

Writing Travel as Janus: Cultural Translation as Descriptive Category for Travel Writing

SHANG WU

Abstract: The intersection of the study of travel writing and the study of translation produces two major perspectives: travel writing in translation and translation in travel writing. The first one looks into how the travel narrative is reshaped in a different linguistic and cultural context; the other looks into the translational character of the travel narrative, as the traveller is constantly moving between languages and cultures. Though the conceptual analogy between traveller and translator has been long noted, the linguistic dimension that marks the language difference in travel narrative is rarely underlined. In this essay, in order to explore the possibility of foregrounding both the conceptual link between travel and translation and the linguistic dimension of travel narrative, I propose to integrate an attention to language difference into a reinvention of the contested yet promising term ‘cultural translation’. The American writer Peter Hessler’s travel account *Country Driving* is cited as a case study.

Keywords: travel writing; cultural translation; descriptive category; Peter Hessler; *Country Driving*

“A mediator between cultures, a Janus-faced being who inhabits two different worlds”

Susan Bassnett (2019: 550)

During the past three decades, the scholarship on travel writing “has itself traveled widely” (Martin and Pickford 2012: 1). From Edward Said’s invention of postcolonialism to gender studies, anthropology, history, politics and sociology, the study of travel writing has gained increased attention from scholars in multiple disciplines and is now recognised as a serious field of research. Across multidisciplinary perspectives, a common understanding of travel literature has been reached: its claim to veracity and objectivity is not always reliable. Such post-positivist suspicion of “authenticity” is shared by translation studies, which has brought a new dimension to travel, “giving thought not only to translation between languages but also to translation between cultures” (Hulme and Youngs 2002: 9). Early in 1998, when translation studies was undergoing

a 'cultural turn', foregrounding the agency of the translator and the ideological constructedness of translation, Susan Bassnett noted on the relationship between travel writing and translation: "it is not accidental that the genre of travel literature is providing such a rich field for exploration by both translation studies and cultural studies practitioners, for this is the genre in which individual strategies employed by writers deliberately to construct images of other cultures for consumption by readers can be most clearly seen" (1998: 138).

Travel Writing and Translation

The intersection of the study of travel writing and the study of translation produces two major perspectives: travel writing in translation and translation in travel writing. The first one looks into how the travel narrative is reshaped in a different linguistic and cultural context; the other looks into the translational character of the travel narrative, as the traveller is constantly moving between languages and cultures. For translation within travel writing, the conceptual analogy between traveller and translator has been long noted (Cronin 2000, Duncan and Gregory 2002, Polezzi 2006, Bassnett 2019). The travel writer, as translator, with a target audience in mind, depicts the foreign and unfamiliar with both references from home and subjective interpretations. This metaphorical sense of translation, according to Polezzi, could be "assimilated to what ethnographers have called 'cultural translation': the transfer and inscription of an entire cultural and social reality and its 'modes of thought' in the terms (and language) of another" (2016: 97).

On the other hand, another crucial translational aspect within travel writing, the linguistic dimension, "is rarely foregrounded" (Bassnett 2019: 550). As Michael Cronin also points out, "the absence of reflection on language difference in travel writing criticism is all the more puzzling in that one of the more common experiences of travellers is to find themselves literally at a loss for words" (Cronin 2019: 294). With the constructed and situated nature of translation in mind, a cursory look at the composition of a travel narrative, a cross-lingual one in particular, shows that the traveller's reality happens in the foreign language of the travelled land, and the travel narrative is composed through the language of the traveller and his or her home readers. We can regard, as in interlingual translation, the language of the travelled land as the source language and the language of the traveller as the target language. In the process of composing a travel narrative, it is inevitable for the source and target languages to come into contact and then be represented in the target language. Therefore, translation is not only the means of producing travel writing, in a metaphorical sense, but very often also the represented subject in travel writing.

