Eugene Chen Eoyang. *The Transparent Eye: Reflections on Translation, Chinese Literature, and Comparative Poetics*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. 1993. ISBN 9780824814298. 311pp.

Ma Huanhuan

(Beijing Normal University)

As a noteworthy Chinese-American scholar and educator of comparative literature, Professor Eugene Chen Eoyang (欧阳桢, 1939-2021) passed away on October 13, 2021. In memory of his contribution to comparative literature and translation studies, firstly, please allow me to look back on his academic career. He is Professor Emeritus of English, Translation, Humanities, and General Education at Lingnan University (Hong Kong) as well as Professor Emeritus of Comparative Literature and of East Asian Languages & Cultures at Indiana University in the U.S. With a B.A. from Harvard College and an M.A. from Columbia University in English literature, he earned his Ph.D. in comparative literature from Indiana University. He has published several monographs, including *The Transparent Eye: Reflections on Translation, Chinese Literature, and Comparative Poetics* (1993), *Coat of Many Colors: Reflections on Diversity by a Minority of One* (1995), *Two-Way Mirrors: Cross-Cultural Perspectives in Glocalization* (2005) and *The Promise and Premise of Creativity: Why Comparative Literature Matters* (2012). He was elected President of the American Comparative Literature Association, Chair of the Intercultural Studies Committee of the International Comparative Literature Association, and Vice President of the Fédération Internationale des Langues et Littératures Modemes. He has also been admitted as a fellow to the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Commerce, and Merchandise.[1] In order to cherish the memory of Professor Eugene Eoyang, I will try to summarize his representative work *The Transparent Eye: Reflections on Translation, Chinese Literature, and Comparative Poetics*, which contains his thoughts and reflections on translation and Chinese literature.

1 ICL Featured Scholar. *International Comparative Literature*, 2020, 3(04): 598.

The title of this book alludes to an essay from American writer Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature*, reminding us that "the object on view is not only the vision we see but also the organ through which that vision is apprehended" (Eugene xv). Obviously, the author's top concern has been laid out: "how our observations of others reflect back on ourselves and the way we see" (Eugene xi). "Transparent" is the key word in this book, since this book is a look at transparencies. Most of the time, readers see another world through translations, but they hardly notice the translator's eyes. The fact is that the better the translator is, the more transparent his eyes are, the more he or she can help the reader to see the original text clearly. However, the notion of "transparent" that Eugene holds is quite different from Lawrence Venuti who doesn't believe the existence of the transparency of translation. For Venuti, "the effect of transparency effaces the work of translation, it contributes to the cultural marginality and economic exploitation that English-language translators have long suffered, their status as seldom recognized" (Venuti 13). For Eugene, "the translator must respectfully render both the transparent (exoteric) and the opaque (esoteric) part of the text. For in the first, the message must be transmitted through words that replace the original, and in the second, a just degree of elusiveness must be preserved" (Eugene 129). To some extent, translation renders the task of being transparent and opaque at the same time, a kind of blending. Nevertheless, the meaning of the translation sometimes can be opaque, but not impenetrable to losing the significance of translation in itself.

The book consists of 13 chapters, with a preface and an epilogue at the beginning and the end, respectively. In the preface, Eugene has made detailed views on some key concepts, such as the attribution of translation studies and clearly explains the purpose of writing this book. Chapters 1 to 5 constitute the first part of the book which include historical surveys of the background for translation in general and Chinese literature in particular. The second part, chapters 6 to 9 fully demonstrates the author's rich connotations in translation theory. The third part, chapters 10 to 13 exemplify some of the cultural conflicts that underlie the complexities of translation, on which the theoretical exposition in the middle part may be tested. Furthermore, reflections on comparative poetics are discussed from polar paradigms. Finally, in "Epilogue: Self As Other in Translation" the author explored what may be called a schizophrenics of reading, where "self" and "other" coexist in responding to the text, where the "deictic" marker of the here and now is decisively compromised, creatively "ambiguated". Generally speaking, with the author's careful consideration, this book is a well-organized one with a combination of theory and practice featuring some previously published material.

