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Joyce and China: A Mode of Intertextuality - The Legitimacy of Reading and Translating Joyce

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Abstract

Drawing upon the history of the reception of James Joyce in China, this essay addresses a number of critical issues with which Joyce's readers – Chinese or international – are confronted. These issues include, most notably, the problems of the liberal humanist approach to reading Joyce – and to studying literature as a whole, the varied conceptions of translation in relation to the Chinese translations of Joyce's *Ulysses*, and the meaning of a literary text characterised by the notion of intertextuality – and hence the particular modes of intertextuality that Joyce's work presents. While acknowledging the importance of translating Joyce, this essay undertakes a task to question the presupposed legitimacy which endorses the 'accurate' reading and/or translation of Joyce.

Save China's millions. Wonder how they explain it to the heathen Chinese.

Prefer an ounce of opium. Celestials. (*U.5.326-27*)

This is one of the typical Bloomian reveries – or what critics would normally call 'stream of consciousness' – that flow endlessly throughout the whole day of June 16, 1904, in the conscious or unconscious of Leopold Bloom, the protagonist of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. This is also one of the comparatively few places in Joyce's oeuvre in which he draws upon China. It is not evident that Joyce had ever been inclined to show much interest in the so-called 'Celestials', nor does Bloom demonstrate a culturally or historically accurate knowledge of China at the time. Jin Di (金堤), a distinguished Chinese Joycean who first translated *Ulysses* into Chinese, comments, 'Gone forever is the China that Bloom vaguely visualized as a land of opium-smoking Celestials' (Jin, 14). Having pointed out Bloom's 'insufficient' knowledge of China, I do not intend to embark on a study of an orientalism in Joyce by following a certain postcolonial theory, such as that proposed by Edward Said, who may perhaps argue that the accounts of China in *Ulysses* – just like the depictions of Africa in

Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* – result from an orientalist representation of the non-European as the Other. Though it is important not to omit colonial and/or postcolonial issues when undertaking a comparative study of a Western canonical work and its depiction of the East, this paper concentrates on an examination of the Chinese reception of Joyce by providing, first, a historical record and critical evaluation of the reception, and second, a discussion of a series of schools of literary criticism which, arguably, have shaped the way of reading and/or translating Joyce – and studying literature as a whole – in China. These schools include, most notably, Socialist Realism, New Criticism, and the Cambridge School: all of these are characterised by a liberal humanist approach to literary studies – an approach which, though it is still influential in English curricula worldwide, has been widely questioned and problematised in recent decades.

To illustrate this and to assess an alternative way to read and translate Joyce given the diminishing dominance of the liberal humanist approach, I draw upon the so-called 'poststructuralist Joyce', a term which came into use after Derek Attridge's *Post-structuralist Joyce* (1984), by incorporating into the discussion Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction and his arguments on the conception of translation. This will lead to an introduction of the notion of intertextuality – following Julia Kristeva, who coined the term – which addresses the abolition of meaning in Joyce. With this notion, I posit one of my essential arguments on the current topic, that is, that the mode of intertextuality in Joyce renders futile 'understanding' or 'translating' him; that the history of Joyce's reception in China, while forming part of the international James Joyce studies, represents an abortive humanist attempt to grasp determinate meanings in literary works.

i) Joyce in China

Ulysses was first introduced into the circle of Chinese intellectuals as early as 1923, only a year after the book had been published by Shakespeare and Company in Paris, but the reception of Joyce in China, like the way home of Odysseus in *The Odyssey* – a vivid comparison of the two is made by Jin – is characterised by difficulties that derive either from

political reasons or from literary conservatism. Jin calls these obstacles ‘Poseidon[s]’ (Jin, 14). Upon the publishing of *Ulysses*, ‘ten copies [were sent] to Peking’ – Joyce excitedly told his friend Harriet Weaver. However, the first commentary on *Ulysses* ever made by a Chinese reader was given by an expatriate in England. Xu Zhimo (徐志摩), a well-known Chinese modernist poet then studying in England, gave a very favourable introduction to *Ulysses* (and Joyce) in the preface of a collection of the poet’s own poems. Jin translated part of Xu’s writing, which was in Chinese, into English:

And there is an Irishman called James Joyce. His name in international literary circles is probably similar to Lenin’s in international politics, because he is both worshipped and attacked like him [...]. Now he has written another book called *Ulysses*. Nobody in Britain and America was willing or daring enough to publish it, and finally he published it himself in Paris. Now I believe this book is not only a unique work of this year, but will be so for a whole historical period. The last 100 pages of his book (which has more than 700 pages in all) are written in a prose which absolutely pure – smooth as cream, and clear as the stone font in a church. It is not only free from capital letters, but is totally unburdened with all those tiresome marks like, ... ? : – ; – ! () “ ”. There is neither the division of paragraphs, sentences, chapters or sections. Just a flow of limpid, beautiful, torrential text pouring forward, like a huge bundle of white poplin let loose, a large waterfall coming down without any break. What great masterly art! (Xu, translated and cited by Jin, 16)

It is not a coincidence that Xu was so fond of Joyce and reviewed Joyce’s style so favourably; Xu’s own style was also very rebellious and freed from conventional constraints. After all, Xu had presumably come across various forms of modern art and different literary movements throughout Europe in the first decades of the twentieth century and must have been accustomed to avant-garde works.

But the reception of Joyce in China – as perhaps in other countries as well – has not been unproblematic, whether before or after the so-called Liberation, that is, the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. Lin Yutang (林語堂), a celebrated writer and scholar, was among the few who praised Joyce’s works by writing on and translating them. Stories from *Dubliners* and ‘three short excerpts from the text of *Ulysses*, [and some] taken from Stuart Gilbert’s *James Joyce’s Ulysses*’ were translated (Jin, 21). However, there was a much stronger and antagonistic group, which read Joyce as an obscene nihilist. Among others, Zhou Libo (周立波), a famous writer who was popular in the periods both before and after the Liberation, gave a decisive and eloquent criticism that almost strangled the life out of Joyce in China:

Ulysses is a notoriously obscene novel, as well as a notoriously abstruse book, and it was at first banned in Britain. It was completed in 1921 and published in 1922; the one person who first appreciated it and promoted it was a very wealthy aesthete. Few other people have been interested in this book, where the reader, cutting through a boundless forest of words, would find nothing but worthless trifles and erratic images. Who but persons with an excess of fat would need such a book.

...

The bizarre formal features of Joyce’s work are closely linked to its empty content. They have nothing to do with literature. The same is true of his microscopic method, his method of the ‘realization of the subconscious’ and the ‘internal monologue’. Even the naturalistic technique he employs in describing the outside world is not beneficial to literature. For all this, being static and artificial in character, is incompatible with literature, which ought to have fresh content and noble aims (Zhou, translated and cited by Jin, 17-18).

Written in 1935, Zhou’s comment is apparently informed by the Marxist literary theory that then prevailed among Chinese leftwing writers. Zhou’s observation of the characteristics of

Ulysses is partly accurate, but he is preoccupied by the dominant socialist realist discourse that hierarchically and ideologically determines what is good or ‘noble’ literature. Though there was not a very clear or systematic study of literary criticism in China, nor was there a clearly theorised framework for critics to draw on, Zhou’s points echo the realism that was then being promoted in the socialist camp in Europe, with which the Hungarian literary critic Georg Lukács was famously associated.

Georg Lukács is considered one of the pioneers who brought Marxist thought into literary criticism, and who, in endorsing a realism that was embodied by Balzac, interrogated modernist discourse. He was one of the earliest Marxist critics who was ‘influential in leading the attack on modernists like Joyce, [...] condemn[ing] what he saw as the “juxtaposition of false – because dead – objectivity and false – because empty – subjectivity”’ (William, 13). It is the univocal decadence or nothingness in modernism that aroused the earlier hostile reaction of Marxists; what Lukács detested in modernist discourse reflects a Marxist concern with the obligation and responsibility of an artist (and novelist) to present human society realistically and as a ‘totality’. ‘Not surprisingly, Marxist criticism has been deeply interested in the concept of “realism”,’ notes Raman Selden (Selden, 42). Lukács declares:

The goal for all great art is to provide a picture of reality in which the contradiction between appearance and reality, the particular and the general, the immediate and the conceptual, etc., is so resolved that the two converge into a spontaneous integrity in the direct impression of the work of art and provide a sense of an inseparable integrity. The universal appears as a quality of the individual and particular, reality becomes manifest and can be experienced within appearance, the general principle is exposed as the specified impelling cause for the individual case being specially depicted. Engels characterized this essential mode of artistic creation clearly in a comment about characterization in a novel: ‘Each is simultaneously a type and a particular

individual, a “this one” (*Dieser*), as old Hegel expressed it, and so it must be.’
(Lukács, 34)

The realism of which Lukács writes reflects an idealist concern with the establishment of an ordered and integrated ‘totality’ in which the norms that are derived from hierarchically purified ideologies are displayed. ‘According to Lukács,’ Selden goes on to argue, ‘the nineteenth-century realist novel is a model of literary form, because it achieves the adequate reflection of human society, as is required by socialist realism’ (Selden, 42). Hence, Lukács’s Marxist literary theory is widely regarded as having inaugurated Socialist Realism, which expounds the socialist ‘noble aims’ that Zhou embraced.

In communist China, the literati went on to exercise a literary critical practice that was in line with Zhou’s hostile attitude towards Western modernism, and to elaborate further this kind of ideological exclusion of any literary style that was different from or incompatible with the orthodox Socialist Realism that had been imported from the Soviet Union. Because it is not my intension in this paper to discuss the history of literary criticism in China, I focus on that which is related to the Chinese reception of Joyce – though I further discuss Socialist Realism in Russia and the Soviet attitude towards Joyce in the second part of the paper.

Another key figure who has been important in the critical reception of Joyce in China is Yuan Kejia (袁可嘉). Yuan published an essay in 1964 in which he criticized *Ulysses* for its nihilism and obscenity. However, twenty years later Yuan approached Jin and urged him to translate the novel. Yuan’s sincerity and enthusiasm eventually moved Jin, who had not been inclined to take up such a formidable task. Yuan’s change of attitude towards Joyce over twenty years can be regarded as a result of the reform and open policy in China in the late 1970s and the early 1980s. Zhao Mei, who witnessed the change of the atmosphere in literary criticism in China, published in the Joycean journal *James Joyce Quarterly* an essay on Joyce’s influence on contemporary Chinese fiction writing in which she gives a detailed account of the introduction of Western modernist literature into China in the new epoch.

Following the initiation of reform and the expansion of cultural freedoms, a large number of modern and contemporary foreign works have been translated into Chinese and introduced into mainland China. Of special note are works by such representative modernist writers as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Claude Simon, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Marguerite Duras, Marcel Proust, J. D. Salinger, Saul Bellow, William Faulkner, Gabriel García Márquez, Jorge Luis Borges, Mario Vargas Llosa, Milan Kundera, and others. Almost overnight, their works, acting as a fresh breeze at once invigorating and exciting, have come to the attention of Chinese writers, hitherto isolated from the outside world. Fresh literary ideas and schools in the West have opened up new vistas for Chinese writers, bringing them new possibilities of literary creation together with new insights into the world. (Zhao, 279-80)

As mentioned earlier, the first translation of *Ulysses* was made by Jin in 1981, and was published as part of a four-volume *Anthology of Foreign Modernist Writings*. Jin translated a rather short episode at first, episode two, 'Nestor', mostly because there was a serious lack of sufficient reference books: they 'could be counted on the fingers of one hand' (Jin, 27). Though this is only a short episode, no more than 20 pages long (in the Chinese version, and just 11 pages in the Gabler edition), Joyce's art initiated an enormous reaction from Chinese intellectuals and general readers. Herself a writer by profession, Zhao was excited by Joyce's 'styles and modes of literary expression ... [which] are the richest sources of sustenance for [Chinese writers], from which [they] receive revelations of incomparable significance' (Zhao, 281).