Such representation is sometimes disguised, as though everything happens in the traveller's language, and is sometimes marked by salient linguistic foreignness. Ignoring the translational composing process risks assuming a transparent transmission across linguistic borders, missing the fluctuating tension of power behind different languages and falling into the trap of so-called universality. To deal specifically with the translational aspect involving language difference, Cronin suggests borrowing from Roman Jakobson's threefold typology of translation (Cronin 2000). Jakobson points out that "the meaning of a linguistic sign is its translation into some further, alternative sign: it may be translated into signs of the same language, into another language, or another, nonverbal system of symbols", and he calls the three types intralingual translation, or rewording; interlingual translation, or translation proper; and intersemiotic translation, or transmutation (1959: 231–232). Accordingly, intralingual travel refers to travelling within the traveller's own language zone; interlingual travel refers to travelling to a foreign country with a different language that the traveller has limited knowledge of; intersemiotic travel happens when the traveller has no knowledge of the foreign language at all and has to rely on visual representations (Cronin 2000: 2–3). Although the classification seems to be clear, translations within one travel narrative can involve any or all of these. In the case of interlingual translation, for instance, the traveller may run into some compatriots or local people who know the traveller's language, and the representation of their conversation would be categorised as intralingual. Also, depictions of foreign people, environments and surroundings could be considered as translations of the foreign nonverbal into written text in the traveller's language, thus becoming, in a way, intersemiotic. Therefore, such categorisation can apply not only to subgenres, but also to readings of various occasions of translation within a travel account.

In order to explore the possibility of foregrounding both the conceptual link between travel and translation and the linguistic dimension of travel narrative, this article seeks to integrate attention to language difference into a reinvention of the contested yet promising term 'cultural translation'. The American writer Peter Hessler's travel account *Country Driving: A Journey Through China from Farm to Factory* serves as a case study.

What is Cultural Translation?

The term cultural translation appears in studies pertaining to movements in various forms: migration, diaspora, expatriation, ethnographic fieldwork and linguistic transformation. It has been the subject of active discussion and debate (Buden and Nowotny 2009). However, it seems that as the debate

becomes more heated, the term becomes more nebulous. On the one hand, the concept remains a fractured polysemy that seems to combine two larger concepts: culture and translation. What is culture? What is translation? Without any historical context, it seems the term is free to mean any combination of the multiple meanings of these words. On the other hand, culture and translation seem too familiar to academic ears to deserve more contextualised elaboration. As in many cases, the term cultural translation is used self-evidently, with no concrete examples (Maitland 2017: 14). Here I intend to prune the ambiguities and put the concept of cultural translation to a more practical use by tracing its historical and disciplinary roots.

Early in the 1950s, a group of British anthropologists first used the term cultural translation, or broadly the translation of and between cultures, to talk about ethnographic works about foreign communities presented to a domestic academic audience. E. E. Evans-Pritchard initiated the use of “translation” to describe the essential part of the communication process in anthropological cross-cultural encounters. Earlier Western anthropologists, inheriting the legacy of scientific rationality from the Enlightenment onward, regarded the “strange” customs of less-developed societies as unscientific, irrational, “prelogical” and “primitive” (Lévy-Bruhl 1923: 59). Unlike his predecessors, Evans-Pritchard sought to delve into the native social system to reveal the institutional meanings of those “strange” customs. His work on Azande witchcraft in Central Africa, first published in 1937, is one such example. Based on intimate fieldwork and sociological analysis, Evans-Pritchard comes to the conclusion that the “strange” Azande witchcraft works not only as a native ritual to determine individual fortunes, but also implies an *institutional* meaning of a stratified society controlled by the ruling class (Evans-Pritchard 1976). He also suggests that a less-developed society, in its own cultural context, also has “a logical structure” that, to a great extent, could be understood by modern Westerners through analytical and analogical explanations (Evans-Pritchard 1951: 99). In short, he believes that, like the Western people, tribes in remote places of the world can also reason logically, and that they do so within the limits of their own culture.