1. Historical Background: Surveys on Translation and Chinese Literature in Translation

Eugene has discussed almost all the heated questions in translation like originality, authenticity and fidelity in the opening chapter of this book. The reason why the author used the word "myth" lies in that it can be both true and false. To start with, the author cited the biblical allegory of the Tower of Babel to illustrate the mythology of language. In a pre-Babelian world, all people speak one language, and in the Babelian world, the languages of humankind become confused; one language becomes incomprehensible to each other. There is also another world, called "post-Babelian world," a world different from the Babelian world in that these languages become mutually comprehensible through translation or other means. More importantly, translations of the Bible involved translating from two different languages. That means the translation of the Holy Bible is derived from more than one language tradition. Concerning the myth of language, the author mentions the written language, "for the Babel story does not admit of the possibility that while speech may be confounded among the peoples of the world, writing may not be" (Eugene 6). In the current "post-Babelian world," multilingualism is everywhere, not only in literary creation, as with James Joyce, or even in the "universal language" of science and mathematics. There is no privileged language and translation can no longer be discussed from a single cultural perspective. The importance of Babel in translation is self-evident. Many scholars in translation tend to discuss translation in mentioning Babel, for instance, George Steiner's *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*. Steiner holds that "to speak seriously of translation one must first consider the possible meanings of Babel, their inherence in language and mind" (Steiner 52).

Then, Eugene continued to discuss the "myths" of translation. The first myth relating to translation concerns originality. In translation there is an assumption that "historical priority is the same as ontological superiority" (Eugene 13-14). That is to say, the original in time is also more authentic and prior to the imitation. This assumption for modern people is inherited from two notions: romantic notion and capitalist notion. The former believes the one that privileges original composition over imitation since imitation entails some kind of derivativeness. The latter is sanctioned and reinforced by the convention of copyright, which confers on the "original" author all rights to his work, which is now his "property" and derivativeness borders on plagiarism, which is theft of intellectual and artistic "property" (Eugene 14). The second myth concerns identity, involving human identity (the notion of unique individuality), works of art (including literature) and

commodities (tangible objects of value). In all three modes of identity, there is an assumption that the original or the "authorized" version is irreplaceable. In the author's eyes, however, there are no real identities to be had, only types or degrees of equivalence between exemplars. The citation of literary modes of identity reminds us that equivalence lies not in reproducing, however faithfully, but in the approximate correspondence between an author's words to the audience in his lifetime and his words to each succeeding generation of readers. The third myth relates to authenticity. When examining the notion of authenticity, we'll find that the principle of valuation is historical. When one thing or one person pretends to be another thing or one person, inauthenticity occurs. Translations are part of that cultural flux which symbolize the life of a work, since the least distorted originals are those that have never been translated. Therefore, their historical and cultural integrity has never been violated. Additionally, Eugene mentions the myth of fidelity. He states that "the ultimate fidelity may be sought in oblivion" (Eugene 22). In other words, there is no such ultimate fidelity in translation.

After discussing the "myths" of translation, Eugene challenged some "myths" existing in translation theories. The first myth of theory is "translating by divine inspiration," an insight that derives more from faith than from theoretical thinking. Mostly, this field of translation is related to the translation of the Bible. The trouble here is that there is no objective basis on which to judge who is and who is not divinely inspired. Unfortunately, devoutness is no guarantee of accuracy in translation, nor is faith. The second myth of theory the author questions is that "none but a poet can translate a poet." The author argued that the status of poets has not been consistently confirmed, and some poets have been known to pretend to be poets. What's more, not all the effective poetic translations of poetry are done by acknowledged poets. Another theoretical myth stems from communication theory, which sees the process of translation as a one-way exchange of messages. In fact, the process of translation is not that simple in that most of the time it is a dynamic back-and-forth process. Hence, the failures of machine translation reflect limits in our understanding of language, so we should not blame the technology, but rather our inadequate understanding of the communication and discourse. Then, the author cites several examples from the translation of the Bible to challenge the myth of perfect translation. By comparing the Authorized Version of the Bible with the Hebrew text, the author believed that the former is not that perfect as assumed. Of course, the author here is not challenging the authority of the "Authorized Version" of the Bible, but rather exemplifying the complexity of translation as a whole.

