

Positionality, Representation and Questions on Translation in Thailand

Judy Wakabayashi
Kent State University, USA
jwakabay@kent.edu

Abstract

The growing interest in translation in Asia highlights ethical questions of positionality and representation, such as who has the right to speak about translation in Asian societies and how different positions (e.g., those of ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’) might affect the interpretation. From the in-between perspective of someone raised and mainly trained in Australia but whose career has been grounded in translation in Japan and, more recently, other parts of Asia, I seek a rationale and strategies for moving beyond the emic/etic dichotomy of self-representation vs representation by outsiders. Prompted by an invitation to speak in Thailand and my desire to learn more about translation in this region, I also raise a number of questions about translation in Siam/Thailand. Although not equipped to provide answers, I hope to stimulate ongoing inquiry by highlighting some issues that seem to warrant further research.

Positionality and representation

Research originating outside the West has long been on the periphery of the purportedly international discipline of Translation Studies. This is problematic on ethical and epistemological grounds, and it means the field is not benefiting from the insights possible if we turn our attention to translation in contexts different from those on which mainstream Translation Studies was founded. As an Australian, I have been greatly influenced by Western approaches to translation, but my research on Japanese translation has led to a broader interest in translation in other parts of Asia as well. Unfortunately, it is difficult to find much information about translation in Southeast Asia in languages that I can read, presumably due to a preference for writing in local languages and the relatively new status of Translation Studies in this region. Nevertheless, here I venture to suggest some topics that researchers specializing in this region might usefully explore, in the hope that this will encourage further thinking about local translation traditions and their potential contribution to Translation Studies. Prompted by my participation in the ‘Translating Asia: Then and Now’ conference in Bangkok, here I focus in particular on translation in Siam/Thailand.

Given my ‘outsider’ position, first I would like to consider some theoretical issues relating to positionality and representation *of* or *by* the Other. More specifically, who has the authority to speak about translation in Asia? Today there is widespread recognition of the potential influence on our research of our positionality and the outcome we are seeking. By positionality, I am referring to how the researcher’s identity (e.g., nationality, ethnicity, gender, age, class, religion, personality, ability) and conceptual matrix or presuppositions, all of which might affect research claims. Positionality also encompasses power relations between the researcher and the culture studied. When a researcher does not belong to that culture, it is particularly imperative to consider subjectivity, affiliations and motivations and how these might affect the portrayal. Like translation itself, the *study* of translation is “an act of re-presentation/representation, mediation and/or intervention” (Cheung 2009: 171). I am merely a ‘translator’ of research by Thai specialists, so there is a risk of misinterpretation or predicating the discussion on an implicit comparison with Western practices and thinking. Another risk is that of “exploiting the expertise and intellectual property” of Asian practitioners and thinkers (Rae 2011: 154). Haraway (1988: 592) emphasizes that “Situated knowledges require that the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent, not as a screen or a ground or a resource”.

Social scientists use the terms *emic* and *etic* to refer to ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ perspectives. Particularly when based on physical location of origin, however, this dichotomy overlooks the fact

that 'hybrid' or multidimensional identities are common. Ashby (2013: 262) therefore argues that it is more appropriate to think of *positionalities*—"a simultaneous multiplicity of positions along the inside–outside pole". My own position(s) as a Caucasian 'translating' Asian translation traditions, not all of which I have direct linguistic access to, needs to be articulated and its legitimacy examined. Obvious risks include Eurocentrism, Orientalism and a reification or romanticizing of difference by 'othering' Asian traditions, or attempting to act as a representative of Asian voices or being perceived as so doing. Yet I refuse to subscribe to the view that we can know only the reality in which we grew up. As Alcoff (1991: 16) emphasizes, location or origin informs one's outlook, but does not necessarily determine it. Garrett (2013: 249) argues that alongside personal and individual factors we need to consider "institutional contexts, academic training, and intellectual genealogy, with their accompanying epistemological commitments". My personal and professional experiences in Japan over several decades have greatly influenced my thinking and place-related identity, so I strongly relate to the following comment by Denecke (2013: 298):

It is this constant negotiation of the ever shrinking difference between a "self," which is heavily inflected by close familiarity with the other traditions, and the "other tradition" that has become more own than other, which provides a powerful intellectual stimulus for creative thinking for East Asianists, Eastern and Western, as well as everybody in-between.

I am not claiming authority to speak 'on behalf' of Asian colleagues, who know more about translation in their societies than I do. Alcoff (1991: 29) cautions that "the effect of the practice of speaking for others is often, though not always, erasure and a reinscription of ... hierarchies." Presuming to speak *for* translation scholars in any part of Asia would be "arrogant, vain, unethical, and politically illegitimate" (6). Nevertheless, I do seek to play a part in introducing the diversity of Asian practices and views to readers unfamiliar with these traditions so that they might appreciate and learn from them. So is my speaking *about* translation in Asia equally problematic? Is it possible for someone in my position to discuss translation in Asia in "a noncentrist, nonauthoritative manner" (Radhakrishnan 2009: 461)? When the person speaking is from a more historically privileged society, 'speaking about' is much more problematic than in the opposite case (e.g., an Asian researcher speaking about translation in the West) because of the unequal power relations.

Cultural pride and an understandable conviction that local researchers know the local context best might suggest that the optimal approach is self-representation by researchers whose primary cultural affiliation lies with the society being studied. Haraway (1988: 583) argues that objectivity is "about limited location and situated knowledge", although she acknowledges the social constructionist argument that "no insider's perspective is privileged, because all drawings of inside-outside boundaries in knowledge are theorized as power moves, not moves toward truth" (576). Autonomous representation by local researchers does not necessarily lead to impartiality, since 'insiders' are also influenced and limited by their positionality and there is a risk of reverse Orientalism (Occidentalism). Kuwayama (2004: 20) points out that "some things escape natives' attention because they are taken for granted. [...] Second, natives' knowledge of the culture is partial and limited because they are usually indifferent to things not directly related to their everyday life. And, third, being knowledgeable about something is not the same as being able to explain it." Local researchers might lack a broader perspective informed by knowledge or theories from elsewhere, and "those who live and work 'in the local' are often mired in complex networks of relations that erode critical distance" (Chen 2010: 227). Hence their positionality needs to be examined just as critically as that of outside researchers. It is not a question of either/or, but of how to bring the two perspectives into critical engagement most productively.

Casanova (2004: 180) says those on the 'periphery' are faced with the tough choice of (1) affirming their difference and condemning themselves to likely marginality or (2) betraying their heritage by assimilating central values. Yet I would agree with Jackson (2005: 27) that "to run away from the admittedly painful negotiation of the power differences involved in cross-cultural research is to risk remaining trapped inside the imperialist, ethnocentric and other minoritizing binary relations that have historically constituted the English-language world of meaning." Acknowledging the limitations of a particular perspective is less likely to lead to false representations than accounts purporting to be impartial or complete. While recognizing that greater self-reflexivity might still

conceal problems, Garrett (2013: 246) argues that “more of it is better than less; and that an increase in self-awareness actually is that, and not simply an increase in self-delusion and rationalization.” This applies both to ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’.

Some possible strategies

Radhakrishnan (2009: 463) suggests that “Awareness of centrism ... can initiate perennial critique as the only valid mode of knowing. [...] no direct access to the other is possible; but what is indeed eminently possible is rigorous autocritique and autodefamiliarization in coeval response to the presence of the other. The assumption, of course, is that the “other self” is performing something similar from its own location.” This points toward a stance on which to base more specific responses to the challenges posed by positionality and representation.