Translation of culture, according to Evans-Pritchard, means rendering a foreign culture into the language and terms of one’s own: the task of an anthropologist is not to provide a “photographic” description of the subject culture, but to “decide what is significant in what he observes and by his subsequent relation of his experience to bring what is significant into relief” (Evans-Pritchard 1951: 82). That is to say, beyond gathering ethnographic facts, translating a foreign culture anthropologically involves selecting and organising fieldwork materials to sort out the logical and social structure of

the foreign society and eventually produce an ethnography for an academic audience. Such a translation goes far beyond searching for cultural equivalents, yet the anthropologist, as a *cultural translator*, would tend to find what the subject culture has in common with his/her own, or a “so-called” universal, to make the seemingly unintelligible coherent and thus intelligible to the Western mentality. The essential frames of reference for cultural translation are the anthropologist’s backgrounds of culture and knowledge. Through this translation process, the anthropologist has a chance to look back at his/her own culture, consciously or unconsciously, critically yet complacently. Here, the use of cultural translation or the metaphorical meaning of translation refers to ethnographic writing about the foreign culture under discussion for readers in the researcher’s own culture. It summarises the ‘proper’ task of social anthropologists: objectively observe and document social rituals and customs of foreign cultures, specifically the non-Western Other; and scientifically deduce and draw conclusions about the social structures and world views of the foreign culture. Such a renewal of the anthropological task can seem heroic in claiming that the cultures of non-Western regions are not irrational nor illogical but have their own logical structures. However, in this sense, it also assumes non-Western cultures as frameworks of translatable signs that could be put “into the languages, the categories and the conceptual world of a Western audience” (Bachmann-Medick 2014: 35), taking Western modernity and superiority as an undeniable truth and as the sole reference. Thus, Western social anthropologists believe that they are able to objectively describe and scientifically supplement the modes of thought of other cultures, and they fail, or sometimes choose not, to see that their ideas of translating foreign cultures are confined to geographical, cultural, and linguistic borders. Implicitly, non-Western cultures are deemed either primitive and illogical or even barbaric and irredeemable. As Said indicates, such anthropological practice in both Europe and America “carries within it as a major constitutive element, the unequal relationship of force between the outside Western ethnographer-observer and a primitive, or at least different but certainly weaker and less developed, non-Western society” (Said 1989: 217).

Since the late 1960s, with the progressive independence of former colonies around the world and the ensuing sociopolitical upheavals, many anthropologists started to doubt these ethnocentric conventions. Instead of creating an objective distance between themselves and the subjects of study, they take into account the personal experiences of both the observer and the observed to depict a dialogic relationship. Beginning in 1986 with the publication of James Clifford and George Marcus’s collection *Writing Culture* and continuing through the 1990s, broader debates about the crisis of

representation increasingly unfolded across the discipline. A new generation of anthropologists sought to question the validity and overturn the authority of conventional Western ethnographic representations and cultural translations. Talal Asad's seminal chapter "The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology" has, to some extent, reinvented the anthropological connotations of cultural translation. Interrogating and redirecting Ernest Gellner's criticism of functionalist anthropologists' attempts to put forth excessive coherence as "charity" in translating and interpreting discourses of less-developed societies, Asad considers such translation an "institutionalized *practice* given the wider relationship of unequal societies" (1986: 148), which cannot be controlled, from field notes to published ethnographies, by the anthropologist alone (1986: 155). To be more specific, Asad responds to the anthropological tendency of building a hidden pattern, the *implicit*, of other cultures according to the anthropologist's own cultural frame of reference. Although he shares a dissatisfaction with prior criticism of the essentially reductive approach, he extends his argument to conditions of language and power inequality. Anthropologists, as Asad points out, take raw material from the field back to their own countries and translate it into their own language in academic papers and monographs, addressing a specific scholarly audience. In doing so, they usually trim out foreign nuances for seemingly objective and diagrammatic coherence and "write up" their own people, consciously or unconsciously obeying the representation norms circumscribed by the disciplinary, institutional and social conditions (Asad 1986: 159). The anthropological task of cultural translation not only spans two different languages, that of the field and that of the ethnographer, but also mediates between native modes of life and Western academic conventions; it is, therefore, in Asad's words, "inevitably enmeshed in conditions of power – professional, national, international" (1986: 163). In questioning such a scholarly style, which is prone to textualise foreign cultures into ready-made institutionalised boxes, Asad puts forward a tentative solution: anthropological cultural translation, instead of safeguarding the so-called "*standards* of scientific objectivity" (1986: 164) rooted in asymmetrical power relations, could try to work in more experimental ways that involve genuine dialogues with the people being studied and that the people being studied could contest. Asad's critical proposal has elicited a constant calling for self-criticism and self-reflexivity in the application of anthropology. Nuances of dialogic processes from both sides are brought into the spotlight, and the essential task of anthropological cultural translation becomes co-creating text, a process that can be transformative for all who take part. Rather than building a neat functionalist model of culture, anthropologists now realise that they are "partial prisoners" (Starn 2015: 6) of

