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# One photo, two stories: Chinese photos in British museums

## ABSTRACT

*The aim of this study is to explore how translations function as an integral part of museum exhibitions. Specifically, this study argues that translators of museum texts and visitors who make use of them in museum exhibitions can actively engage in forming different interpretations of the exhibitions themselves. In both museum and translation studies, the producers and receivers of translations tend to be viewed as additions to the monolingual communication in the source language of the museum. Therefore, analyses of translations tend to search for potential errors by using the source text as the yardstick by which to measure how much the translations have deviated from the original and how much potential damage may have been caused to the interpretation as a result. This article draws on Clifford's (1997) conception of museums as 'contact zones', through which objects stimulate on-going dialogues rather than the site of their display being a final destination in itself. It further extends Clifford's concept to include the multilingual museum exhibition. From this perspective, I explore how the different voices of object makers, source and target text writers, and visitors take place in the museum and interact or exist in dialogue with each other.*

## KEYWORDS

translation, narrative, reframing, visitors' voices, contact zone

## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to explore how translations function as an integral part of museum exhibitions. Specifically, this study argues that translators of museum texts and the visitors who make use of them in museum exhibitions can both actively engage in forming different interpretations of the exhibitions themselves. This challenges the assumption that museum translators and visitors simply relay and receive the message of the source text.

In museum exhibitions, the communication among the objects, the source-text writer and the source-text readers is often regarded as the default message, whereas the 'translated route', including the translations and the target readers, are something additional, and are not directly linked to the displayed objects or the source-text readers. This can be supported by the fact that very often translators of exhibition texts are provided only with the source texts, having no access to the displayed objects or other contextual information, such as, at what angle objects will be viewed by visitors. It is, therefore, inevitable that translations are linked only

to the source text, excluding other semiotic signs in the exhibition. Studies of museum translations, therefore, tend to focus narrowly on the accuracy of transfer between the source text and the target text, as will be reviewed in the next section.

This article reports on a case study that was carried out on a bilingual exhibition in which the translation seems to engage more with other semiotic signs in the exhibition than might be expected. Through this study, I aim to demonstrate a different way of investigating the role of translations in museum exhibitions, and to explore the possible effects of translations in museum communication.

According to Baxandall, in an exhibition there are at least three separate agents in play – object makers, exhibitors of made objects, and viewers – and the three are all active in making meaning in the exhibition (Baxandall 1991: 36). In exhibitions with translations, the agents in play will further include the translators and readers of target texts. Before we discuss the role of these agents in the selected exhibition, we will review the relevant literature in languages and translations in museum exhibitions to date.

## **LANGUAGES AND TRANSLATION IN MUSEUM EXHIBITIONS**

Translation in museums seems to have received more attention from scholars of translation than of museum studies. Despite almost all major museums now involving translated written or spoken texts, the suggestions made by museum experts with regard to translations tend to be primarily practical, if not superficial. The following is a case in point: ‘If you are getting labels translated into other languages, do try to get the translation done by a native speaker; a bad translation may make your visitors laugh, but it will not help them to understand your exhibition’ (Ambrose and Paine 2006: 101). Discussions within museum studies seem to regard translations as a post-editing to the already complete monolingual exhibition, with the added potential to damage the exhibition. These same concerns of potentially flawed translations are shared by scholars in translation studies, and the idea of being faithful to the source has also been endorsed by many translation scholars.

The contribution of translation studies to the study of museum translations is associated with the traditional, source-oriented approach, i.e. with examining the relationship between source texts and target texts. In the context of museums, this obsession with accuracy or equivalence in early translation studies naturally leads translation researchers to focus on the accuracy of translations for specialised terms in exhibitions. These studies are often conducted from the perspective of translation deficit.

