不同耳。由是翻譯二名行焉。（Zan Ning 1993b: 23-25）

[...] the Eastern Han Dynasty saw the first translation of the Sutra in Forty-two Chapters 四十二章經 [Sishierzhang jing]. At that time, the character “fān” [翻, literally “turn [something] over”] was added in front of the character “yì.” The meaning of “fān” can be conveyed by likening it to turning over a piece of brocade – on both sides the patterns are the same, only they face in opposite directions. Since that time, both the term “fān” 翻 and the term “yì” 譯 gained currency [as synonyms, meaning “translate”] and traveled far and wide. (Cheung 2006: 177, translated by Martha Cheung)

To translate, then, is to turn something over, like turning over a piece of brocade. And what does one see? “On both sides the patterns are the same, only they face in opposite directions.” The image stands in sharp contrast to the one used by Don Quixote in the novel of the same title. There, reading a translation is compared to looking at the underside of a Flemish tapestry. The implicit meaning is that translation is inferior to the source. Zan Ning, however, is not taking a judgmental stance. The tone is matter of fact. The point to note is that there is sameness in difference, and there is difference in sameness. That is the result of translation (*fan* 翻, to turn over), and to translate (*yi* 譯) is to change (*yi* 易).<sup>15</sup>

#### 4. Putting the Pieces Together

The three configurations presented so far have been discerned from Chinese discourse on translation produced in different periods of Chinese history. More configurations can be traced from discourse on translation produced in other periods. But these three are sufficient to show a pattern that is worth commenting on for its significance.

Each of these configurations embodies a conceptualization of translation that is anchored in historical specificities, but they are still relevant to current attempts to answer the question of what translation is; each exists independently, but they all cover the same topics: translation as a concept; translation as an activity; translation as a product; modes of practice; designations. We can take the terms from the configuration to which they belong, and use them to form a bigger, more inclusive and more complex configuration with which to get a more comprehensive understanding of the different facets of *fanyi* 翻譯 (translation) (Table 1).

The terms from the three configurations, discussed in earlier sections, are arranged chronologically. The earliest one, presented as row three from the top, is followed by the Buddhist conceptualization – as row four from the top, and Qian Zhongshu’s conceptualization is one row further down.

The 1<sup>st</sup> column from the left gives the designations of the concept/activity/product now known as *fanyi* 翻譯 (translation). As has been noted, even designations no longer in use can throw conceptual light on what *fanyi* 翻譯 (translation) is.<sup>16</sup>

The 2<sup>nd</sup> column from the left highlights the conceptual features of translation:

- (i) Translation as trusted transmission (*ji* 寄);
- (ii) Translation as imitation (*xiang* 象), as the rendering of likeness;
- (iii) Translation as linguistic exchange (*yi* 譯);
- (iv) Translation as exchange (*yi* 易) – of what one has for what one does not have, i.e., the tenets of Buddhism. Cultural exchange;
- (v) Translation also involves change (*yi* 易);
- (vi) ‘Change’ echoes ‘transform’ (*hua* 化). Translation is transformation.

TABLE 1

**Conceptualizations of *fanyi* (translation)**

	Concept	Activity	Product	Activity
Designations	Conceptual features	Purposes and functions	Relation with the source text	Modes of practice
<i>ji</i> 寄 <i>xiang</i> 象 <i>didi</i> 狄鞮 <i>yi</i> 譯	<i>ji</i> 寄 (trusted transmission) <i>xiang</i> 象 (imitate render in likeness) <i>yi</i> 譯 (linguistic exchange)	<i>ji</i> 寄 (transmit)[the words of the king and the languages of the tribes for the purpose of communicating]		Transmit the words (of the king) Oral translation [ <i>didi</i> 狄鞮 = <i>tilqi</i> in the Uighur language = <i>sheren</i> 舌人, literally “tongue-men,” meaning “interpreters”]
<i>fan</i> 翻 <i>yi</i> 譯 <i>chu</i> 出	<i>yi</i> 易 (change; exchange)	<i>shi</i> 釋 (exegesis) <i>yi</i> 易 (exchange) [to achieve cultural enrichment]	Sameness & Difference [“turning over a piece of brocade – on both sides the patterns are the same, only they face in opposite directions”]	<i>chu</i> 出 (bring forth) (oral and written) Co-translation; team translation
<i>fanyi</i> 翻譯 <i>yi</i> 譯	<i>hua</i> 化 (transform)	<i>you</i> 誘 (entice) <i>mei</i> 媒 (medium; match-make)	<i>e</i> 訛 (errors) [deliberate transgression, or betrayal, or enhanced performance; <i>huajing</i> 化境 (state of total transformation, i.e., flavour and feel of ST fully preserved)]	Change and replace the words of one language by another (written)