the ways they are trained, and consciously take on a more dynamic, open-ended view of culture as “a terrain of hybridization, disjuncture, and heteroglossia” (Starn 2015: 3).

Asad’s redefinition of cultural translation in the late 1980s stands not only as a turning point for social anthropology, but also as a means of reaching a wider audience beyond its own discipline.

Among the most prominent scholars discussing cultural translation in the late 1980s and early 1990s is Homi Bhabha. One of his earliest uses of “translation” as a conceptual metaphor appears in his article “The Commitment to Theory”, first published in 1988 and later adapted into the first chapter of *The Location of Culture* (1994). The chapter deals with cultural representation and makes a distinction between cultural diversity and cultural difference. Sharing a critical perspective with the “crisis of representation” in anthropology, Bhabha points out that the civilised “cultural diversity” in the Western liberal tradition of universalism and relativism is created within a Western cultural and academic discourse (Bhabha 1994: 31–35). In other words, although cultural diversity seems to encourage democratic societies in a utopian manner, it is also partially and implicitly ethnocentric. With the concept of “cultural difference”, Bhabha proposes facing unequal and even antagonistic political situations head-on, and introduces “a space of translation” where the so-called universal frameworks are disabled and the incommensurability between different cultures are recognised (1994: 25). He notes that the “language of critique” becomes most effective when it “overcomes the given grounds of opposition” and “opens up a space of ‘translation’: a place of hybridity, figuratively speaking, where the construction of a political object that is new, *neither the one nor the Other*” (1994: 25). Here translation is used analogically to refer to “a place of hybridity” (1994: 25). Bhabha borrows from translation, not the direction from source to target, but the transposition of the original to somewhere else and the impossibility of absolute equivalence, which brings instability and dynamics to the translation process. His translational critique moves away from both the utopia of cultural diversity and the antithesis of rival cultural-political theories, to a place in which the competing positions can meet and negotiate in an ongoing dialogic process that challenges both sides to dismantle fixed oppositions and to create new modes of understanding beyond any sort of univocal claim. Robert J. C. Young points out that, instead of moving different cultural and political elements to a new ground in which conflicts could be ideally resolved in some harmonious way, such as the in the promotion of cultural diversity or globalisation, it “shoves them sideways into a space where all the original elements continue to operate together according to their diverse, heterogeneous terms” (Young 2017: 190).

In an interview published in 1990 titled “The Third Space”, Bhabha explains his use of cultural difference and develops his earlier metaphorical use of translation into the term cultural translation. Restating the situation of the incommensurability between different cultures, Bhabha notes that the assumption promoted by relativism and universalism that “all forms of cultural diversity may be understood on the basis of a particular universal concept [...] can be both very dangerous and very limiting” (1990: 209). He introduces the notion of “cultural translation” from a strategic perspective, stating that different cultures can be articulated not due to any universal standards or similarities between cultures, but because all cultures are symbolic interpellative activities and thus, on some level, are open and related to each other (1990: 209–210). From deconstructive and decentralised grounds, Bhabha extends his use of “translation” in “cultural translation” to two layers of meaning that both transcend the linguistic sense. First, translation is used “as a motif or trope as Benjamin suggests for the activity of *displacement* within the linguistic sign” (my emphasis) to illustrate a process of alienation in objectifying cultural meaning (Bhabha 1990: 210). In this sense, culture itself, full of possible and potential displacements, is translation or translational, to put it into less philosophical and more explanatory terms. Then, building on the first layer of translational culture, Bhabha develops translation as “a way of imitating, but in a mischievous, displacing sense” (1990: 210), so that the original is dethroned and is always open to new rounds of interpretation. Thus, first, the holistic concept of culture as original is challenged, and an understanding oriented around negotiations and transformations prevails: culture(s) is/are not plenitudinous, but hybrid. Second, the encounters of different cultures create a heterogeneous “third space” where the act of cultural translation, as representation and reproduction, can generate something new to articulate cultural difference and even incommensurability (1990: 121).