Alcoff (1991: 16ff) has suggested some possible responses to the problematic of speaking for or about others. One is simply to “assert that one can only know one’s own narrow individual experience and one’s ‘own truth’ and can never make claims beyond this” (17). This is partly motivated by a desire to recognize difference “without organizing these differences into hierarchies”. Alcoff argues, however, that refraining from speaking is problematic on several grounds. It “will not result in an increase in receptive listening in all cases” (17); “there is no neutral place to stand free and clear” (20); a retreat allows and reinforces “the continued dominance of current discourses” (20); and it might be motivated by a “morally and politically objectionable” desire to avoid criticism (22). What we need is *more* dialogue between ‘Western’ and ‘non-Western’ researchers, not less. This speaking *with* (rather than *for* or even *about*) does, however, need to be power-sensitive and thought through critically.

Commenting on Gayatri Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988), Alcoff (1991: 24–26) suggests four helpful practices that can be summarized as follows:

1. Analyze and sometimes resist the impetus to speak and thereby dominate the discourse.
2. Question the effect of our location and context on what we say. Alcoff advocates doing this with others so as to reveal new aspects (25).
3. Be accountable for what we say and open to criticism.
4. Analyze the likely or actual effects of what we say. Despite good intentions, speakers might end up reinforcing misconceptions and further silencing “the lesser-privileged group’s own ability to speak and be heard.” (26)

Overlapping with these strategies, the following ways to become more self-reflexive have been proposed by Garrett (2013):

1. Monitor one’s responses: “mindfulness refers to an ongoing nonjudgmental observation of one’s thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations” (252).
2. Ask “the natives” or co-collaborators.¹
3. Put oneself in the other person’s position: Garrett cautions that the key to exercising empathy is that it is “done consciously and is subject to scrutiny. Otherwise it can simply devolve into projecting one’s existing self into the position of the Other.” (253). She acknowledges that “If we take the idea of habitus seriously, there are limits to the extent to which we can truly put ourselves in the position of the Other” (254).

Garrett states that these strategies are intended for use in a particular research project, “unlike the humanities model for increasing self-reflexivity, which relies on extended cultivation of a disposition”, but that the two approaches are complementary (254). In addition, I would suggest that rather than focusing just on inside-outside, we also turn our attention to the points *connecting* the two

¹ Garrett raises the question of “Who are “the natives” when we face texts written, or written down, centuries ago? [...] to what extent have particular cultural traits, beliefs, and behaviors from a previous historical era persisted into the present? This ... will have to be answered on a case by case basis.” (2013: 252).

perspectives and experiences—while remaining open to the possibility of a disconnect, which is where some of the most fruitful insights might emerge.

Let us move on to a consideration of translation in Siam/Thailand. My reading has raised a series of questions I would like to share, in the hope that it might suggest future avenues of inquiry for Thai researchers and that we can continue this learning process together. My questions revolve around the interaction between translation and other parts of the Thai polysystem (e.g., the linguistic, religious, political, ideological, economic, artistic and literary systems), with a particular focus on historical aspects. In my reading I found little information about the contemporary situation, although perhaps much has been written in Thai. This is a rich field waiting to be mined for new insights.

Internal, intraregional and outward translation

How common and important are interlingual renditions of oral texts in Thailand today, either in oral or written form? How does the oral nature of the source texts influence their translation? Does the government policy of preserving endangered languages extend to promoting translations of oral texts in these languages? A related area is that of intersemiotic translations—visual and performative renditions of texts such as the *Ramayana*.² How has the performative nature of some texts (e.g., performances at temples) shaped how they have been rendered linguistically—and how might their translated nature have shaped these performances or visual representations (e.g., domestication of the themes and settings)?

How does the linguistic and ethnic complexity of Thai society, including a large Chinese minority and numerous other ethnicities, affect translation? How much interest is there in translating from or into minority and tribal languages? How much translation has occurred between Central Thai and related languages such as Shan, and predominantly in what direction? My understanding is that there has been little or no demand for such internal translations, with the exception of Burmese in hospitals and also Mon.³ Is the lack of demand and interest because most speakers of related languages can read Standard Thai and do not need translations? What issues (e.g., false cognates) are raised by translation from languages that are similar to Thai but not readily understood by most Thai speakers, such as Thai Dam? What about translation to and from non-related regional languages within Thailand, such as Khmer? If there has not been much translation, are the reasons linguistic, literary, religious or political, for instance? If translation has occurred, in which main direction and why (e.g., translation of laws affecting migrant workers)? Maranhão (2003: xvii) refers to a type of translation “innocent of the geopolitics of the colonial difference, for example, from Spanish to Portuguese”, and it would be worthwhile investigating the degree of any such ‘innocent’ translation among languages in the Thai environment.

What role has Thai played as a relay language in the region? For instance, sometime before 1845 *Paṭhamasambodhi*, the Southeast Asian version of Buddha’s life story, was translated from Pali into Siamese Thai by Prince Paramanujit and from there into a word-for-word Cambodian rendition that followed the Thai sentence structure and choice of words and style. What about Thai versions that relied on relay translations via other languages? For example, the old legal code known as the Dhammasastra was based on a Mon Buddhist adaptation of the Hindu classic, *The Laws of Manu*. More recently, what role have relay translations via English into or from Thai played? For instance, “Even the current Sinoism and Maoism were introduced indirectly through Western literature as well as directly through original Chinese sources.” (Rutnin 1988: 66).

In terms of cross-regional research, Chaloeontiarana⁴ (2009: 107n36) suggests that “the fact that many societies in Asia read translations of similar novels could be a subject of investigation: would different cultural and intellectual traditions lead to different translations and explanations? Would simultaneous literacy of European novels across different Asian cultures and communities

² See Krishnan (2010).

³ After the Mons arrived from Burma in the seventeenth century, “a sizeable percentage of the male population were literate in Mon. Literacy and population size even warranted a Mon-language press.” (McCormick 2010: 212). If records are extant, one area for research is whether this resulted in translations between Mon and Thai.

⁴ In academic papers about Thailand it is customary to refer to people by their first name, but here English academic conventions are followed.

conjure up uniform or dissimilar images of the west? How different is each translation intra-culturally and inter-culturally? How does colonial status complicate translation?” In what light do translations of Thai works into other languages (e.g., Asian or European) represent Thai culture, and how representative is the selection? For instance, Kepner (1996: 215) remarked that most translations of Thai literature reflect “the attitudes and objectives of politically active leftist writers with ties to Western intellectuals. There is nothing wrong with this, but it does have the effect of canonizing certain kinds of writing while ignoring others.” Is this still an accurate portrayal today?

What is the impact of script variety? Are different scripts sometimes used in translated texts for different effects? For instance, Lefferts, Cate and Tossa (2012: 96) note the use of the Khmer script “to express authority and power” on the part of royalty in a particular text and the Dhamma script “to speak of sacredness”. What about the task of transcribing Pali texts in the Thai alphabet, which first occurred in 1880, or transcription involving the other scripts in use throughout the kingdom? Is this merely a mechanical process, or is more involved? Jory (2000: 372) suggests that “The appearance of these works, originally of diverse scripts and language, published in standard Central Thai script and language, reinforced the perception of the existence of a single literary tradition that belonged to the Thai nation.”

Religion

Religion is a vital element of Thai society, raising questions about its interaction with translation. How have the Buddhist worldview and Buddhist views on language and meaning shaped translation?⁵ For instance, was the “paramount emphasis on the preservation of ... original form” (Jory 2000: 355) of the scriptures because of their sacred nature conducive to a literal approach? Does Buddhism’s attention to “external phenomena” and its de-emphasis on “metaphysical speculation” (Wenk 1995: 11) explain the priority on the beauty of language and the general lack of interest in theory? Have temples played any role in propagating translation culture (as they did for literary culture)—e.g., through parallel translations of Pali teachings into other languages? McDaniel (2008) describes various practices collectively known as *yok sab* (lifting words), whereby Buddhist monks in Laos and northern Thailand ‘lift’ Pali words from a text and explain them in the modern vernacular. His thought-provoking discussion of these practices known as *nissaya*, *vohāra* and *nāmasadda* has the potential to broaden our concept of ‘translation’. These micro-level translation practices present a counterpoint to the usual focus in Translation Studies today on complete texts, and they warrant further exploration. Yet how important have these practices been relative to more ‘prototypical’ translation in Thailand in the past and today? How much impact have they had on the practice and conceptualization of translation beyond the realm of preaching and modern-day textbooks?