Certainly, according to Eugene, the "Barbarians" have made as great a

contribution for the survival of native civilizations. He believed that in history the transmission of important canonical texts has depended heavily on "barbarians." There are some historical instances like Maimonides, the so called "barbarians"—the Jewish theologian and philosopher, who contributed to the rediscovery of Aristotle, thus spurring on the Renaissance. What's more, by challenging the notion of "barbarians," the author argued that the concept of barbarianism may be just another form of unrecognized civilization. Then, the author reconsidered the role of translation. Translation plays an important role in both literary history and global history. It can be said that there would be no world history without translation. Eugene characterized two types of translation: the "endotropic," translations out of a foreign language into a native language; the "exotropic," translations that are translated out of the native language into foreign languages. He concludes that the transition from endotropic to exotropic may be the key to the development of civilizations. In this process, translations not only transmit but also transform. Sometimes, this transformation takes the form of distortion; at other times, the transformation becomes an amalgamation that introduces cultural alloys from other traditions. Actually, to Eugene, translation has a dual function: it not only shows the replaceability and irreplaceability of the original text; it also takes the place of the original, but for those familiar with the original, the translation is undoubtedly a departure from the original. Obviously, by reconsidering the role and function of translation, the author attempts to enhance the importance of translation in human history as well as the status of translation studies as a discipline. In addition, Eugene continued to examine the role the audience has played in the process of translation. Modern translators like actors tend to please the scholars and readers in order to gain a relatively good response. Critics and scholars will act as surrogate authors in the absence of an author and remind the actor-translator of unrealized potential or controverted meanings. Therefore, the critic-scholar needs to bear responsibility to the work, and at the same time, to the audience. Finally, the author explores the opportunities presented by the relationships between translators and their audiences. The author deems that the importance of the audience for translation cannot be too strongly emphasized. The audience is contributing and constructive. The better the audience, the greater the possibility of creative translation. The audience for translation cannot be merely present and passive. The original text belongs to another era and another place, while translation is the common property of the translator and the audience. Translation is a deliberate anachronism: it revitalizes the work of the past and makes it part of the present. Besides, the author illustrates two examples of his own translations to verify his idea of good translation. They

all have the problems of context and form in the process of translation. In each case, he took certain liberties and had departures with no intention to deceive the readers since the readers of his translation are intended to be those who had access to the original. Hence, "faithfulness" is no top concern here. Instead of imitating, the translator is virtually creating a new work of art similar to the original. In a departure from the traditional focus of translation, the central point of his attention is on the audience. The more the translator learns to be better with audiences for translation, the better the translator will become.

When talking about the images of Chinese literature in English translation, Eugene pointed out three major factors that affect the image of Chinese literature in English translation: the conceptual (which includes philosophical notions and ideas), the generic (which includes modal differences between certain forms of discourse in one language with those in another) and the cultural. To be specific, language problems in the translation of Chinese literature inevitably affect foreigners' attitudes towards China and the Chinese. This, in turn, distorts China's image, whether positively or negatively. The author cited examples in English translation for Chinese literature to illustrate that most of the time they fail to convey the variety of Chinese literature. Hence, the image of Chinese in English translation is not adequate. Due to the omission of a subject in poetry and in prose, the author held that the Chinese language belongs to what the Soviet linguist Lev Vygotsky called "inner speech." Inner speech is "to a large extent thinking in pure meanings. It is a dynamic, shifting, unstable thing" (Eugene 95). Most examples Eugene mentions are poems; other types of literature are in the same situation, like novels, especially the contemporary Chinese novels. Due to what the author called "conceptual" and "cultural" factors, which affect the image of Chinese literature, politics also plays an important part in constructing the image of Chinese literature. In addition, "flavor" and humor of Chinese vernacular fiction are often lost or muted in translations. Eugene considered that the examination of the image of China through its literature in translation will reveal as much about ourselves as about the Chinese. The disparities between the image reflected and the image projected must then be differentiated as to whether the differences are those of perception or those inherent in dissimilar objects. In a real sense, the "dim emblazonings" (Eugene 110) of Chinese literature seen in English translation are intimations of a strange object made familiar, as well as of something familiar made uncannily strange.

2. Theoretical Framework: Construction of Translation Theories

Before constructing the theoretical framework of translation, Eugene further

emphasized the importance of translation. He declared that "only in translation, and through the process of transposing a work from one linguistic medium to another, can the nature of a culture as well as its deictic and esoteric emphasis be disclosed" (Eugene 120). Though translators may face the risk of what the author called "excommunication" because of his betrayals of the original, they have to take translation as an "intraworldly poetics." The term "intraworldly poetics" is thought-provoking, but more detailed explanations are needed. For Eugene, whether translated well or not, a study of translations has much to tell about "the nature not only of the work being translated but also the language from which the work emerges" (Eugene 121). In his view, language is "esoteric" in varying degrees and Chinese literary language is undoubtedly more esoteric than other languages, but translation is "exoteric." Translation can both reveal and hide the original text, because of the difference in the translator's ability and factors of translatability. Eugene concluded here that every language is both esoteric and exoteric, but "the exchange of meaning through translation is not equal: translation is communicative but not commutative". In a word, the subject of translation deserves our attention since it provides us with a way to know ourselves as well as the other.

As to the ontology of translation, Eugene held that translation replaces the original work, which can be said to be "the closest continuer of a work in another language" (Eugene 129). He further explained the dual ontology of translation: while it replaces the original, it also shows that the original is irreplaceable. What must be transmuted in the process of translation is not a series of words, but "a context of causes and effects" (Eugene 134). For this reason, the act of translation is to preserve the original work in another cultural context and to make it survive in a new context.