In the chapter in *The Location of Culture* titled “How Newness Enters the World: Postmodern Space, Postcolonial Times and the Trials of Cultural Translation”, Bhabha further develops his model of cultural translation in a reading of Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* (1988) to contemplate postcolonial “journeys of migration” and “dwellings of the diasporic” (Bhabha 1994: 213). Looking into the lives of those who moved from the postcolonial Indian subcontinent to the West in general and to Britain in particular, Bhabha notes that the problematic resides in whether the geographical migration brings about freedom or only a change of location. Can and would ethnic minority migrants moving to a country that had oppressed them or their ancestors in the colonial era be assimilated into the dominant host culture, or would they stay unchanged in terms of their cultural identity and heritage? Based on his earlier

observation that “culture is translational” (Bhabha 1994: 172), Bhabha argues that the migrant experience cannot be categorised by either, but is a dynamic ambivalence that dissolves all such categorisations. In addition to using translation as “cultural inter-articulation” (Guldin 2016: 72), Bhabha draws from Benjamin in foreignising translation as the element of resistance “which does not lend itself to translation” (Benjamin 1968, qtd. in Bhabha 1994: 224). Untranslatable foreign elements from the source culture would be interwoven by the migrants, as cultural translators, into the dominating target culture and then something new, or the “newness” in Bhabha’s term, comes into being and transforms the target culture. Bhabha’s model of cultural translation is a strategic practice and an active process by which the ethnic minority can claim an agency to intervene and subvert the binary, proposing “a new language for minority positions” (Young 2017: 186) beyond appropriation and assimilation.

Cultural Translation as Descriptive Category for Travel Writing

Both models of cultural translation use the concept of translation metaphorically to refer to cross-cultural encounters that do not *directly* involve linguistic exchanges, and both question the production of knowledge about the foreign Other. Concerning the implications of power relations, they provide solutions that seek to transcend antagonistic polarities from the perspective of their own disciplines in the post-war age in which social, cultural, political and economic upheavals arise simultaneously or in succession. Asad’s model proposes that ethnographers write about an investigated foreign culture in one’s own language for their own audience in a more reflexive, dialogical and post-positivist manner, avoiding eurocentrism and ethnocentrism governed by institutional power relations as much as possible. Bhabha uses the term as a strategic practice of negotiation for ethnic migrants, cultural critics and literary practitioners to confront and subvert postcolonial conditions. Both models also borrow from Benjamin’s notion of foreignisation. Asad takes a prescriptivist position that the anthropologist, as cultural translators of the foreign, should push beyond his/her own cultural logics and try to represent foreignness in its own particular form instead of domesticating it as systematic appropriation. Bhabha makes a strategic proposal that foreign elements brought by ethnic migrants, the cultural translators, can challenge and transform the normativity of the dominant host culture and create something new. To some extent, it could be said that the cultural translators in Asad’s and Bhabha’s models are two sides of the same coin: one is introspective and prescriptive; the other is subversive and strategic. One looks backward at the scholar’s home culture; the other moves forward to the foreign. How can these two models be used in readings of travel writing?