These terms are the conceptual attributes of *yi* 譯 (translation). We can examine and analyze how they are related, the better to understand the nature of the activity now called *fanyi* 翻譯 in Chinese and translation in English.

In addition to the question of “what is translation?,” another question dealt with is “what is the purpose and function of translation?” (3<sup>rd</sup> column from the left)

- (i) Transmit (*ji* 寄) the words of the king and the languages of the tribes for the purpose of communication;
- (ii) Exegesis (*shi* 釋);

- (iii) Exchange (*yi* 易) for the purpose of attaining cultural enrichment;
- (iv) Entice (*you* 誘) the readers to become attached to the work without having to learn the foreign language;
- (v) Serve as a medium of transmission (*mei* 媒) and bring the foreign work to the readers;
- (vi) Match-make (*mei* 媒) – bring about literary romance between nations.

Looking vertically down the column, we can see how these functions and purposes varied in different historical periods and depending on the type(s) of translation involved.

The 4<sup>th</sup> column from the left deals with translation as a product, especially its relation with the source:

- (i) There is sameness in difference and there is difference in sameness;
- (ii) Faithful rendering of the source; misrepresentation of the source; betrayal of the source.

Translation exists not in one single relation with the source but many. We can take this column as a springboard to conduct a critique of the dominance of the model of communication that is based on faithfulness, or discuss other related theoretical questions.

We can also study the different modes of practice that prevailed in different historical periods (5<sup>th</sup> column from the left):

- (i) Transmit the words of the king; oral translation;
- (ii) A combination of oral and written translation; co-translation, team translation;
- (iii) Written translation.

It should be stressed that this framework is open and new columns (for example, “techniques of translation”) can always be added. In addition, the columns themselves can be extended to include discourse on translation taken from other periods. Take for instance, the definition of *fanyi* 翻譯 given in the authoritative contemporary Chinese dictionary, *Xiandai Hanyu Cidian* (現代漢語詞典):

把一種語言文字的意義用另一種語言文字表達出來[也指方言與民族共同語、方言與方言、古代語與現代語之間一種用另一種表達]; 把代表語言文字的符號或數碼用語言文字表達出來 (*Xiandai Hanyu Cidian* 1996: 345)

*to use one language to convey the meaning of another language (including dialect and the vernacular, dialect and dialect, language in classical times and modern language); to use language to convey the meaning of signs or codes that stand for language* (Translated by the author)

This definition of translation, which emphasizes the conveyance of meaning, can be understood as a continuation and a variant of “‘to translate’ means ‘to exchange,’ that is to say, to change and replace the words of one language by another to achieve mutual understanding” (譯即易, 謂換易言語使相解也) (Jia 1983: 620, translated by the author). The expression “convey/express meaning” can be added in a new box under the column “Purposes and functions” (of translation). The three types of translation mentioned in the definition – intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic – can also be added in a new box under the column “Modes of practice.”

With this mega-configuration, analyses of different aspects of *fanyi* 翻譯 (translation) can be conducted – vertically down any or each of the columns, horizontally across any or each of the rows, or focussing on a few boxes in any or each of the

columns or the rows. At the same time, this mega configuration can serve as the basis for a big comparative project on notions of translation in China and in other traditions. Researchers could investigate whether similar endeavours at conceptualization and reconceptualization have also characterized the history of discourse on translation in their tradition. They could use the framework presented in table 1, or a modified version of it, to study if patterns can be detected that are similar to, or different from those in the Chinese tradition. When we have collected a number of configurations from different traditions and conducted a comparative study of these configurations, we can then speak with greater certainty what are the central cross-cultural defining characteristics of translation. If no defining characteristics can be identified across different cultural traditions, we can still ask searching questions about the modes of practice, the purposes and functions of translation, and other contextual questions to examine what are the historical and local specificities that have given rise to the distinct features of individual concepts of translation from different cultural traditions.