After clarifying the ontological status of translation, Eugene began to discuss the epistemology of translation. He delineated three types of translation, namely, the surrogate translation, contingent translation and coeval translation. Firstly, the surrogate translation has its own literary achievement without an appreciable reference to any other work. It reflects an early stage of cultural exchange, often catering to the target audience's taste for exoticism without regard to fidelity to the culture being depicted. As a reliable introduction to the original, contingent translation does not intend to replace the original. Secondly, occasional translations are a bit stilted, and it makes the original look so strange that readers are often alienated by the presentation. Therefore, the author considered that "its value is conditional, its audience is at least potentially bilingual" (Eugene 145). Finally, coeval translation is considered a correlate to the original, neither a replacement

for it nor an aid for those who wish to approach the original. Through the analysis, the author believed that coeval translation is the most constructive form, because with access to valuable original texts and credible translations, the prospects for profound exploration are greatly enhanced. Furthermore, Eugene demonstrated that the three types of translation are analytic constructs, not arbitrary compartments with mutually exclusive content. For him, some works may serve all three functions at one time or another, while others may start out as a surrogate translation and evolve over time into a coeval translation. The progress of translations from the surrogate to the coeval phase is "a progress toward a true mutuality of cultures, toward a condition of equipoise between source and target language, toward an ultimate cosmopolitanism" (Eugene 146). Thus, translation can be used as an epistemological tool by which we can have a better understanding of our own culture through the culture of other nations.

Regarding the phenomenology of translation, Eugene introduced four important concepts in the reception aesthetics theory of western scholars to illustrate the phenomenology of translation. First, because the translator is the reader of an original text, Hans Robert Jauss' "horizon of literary expectation" (Jauss 13) can be reflected in the translation. The second is Wolfgang Iser's concept of "convergence of text and reader" (Iser 275), which brings the literary work into existence, making the author and the reader partners in literary realization. The translator is a reader of an original text, as well as the author of the translation, so the partnership is self-evident. The last two concepts are still from Iser's, which are the concepts of "uncertainty" and "defamiliarization" (Iser 288). The blanks in the text are not only a source of uncertainty, but also a space for the reader's imagination. In the process of translation, the blank is two-folded: cultural and textual; in this regard, translators should try to eliminate the cultural blank, but avoid removing the textual blank. In other words, the translator can even add notes to help the reader understand the culture without depriving the reader of the sense of participation in the literary work. As for the fourth concept of "defamiliarization" which is about literary works borrowed from Russian formalism, Iser refers to psychological verisimilitude. It emphasizes the novelty or the new position/standpoint formed by the readers from the unfamiliarity of a foreign culture to familiarity when translated into the target language. So far, the author completed his construction of theory in translation which is quite philosophically based. We as readers are amazed that he quoted copiously from such a wide array of sources.

3. Proof of Theory and Reflections on Comparative Poetics

After provoking thinking, Eugene practically analyzed several examples which derived from the Chinese to illustrate the theory of translation as constructed above. Some of the instances mentioned are James Legge's translation of *Analects* (论语), Gustav Mahler's adaptation from Chinese poems, and a comparison between Ezra Pound's and Arthur Waley's translations of *Book of Songs*, the *Shijing* (诗经). Through an analysis of these cases, the author explored the way translations provide insights not only into the original and process of translation, but also into the "horizon of expectations" of each translator. Though far from ideal, each instance provides a textual warrant for "an implied reader" somehow apt and useful for us to acquire knowledge from the texts, whether originals or translations (Eugene 187). Because the translator is a reader of an original, as well as the author of the translation, he provides invaluable testimony on reader response, for he is an implied reader. Therefore, translation provides at least one reader's complete "reader's response" (Eugene 169). By the study of reader interpretation, translation provides a way to uncover the mystery of the Other. As a typical example, Eugene devoted a separate chapter to fully discuss Ezra Pound's and Arthur Waley's translations of *Shijing*. By applying the three categories of translations (surrogate translations, contingent translations, coeval translations) as discussed above, the author further explores the different characteristics of Arthur Waley and Ezra Pound as translators of the *Shijing*. After comparing and analyzing Pound's and Waley's translations, Eugene sometimes provided a translation of his own. To be honest, the author's translation is an attempt at coeval translation, with emphasis on the direct sentiments that were expressed in the poem. Obviously, Pound's version of translation is an attempt at a surrogate version, and Pound makes no effort to accommodate the original meaning, which the student of poetry and the general reader will find more interesting. Waley's version is a serviceable contingent translation that can be relied upon to render at least the sense of the original plaint, which the students of Chinese will find more reliable. Generally, there are three categories of audience in Eugene's eyes: the monolingual, the incipiently bilingual and the bilingual. Finally, the author further pointed out that surrogate translations "accommodate the monolingual, contingent translations appeal to the bilingual and coeval translations attract the bilingual. Most teachers of world literature depend on surrogate translations" (Eugene 209). This kind of comparison truly arouses my interest. Pound and Waley are two representative translators of Chinese classics, and both of them make great contributions to the disseminating of Chinese culture. As a representative of Imagism, Pound absorbed the essence of Chinese classical poetry, which had a great