How do the additions and interpolations in Thai versions of canonical Buddhist birth-stories (*jataka*) domesticate them for local audiences? In Thai Buddhism various acts are regarded as merit-making, including translations of the Tripitaka and other key texts and volunteer translations of Buddhist websites; does their merit-making nature favor a particular translational approach? Has translation been affected by differences between Theravada Buddhism and the Mahayana Buddhism of other parts of Asia or the fact that Islam is an important religion in southern Thailand and neighbors such as Malaysia?⁶ Have there been many interfaith translations in addition to the Thai translation of the Qur’an, which was partly financed by the current king (Loos 2006: 186)?

How might the Hindu and Animist belief systems have shaped ideas and practices of translation (or interpreting)? For instance, in her discussion of modern spirit mediums—whose own practices “can be understood as part of a heroically translational effort” (Morris 2000: 16)—Morris notes that interpreters are used during performances of spirit possession:

By theatricalizing their own function, the translators act as the gatekeepers of alterity. They stand on a perimeter and hold the line of power. And they do so by confessing their ignorance and claiming that, often, they can only approximate the meaning of Siwa’s words by

⁵ For example, in the translated novel *Khwan phayabat* Mae Wan explained the heroine’s death “not just in terms of a vendetta, but in terms of Buddhist karmic retribution” (Chaloentiarana 2009: 99).

⁶ About three million Malay Muslims are Thai citizens.

reference to surrounding terms. Or they say they must trust to the deity a capacity to mark their speech with his intention without, at the same time, making that intention transparent to them. In the end, such stumbling and occasionally confused explanations insert a gap between speech and language. They render Siwa's speech as the untranslatability (of the Real) that both demands their own labor and mocks it as a failure. (297)

What role did foreign Christian missionaries play in the translation of religious and secular works? In 1685 Bishop Louis Laneau of Metellopolis produced the first Siamese translation of part of the Gospel, "adapted for the understanding of Siamese readers to whom such Hebrew words as Jehovah would be incomprehensible" (Hutchinson 1935: 197). The American missionary Dan Beach Bradley was a translator as well as a publisher of secular prose works (including Chinese stories in translation).⁷ Bradley and other missionaries also translated for the elite. What was the role of Siamese informants or collaborators in such ventures? Were they given credit? What might the diaries and records of these missionaries and their collaborators reveal?

Have different views or approaches been adopted toward the translation of religious texts and secular texts, or is there a spillover effect (in which direction)? Which category predominated at different times in history, and who was associated with each category as patrons, translators or readers? How did the shift in the site of knowledge away from monks and Brahmins to the secular realm affect translation?

Foreign relations

What role has been played by Indian influences as transmitted through Buddhism, Hinduism and Indian texts, as well as Indian traders and settlers? What about other foreign influences? What might diplomatic records (on the Thai side if court chronicles are still available, or in foreign sources) reveal about the work of translators and interpreters? Ayutthaya was a very large and cosmopolitan city by sixteenth-century standards, so it would be worth investigating archives of relations with neighboring states and foreign traders (e.g., from Japan and Persia).⁸ The court of King Narai (r 1656–1688) had strong links with that of Louis XIV, and King Narai encouraged both literature and foreign trade and allowed missionaries into the country, suggesting a fertile ground for translations. Although nearly all Ayutthaya records were lost when the Burmese invaded in 1767, the French at the Siamese court maintained historical records of possible relevance. What might records of the 1686 embassy to France or the diary of the interpreter on the first embassy to London in 1857, Mom Rajothai,⁹ reveal? Archival research might turn up relevant materials overlooked by researchers focusing on original literature or non-translation-related issues.

Did tributary missions to China bring back texts that were subsequently translated? What role did Chinese play as a lingua franca (e.g., in relations with the Ryukyu islands)? Did the influx of Chinese immigrants after the fall of the Ayutthaya Kingdom lead to a wave of translations? Since the new Thai leaders were of Chinese descent, did they patronize translations of Chinese works? How did the shift in cultural orientation from India during the Ayutthaya period to China under Rama I (r. 1782–1809) affect the choice of texts or mode of translation? Did this signify a shift toward greater secularization and/or Sinification in translations?

Rama I encouraged the translation/adaptation of China's *San guo yanyi* (*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*; *Sāmkok*) and the romance *Saihan* as part of his literary reconstruction project. Depicting "the struggle of the Thai in Yunnan against one of the Chinese generals" (Manich Jumsai 1992: 201), *Sāmkok* was "largely intended as a text of military tactics" (Dilokwanich 1985: 77), and it "leaves out the Chinese concept of *T'ien* as the Creator and systematically adopts the Buddhist concept of *bun-kam* or the principle of moral retribution. In consequence, the idea of fate, heroism, and tragedy, which is central to the Chinese original, has changed in its meaning and significance to

⁷ In 1836 Bradley designed the first typeface for printing Thai, and he introduced journalism to the country.

⁸ See Cruysse (2002) for a study of Siam's relations with the West between 1500 and 1700. This includes references to the interpreting and translating work of a young Dutch dragoman (probably Evert Dircksz), Laneau, Fr Claude Gayme and Bénigne Vachet.

⁹ *Chotmai het Lae Nirat London* (Records of the Siamese embassy to London; 1918).

the story.” (78). What does this “total adaptation to Thai literary conventions, to the Thai language, and to the Thai world view” (78) reveal about contemporary attitudes toward foreign texts in translation? Was a similar approach adopted in translations of other Chinese works? Have Chinese immigrants imported Chinese literature and translation norms? Did resumption of trade with China during the reign of Rama III (r. 1824–1851) lead to increased interest in Chinese works? How did the “shift from Chinese economic and cultural hegemony to an English/European hegemony” (Chaloemtiarana 2009: 95) in the lead-up to the Bowring Treaty of 1855 affect translation? Did the suspension of trade between 1959 and 1974 lead to a corresponding decline in translations? How are Japanese and Euro-American influences today affecting the translation scene?

Patronage and institutions

Thai kings have been noted patrons of literature, and several have themselves been involved in translation. Phillips (1987: 13) notes that “literary talent ... was assumed to be part of the charisma, karmic status, and superior civility not only of kings themselves but of the whole ambience of the court.”

Political motives were behind the 1785 translation of the historic novel *Ratchathirat*, which contains an event from Mon history based on a Burmese chronicle. It is said that Rama I personally ordered the translation, “with a view to give literary expression to the king’s endeavors to subject the southern Mon states of Burma to his rule and to foster a rapprochement of the Mon and the Thai people” (Wenk 1995: 29). In 1789 Rama I also produced the longest and most complete version of the Rama epic, the *Ramakian*, which “adopted a political vision centred on the ties between a warrior-king and his soldiers” (Damrhung 2006: 245).¹⁰ This suggests a comparison with Indian versions or the other Thai versions to ascertain how Rama I incorporated his political vision, as well as Thai love scenes and etiquette (Manich Jumsai 1992: 199), thereby emphasizing the secular and entertainment elements. Damrhung (2006: 245) notes that the Hindu atmosphere was retained, but it “was written in a Buddhist framework and is full of Buddhist ideas.” How this shift in framework was specifically manifested in and through translation deserves study. Another area worth researching would be how Rama I “framed everything in a classical poetic form with rhyme and alliteration” (246). A century and a half later, Rama VI (r. 1910–1925) drew on an English translation from Sanskrit to write “many episodes of the *Ramakian* following the story line of Valmiki’s *Ramayana* instead of the *Ramakian* of Rama I and Rama II (r. 1809–1824) in an effort to retrace the original source” (Rutnin 1988: 30). I assume that comparisons of the different *Ramakian* versions already exist in Thai, but perhaps not from the perspective of Translation Studies.

