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When Theology of Cross-Cultural Translation Goes Asian. Engaging the Asian Translational World

The notion of cross-cultural translation, in the 1980s and 90s, has enjoyed a certain pride of place among the approaches adopted by scholars studying the cross-cultural process of Christianity (like A.Walls, L.Sanneh and K. Bediako). Their emphasis in studying Christianity's cross-cultural translation was on Africa and they were essentially drawing on Western translation theory for their approaches. In this strand of modern missiology, there has been no or very little attention to the vast translational worlds and translation traditions of Asia, with its complex multi-lingual cross-cultural and interreligious translational processes and its distinct understandings of translation. Indeed, the histories of translation across many Asian languages and religions, although long and complex, to a large extent remain obscure and unacknowledged in both, Western translation studies and Christian cross-cultural and missionary translation discourse.

However, over the last decade, more attempts have been made to study how translation – as an ideological act, as an artistic endeavour, as an opening to unknown terrain, as a cross-cultural activity, as an interreligious practice – was understood and practiced within Asian societies during particular historical moments and how it is still prevailing. This paper first explores what lessons can be learned from this recent scholarship on Asian translation traditions for both, an expanded definition of translation in translation studies and for cross-cultural theologies seeking to expand and rework the cross-cultural translation paradigm in an Asian age. Second, while modern Catholic missiology did not ride very much the wave of the late 20th century “cross-cultural translation” paradigm, it is show how a distinct culture theory embrace of some Catholic missiologists (prominently Robert J. Schreiter) allows for a fresh engagement with this Asian translational world.

Select literature on Asian Translation Traditions

(1) "Asian Translation Traditions"

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Martha Cheung, Special Issue: Chinese Discourses on Translation, *The Translator* 15,2 (2009); *An Anthology of Chinese Discourse on Translation* (2006)

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Ronit Ricci and Jan van der Putten (eds.), *Translation in Asia: Theories, Practices, Histories* (2011)

Sujit Mukkerjee, *Translation as Discovery* (1994)

Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation* (1992)

Myriam Salama-Carr, Translation into Arabic in the 'Classical Age': When the Pandora's Box of Transmission Opens..., in: *Translating Others*, ed. by Theo Hermans, 120–31 (2006)

Gayatri Spivak, The Politics of Translation, In *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, 179–200 (1993)

Maria Tymoczko, *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators* (2007)

(2) "Religions in Asia: Cultures of Translation"

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Walter J. Fischel, The Bible in Persian Translation: A Contribution to the History of Bible Translations in Persia and India, in: *The Harvard Theological Review* 45,1 (1952) 3-45

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Arvind-Pal S. Mandair, *Religion and the Specter of the West: Sikhism, India, Postcoloniality, and the Politics of Translation* (2009)

Ruth Mas, Refiguring Translation in Religious Studies, in: *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 23 (2011) 143-159

Archie C.C. Lee, Scriptural Translations and Cross-Textual Hermeneutics, in: *Oxford Handbook on Christianity in Asia*, edited by Felix Wilfred (forthcoming)

Anuradha Dingwaney / Carol Maier (eds.), *Between Languages and Cultures: Translation and Cross-Cultural Texts* (1995)

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Nasr Abu-Zayd, The Translation of the Qur'an: An Impossible Task. The Classical Linguistic-Theological Roots of the Debate, in: Mehran Kamrava (ed.), *Innovation in Islam: Traditions and Contributions* (2011), 98-110

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Ronit Ricci, *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion, and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia* (2011)

Carl W. Ernst, Muslim Studies of Hinduism? A Reconsideration of Persian and Arabic Translations from Sanskrit, in: *Iranian Studies* 36 (2003), 173-95