Sturge (2007) is an exception: her work expands the concept of translation in museum studies from translated texts within museums to the metaphorical concept of museums as translations. In her study, the term ‘translation’ is used to mean different processes taking place in an exhibition. She proposes that in ethnographic museums, translation can be understood as the process of selecting, relocating, exhibiting and interpreting. In this sense, ‘museumized objects’ are seen both as source texts and target texts (Sturge 2007: 153). In this alternative translation process, displayed objects can be regarded as representing source texts, and the verbal interpretation of museums as target texts. In the context of bilingual labels in terms of the above discussed ‘translated texts’, Sturge briefly comments that monolingual labels are still the norm in English (Sturge 2007: 163).

Although the aim of our study is to explore bilingual texts in museum exhibitions, the metaphorical view of museums as translations in Sturge's study is not applicable in this regard and may, in fact, be confusing to our study. However, her study does provide a new perspective in the investigation of museum translation. That is, instead of viewing translators as outsiders of the exhibition, translations can be regarded as one of the many encounters in museums, which Sturge also regards as 'contact zones' between cultures. Clifford puts forward the argument that the museum should be viewed as a 'contact zone', in which objects represent on-going historical, political and moral dialogues, rather than seeing the museum as the final destination of cultural objects (Clifford 1997: 192). Sturge further argues that this view may challenge translation researchers to 'question the model of source texts and target texts facing each other across a divide bridged by a heroic translator figure' (Sturge 2007: 164). This is related to the above discussion of the target communication as outsider, and of the standard measure of a 'capable' translator in museum studies as being an accurate relayer of the source text.

Following this concept of the museum as a contact zone, this article will investigate how 'dialogues' from different voices take place in the museum and among them, the voices of the translators and translation readers. This article endeavours to demonstrate that in a photographic exhibition on China, the photographers, exhibitors, translators, and visitors should all be considered as active participants in the exhibition, who collectively shape the meaning of the exhibition with their own interpretations.

## DATA

The selected exhibition is *China: Through the Lens of John Thomson 1868-1872*, an exhibition of a Scottish photographer's record of nineteenth-century China. This exhibition toured several cities in the UK, and contained texts in English and in Chinese. The texts analysed in this paper are based on the catalogue published by the Wellcome Library and edited by the exhibition organiser Betty Yao (a bilingual British-Chinese), which provided the basis of the textual panels and captions in the touring exhibitions (Yao (ed.), 2010). Although curators of different hosting museums made changes, these changes were minor in nature, consisting of spelling changes or very rarely, the addition of footnotes. Paratextual data include visitors' books. Observations of the exhibition took place in Merseyside Maritime Museum, Liverpool (5 February to 6 June 2010) and in the Burrell Collection, Glasgow (4 February to 12 June 2011).

In this article, the terms 'source text writers' and 'target text writers' (or translators), referring to the agents involved in the production of source texts (ST) or target texts (TT), are deployed for convenience. This does not necessarily mean that they are separate groups. Despite our effort to contact the exhibition organiser to find out more details about the process of translation, we did not receive responses. However, we learned from the curators of the two museums that the ST and the TT were produced 'at the same time', i.e. their respective purposes or agendas were considered simultaneously, rather than the need for translations coming after the ST. The exhibition organiser, the editing team, and curators of hosting museums may all have participated in the production of both texts. Therefore, it should be made clear that although we use the two terms separately, the ST writers and TT writers may overlap. This coincides with Sturge's call for challenging a heroic figure standing between the two language versions (Sturge 2007: 164).

## **THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S STORIES**

John Thomson's purpose in producing such photos needs to be understood in terms of its historical background, as a response to the demand in the nineteenth-century Western society for pictures of exotic and alien cultures. His series of Chinese photos frequently adopted techniques whose aim was to 'demonstrate the barbarity of the Chinese' (Maxwell 1999: 59), and his commentary on the photos further 'conveyed the impression that the cruelty and sadistic violence of the Chinese governing class, together with the feudal structure of Chinese society, contributed to the decline of Chinese civilization' (Maxwell 1999: 60).

The photographer's 'voice' can be analysed through the visual language of the photos: the gazes, the perspectives, and the angles chosen. Direct gazes are an act of involvement, demanding viewers to engage in an imaginary relationship with the people depicted in the photographs. Indirect gazes, on the other hand, present the depicted people not as subjects to be interacted with, but portray them 'as items of information, objects of contemplation, impersonally, as though they were specimens in a display case' (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 119).