Is there any connection between Rama IV’s (r. 1851–1868) study of English, French and Latin and his encouragement of more literal ‘proper’ translations—i.e., was this influenced by an imported norm? Or might it share roots with his advocacy of adhering to the rules of Pali Canon? When texts used in the court *lakhon* stage plays became permitted in the ‘exterior’ *lakhon* for commoners from his reign onward, were they vernacularized for the new audience?

Rama V (r. 1868–1910) was the first monarch to visit another country, and at the end of the nineteenth century he sent his children and the sons of nobles to be educated in Europe. On their return, they started to translate and publish Western literature. Rama VI studied at Oxford and translated Shakespeare plays and sonnets and introduced the short story and essay as new genres. This top-level interest in translation must have constituted a powerful form of patronage that merits further study. Other members of the elite also patronized translations. For example, Chuang Bunnag, head of the most powerful aristocratic family, commissioned translations of Chinese romances in the late 1860s and 1870s (Limapichart 2008: 56). Conversely, the lack of records about translators who were commoners might mean that members of the royal family “received perhaps undo credit at the expense of their non-royal Siamese counterparts” (Loos 2006: 31).

Rutnin (1988: 35–36) notes that in democratic Thailand, “The centre of intellectual and creative activities has shifted to the educated middle class.” Do they sponsor translations (either as individuals or through institutions), and if so, what kinds of texts? Have different governments

¹⁰ Chaloemtiarana (2009: 94) argues that the *Ramakian* celebrates “the royals and not the gods as in the original Hindu text.”

(including foreign governments¹¹) encouraged or sponsored translations? For instance, how did translation fare under the new policy of Westernization during Marshal Phibun Songkram's regime (1938–44 and 1947–57)?

What role has been played by different institutions? For instance, the court-sponsored Wachirayan Library, which opened in 1884, and its journals were the elite's "principal institutions of literary and knowledge production, and to a certain extent, sources of literary and cultural legitimacy" (Limapichart 2008: 46). Renamed the National Library in 1932, its collection includes, for instance, translations of Japanese works on Buddhism, but is there any policy about the collection and preservation of translations? Since 1922 printers have been required to send copies of all printed works to the Library, thereby constituting a valuable archive of translations printed in Siam/Thailand. Their accessibility to researchers will depend in part on whether translations are annotated as such in the catalogue or whether they are subsumed under the categories of "Thai" or "Foreign" mentioned by Jory (2000: 366). The Library also publishes selected works from its collection, including "certain religious works in Thai translation" (369) and cremation volumes (see below). Jory (371) mentions the importance of the numerous prefaces written by Prince Damrong to the Library's publications, and it would be interesting to examine any paratexts he wrote for translated works.

In the proclamation establishing the Royal Society of Literature in 1914, Rama VI criticized the choice of mediocre works for translation, as well as the adoption of foreign grammatical structures in translations and original writing and the failure to state the original author and title. The Society was charged with choosing books of quality according to criteria set by the king, so its task was "that of the guardian of the purity of the Thai language and of literary quality" (Nagavajara 1985: 67). While acknowledging the Society's contributions, Nagavajara has condemned its parochialism and the fact that "it addressed itself mainly to the criticism and evaluation of literary works which were in line with the King's preoccupation with an "Indological Renaissance" " (68). Did this "Renaissance" result in the publication of related translations?¹² The Royal Society also played a role in coining terms for various fields.

The Society was dissolved in 1925 after Rama VI died, but its work was carried on by other bodies. These and other institutions that have an impact on translation warrant investigation. Many "voluntary associations and semipublic institutions ... promote the literary enterprise" (Phillips 1987: 51), but do their efforts extend to translated works? Are there any awards for translation?¹³ What institutions sponsor these, and what are the criteria? What role has the Translators and Interpreters Association of Thailand played? Have translators and translation been part of the Thai Writers Association's efforts to obtain higher royalties and for newspapers "to devote more attention to literature and authors in their feature sections" (Phillips 1987: 52)? Has the Thai branch of PEN International played a role in placing translations of Thai works in foreign magazines and anthologies? The newly formed Association of Asian Translation Industry is headquartered in Thailand and currently has a Thai president, which might be expected to foster the translation industry in this region.

Censorship and the law

The flip side of patronage is censorship, and it would be worth researching the nature and motivation of translation censorship by the court, government regimes, or religious or educational institutions, for instance. Was there censorship of translations after the various declarations of martial law or during the decade after 1969 when political parties were banned under military rule?¹⁴ Does the Thai

¹¹ For instance, the American Embassy in Bangkok sponsored a translation of the *Communist Manifesto*, in an attempt to warn the government of the Communist menace (Anderson 1985: 18).

¹² Limapichart (2008: 80) notes that *Nithan Bengkholi*, a collection of Bengali tales translated by Phraya Anumanratchathon, won an award from the Society in 1918–19.

¹³ After dissolution of the RSL in 1925, Rama VII (r. 1925–1935) set up a new institute, Ratchabandittayasapha (The Royal Institute of Literature, Archaeology, and Fine Arts), which organized an annual contest for a "well-written book in Thai" (Limapichart 2008: 95). Translations were eligible if in poetic form and from a well-known literary work (96n83).

¹⁴ During the 2014 coup d'état, Kafka works disappeared from bookstores.

Censorship Committee have any policy on translated works? The 1958 Proclamations of the Revolutionary Group, “the basic charter of the military regime that governed Thailand during the late 1950s, most of the 1960s, the early 1970s, and, with some important modifications, the late 1970s” (Phillips 1987: 24), provided the legal authority for censorship and included an anti-Communism provision. To what extent did fears of communism and socialism lead to censorship of foreign works on these topics? What was the fate (and influence) of translations of socialist-Communist works after the October Uprising of 1976, which led to the imposition of further censorship laws? What other themes tend to be censored (e.g., sexual themes, works about the monarchy, works that portray Thailand in a poor light)? Has censorship of translations been overt, systematic and widespread, or has it acted mainly as a deterrent, resulting in underground publication or self-censorship by translators and publishers? Have translations acted as a safer outlet than original writing for ideas regarded as subversive? What textual strategies have translators used to evade censorship? Is there much euphemistic ‘toning down’ in line with Thai morality, as in translations of *Cosmopolitan* (Chueasuai 2013)?

More generally, how do laws affect translation (e.g., are there any laws prescribing translation quality or the certification of translations of official documents)? Conversely, what about the translation of laws? Loos (2006: 4) notes that “With a few exceptions—family law being one—Siam’s modern laws were first drafted in English and only later translated into Thai.” Moreover, foreign legal advisors on the commissions drafting the different codes outnumbered Siamese, with the result that “At both the levels of codification and linguistics, foreign laws and concepts dominated the reform process” (66). This suggests a rich field for exploring how foreign legal concepts were rendered in Thai and what semantic shifts might have occurred. The fact that the government published translations of the Penal Code not just in Central Thai but also northern Thai, French and Chinese—but *not* Malay (Loos 2006: 67)¹⁵—raises questions as to the relative status of different languages within Siam and their different treatment in translation.

Writers, translators, creativity and adaptations

Have any particular groups (e.g., ethnic groups, Eurasians, monks, the overseas educated, or people of a particular class) commonly acted as translators? What status have translators been accorded at different times? Chaloeontiarana (2009: 96n22) notes that “translation became an honourable pastime for the educated class ... These early writers translated and wrote original prose fiction as a duty, as well as to seek fame. They did this while working at their regular government jobs.” How did the divide between aristocrats and commoners affect the pool of translators? Were translations used as a means of rejecting the traditional literature of the upper classes? Was it common for writers to turn to translation as a source of income or a way of refining their writing skills? Did their translations of foreign literature affect their original writing, and vice versa? Writing became a serious profession in the late 1920s, but was generally still “a part-time hobby and not a money-making profession” (Rutnin 1988: 37) even in the 1940s. What about translation? Is it feasible today to have a career devoted solely to translation? How have economic conditions shaped translation? Are *readers* of translations drawn mainly from any particular class or gender,¹⁶ and does this readership differ from the audience for original works? If so, why? Has collective (collaborative) translation between Thai and non-Thai been a common practice?