This is a hugely ambitious project, but it is also hugely important. Being a project that must be carried out on the basis of equal partnership between researchers from different cultural traditions, the project will help researchers break away from the dichotomous mode of thinking and of discourse on translation (especially the dichotomy between the West and the non-West) in which translation studies as a discipline has been, for too long, trapped. The project has the potential not only to take translation studies to a truly international level, but also to promote intercivilizational dialogue and understanding of the most enlightening nature.

### 5. Reconceptualizing translation – a permanent intellectual endeavour?

The phenomenon of continuous reconceptualization, observable in Chinese discourse on translation produced in different historical periods, can be explained in the following way: theory arises from practice; translation theory arises from the practice of translation, hence new modes of translation necessitate new ways of theorizing what translation is, and new views of translation.

I would like to go a step further and offer an explanation grounded on traditional Chinese thought. This explanation is inspired by an expression used by Qian Zhongshu in “The Translations of Lin Shu”: *xuhan shuyi* 虛涵數意 (1979). Qian used that expression to translate the term *manifold meaning* and to provide a hint for his readers to read his essay not as a legislation of the root meaning of *fanyi* 翻譯 (translation) but as an innovative handling of some lexicographical material pertinent to translation. I would like to borrow Qian’s expression and use it for a different purpose – to help me in my endeavour to reconceptualize *fanyi* 翻譯 (translation). But first I need to explain the character *xu* 虛 in the expression *xuhan shuyi* 虛涵數意 for it is a word which carries rich meanings in traditional Chinese thought.

As a key concept in Daoism, one of the most important schools of thought in China, *xu* 虛 is usually explained and translated as “emptiness,” “void,” “vacant,” but other renderings are also possible because *xu* 虛 is the philosophical underpinning of a lot of expressions used in ordinary everyday language. As listed in the dictionary *Hanyu da cidian* (漢語大詞典) (1988), *xu* 虛 can be used to describe principles, or theories, or ideas and it means “abstract.” In another context, as for example in the



expression *xuwu piaomiao* 虛無縹緲, which is often used in discussions about a phenomenon or a state, the character *xu* 虛 would be rendered as “imaginary” or “illusory.” In describing interpersonal relationship, someone who relates to another person (usually an enemy) in a superficially friendly manner is described as *xuyu weiyi* 虛與委蛇 (pretending to be amiable and agreeable), while a person who is modest and open-minded is often characterized as *xuhuai ruogu* 虛懷若谷 (having a mind that is as receptive as a valley). In the context of traditional Chinese medicine, the term *xu* 虛 (frequently translated as “vacuity”) also features in descriptions of symptoms, and “refers to a general insufficiency of vitality, energy, and functioning of the body” (Zhang and Rose 1999: 225).