In Thomson's collection, the majority of subjects do not look at the camera directly. A few exceptions to this, which invite a direct gaze, are those photos depicting Chinese government officials. Others seem to look directly into the camera, but their direct gaze appears to be accidental, as the subjects are positioned in the distance or in the background of the photo, a fact which 'greatly diminishes the impact of their look' (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 119). From the gazes of the subjects in the photos, it seems that the intention of the photographer was not to directly bridge the Chinese people represented and the British audience, rather, it was to present the Chinese as 'other'.

Closely related to the gazes of the photographs are their perspectives, that is, the angle from which the photo was taken. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) make a distinction between oblique and frontal angles in relation to self and other. The frontal angle is a sign of the involvement of the image producer and the represented participants, showing 'our worlds'. The oblique angle, on the other hand, says 'what you see here is not part of our world; it is their world, something we are not involved with' (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 138). The photographer uses oblique angles to place himself and the viewers in a position detached from the represented participants. Again, Thomson's photos created two different worlds: the world that Chinese people looked at, and the world of the viewers. Given the historical context and the techniques adopted by the photographer, we can conclude that 'otherness' is an important theme in Thomson's photos. Thomson presented Chinese people as objects for his viewers to examine, rather than allowing direct contact between his subjects and the viewers.

## **THE EXHIBITORS AND THE TRANSLATORS**

Although Thomson's intended meaning may be communicated through the angles, frames, and poses of the subjects in the photos, once these photos enter another geographical and temporal realm, they 'can have meanings deliberately imposed upon them through the context in which they are placed, and through an anticipation of how they will be encountered' (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 110). In the display of other cultures, texts play an

even more important role because in such circumstances visitors may find it difficult to identify common ground with the objects and will therefore rely on the information provided in texts as cultural aids (Lidchi 1991: 166). We are reminded by scholars of museum studies that decisions made by text writers are never neutral. Museum texts reflect ‘the wishes and ambitions, the intellectual or political or social or educational aspirations and preconceptions of the museum director, the curator, the scholar, the designer, the sponsor’, as far as ‘the society, the political or social or educational system which nurtured all these people’ (Vergo 1989: 3).

Similarly, translated texts are the results of motivated choices, because translators, just like the source-text producers, ‘have their own communicative aims and select lexical items and grammatical arrangement to serve those aims’ (Hatim and Mason 1990: 4). Through a comparison of English and Chinese, we see different motivations behind the texts, which can be related to the different backgrounds of the English and the Chinese visitors, and also to what the exhibitors want the two different groups of visitors to take away from this exhibition.

## FOREGROUNDING

The first noticeable difference between the two language versions is in the particular elements that are chosen to be foregrounded: is this exhibition about exotic China or the legendary photographer? Under constraints of space, the exhibition panels often display selective information, based on the purpose of the exhibitor. In the display of other cultures, Lidchi comments that ‘ethnographic texts, more consciously than others perhaps, direct the reader towards a *preferred reading* since they must navigate the reader on a directed route through potentially complex and unfamiliar terrain’ (Lidchi 1991: 167, original emphasis).

A preferred reading can be created by foregrounding, that is ‘whenever some item or construction appears in a text with unusual or noticeable frequency and apparently for some valid reason, then cumulatively a distinctive effect emerges’ (Fowler 1990: 95).

Foregrounding may be achieved through syntactic or lexical devices, or through selection of content.

We found that the Chinese texts tended to highlight the role of Thomson by referring to his views on his Chinese subjects. Example 1 below is the first sentence from one caption:



Figure 1: Reproduced by the permission of the Wellcome Library, London.

### Example 1

(English)

This half-length portrait shows a woman wearing a black velvet snood with her hair encased.

(Chinese)

这位上海女子吸引汤姆逊的是她时髦的头饰。

[What attracted Thomson to this woman from Shanghai was her fashionable headdress.]