Nagavajara and Kepner (1997: 43) state that “Women have been in the forefront of modern fiction writing in Thailand for sixty years.” Does the same go for translation? When did the first women translators emerge, and how was their work viewed? Rutnin (1988: 30) notes two journals that encouraged women writers in the early twentieth century. Did they include translations by women?

¹⁵ Commenting on the codification of Islamic laws in the Malay Muslim South in the first half of the twentieth century, Loos (2006: 93) says that “Astoundingly, the laws were not fully systematized (from dozens of Arabic and Malay language kitab) and translated into Thai until 1941”—“nearly half a century after the establishment of Islamic family courts in the south” (30). She states that “Siamese officials appear to have been less concerned than European colonial magistrates with controlling the substantive content and translation of Islamic law, so long as these codes did not usurp powers outside the bounds of Islamic law’s newly delimited authority.” (99).

¹⁶ Rutnin (1988: 45) notes that women constitute the majority of the reading public.

Did the women's liberation movement of the 1970s stimulate the translation of feminist works or works by or about women? Have women focused on translating works containing women-related themes or portrayals of women? Has there been a gendered discourse linking women and translation as 'inferior', as in the West? What are the implications of the fact that some female translators use male pen-names? Is the use of pen-names by translators of both genders simply an extension of the common Thai practice with original works?

What are the implications for translation of Thai attitudes toward originality and creativity, given the fact that the concept of ownership of ideas was not strong in premodern Southeast Asia in general? Gedney (in Hudak 1997: 145) states that in early times "there was not much attention paid to individual authorship. Many of the earlier classics were group efforts. Literary works were regarded rather like public property, in which anyone qualified could make additions and improvements. [...] But from the time of Rama IV onward the author or authors are always clearly identified." Morris (2000: 22) notes that authorship in mid-nineteenth century northern Thailand was regarded as "a complex technology of writing at the boundary between repetition and newness rather than an originally creative act", while Harrison (2009: 304) points to a longstanding tradition of "imitation and modification" that is still relevant today. Phillips (1987: 9–10) argues that Thai writers value "the entertaining qualities of the literary effort" more than originality and creativity.

For their part, Thai translators often seem to have a healthy regard for themselves as closer to writers than as 'secondary citizens, further narrowing any perceived gap between the acts of writing and translating. Chaloeontiarana (2009: 95) claims that "Thai translators do not always see themselves as technicians of language, but as artists, authors and composers. ... the first Thai author/translators exercised freewheeling agency by including their own stories and ideas that exceeded what was actually in the novels themselves." He adds that "Appropriation, or to make something one's own, may explain why some of the early translators see themselves as authors and composers of new transformed literary works and therefore did not feel compelled to acknowledge the original manuscript or author." (96n21). The question is do these attitudes still prevail today. Are translator prefaces or afterwords common? What do these paratexts tell us about typical sentiments professed by translators (e.g., modesty about the translator's competence, praise of the author or patron)? Do they typically discuss the linguistic and cultural issues and the process of translation in detail or just cursorily?

In a related vein, what have been the attitudes toward source texts? Phillips (1987: 32) suggests a possible link between "narrative literalness" and "the didactic tradition in Thailand ("everything must be explained")",¹⁷ but Chaloeontiarana (2009: 94) contends that translation into Thai mainly involves a sense-for-sense approach and "Translators have exercised a wide range of agency in adding to, subtracting from, or changing the stories they translate." Sometimes source texts are merely 'invoked', as McDaniel (2008) has argued in relation to the practices of 'lifting words'. Is the resistance toward literal translation linked, for instance, to a desire to maintain linguistic purity or to the transcreation common in India and Indian-influenced cultures? What were the factors behind any changes in translation norms over time?

¹⁷ Phillips (1987: 57) observes that "there is a powerful didactic strain in Thai literary tradition which assumes that the *raison d'être* of virtually all writing is the promulgation of morality In these terms, writing is defined as inherently political or ideological".

If information is available, what were the relative proportions and importance of translations versus adaptations at different periods—e.g., during the time of literary reconstruction under Rama I, when literature from India, Lana, Iran, Java, Mon and China was used as “source of inspiration” (Dilokwanich 1985: 85)? What do these proportions suggest about attitudes toward translation and adaptation and society’s needs at that time? How were the Javanese stories of prince Panji transformed into the tales of prince Inao in Siam? Chaloehtiarana (2009: 98n27) notes that “plots from *nithan* [the oral genre of fables or tales], *jatakas* and epics have been considered as part of the public domain that can be used to form new stories.” Were many translations presented as original compositions (pseudo-originals borrowing the cloak of authorship to gain legitimacy),¹⁸ or were many original works presented as translations (pseudo-translations),¹⁹ and if so what were the motivations?

One question I am interested in is the meanings entailed in *plae*, the word for ‘translation’. What is its etymology and connotations, and what implications might this have for how translation is conceptualized? Is the formal similarity to *plaeng* (adaptation) coincidental,²⁰ or are these concepts regarded as closely linked—perhaps even to the extent that it is often difficult to distinguish between the two? What metaphors of translation are in circulation in Thailand, and what perspectives do they reveal?

Printing, publishing, literacy, education

Before the 1835 introduction of printing technology to Siam, producing books was a highly labor-intensive task, making them expensive and limiting the readership. How did the introduction of Thai typefaces affect translation, and how did print culture change attitudes toward ownership of ideas?²¹

The press has played a noteworthy role in introducing translations and giving more readers access to foreign works. From 1884 the court-sponsored *Wachirayan* journal published translated features from Western works (not just literature),²² and the *Wachirayān Wisēt* newspaper (1883–94) introduced readers to translated Western works.²³ The most active journal in introducing Western works was *Lak Witthayā* (Stealing knowledge), published monthly by a group of Western-educated elite from 1900 to 1903 and catering for sophisticated readers. In the first issue the editor stated that its purpose was “to encourage translations and adaptations of good foreign stories to help develop a new genre of *nangsū ān len* (“books for pleasure reading”) for modern Thai readers who no longer took interest in the traditional Thai romances” (Rutnin 1988: 21). In line with this goal, *Khwan phayabat*, a translation of Marie Corelli’s novel *Vendetta* and widely recognized as the first novel translated into Thai, was serialized in *Lak Witthayā* in 1901 before being published in book form (a

¹⁸ For instance, “The tale of the Sipsōng liem ... (The Duodecagon) which was written in 1783 under royal patronage was in fact a translation of an ancient Iranian literary work.” (Dilokwanich 1985: 86). Barmé (1993: 59n38) writes that “The fact that Phraya Suriwanuwat’s work, *Supayasat* (Economics) was largely a translation has not been recognized by Thai scholars”, and Luang Wichit Wathakan’s *Chitanuphap* (The Power of the Mind) “was little more than a translation of one of the works of Paul Jacquot, a French psychology professor, in June 1929” (45).

¹⁹ Chaloehtiarana (2009: 102) discusses Khru Liam’s 1916 novel *Nang neramid* (Created nymphs), which “seemed to be a translation but was not” (a fact only revealed in the postscript), although Khru Liam “borrowed ideas” from his own translation of Rider Haggard’s novel *She* (104). Khru Liam probably “authored many novels that were passed off as translations” (102).

²⁰ Chaloehtiarana (2009: 94) is of the view that “*nangsu plae* (translated book), *nangsu prae* (transformed book), or *nagsu plaeng* (metamorphosised book) ... are distinctions without difference.”