*Xu* 虛 (emptiness) as a conceptual term is often used together with its conceptual opposite *shi* 實 (concrete, solid, full, substantial, actual, true, real, fact, replete, again a term with many translations). In Daoist thinking, emptiness (*xu* 虛) and fullness (*shi* 實) exist in a relationship of mutual generation, and this relationship is expressed as *xushi xiangsheng* 虛實相生 (the empty and the full, or the abstract and the concrete, give rise to each other). This is the philosophical foundation upon which the expression used by Qian Zhongshu – *xuhan shuyi* 虛涵數意 – is based. A word for word translation of this expression is “emptily-holding-several-meanings,” or “notionally-holding-several-meanings,” which is more idiomatic. I will use this expression, and the Daoist idea of mutual generation that lies behind it, in my reconceptualization of *fanyi* (translation): 虛涵數意是翻譯 *xuhan shuyi shi fanyi* (word-for-word translation, “notionally-holding-several-meanings-is-translation”). At the figurative level, the term *fanyi* 翻譯 (translation), is like a container, it holds/contains/carries (the meaning of 涵 *han*, the second character of the expression *xu-han-shu-yi*) meanings, but the meanings can be emptied out and new semantic contents filled in. This happens because of the principle of mutual generation of *xu* 虛 and *shi* 實 – a container is *xu* 虛 because it has space (implying emptiness) and hence can hold things (implied meaning of *shi* 實); likewise, a container can be emptied, become *xu* 虛 again, and take in new things. What we have analyzed in the previous section, namely, the designations, meanings and definitions of the concept now called *fanyi* 翻譯 (translation), are the concrete (*shi* 實) meanings injected in different historical contexts into the empty (*xu* 虛) space of the concept now called *fanyi* 翻譯 (translation). They last for as long as they can as working definitions but can be displaced, replaced, or re-placed. When that happens, they become inoperable as meaning – become *xu* 虛. The appearance and disappearance of these configurations of terms used to, as it were, hold the meaning(s) of the concept now called *fanyi* 翻譯 (translation) is a manifestation of the working of the principle of mutual generation of *xu* 虛 and *shi* 實. The mega configuration (Table 1) I have produced in the previous section is an attempt to activate this principle by gathering the meanings that have been rendered null and void (*xu* 虛) and make them operable (*shi* 實) again for further intellectual exploration.<sup>17</sup>

It should be noted that my reconceptualization, *xuhan shuyi shi fanyi* 虛涵數意是翻譯 “notionally-holding-several-meanings-is-translation,” is itself an abstract (*xu* 虛) statement because the term “*fanyi*” 翻譯 can serve as both a verb and a noun, Chinese not being an inflectional language. The reconceptualization can be elucidated in accordance with the principle of mutual generation of *xu* 虛 and *shi* 實. Used as a verb, the expression “*fanyi* 翻譯 is *xuhan shuyi* 虛涵數意” can be concretized

to mean, “to translate is to hold (several) meanings notionally (in a target text verbal or written).” Used as a noun, the expression can mean “a translation holds (several) meanings notionally.” Still as a noun, the expression can also mean “the concept designated by the term *fanyi* 翻譯 holds (several) meanings notionally.” To put it simply, *fanyi* 翻譯 (translation/to translate) can be defined as follows – *fanyi* 翻譯, translation (is an activity/a product/a concept that) holds (several) meanings notionally. The meanings are notional and not final because language, as a system of signs, carries only provisional meanings. Another reason is, every act of translation is carried out in the concrete circumstances of time and space by a particular person or a group of persons, and every work of translation or every definition of the concept now called translation is the product of an individual or a group effort made in time and in space. A change in contextual factors will set into operation the principle of mutual generation of *xu* 虛 and *shi* 實 and there will be the space or need for a new attempt at translating, for a new translation, or a new definition of the concept.

Reconceptualizing translation, therefore, is a permanent intellectual endeavour, for practical reasons and also philosophical reasons. It deals with texts and contexts but also takes us to the beyond – to the world of ideas pertaining not only to the nature of translation and the nature of language, but also to the very nature of change itself, the mutual generation of *xu* 虛 and *shi* 實 being just one way of discoursing change.

## 6. Conclusion

It can be said that the conceptualization of *fanyi* 翻譯 (translation) just proposed comes close to the definition of translation provided by Maria Tymoczko. In her latest work *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators* (2007), Tymoczko argues that translation is a cluster concept, in the sense in which Wittgenstein describes an open concept, and that is, a concept with no set demarcation of boundary, with the properties relating to each other through family resemblance rather than fulfilling any necessary and sufficient conditions for membership. Wittgenstein illustrates what he means by an open concept with the example of games. From him, Tymoczko borrows the idea and presents *translation* as a cluster concept, in contra-distinction to the influential view that translation is a prototypical concept. What is more, she says that translation is a cross-cultural, cross-linguistic cluster concept.