A comparison of the two versions shows that whereas the English text begins with the description of the figures in the photos, the Chinese text begins by explaining why Thomson was motivated to take the photo. Considering that these are the first sentences in both texts, the different focuses are even more significant, because in an exhibition, ‘visitors turn to the text expecting to find the focus of the exhibit as the point of departure for the text’ (Ravelli 2006: 37). Therefore, the English visitors are guided to observe the woman's hair decoration, whereas the Chinese visitors are encouraged to look at the photos from Thomson's view, as a foreigner.

In other examples, although both language versions refer to the relationship between Thomson and the photos, the English text seems to try to downplay Thomson's presence, whereas the Chinese text makes manifest Thomson's impact, as shown in Example 2:



Figure 2: Reproduced by the permission of the Wellcome Library, London.

### Example 2

(English)

Although this couple are [*sic*] sitting closely together, the husband looks away. In traditional China it was improper for a couple to face one another. It *seems that* the scene was set up by Thomson, but the couple looks rather hesitant. (emphasis added)

(Chinese)

这是身穿传统服饰的一对厦门夫妻。根据中国习俗，当时的夫妻是不会有这样对望的姿势的。这肯定是沟通大师汤姆逊的杰作。虽然他们的表情有点勉强，目光也没有完全相对。

[This is an Amoy couple wearing traditional garments. According to Chinese tradition, couples at that time would not directly face one another. This *masterly portrait* is

*surely* down to Thomson, *a skilled communicator*. Their expressions are a little forced, and they do not make full eye contact.] (emphasis added)

The English text begins by pointing out the unusual pose of the couple in the photo, which the exhibitor suspects stems from Thomson's instructions – the uncertainty is marked by the hedge '*seems*'. By contrast, the Chinese text is more certain about the intervention of Thomson, as demonstrated by the firmer modal adverb, '*surely*', and praises such intervention. The photographer is described as '*a skilled communicator*', suggesting that it was very difficult to persuade a couple at that time to pose in such positions but Thomson managed it, and his intervention created a '*masterly portrait*'. In the English text, the focus is on how at that time Chinese couples felt uncomfortable to gaze at each other in such a position, whereas in the Chinese text the achievement of the photographer is highlighted.

The difference of highlighting either China or Thomson in the exhibition may not be a surprising move, since it is easy to assume that the British even today are more interested in exotic China and that the Chinese are more interested in the foreign photographer. However, some other variations between the two language versions may have other motivations, as we will discuss in the next section.

## **REFRAMING**

It is now widely recognised that exhibitions not only provide information, but also build 'narratives which use art objects as elements in institutionalised stories that are promoted to an audience' (Ferguson 1996: 715). In a multilingual exhibition, it may be the case that all language versions render the same narrative. However, there can also be conflicts in the values possessed by different languages. For example, this exhibition records one of the darkest eras in Chinese history under the exploitation of the British Empire. Given these historical circumstances, it is interesting to see how the two versions are 'framed', a term defined by the translation scholar, Baker, as 'discursive moves designed to *anticipate* and guide others' interpretation of an attitude towards a set of events' (Baker 2010: 119, original emphasis).

The intention of framing Thomson's role as a foreigner in China during the late Qing dynasty is clearly expressed by the exhibition organiser in an interview: 'Thomson was particularly respectful of the Chinese. His camera presented positive images of the Chinese. We sometimes feel that foreigners look at the Chinese in a negative manner, but he was very different – all his photos showed positive images' (Yu, 2010, our translation). In another review included in a bilingual exhibition catalogue, it is also commented in Chinese that Thomson 'was the first Western photographer to show profound friendship and sympathy towards Chinese people' (Tong 2010: 10, our translation). By contrast, the English version of this review is less specific in saying that he was 'a human being with a profound love for China and deep feelings for its people', without highlighting him as being 'the first' or as 'Western' (Tong 2010: 10).