In the metaphorical use of cultural translation for movement, what is moved and translated, and what is carried across? In Asad's model, portraits of the foreign culture are carried back to the home context, and in Bhabha's model, the migrants and their cultural difference are carried to the host society into which they have moved. Similar metaphors from both models can apply to travel literature as well. The traveller creates depictions of the lands he/she has travelled in his/her own language and brings them back to readers in his/her own culture; and the traveller also brings his/her own cultural factors to the lands in which he/she travels. Then, conjoining Asad's and Bhabha's models complementarily and setting the traveller as the cultural translator produces an image of the traveller as 'Janus-faced', one side facing backward to his/her own cultural context and audience producing translation as product, and the other side facing forward to the foreign context of the travelled land going through translation as process. Janus, in Roman mythology, is the god of doorways and archways, beginnings and transitions, and is generally depicted with two faces: one facing the past, and one facing the future. Accordingly, taking the conjoined models of cultural translation as descriptive categories yields the image of the traveller as the two-faced Janus standing at a liminal position, gazing not towards past and future but home and the travelled land. As a descriptive tool for analysis, the term cultural translation now foregrounds a contextual approach rather than Asad's prescriptive and Bhabha's strategic models and the presuppositions of postcolonial power relations. There is no definite border between the models of cultural translation as descriptive categories, as these models interweave and overlap. Regarding cultural translation as product and process, both models intend to offer distinct and complementary perspectives.

Hessler's *Country Driving*, the final volume of his China Trilogy, which also includes *River Town* and *Oracle Bones*, is based on his driving trips during his stay in China as a correspondent for the *New Yorker* between 2001 and 2007. The book consists of three separate sections: "The Wall" recounts his journeys driving from Beijing to the west of China, as much as possible along the relics of the Great Wall; "The Village" features a hamlet near Sancha, a suburb of Beijing, particularly the Wei family with the only child in the village; and "The Factory" depicts his road trips towards southeast China, especially the smaller growing cities in Zhejiang Province with new factories that attract migrant workers from around the country. Applying the two models of cultural translation to this text, Hessler, facing towards English as the target context, translates his road trips and sojourns in the Chinese context into English for his English readers; and facing towards Chinese as the host context, he constantly translates himself into Chinese situations to experience the local life while

also being translated by the locals and their own cultural norms. With the linguistic dimension in mind we can also factor in a variation of the ternary taxonomy. Reading the translation of Hessler's Chinese journeys into English can be approached as intralingual, as Hessler talks to fellow foreigners or locals who know English in his own language; interlingual, as everyone speaks and everything happens in Chinese; and intersemiotic, as Hessler depicts non-verbal elements in Chinese contexts, such as experiences, environments, and local people, in English.

With a specific category for intersemiotic translation, representations of other overlooked and underexplored sensations, such as hearing, touching, tasting and smelling, can be brought into the spotlight. As Youngs points out, "[p]erceptions of and attitudes towards these factors are socially constructed and subjective" (2019: 208), which can also be underlined in the concept of translation. One such case in point in Hessler's travel accounts is his intersemiotic translation of Chinese car horns. Hessler first arrived in China in 1996, and worked as a Peace Corps teacher in Fuling, then a backwater town in southwestern China. In the first book of his trilogy, *River Town*, Hessler describes his first impression of Chinese car horns:

Noise was even more impressive. Most of it came from car horns, and it is difficult to explain how constant this sound was. I can start by saying: Drivers in Fuling honked a lot. There weren't a great number of cars, but there were enough, and they were always passing each other in a mad rush to get to wherever they were going. [...] Nobody reacted to horns anymore; they served no purpose. (2001: 62–63)