The conceptualization of *fanyi* 翻譯 I have proposed: *fanyi*, translation (is an activity/a product/a concept that) holds (several) meanings notionally (虛涵數意是翻譯), can be taken as a Daoist version of the notion of translation as a cluster concept. The difference is, Tymoczko asserts that translation is a cluster concept, while my position is that *fanyi* 翻譯 (translation) can be defined as “an activity/a product/a concept that holds (several) meanings notionally.” The former is an ontological statement – assertive, bold, ringing with authority, flamboyant in its readiness to embrace closure, a closure that paradoxically can continue to take in new definitions. The latter is a counter-narrative – episodic, self-conscious about the provisionality of its status as definition, exuding not authority but the almost stubborn energy of the -ing.

But, as the Chinese saying goes, *shutu tonggui* 殊途同歸 – we reach the same goal via different routes, and that goal is, to introduce a new mindset for thinking and discoursing about *fanyi* 翻譯/translation. In this era of globalization, when com-

munication technology is developing by leaps and bounds, when ideas move round the globe at breakneck speed, when translation assumes a myriad of forms and there are bound to be new attempts to theorize the new realities of such practices, it looks likely that the energy of the -ing will remain active for a long time to come. After all, it is a tenet of Daoism that the principle of *xiangsheng* 相生 (the mutual generation of complementary opposites such as *xu* 虛, the empty, and *shi* 實, the full) is one of the eternal principles of life.

#### NOTES

1. Research for this paper was supported by a General Research Fund grant (GRF 240907) from the Research Grants Council of Hong Kong.
2. In 2005, the Ministry of Education of the PRC gave approval to three universities on the Chinese mainland to offer Translation Studies at a BA level from 2006 ("Jiaoyubu pizhun shezhi fanyi benke zhuan" [教育部批准設置翻譯本科專業] 2006) and Translation Studies finally gained official recognition and status as an academic discipline of its own.
3. This is the revised and expanded version of my article in Chinese "Qianzhongshu dui fanyi gainian de chanshi ji qidui fanyi yanjiu de qishi" (錢鐘書對翻譯概念的闡釋及其對翻譯研究的啟示), published in *Chinese Translators Journal* (2009): 5: 27-32. I wish to thank Professor Dirk Delabastita for having read an earlier version of this paper when he was visiting Hong Kong in October 2009 and for his constructive comments. I have benefited from discussions on the topic with Maria Tymoczko, Cemal Demircioğlu and Sehnaz Tahir Gucaglar. I am also grateful to the participants and staff of the 2009 CETRA Doctoral Summer School Programme for their feedback to my presentation of this topic when I was the 2009 CETRA Chair Professor. Last but not the least, I wish to thank the anonymous reviewers of this article. Their questions, comments and suggestions have helped me see new possibilities for revision.
4. The title of this dictionary is composed of four Chinese characters – *Shuō* 說 *wén* 文 *jiě* 解 *zì* 字. It means "explaining" (*shuō* 說 [talk about; discuss; elucidate; explain]) the *wén* 文 and "analyzing" (*jiě* 解 [untie; cut apart; separate; analyze;]) the *zì* 字. In Xu's explanation, *wén* 文 and *zì* 字 represent two main types of Chinese characters, the former being those made up of a single graphic component of stroke-pattern (such as *shān* 山 [mountain], or the character *wén* 文 itself), and the latter being those made up of more than one such component (such as *míng* 鳴 [sing], with *kǒu* 口 [mouth] on the left side and *niǎo* 鳥 [bird] on the right, or the character *zì* 字, which is composed of *mián* 宀 at the upper part and *zǐ* 子 below). The first type of characters (*wén* 文) are not reducible to smaller units for analysis, and hence they can only be "talked about", "discussed", "elucidated" or "explained." The second type (*zì* 字), on the other hand, can be analyzed in terms of their component parts. These two categories, *wén* 文 and *zì* 字, however, are not to be confused with the six categories called *liùshū* 六書 (six [forms of] scripts) into which all Chinese characters are classified. The *liùshū* 六書 also represent the six principles by which Chinese characters are formed. The elucidation of meaning carried out by Xu in *Shuowen* is based on his understanding of *liùshū* 六書, and specifically of the principles of pictographic imitation, combination, substitution, borrowing and association underlying the formation of Chinese characters. For a lucid explanation, in English, of these principles, see Needham (1954: 27-41). For a good introduction to the Chinese writing system, see Boltz (1994; revised 2003).
5. Before Buddhist sutra translation, the Chinese character *yì* 譯 was used singly to mean 'translate'/'translation.' Even now, when the term *fānyì* 翻譯 is generally used to mean 'translate'/'translation,' *yì* 譯 still serves the same function, with the meaning unchanged.
6. In the lucid explanation of Boltz (2003: 181), phonophoric is "that component of a Chinese character that 'bears the sound,' i.e., that indicates or suggests the pronunciation; commonly, but imprecisely, called a 'phonetic.'" In the Chinese writing system, the meanings of a character are to be analyzed and gleaned not only from its semantic component (determinative or radical) but also from its sound-bearing component. However, due to phonological changes, there are often discrepancies between the pronunciation of a character in ancient times and its pronunciation at a later period. In such cases, Xu would retain the phonophoric of the entry item so that the meanings of that entry item can be traced. At the same time, he would indicate how that entry item is to be pronounced by adding the phrase "pronounced –" (讀若 –). The entry (e 囍) discussed by Qian