²¹ In 1862 Dr. Bradley introduced the practice of buying and selling copyrights, although it was not until 1902 that a copyright law was passed, and “even today this practice is not always followed by Thai publishers” (Rutnin 1988: 9). Senanan (1975: 27) notes that “copyrights had already been bought and sold before that, but in a different manner. Thai poets, and/or possibly the owners of manuscripts as well, would sell the right to copy from their books by long-hand writing.”

²² *Wachirayan* appeared monthly for a year and then ceased publication before resuming in 1895 (up to 1905).

²³ Reflecting the relative values accorded to original writing and translating at that time, contributors of original works to *Wachirayān Wisēt* in the 1890s were paid four baht per page, while contributors of translations were paid two baht per page (Senanan 1975: 38).

common practice that allows access to a broader audience²⁴). Several other magazines included translations and adaptations of Western novels, short stories and essays, “often without acknowledgment” (Senanan 1975: 40), while the *Sayām Rat* newspaper specialized in translated Chinese fiction and attracted a broad range of readers. It would also be worth examining the place of translations in the literary magazine *Bookworld*, launched after the political upheaval of October 1976, and the later literary magazine *Thanon Nangsu* (Book-path) or the influential *Warasan phasa lae nangsu* (The Journal of Language and Books), as well as in the “literary page” of the Sunday supplements of contemporary newspapers. Have the various publications had different editorial policies toward translations? The implications of the serialization format for translation also merit examination—e.g., how it affects the translation process and product and its reception, as well as royalties (see Phillips 1987: 19). What role in publishing translations or formulating a discourse on translation has been played by academic journals such as *Phāsā Lae Nangsu* (Language and literature) of the Association of Language and Literature?

In the early 1920s the plots of Western films were rewritten in Thai (in full or summary) in the magazine *Phāpayon Siam* (The Siam cinema) for viewers who could not understand the original language. These stimulated the imagination of “potential novelists who were commissioned to translate or rewrite a story” (Senanan 1975: 44).²⁵ A similar situation existed with theatre magazines published between 1926 and 1928, helping to introduce dramatic dialogues to Thai writers and readers. A study of the nature and impact of the ‘translations’ in these magazines would form an interesting historical backdrop to a study of subtitling today.

Has the custom of distributing commemorative books at cremation rites since the turn of the twentieth century (including reprints of library manuscripts or out-of-print favorite literature of the deceased person) played any role in disseminating translations? Rutnin (1988: 18) notes that Rama V “started the tradition of having the National Library publish educational books in memory of the dead and distributing them to guests at funerals. [...] It is also a very effective means of book distribution and of free education extended to the general public and is considered a means of accumulating merit for the souls of the departed ones.” Although these are usually religious works or biographies of the deceased person, in 1904 Rama V encouraged people to include fiction, which raises the possibility that translated fiction might have been distributed. For instance, the only circulating copy of the first translated novel (*Khwan phayabat*) is a reprint for the 1967 cremation of the translator’s wife (Chaloemtiarana 2009: 92–93 n11). Has the publication of many translations been funded in this way? Phillips (1987: 21) notes that “Since cremation books represent approximately 30% of the books published in Thailand, the potential readership numbers in the scores of thousands of people.”

What different focuses are evident in translations produced by monastic, academic, government and commercial publishers? How has the state of the overall publishing industry in Thailand affected translations? Does the “anything goes” spirit mentioned by Phillips (1987: 17) in the context of original writing apply equally to translations, or are there more (or less) rigid selection criteria? All this raises questions of the reception of translated works at different periods, as well as in different segments of society.

How have literacy rates—including “recitation literacy” (Houston 2004: 8)²⁶—and education rates affected the audience for translations at different times? What about within particular groups, such as the elite vs commoners, men vs women, adults vs children? Since much education was traditionally the province of temples, how did this affect the choice of texts read in translation (e.g.,

²⁴ Other venues for access to translated works included libraries, bookstores (the first was established in 1913), book rental stores and barber shops (Limapichart 2008: 103).

²⁵ In 1918 translators of film booklets were paid 40 to 50 baht for a couple of hundred pages of translation, equivalent to the monthly salary of a middle-tier public servant (Barmé 2002: 49).

²⁶ Phillips (1987: 21) states that “as a result of borrowing patterns and group readings (particularly those in village Thailand, which may involve illiterate listeners), the number of copies printed or sold always represents a gross underestimation of the number of people who actually read or hear a work. [...] The rule of thumb used by most publishers is that for every book, magazine, or newspaper sold there are at least five people who read or hear the text”. He adds that in Thailand reading is “somewhat more of a social act and, collectively, somewhat less of a private, psychological act than we customarily think of it in the West.” (21). Are these comments still relevant today? Phillips suggests that “More reliable indices of functional literacy are the statistics on schooling.” (18)

religious vs secular texts)? What has been the function of translation in the education system, such as translations of classics in textbooks, or has there been an emphasis on including local rather than foreign works? What criteria have been used when selecting translations for inclusion—e.g., “their moralistic and social values and smooth prose styles” (Rutnin 1988: 60)? What about the role of oral translations of community languages in the classroom? In foreign language classrooms, is translation (particularly word-for-word translation) still the “main teaching technique in all levels of education throughout the kingdom” (Somboontakerng 1981)? How has this shaped attitudes toward translation in non-educational contexts? What has been the state of translator training since the first program was offered at Thammasat University in 1993?

Genres

Traditional Thai literature was in verse, and Rutnin (1988: 10) notes that some believe this is “still the more natural means of expression for the Thai people”, despite the current dominance of prose. How did traditional poetry’s emphasis on linguistic beauty, elegance and musical effect rather than content affect attitudes toward the translation of poetry and other genres? Was the ongoing predilection for verse because of a preference for the oral mode common with poetic compositions, rather than the silent reading mode facilitated by printed works (often associated with prose)? How have foreign poetic metres been rendered in Thai? Why is it that certain foreign genres (e.g., short, self-contained poems) have not been influential (Gedney in Hudak 1997: 21)?

Prose was long reserved for official writing. The translated works *Sāmkok* and *Ratchathirat* mark the first time Thais became acquainted with narrative prose in fiction, although this did not trigger further writing in this mode. Eventually prose became recognized for use in translated works, but it was not until the turn of the twentieth century that it was accepted in original works. Were foreign works ‘exempt’ from the long-held view of fiction as lacking respectability (Rutnin 1988: 62) because of their usefulness for learning about the West? Unlike the entertainment orientation of verse, the novel was “able to express the new relationship between art and life and it had to be written in prose” (Esche 2000: 10). Did the “literature for life” movement in the late 1940s and the 1950s and 1970s affect the selection of works for translation? Is there a commitment to introducing foreign works about issues such as social justice (similar to the emphasis in original Thai literature)? What about the effect of other discourses, such as that on the function of literature as “a representation of national culture” (Limapichart 2008: 11)? How is the shift in values in contemporary Thailand reflected in the choice of works to translate?

What other new genres were introduced through translation, and how have they interacted with local genres? When translations of Western works began to take off in the early twentieth century, why were romances and detective stories the most popular genres, alongside mystery stories? Is it because of a preference for “the action of Western fiction” rather than “its in-depth portrayal of individuals or its extensive treatment of their personal motivations” (Harrison 2009: 324), or were there other reasons? Does the statement by Rutnin (1988: 21–22) that “the Western novels translated into Thai are usually of very low literary value” still apply? The longstanding discourse on “good books” (Limapichart 2008) suggests that distinctions are made between high-brow and low-brow literature (*nangsu aan len*; books that are read for fun),²⁷ so how has this played out in the importation of foreign works?

