



Translation Talk

Interviews conducted by students in the M.A.
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GIGI CHANG

Gigi Chang translates from Chinese into English. Her translations include *A Bond Undone: Legends of the Condor Heroes II* by Jin Yong (MacLehose, 2019), classical Chinese dramas for the Royal Shakespeare Company and contemporary Chinese plays for London's Royal Court Theatre, Hong Kong Arts Festival and Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre. She also co-translated *A Snake Lies Waiting: Legends of the Condor Heroes III* (2020) and *A Heart Divided: Legends of the Condor Heroes IV* (2021). The *Condor Heroes* series is considered one of the greatest works of Chinese wuxia ("martial arts and chivalry") literature and has been called the Chinese *Lord of the Rings*.

Can you tell me a little about your background and your career as a translator?

In 2002, I moved to England to attend university. When I graduated in 2005, it was on the eve of the Beijing Olympics. British cultural institutions of all sizes were planning China-themed activities to be launched during the 2008 Olympics, so they were trying to recruit staff who understood Chinese. I was very lucky to have both the language skills and a suitable academic background. So after graduation, I went to work at the Victoria and Albert Museum and participated in research and planning for the contemporary Chinese design exhibition *China Design Now*. I communicated with exhibiting designers from all over China, assisted curators in collecting information, and then wrote reports in English for colleagues at the museum. Naturally, there was a lot of translating back and forth, both written and spoken. Some of the translations were used in the art catalogues and in the introductions of the exhibition spaces. These were my earliest translations.

However, making a living with translation only became possible after I returned to Hong Kong. After returning there, I worked as an English editor and marketer for the Hong Kong Arts Festival. The Hong Kong Arts Festival is a performing arts festival that includes opera, classical music, plays, traditional Chinese opera, etc. After the handover of Hong Kong, the official languages were Chinese and English, so my colleagues wanted me to translate and write promotions in English and to produce English subtitles for plays. That was when I started a more "serious" literary translation career.

You translated Chinese dramas for the Royal Shakespeare Company. Which pieces did you translate?

I was invited by the Royal Shakespeare Company to translate *The Injustice to Dou E Touches Heaven and Moves Earth* and a set of Ming Dynasty operas, for playwrights to adapt into modern plays. I also translated three plays by contemporary Chinese

playwrights for the Royal Court Theatre.

How did you get the job to translate *Legends of the Condor Heroes*? Did you approach the publisher, or did they approach you?

When I first started translating, I was lucky enough to meet Anna Holmwood. While I was working at the V&A Museum in London, Anna came to my department for an internship and just happened to be assigned to my group. She was in England for graduate school, studying Sinology, and she later went to universities in Beijing, Taipei, etc. for further studies. After graduation, she actively took jobs translating, editing, and selling rights for Chinese literature. She knew that I was translating stage scripts in Hong Kong, and she happened to have a Hong Kong novel that she wanted to recommend to foreign publishers, so she invited me to translate selected passages and officially gave me the opportunity to do literary translation. Later, we collaborated on other things. She was my editor, and we also translated some novels together.

In 2012, Anna took a sample translation of *Condor Heroes* and a book introduction to find an English publisher for the trilogy. The plan for the *Condor Heroes* trilogy was to publish one volume per year, taking 12 years in total to complete. (Each book in Chinese was split into four volumes in English.) When Anna was translating volume I, she found it difficult to complete the entire book on time by herself, so she asked me if I was interested in joining. We probably started discussing co-translation in 2014. I met with the publisher and officially started in 2015. The first volume *A Hero Born* was published in 2018. Volume II was published in 2019; volume III was launched in the UK in January 2020; and volume IV will be published in early 2021.

I'm interested in how you approach translating things that are very culturally specific. How did you translate concepts like 内功 *nèigōng* that are very common in Chinese martial arts?

Describing the 内功 *nèigōng* scenes was pretty troublesome, because it's not like a physical fight with punches and kicks where you can see actual, specific actions. There may not be any physical contact or visible changes in 内功 *nèigōng* contests. However, readers, with their rich imagination, can accept the use of the Force to move objects in *Star Wars*. Isn't that a bit like 内功 *nèigōng*? So the focus is on how to express the abstract content clearly and build up its logic in the world of the story.

Many martial arts concepts in the book are derived from traditional Chinese thought, so I briefly introduced the relationship between Chinese martial arts and philosophy in the appendix. Interested readers can search out the *Tao Te Ching* and the *I Ching* for further reading. Although the martial arts in the book is made up, the descriptions are based on actual martial arts terms. In order to translate better, I also learned martial arts myself and used my body to "feel" the text. This helped greatly with imagining the scenes in the book and figuring out how to rewrite them in English.

I'm also interested in your approach to translating Chinese names. What was the philosophy behind your choices?

Regarding the translation of personal names and martial arts names, we chose not to set a single translation standard. We did not present names rigidly in either transliteration or semantic translation, but we considered things like ease of reading and the meanings of the names. This decision was quite controversial, and some readers thought that we arbitrarily changed the names of characters or that our translation choices were improper. Transliteration was sometimes used, and semantic translation was sometimes used. I'll give some examples.

The names of 包惜弱 *Bao Xi-ruo* and 穆念慈 *Mu Nian-ci* reflect the nature of the characters. We used the meanings of the words 弱 *ruò* "feeble" and 慈 *cí* "loving" to come up with English names. So 包惜弱 *Bao Xi-ruo* was translated as Charity Bao, and 穆念慈 *Mu Nian-ci* as Mercy Mu. The names of 郭靖 *Guo Jing* and 楊康 *Yang Kang* represent the Humiliation of Jingkang. Jingkang was the era name of Emperor Qinzong's reign. Translating the meanings of the words 靖 *jìng* and 康 *kāng* was not important, so transliteration was used. Additionally, we added an introduction about the Humiliation of Jingkang in the appendix. Sometimes in order to differentiate characters, it was necessary to give the characters English names. The five apprentices of Apothecary Huang are all of the 風 *fēng* "wind" generation, and they all changed their names after they went to Peach Blossom Island to become apprentices. 梅超風 *Mei Chao-feng* and 陳玄風 *Chen Xuan-feng* were the big bad guys in volume I. Anna Holmwood gave them names related to destructive winds: the former is Cyclone Mei, and the latter is Hurricane Chen. In volume II, other apprentices made their debut. We continued to name them after winds and tried our best to match the meanings of the names or the natures of the characters. 曲靈風 *Qu Ling-feng* is Tempest Qu, and 陸乘風 *Lu Cheng-feng* is Zephyr Lu.

We mostly used literal translations for the martial arts names. Our main considerations were the "feeling" of the moves and how "smooth" they sounded in English. For example, 降龍十八掌 became Eighteen Dragon-Subduing Palms, and 馬步 became Horse Stance or Horse-Riding Stance. The Eighteen Dragon-Subduing Palms move comes from one of the hexagrams of the *I Ching*. So we also referred to Chinese commentary and English translations [of the *I Ching*] in order to choose the most suitable terms and wording.

This interview was conducted by Katherine Zhang.