influence on the American poetry circle. It is quite appropriate to regard Pound's translation as surrogate, to some extent, as his translation is a kind of creation on the basis of the original.

As an interlude, Eugene used a separate chapter to discuss the importance of "flavor" in the history of Chinese literary criticism. In his discussion of literature, students of Chinese literary criticism will notice that they often come across the word "wei"(味) or "flavor." The author thoroughly surveyed the key passages in the history of Chinese literary criticism to see how this notion of *wei* is used—as metaphor, as organic model, as epistemological vehicle, which includes the most representative theorists like Lu Ji (陆机), Liu Xie (刘勰), Sikong Tong (司空图), Yen Yu (严羽), Yuan Mei (袁枚), Yao Nai (姚鼐) and so on. For the Chinese critic, the distinctiveness of a work lies in the quality of "flavor." "The warrant of true savor is in the authenticity with which the writer expresses his feelings. Without this authenticity, the most elaborate and dazzling work turns out to be bland and tasteless" (Eugene 224). However, Eugene acknowledged that deciphering the values enunciated in the critical language of scents and flavors could be a frustratingly difficult task. The author repeatedly emphasized the importance of flavor in Chinese literary criticism. If this discussion does nothing more than arouse the appetite for an extended study of flavor in Chinese aesthetics, that will be enough.

Comparative poetics is another subject addressed by Eugene. The final chapter "Polar Paradigms in Poetics: Chinese and Western Literary Premises," tries to establish a multiple perspective from which biases and distortions can be effectively minimized. The author examined four groups of polar paradigms in Chinese and Western poetics, which are modal, conceptual, generic and philosophical. Many penetrating conclusions have been drawn from the analysis, for instance, there is no division between heart and mind in Chinese poetics; ancient Chinese philosophy endeavors to see the abstract in the concrete, to develop theory in practice, to view the eternal in the diurnal, to regard noumena and phenomena as inseparable; Chinese poetry tends toward the incidental and the commonplace whereas Western poetry aspires to the transcendental and the extraordinary. But in the construction of any lasting theory, in the development of any durable understanding, analysis and intuition must proceed as one: "the paradigms of mimesis must be alloyed with the paradigms of resonance" (Eugene 269). Comparison like this is helpful and fascinating for the beginners to know different cultures. Undoubtedly, as an expert in both Chinese and western culture, Eugene has made a great contribution to the field of comparative literature.

To conclude, part of *The Transparent Eye*'s originality lies in that it identifies

a new audience, one that is knowledgeable in both East as well as West. It is an inspiring and indispensable book for readers with interest in the theory and practice of translation. Hence, this work deserves much attention in the field of comparative literature, translation studies and Chinese literature, though it was published before the 21st century. Holding a multiple perspective, Eugene attempts to minimize biases and distortions in eastern and western cultures. Clearly, the author's research attitude marks him as a multiculturalist. According to Eugene, translation allows the self to see itself increasingly as other and other increasingly to be seen as the self, which is the ultimate form of literary evaluation. Moreover, contrary to the often-debated question of translatability in translation circles, Eugene declared that the objective of translation is not so much to translate but to indicate the areas of untranslatability. His incisive insights further prove the value of this book.

Works Cited:

Eugene, Chen Eoyang. *The Transparent Eye: Reflections on Translation, Chinese Literature, and Comparative Poetics*. Honolulu: U of Hawai'i P. 1993. Print.

Iser, Wolfgang. *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*. Baltimore and London: John Hopkins UP, 1974. Print.

Jauss, Hans Robert & Elizabeth Benzinger. "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory." *New Literary History* 2.1(1970): 7–37. Print.

Steiner, George. *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*. London: Oxford UP, 1976. Print.

Venuti, Lawrence. *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. (2nd edition). London & New York: Routledge, 2008. Print.

Author Profile:

Ma Huanhuan is a PhD candidate in the School of Chinese Language and Literature, Beijing Normal University. Her major research interests include the study of contemporary literary translation from Chinese to English, comparative literature and world literature.