Rutnin (1988: 62) observes that Thai dramatic literature was traditionally written “to be read, recited or sung to musical accompaniment, and not to be directly performed”, but that spoken drama in prose and verse developed “under the direct influence of Western drama” (23). He adds that with Lakhōn Rōng, another new type of dance-drama created during Rama V’s reign, “The introduction of modern social themes and the sung dialogue are new elements influenced by Western operettas.” (23). Spoken drama in verse and prose flourished in the reign of Rama VI, who himself translated and adapted many English and French plays and, via English, adapted masterpieces of Sanskrit drama as

²⁷ Phillips (1987: 10) notes the deep-rooted priority accorded to literature as entertainment in Thai culture, where “the entertaining elements of writing... go far beyond the limits of any conventional genre. As the anthropological literature demonstrates..., *sanug*, or fun, is such a central feature of Thai life ... that it is felt to be inherent to the expressive process.”

“a way to create Thai national myths and legends as tools of his nationalistic schemes” (29). Despite the increasing prevalence of Western-style modern drama, Rutnin concludes that the genre of prose plays is “still not naturally absorbed into Thai culture”, where the concept of drama is that of “a composite performing art in which music, dance, literature, and other visual arts are harmoniously intertwined” (140).

Atypical colonization status, modernization and Westernization

What are the implications of the fact that Siam was never colonized by European powers, although it was earlier overtaken by Burmese invaders and was influenced by the threat of colonization? As a buffer state, how similar or different was Siam’s experience of translation from those of its colonized neighbours? What can we learn from this about the relationship between colonization and translation? Siam did not entirely escape colonizing influences or attitudes, because it was “dramatically transformed by the global projection of Western imperial and neocolonial power” (Jackson 2005: 13). Chaloehtiarana (2009: 95) argues that “the Thai had control over cultural production that served their own needs”, and “translation was a way to cushion the impact of western domination.” He observes that Siam’s “semi-coloniality allowed for a lesser disruption and a less distinctive demarcation of pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial conditions. The Thai elite was able to engage in a domestic project of translation (vernacularisation) that turned translation and imitation into anti-hegemonic instruments of self-affirmation, self-interpellation and resistance against empire.” (109). Has domestication been used as an empowering approach to translation at other times? What might an examination of the translations of the unequal treaties from 1855 into the mid-1930s reveal? Nevertheless,

What about internal colonialism, such as in Northern Thailand? Morris (2005: 6) mentions various measures from the late nineteenth century, including the designation of Central Thai as the language of government and schooling, that led to a sense of national identification among most northerners, although today there is a growing sense of Lanna regionalism. Did translations play any role in Siam’s subjugation of Lannathai, whose language is closely related to Thai but traditionally used a different script? What role did translation play in the centralized territorial administration system instituted in line with Western models of colonial government? In terms of Siam’s rule over the Muslim population in the south, Loos (2006: 30) suggests that post-colonial theories about knowledge production (i.e., how “the translation into European languages of Islamic law helped colonial officials better contain and control Muslim populations”) seem inapplicable, because “There is no comparable “colonial” scholarship produced in Thai about the Muslim south.”

Did French colonization of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia until 1954 affect translations in their neighbour? For instance, did the French presence lead to more translations from or via French? Did Siam’s siding with Japan during World War II boost translations of Japanese works? What about translations during the Vietnam War? Phillips (1987: 6) notes “the arrival of American military and economic aid programs, as well as agents of the CIA” by 1960, along with the presence of American soldiers on airbases used for bombing Vietnam and Laos—all possible triggers for non-fiction translation.

How important were translations of non-fiction works in importing knowledge and promoting Siam’s modernization and Westernization?²⁸ Did a utilitarian approach extend even to attitudes toward the ‘usefulness’ of translated literature, or was there also a focus on cultural appropriation? Did many of the thousands of foreign advisors serving in the administration from the 1850s to the mid-twentieth century play a role as translators?

How have translations contributed to the shaping of national identity (e.g., by highlighting Thai identity as distinct from those of cultures imported through translations)? The attitude toward foreign cultures has generally been one of assimilation and adaptation. Chaloehtiarana (2009: 95) frames Rama V’s 1886 policy of encouraging translations as a way of learning about the West in terms of a “discourse of resistance”—not one that entailed rejecting the West, but keeping abreast with the latest achievements regardless of origin, in line with Siam’s needs. Discussing the early

²⁸ Today an important area of translation in Thailand seems to be the translation of health-related questionnaires and interviews into Thai in the context of transcultural nursing.

twentieth century, Chaloehtiarana notes that “translation was an appropriation of western knowledge that helped to boost the Siamese sense of self-assurance, cosmopolitanism and understanding of the benefits and pitfalls of modernity that would prepare them to deal with the encroaching west. [...] To emulate the west did not necessarily mean to submit to the west.” (96). Harrison (2009: 313) suggests there was also a desire for things Western. What are the ramifications of this openness to other cultures, and how have imported works changed Thai society?

When rendering unfamiliar foreign concepts, which methods predominated at different times—e.g., borrowing, coining new terms or ‘recycling’ existing Thai or classical words? McDaniel (2008: 187) notes “the invention or adaptation of Pali/Sanskrit words based on classical rules concerning prefixes, and roots”. What issues, such as semantic shifts or opacity, have arisen in the process? What imported concepts have not found a fitting equivalent (e.g., *democracy* or *ideology*)? What role has been played in coining and policing new words by institutions such as the Rāṭchabundit Sathān (Royal Institute of Scholars), established in 1933, and have these recommendations been widely adopted or largely ignored? What processes of standardization and Thaification are involved? Apart from terminology, how have foreign-influenced expressions and syntax in translations affected the written language? Have changes in the language over time led to a need for updated translations of classic works?

Translation studies

How has translation been theorized in the local discourse? Are there any traditional values, views or literary theories (e.g., Sanskrit literary theories) that constitute incipient ‘theories’ of translation? I have seen claims that pragmatism is a Thai characteristic²⁹ or that “most Thai literary critics and scholars do not consider theorizing a worthwhile preoccupation” (Nagavajara 1996: 247). Has the situation changed in recent years?³⁰ Even if not formalized theories, what debates about translation have occurred? What has been their impact and significance? Has there been continuity or discontinuity in views on translation? Nagavajara (48) notes that “evaluative judgments are accepted practice in Thai literary history.” Has translation criticism largely taken the place of theorizing?³¹

What is the relation between translation and literary theories in Thailand and those in other parts of Asia and the West? Have Thai scholars engaged with other Asian ideas on translation? There is also room to explore the extent of integration of Western ideas, analytical categories and practices of translation and their impact on local thinking and praxis, as well as whether imported notions fully account for local practices or whether there is any ‘surplus’ that needs further theorizing. Have imported ideas from any specific source been particularly influential at different periods (e.g., those of the U.S. during the “American Era” from 1958 to 1973, rather than those of Europe)? Have Western theories been imported and consumed uncritically, or have they been adapted or even rejected in line with local realities? What aspects of these realities have the potential to contribute to and reconfigure Translation Studies in the West? Rutnin (1988: 2) says that “It has often been noted that the Thais have remarkable ability to assimilate foreign influences and to synthesize them until new offsprings are created.” So have there been any “new offsprings” created in Thai Translation Studies that

²⁹ For instance, Harrison (2010: 5) and Wongyannava (2010: 154).

³⁰ Yamamoto (2010) analyzed the nature of translation research in Thailand, finding a preponderance of “contents analysis” (typically with a linguistic approach and an emphasis on equivalence), followed by studies of translations, with very little research in terms of sociology or cultural studies (29–31). In terms of the genres studied, he found that literature was the most popular, followed distantly by audiovisual translation and other genres. Yamamoto (27) found that master’s theses account for the majority (62.7%) of publications on translation in Thailand, followed by journal articles and independent studies. There are no specialized journals of Translation Studies.

³¹ Phillips (1987: 36) observes that “Thai reviewers tended to be kinder and more mutually approving of one another in their evaluations than are their Western counterparts, which may be a function of the fact that they and the authors are fewer in number and often know each other personally. At the same time, Thai criticism can be far more persnickety than its Western counterpart, focusing on minor or tangential flaws in a text. Often these peripheral criticisms serve as displacements for more devastating, but unstated, criticism — all of which is in accord with more general patterns of Thai public discourse.”