Not at all accustomed to the local norm of honking in traffic, Hessler found that the local cars honk too much to "explain"/translate, thus marking his complete foreignness to the Chinese context at that time. Five years later, when Hessler obtained his Chinese driver's license and sat behind the wheel, the Chinese honks were much more explainable/translatable, even humorously: "In a Chinese automobile, the horn is essentially neurological – it channels the driver's reflexes. People honk constantly, and at first all horns sound the same, but over time you learn to interpret them" (2010: 31). Honks can be meant to attract attention, indicate irritation, vent feelings when stuck in traffic, or express panic; and there is also "the afterthought honk – the one that rookie drivers make if they were too slow to hit the button before a situation resolved itself" (2010: 31). Though the honking sounds seem external, they are not just transparent but translated: the depictions evolve as the traveller's relationship with the place evolves and his manner of travel changes. Classifying the honks into different types also marks Hessler's foreignness, as locals usually do not

do this. However, as he gains experience on Chinese roads and knowledge of China's growing traffic system, he can make sense of the noise, and his attitude changes from critical and disbelieving to slightly ironic and humorous. Drawing on the anthropological model of cultural translation, Hessler's attitude shift can be understood as the shift of the referencing cultural system from enstranging to contextualisation, so that we can see, with more clarification, how interpretations of sounds "vibrate with cultural significance" (Youngs 2019: 218). Instead of delivering a precise observation, the significance of such contextualisation lies in its *recognition* of intercultural difference. And to the target English readers, the foreign Other would become more intelligible and less estranged.

In the interlingual category of translating Hessler's Chinese journeys into English, where everyone speaks and everything happens in Chinese, linguistic exoticism is the most prominent and salient feature. From the perspective of authorial agency, writing strategies signifying interlingual translation are usually intended to reinforce the authenticity and veracity of foreign contexts to win the readers' trust. One of the conventional, and old, devices in English-written travel accounts is the use of an invented and bizarre pidgin English to signal foreignness, which is "patronising in extreme" (Bassnett 1998: 34). Other devices may include direct exoticism, laying out foreign words directly, and other forms of translation bearing hints of foreignness on different levels, such as transliteration and literal translation. If we are to read the complex constructedness of travel writing as translation, we must look at when and how this constructedness is achieved. In *Country Driving*, the first utterance represented as a direct exoticism in Chinese pinyin (romanisation), stressing that the interlocutor was speaking in Chinese, concerns a stray dog killed by a car on the road, when Hessler was returning a rented Jetta for his weekend trips around the countryside of Beijing to the state-owned company Capital Motors. Mr. Wang was one of three men in the front office of the company who usually handled Hessler's renting procedure; Hessler found him the friendliest of the three. Hessler learned Chinese while staying in Fuling, and in the last book of the trilogy, he was already quite fluent; therefore, we can determine that the conversation with Mr. Wang was in Chinese:

When I returned the car, Mr. Wang seemed pleased to see that the plastic cover for the right signal light had been smashed. He asked me what I had hit.

"A dog," I said.

"Gou mei wenti?" he said. "The dog didn't have a problem, did it?"

"The dog had a problem," I said. "It died."

Mr. Wang's smile got bigger. "Did you eat it?"

"It wasn't that kind of dog," I said. "It was one of those tiny little dogs."

“Well, sometimes if a driver hits a big dog,” Mr. Wang said, “he just throws it in the trunk, takes it home, and cooks it.” I couldn’t tell if he was joking; he was a dog owner himself, but in China that doesn’t necessarily involve dietary restrictions. (2010: 19)

Mr. Wang’s question about whether the dog was hurt is presented in pinyin as direct exoticism, followed by an English translation that is slightly literal though also grammatically correct. In idiomatic English, the phrase would be “Is the dog ok?” In Hessler’s translation, the word order in the Chinese source text is kept as much as possible: “Gou” is translated as “the dog”; “mei” is translated as “didn’t”; “wenti” is translated as “have a problem”; and a tag question “did it?” is added at the end to emphasize the interrogative intonation with a hint of curiosity. Hessler, as the cultural translator facing towards his home audience, uses the original form of the foreign language and its translation to underline the differences in dietary and cultural norms and to reinforce his disapproving and critical attitude on these ethical issues. Beyond the linguistic dimension, also facing towards the home audience, Hessler uses this incident as a play on the stereotypical myth that Chinese people will eat anything, even though eating dog meat is also controversial in the Chinese context, and is actually rare. Just as ethnographers select raw data from fieldwork, travel writers, despite claiming the veracity of their experiences on their journey, work selectively and sometimes even shift things around for their own purposes and the expectations of their readers. As Youngs points out, “travel writing is as much artefact as it is documentary” (2013: 156). With the combination of the anthropological model of cultural translation and the category of interlingual translation, the linguistic dimension that signals the fact of translation can be used as the starting point to look into the translational character and the constructed nature of travel writing.