Clearly, to encourage Chinese viewers to appreciate this exhibition, the photographer has been presented as a friendly foreigner, who is different from other invaders at that time. Example 3 (below) shows how the Chinese translation carefully omits the accusation of Thomson treating Chinese people as ethnic subjects because this does not correspond with the image of Thomson as a photographer, who shows sympathy towards the war-torn Qing dynasty.





Figure 3: Reproduced by the permission of the Wellcome Library, London.

### Example 3

(English)

Style of Female Coiffure in Shantou: This photo shows a style of female coiffure belonging to a clan in the Shantou region. In Chaozhou and Shantou, while the main population group are the Teochew, there are also other ethnic groups, such as the Hakka, Punti and others. Each group has its own dialect and distinct culture and customs, and throughout the 19th century, clan disputes were a regular recurrence in the region. *In his portrayals of different types of female coiffures, Thomson occasionally adopted certain racial stereotypes.* For instance, he saw the female in this photo represented a “facial type”, which “is one peculiar to certain of the natives of Swatow. The nose is prominent, well-formed, and straight, the upper lip short, the teeth white and regular, and the chin well cut”. (emphasis added)

(Chinese)

妇女

这张照片中妇女梳着当地特别的发髻。这位妇女隆鼻、削颊、短人中，牙齿白而整齐。汤姆逊说：当地妇女的发髻千变万化，值得西方人作为一个课题来研究。这可能也是汤姆逊拍摄大量中国妇女发髻的原因吧。

[Woman: The woman in this photo has a hairstyle that is very particular to the local region. Her nose is prominent, her cheeks well-formed, her upper lip short, and her teeth white and regular. Thomson said, “The numerous hairstyles worn by the women in this region are certainly a topic worthy of further research by Westerners”. This probably explains why Thomson photographed a large number of Chinese women’s hair.]

In Example 3, although the English text accuses Thomson of portraying the woman as a cultural specimen, the Chinese text states that Thomson is interested in physical features of Chinese women because they are attractive and that their regional hairstyles are a topic worthy of further study by Westerners.

In investigating how exhibition visitors move between images and texts, Macken-Horarik reflects on her personal experience: ‘I would respond in the first instance, often in a diffuse way, to the image and then reframe this in the light of the text panel, which directed my gaze

to certain qualities in the artwork. When I returned to the image, there was more meaning than before [...].’(Macken-Horarik 2004: 7). The photo accompanying the text in Example 3 is a simple portrait of a woman positioned in the middle of the photo and looking left. Moving between the photo and the text, the Chinese visitors are guided to look in detail at the attractive physical features of this Chinese woman, whereas the English visitors may start to feel how this Chinese woman was viewed through the cold, imperialist gaze of Thomson.

It is also interesting to see that the English exhibitor demonstrates their distance from Thomson’s viewpoint by stating what Thomson intended to convey (either by analysing the photo or by citing from Thomson's own publications) and by being critical of Thomson's presentation. For example, in the exhibition in the Merseyside Maritime Museum, a footnote is added to the word ‘*coolie*’ in the English text, explaining that the term would be considered politically incorrect now, but is presented as such because it was used by Thomson in his diary in a different temporal context. This seems to suggest that the English narrative is about China, and although Thomson provides interesting data, the exhibitor does not always agree with his views. In the Chinese texts, the exhibitor simply omits the potentially controversial aspect of Thomson’s photography, instead building a narrative of a friendly Thomson, as shown in Example 4 below:



Figure 4: Reproduced by the permission of the Wellcome Library, London.

#### **Example 4**

(English)

A Manchu Lady having her Hair dressed by a Servant Girl: At Mr. Yang’s home, Thomson had the opportunity to observe the detailed – often tedious – routines of a Manchu lady being dressed by her servant girl. Hairdressing perhaps constituted the most important part of the day for a Manchu lady. In general it took one to two hours for the servant to dress her lady’s hair: “Many of them have chignons and false hair; but no hair-dyes are used, for raven hair is common and golden tresses are not in repute”.