Zhongshu is an illustrative example. 化, now pronounced ‘huà’ is the phonophoric, and the entry character 囿 is “pronounced ‘è’ (讀若譌).”

7. The Chinese in ancient times had always been wary of their neighbours. They considered it a matter of priority to maintain good relations with the neighbouring peoples by speaking their languages, communicating with them, “enticing” them to become vassal subjects – just as bird decoys entice birds and beasts.
8. In addition to the semantic component (determinative or radical) and the sound-bearing component, the meanings of a Chinese character can also be studied by analyzing the variant form(s) of that character.
9. The sources given by Qian are, *A Compendium of Annotations and Exegetical Commentaries on Shuowen Jiezi* (說文解字詁林) (Ding 1966), collated by Ding Fubao (1874-1952), an acknowledged authority on the subject, and *Kuan Chui Pien*, vol. 3, essay 135 (管錐編. 全晉文卷九十二) (Qian 2001), which is a disquisition on the subject of bird-decoys.
10. In Cheung (2005), I have explored, with reference to more historical material of the period than included here, the theoretical implications and significance of the earliest Chinese attempts to capture the meaning(s) of the activity called “*fanyi*” 翻譯 (translation) today. Some of the points are recapitulated here since they form an integral part of the argument of this article, which is developed from the tentative hypotheses and isolated comments I made in my earlier works, including those in the commentary section of *An Anthology of Chinese Discourse on Translation* (Cheung 2006).
11. Due to the constraint of space, I shall only cite those annotations that are generally considered to be the most authoritative.
12. Kong Yingda’s annotation echoes the explanation of *yi* 譯 given in Xu Shen’s dictionary *Shuowen jiezi* (說文解字): “Those who transmit the words of tribes in the four directions” (傳譯四夷之言者) (Shuowen 1969:57, translated by the author).
13. This is the hypothesis I put forward in Cheung 2005. It was, however, presented in a tentative manner because I believed then that more research would be needed to ascertain whether I was dealing with an isolated phenomenon or whether that phenomenon was part of a recurrent pattern detectable in Chinese discourse on translation through the centuries.
14. For a more comprehensive understanding of the differences in meaning between *chu* 出 and *yi* 譯, see Cheung 2006, 9-10.
15. See Cheung (2005: 33-36) for an analysis of the ideological reasons behind the Buddhist monks’ attempts to provide explications of “To translate [*yi* 譯] means to exchange [*yi* 易]” that are different from the explication provided by Jia Gongyan, who first introduced this annotation of *yi* 譯.
16. There may be some overlap in content between this column and the one for “Conceptual features,” or the column for “Designations.” This is because Chinese is not an inflectional language and one Chinese character can often serve several grammatical functions. Certainly the division into columns is not meant to be rigid but is primarily intended to help stimulate thinking.
17. It can be said that what Jacques Derrida and many deconstructionists are attempting to do with the concepts of erasure, traces and supplementarity (Baldick 2008) are also instances of efforts to activate the principle of mutual generation of *xu* 虛 and *shi* 實, but this is a topic beyond the scope of this paper.

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