“profess a Thai identity quite distinct from their parental origins”? Or has there been a synthesis of Western and Thai views on translation?

Closing remarks

One practical problem facing historians in many parts of Southeast Asia seems to be the relative scarcity of archival material (including translations), except in more recent times. With the records that are extant, there is a need to preserve or reproduce perishable manuscripts such as texts incised on palm leaves. What efforts are being made to identify and preserve early translations and associated texts? Translation historians sometimes need to work in the field to locate texts, not just write about known works. Are there ongoing efforts to date early translations or compare various versions in an attempt to establish a chronological lineage? Such efforts require skills that many translation researchers lack, so it might be necessary to collaborate with experts in manuscript preservation and book history, for instance.

Working on this article and speaking with translation scholars in Thailand made me realize anew how much researchers and translators in the West take for granted, such as access to academic journals and specialized dictionaries. One practical step that civic-minded journal publishers could take to reduce such academic inequities is to donate a subscription to the national library of less privileged societies.

I hope the questions raised here might stimulate readers to reconsider some of these issues—both the positionality of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ researchers and matters of translation in this region—so that Translation Studies in Thailand and internationally can continue growing as a discipline. By no means am I suggesting that local scholars should confine themselves *solely* to the study of translation in local contexts. Yet they are well-equipped to contribute information about and understanding of the local context so as to put the discipline as a whole on a sounder footing and achieve a “more nuanced and more discourse-sensitive” understanding (Cheung 2009: 184).

References

- Alcoff, L. (1991). The problem of speaking for others. *Cultural Critique*, 20, 5–32.
- Anderson, R. O’G. (1985). Introduction. In R. O’G. Anderson & R. Mendiones (Eds.). *In the mirror: Literature and politics in Siam in the American era* (pp. 9–87). Bangkok: Editions Duang Kamol.
- Ashby, D. (2013). *Uchi/Soto* in Japan: A global turn. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 43(3), 256–269.
- Barmé, S. (1993). *Luang Wichit Wathakan and the creation of a Thai identity*. Singapore: ISEAS.
- Casanova, P. (2004). *The world republic of letters*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Chaloemtiarana, T. (2009). Making new space in the Thai literary canon. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 40(1), 87–110.
- Chen, K. (2010). *Asia as method: Towards de-imperialization*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Cheung, M. (2009). Representation, intervention and mediation: A Translation anthologist’s reflections on the complexities of translating China. In Luo, X. & He, Y. (Eds.). *Translating china* (pp. 171–188). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Chueasuai, P. (2013). Translation shifts in multimodal text: A case of the Thai version of *Cosmopolitan*. *The Journal of Specialised Translation*, 20, 107–121.
- Damrhung, P. (2006). Translation and making meaning in Thai Khon performance. In J. Lindsay (Ed.). *Between tongues: Translation and/of/in performance in Asia* (pp. 242–263). Singapore: Singapore University Press.
- Denecke, W. (2013). *Classical world literatures: Sino-Japanese and Greco-Roman comparisons*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dilokwanich, M. (1985). A study of SAMKOK: The first Thai translation of a Chinese novel. *Journal of the Siam Society (Bangkok)*, 73, 77–113.
- Esche, A. (2000). Myanmar prose writing: Tradition and innovation in the twentieth century. In D. Smyth (Ed.). *The canon in Southeast Asian literatures* (pp. 8–20). Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press.
- Garrett, M. (2013). Tied to a tree: Culture and self-reflexivity. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 43(3), 243–255.
- Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), 575–599.

- Harrison, R. (2009). "Elementary, my dear Wat" – Influence and imitation in the early crime fiction of 'late-Victorian' Siam. In D. Jedamski (Ed). *Chewing over the West: Occidental narratives in non-Western readings* (pp. 303–347). Amsterdam, NY: Rodopi.
- Houston, S. (2004). *The first writing: Script invention as history and process*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hudak, T. (1997). *William J. Gedney's Thai and Indic literary studies*. Ann Arbor, MI: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, The University of Michigan.
- Hutchinson, E. (1935). The earliest translation of the Gospel into Siamese. *Journal of the Siam Society (Bangkok)*, 28(2), 197–200.
- Jackson, P. (2005). Semicoloniality, translation and excess in Thai cultural studies. *South East Asia Research*, 13(1), 7–41.
- Jory, P. (2000). Books and the nation: The making of Thailand's national library. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 31(2), 351–373.
- Kepner, S. (1996). *The lioness in bloom: Modern Thai fiction about women*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Krishnan, G. (2010). *Ramayana in focus: Visual and performing arts of Asia*. Singapore: Asian Civilisations Museum.
- Kuwayama, T. (2004). *Native anthropology: The Japanese challenge to Western academic hegemony*. Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press.
- Lefferts, L., Cate, S., & Tossa, W. (2012). *Buddhist storytelling in Thailand and Laos: The Vessantara Jataka scroll at the Asian Civilisations Museum*. Singapore: Asian Civilisations Museum.
- Limapichart, T. (2008). *The prescription of good books: The formation of the discourse and cultural authority of literature in modern Thailand (1860s–1950s)*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison.
- Loos, T. (1999). *Gender adjudicated: Translating modern legal subjects in Siam*. Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University.
- Loos, T. (2006). *Subject Siam: Family, law, and colonial modernity in Thailand*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- McCormick, P. (2010). Between translation and retelling: Thai models for the *Mon Rājādhirāj*'. *Rian Thai: International Journal of Thai Studies*, 207–232.
- McDaniel, J. (2008). *Gathering leaves and lifting words: Histories of Buddhist monastic education in Laos and Thailand*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.
- Manich J. M. (1992). *History of Thai literature*. Bangkok: Chalermnit.
- Maranhão, T. (2003). Introduction. In T. Maranhão and B. Streck. *Translation and ethnography: The anthropological challenge of intercultural understanding* (pp. xi–xxvi). Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press.
- Morris, R. (2000). *In the place of origins: Modernity and its mediums in northern Thailand*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Nagavajara, C. (1985). Literary historiography and socio-cultural transformation: The case of Thailand. *Journal of the Siam Society*, 73(1 & 2), 60–76.
- Nagavajara, C. (1996). *Comparative literature from a Thai perspective: Collected articles 1978-1992*. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press.
- Nagavajara, C., & Kepner, S. (1997). Modern Thai literature in translation. In G. Olson (Ed.). *Modern Southeast Asian literature in translation: A resource for teaching* (pp. 27–55). Tempe, AZ: Program for Southeast Asian Studies, Arizona State University.
- Phillips, H. (1987). *Modern Thai literature: With an ethnographic interpretation*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.
- Radhakrishnan, R. (2009). Why compare? *New Literary History*, 40(3), 453–471.
- Rae, P. (2011). In tongues: Translation, embodiment, performance. In R. Ricci & J. van der Putten (Eds.). *Translation in Asia: Theories, practices, histories* (pp. 152–166). Manchester, UK: St. Jerome Publishing.
- Rutnin, M. (1988). *Modern Thai literature: The process of modernization and the transformation of values*. Bangkok: Thammasat University Press.
- Senanan, W. (1975). *The genesis of the novel in Thailand*. Bangkok: Thai Watana Panich Co., Ltd.
- Somboontakerng, T. (1981). Translation and the teaching of English in Thailand' *Pasaa (Bangkok)*, 1, 10–13.
- Spivak, G. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.). *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271–313). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- van der Cruysse, D. (2002). *Siam and the West: 1500–1700*. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books.
- Wenk, K. (1995). *Thai literature: An introduction*. Bangkok: White Lotus Co., Ltd.
- Wongyannava, T. (2010). Wathakam: The Thai appropriation of Foucault's "Discourse". In R. Harrison & P. Jackson (Eds.). *The ambiguous allure of the West: Traces of the colonial in Thailand* (pp. 153–72). Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