(Chinese)

正在梳妆的满族女子

在杨方先生家里，汤姆逊拍摄了满族女子梳妆的详细过程。整理头发也许是这个过程中最重要的一环，通常需要仆人用一两个小时的时间来完成。“很多人使用假头髻和假发，但不用染发剂”。整个画面充满了温情与平和，也应当是汤姆

逊人道主义情怀在拍摄时的一个典型体现。照片中不论是温情的女主人，还是笃厚的侍女或者无邪的孩童，都带给我们一种阳光的温暖，让我们暂时忘掉了当时正摇摇欲坠的大清帝国和一个腐朽没落的政权。

[Manchu lady getting dressed: In the home of Mr. Yang Fang, Thomson photographed the detailed process of this Manchu lady getting dressed. Styling the hair was probably the most important part of the process, taking the maid anywhere from one to two hours to complete. “A lot of people use fake chignons or extensions, but do not use hair dyes.” *It is a warm and peaceful scene, typifying Thomson’s humanitarian approach to his photography. Whether it is the warm-heartedness of the lady, the sincerity of her maid, or the innocence of the children, the photograph conveys warmth like the sun. We almost forget that the Qing Empire of the time was a crumbling, decadent regime.*] (emphasis added)

While for the English visitors, this is a photo about the Manchu women’s hairstyles, the Chinese text has greater ambitions. The Chinese text anticipates the possible reaction of its Chinese visitors to Thomson’s photographs based on their understanding of what happened at that time in China and contradicts this. The text creates a preferred reading guide for visitors, directing them back to the pictures to look for more evidence of the warm and peaceful atmosphere portrayed in the photos, and persuade himself/herself that Thomson was sympathetic towards the people who lived under the Qing regime.

As we will discuss later, visitors also actively interpret the exhibition, and what exhibitors intend to convey is not always how visitors understand the displayed objects. However, what we aim to show in this section are the two distinct narratives constructed by the Chinese and the English exhibitors respectively. In referring to the same photo, the texts act as different mediums which attempt to restrict or guide visitors to view photos in a particular way.

## THE VISITORS

Although photographers and text writers construct their narratives of exhibitions through various semiotic signs, exhibition visitors are not necessarily passive receivers of these messages. In this section, visitors' responses to the exhibitions will be analysed. However, rather than measuring the effect of verbal or visual signs upon the visitors, the focus is on how visitors, as active participants, produce their own interpretations of the exhibitions. The source of our analysis is museum visitor books, not only because they are the only source available for visitors' responses to past exhibitions, but also because ‘an exhibition's visitor book should, perhaps, be seen as an integral part of the exhibition—an interactive exhibit in which many visitors participate’ (Macdonald 2005: 119).

The English comments are mostly on the theme of China: ‘Love the Chinese stuff’, is a typical instance. The exhibition is frequently called ‘the Chinese exhibition’, as in, for example, ‘the Chinese exhibition makes me want to visit China’. This seems to correspond with the above comments by Lidchi (1991: 167) that the ethnographic texts guide those visitors who are unfamiliar with Chinese culture through a ‘directed’ route. Therefore, even though the visitors may have come from different cultural backgrounds, their response to the exhibition seems to have been quite uniform.

Some responses demonstrate problems that a portion of viewers experienced in understanding culture-specific terms in the texts. For example, ‘Wonderful exhibition - pictures look almost modern. But would have been helpful to have a longer introduction - explaining who were the

Mandarin and the Qing dynasty [...]?' As Baxandall points out, visitors in an exhibition of foreign culture are in a complicated position, because they may not be familiar with the ideas or values attached to those objects (Baxandall 1991: 34). This may be another reason for uniform responses from British visitors: perhaps because they are not familiar with the signs in the photos, they rely more on the text for explanations – and sometimes they may not even understand what is written in the text itself.