Bhabha’s model of the other side of the Janus-faced traveller also invites the use of linguistic exoticism as its starting point. For instance, in the second part of *Country Driving*, Hessler recounts his experience of staying in a small village near the Beijing suburb of Sancha Sancha. During his time there, he became close to the Wei family, the only family with a child in the village, as all the other young families had moved out to larger towns. There are four members in the Wei family: Wei Ziqi and his wife Cao Chunmei, their five-year-old son Wei Jia, and Wei Ziqi’s oldest brother, who is mentally disabled and taken care of by his family. According to local regulations, the Wei family could earn about fifty yuan a month for taking care of a mentally disabled family member, but the policy was not strictly implemented at the time. Wei Ziqi decided to bring his brother to the office of the local town government until they pay the subsidy, or he would not bring his brother back; he asked Hessler to give them a ride while

dropping Wei Jia off at school, believing that an aggressive act will push the local government into doing what is necessary. Later, Hessler learned that Wei Ziqi's brother had been sent back to the village by the local cadres, but he took a long time to find his way home, and Hessler felt very guilty about the incident:

I hadn't fully understood the situation while it was unfolding. I often felt like that in China; the place had a way of making me feel slow-witted. Sometimes I benefited from this stupidity, especially as a writer. Over the years I had learned to be patient, and probably I was more open-minded than I had ever been in America. But my reactions could be slow and sometimes a situation developed before I could respond. In any case, life is complicated in China, and often there isn't a good solution regardless of how quick you are. The people have a common expression for that: *Mei banfa*, they often say. Nothing can be done. (2010: 155)

In this situation, Hessler uses the Chinese phrase "*Mei banfa*" to express his guilt and helplessness, as well as to underscore the complicated social and cultural contexts of the incident. "Nothing can be done" indicates not only how he felt as a foreigner living in China, or the perception that it was difficult for him to help, but also how challenging life was for the people of Sancha. Not long after the incident, the Weis' son Wei Jia developed an acute immune disease, and Hessler helped the family at every step, from sending the boy to the hospital in the city to making sure that the treatment he needed would go well. It was not easy, and Hessler constantly felt that state of "*Mei banfa*" as did Wei Jia's parents, as they trusted him entirely with their son's health. Though he was empathetic, Hessler dealt with the situation differently than "*Mei banfa*":

My own reaction was different – I was also badly out of my element, but the seriousness of the situation made me want to control it. In truth all I could do was try to get information, hoping to make the right decision. (2010: 172)

Eventually, thanks to their efforts, young Wei Jia recovered. As Hessler translates himself into the local terms, he also brings in his own personal and cultural elements to help break down the state of "*Mei banfa*". This incident is an example of the traveller's transformative potential towards the travelled place without any politically or ideologically anchored antagonism; it opens up a space in which cultural understanding and incommensurability can co-exist, and embodies the translational nature of travel writing.

As Cronin has eloquently put, "[j]ust as travel writing gives mobility a language, mobility gives travel writing the complex gift of not one language but many" (Cronin 2019: 330). The metaphorical image of the travel writer

as Janus proposes a way of reinventing cultural translation to look into the translational nature of travel narrative with specific attention to the linguistic dimension. Reciprocally, such an empirical use of the concept of cultural translation bridges the sometimes competing and contested models of Asad and Bhabha. By applying the term as descriptive and contextual, it also breaks down the presuppositions of postcolonial power relations. Further interesting explorations could be looking into the translations of travel writing. Following the framework of cultural translation developed in this essay, we could ask: how would the translational character of travel writing be translated into a different linguistic and cultural context, for what purpose, by whom, and for what audience?

Shang Wu

wushang198811@gmail.com

Shandong University / Shanghai Jiao Tong University

CHINA

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