The reactions of the Chinese audience, however, seem to be more diverse and tend to go further beyond the themes expressed in the Chinese captions. In an interview, the organiser of the exhibition said that she hoped after seeing these photos, Chinese visitors would feel proud of nineteenth-century China, because it was so beautiful (Tong 2010: 10). This desire is constructed through the Chinese narratives, which repeatedly emphasise the images created by Thomson as positive and peaceful. However, one noticeable theme that emerges in the Chinese responses is sorrow for the fall of the Qing dynasty, with indirect blame placed on foreign invasions. The following is a case in point: 'Looking at the photographic exhibition, I feel so pained to see how hard life was for the Chinese in the late Qing period. If only China had been more powerful then. I hope the Motherland can continue its current progress' (our translation).

Responses like this show that besides the verbal signs, visitors also engage directly with the visual signs in the photos. The images of opium eaters, 'coolies', and the Qing officials who signed humiliating agreements with western powers all have the capacity to quickly trigger Chinese people's feelings over this dark period of the late Qing dynasty. This once again supports the view that exhibition visitors are active participants, who form their own interpretations of the exhibition based on selected semiotic signs available to them in the exhibition as well as their own knowledge and history.

The following response shows how visitors engage in dialogues with other exhibition participants, including the photographer and other visitors, thereby providing further evidence for the argument of visitors as 'active participants': '[I] wish Thomson could see Beijing today, China's Beijing undergoing transformation. Beijing welcomes you all' (our translation). The first part of this response acts like an imaginary conversation with Thomson, while the second part is an invitation to other non-Chinese visitors to travel to Beijing.

Moreover, some museum visitors are openly critical of the texts and make suggestions to the exhibitors. For example, several responses challenge the accuracy of the texts: 'There is only a minor mis-use of the words 'Chinese' and 'Manchu' = Manchu people are Chinese as well and the so-called 'Chinese' in [the] instructions of this exhibition should be 'Han Chinese''. Visitor books also show that some visitors actually read both English and Chinese texts carefully and noticed the different narratives created by each: 'What interests me is the great diversity between the English and Chinese captions. In many ways the difference shows the very characters of China and Britain'.

With our focus especially on translation activities, we can conclude that TT readers engage actively in the exhibition. Like translators, they also create their own understanding of the exhibition. Furthermore, they engage with the photographers, the ST readers, and the ST writers. It is also important to notice that TT readers not only base their interpretations on the TT writer's narratives, but also engage directly with the displayed photos. Far from being passive, some visitors are openly critical and challenge the view presented in the exhibition.

## RETHINKING TRANSLATION IN THE MUSEUM AS A 'CONTACT ZONE'

By analysing translation activities in a bilingual exhibition, this study has demonstrated that translations can be an integral part of the exhibition theme. Rather than simply relaying the content of the source text, translations operate in a multimodal context. Translators and TT readers are all motivated participants bringing their own interpretations to the exhibition. This analysis has demonstrated that the translations not only contain an interlingual link with the source text, but also an inter-semiotic link with the displayed photos. Furthermore, TT readers interact not only with the translations, but also with the photographer, the ST writer, and even the ST readers. These findings support the argument that the analysis of translation in museum exhibitions should not only be based on its link to the source text because translation can involve more than simply relaying the meaning of an existing monolingual exhibition. Rather, it can enrich the exhibition by offering alternative viewpoints.

This much is probably easily agreed. However, this article aims to go further by posing a further question: Can we accept that museum texts in different languages tell different stories for motivated purposes? Some reviews of Thomson's exhibition criticised the Chinese text as being 'lost in translation', commenting especially on the omission of critical references to Thomson's racism. However, if we look at the translation not as a mere language-transferring practice, but accept translation as a discursive practice which can interpret, reinterpret and even shape cultural objects because their value may shift across time, space, and culture, then it is unsurprising that every language has a different story to tell. Returning to the concept of the museum as a contact zone, in which different cultures encounter each other and intercultural dialogues are created, this article suggests that perhaps translations can be seen as a physical presentation of the different cultures coexisting in museum exhibitions. Translated museum texts (as but one voice in these interacting dialogues) represent the specific culture, values, and viewpoint that a particular language embodies and reflects, and form a part of the contact zone.

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