From the early 1980s to the mid-1990s, Joyce became more and more popular among Chinese readers. This led to two complete translations of *Ulysses* – Jin's version (published in 1993) and a version by Xiao Qian and his wife Wen Jieruo (published in 1994) – almost simultaneously available to Chinese readers in Taiwan and in mainland China. The 'First International Academic Conference on James Joyce in China' that was jointly held in Beijing

and Tianjin in July 1996 was a milestone that marked a new episode in the reception of Joyce in China.

ii) Liberal Humanism in China

The Chinese reception of Joyce, as discussed above, shows a particular manner of recognizing normative attributes in literature among Chinese readers. Though in each historical or political period the type of literary criticism varies, the attempt to identify and advocate good literature is consistent. This attempt can in the first place be attributed to the aesthetic tradition of Socialist Realism, inherited from Soviet Russia, which was highly ideological and programmatic. In fact, the reception of Joyce in Russia foreshadowed that in China: ‘James Joyce or Socialist Realism?’ was the overtly anti-modernist question that was posed in the Soviet Writers’ Congress in 1934. According to the Soviet literary theorist Karl Radek, ‘Joyce’s preoccupation with the sordid inner life of a trivial individual indicates his profound unawareness of the larger historical forces at work in modern times’ (Selden, Widdowson and Brooker, 93). Culminating in the movement called ‘Revolutionary Romanticism’, Socialist Realism became increasingly political and authoritarian. Andrey Zhdanov’s programmatic speech characterises this trend: ‘Yes, Soviet literature is tendentious, for in epochs of class struggle there is not and cannot be a literature which is not class literature, not tendentious, allegedly non-political’ (Selden, Widdowson and Brooker, 93). Influenced by these conservatively radical aesthetic concerns, literary criticism in China presumably also went through a similar conservatism. The hostility towards Joyce stems from this conservative radicalism. But this is not the only source from which a dualistic manner of looking at literature has developed. Another major factor which determines the manner can be seen as relying on a liberal humanist approach to literature.

Though scholars in China who study foreign literature do not indiscriminately favour English literature but rather study all good literature regardless of its origins – Zhao Mei’s list of various writers writing in different languages can prove this – the practice of literary criticism in China is rooted in the English liberal humanist tradition that was taught in the

curricula in the early days of contemporary literary studies in British universities. The curricula in the early days of Qinghua (Qinghua University) and Beida (Beijing University) can be regarded as the fountainhead of the Chinese tradition. Most of the influential and celebrated literati were graduates from and then teachers in these two universities, Qinghua in particular: to name but a few, Qian Zhongshu (錢鍾書), Cao Yu (曹禺), Li Jianwu (李健吾), Wang Zuoliang (王佐良) and, certainly, Jin Di (who studied and graduated from Xinan Lianda, or the South-West Associated University, which was then a new university that was built on a number of former prestigious universities – including Qinghua – and which moved from the North due to the Sino-Japanese War). The curricula of English literature in these early universities are closely associated with the liberal humanist approach promoted in English universities in Britain, in Cambridge in particular, since the advent of English as a university subject in the nineteenth century. In addition to a large number of Chinese professors of English who were educated abroad either in America or in England, there were also foreign professors who taught English literature in Chinese universities. Qinghua University provides a good example. According to Tang Yan (湯晏), the biographer of Qian Zhongshu (who studied in Qinghua from 1929 to 1933, and returned to Xinan Lianda to teach English literature a few years later, after obtaining a B. Litt from Oxford University), the Department of English (or ‘Foreign Literatures’, to be precise) in Qinghua had a very strong professorship, which included ‘Wang Wenxian (王文顯) [Department Head and a distinguished Shakespearean educated in England], Chen Futian (陳福田) [educated at Harvard], A. M. Bille, A. L. Pollord ... Wu Mi (吳宓) [educated in Harvard], R. Winter, P. D. Jameson, I. A. Richards ...’ (Tang, 72). The scholars who taught English literature in China at that time – just like anywhere else – were associated either with New Criticism, which had originated in American universities, or with the Cambridge School, of which I. A. Richards – together with his pupil William Empson who was to also teach in China later – was a leading figure. Both New Criticism and the Cambridge School present a series of ideas that stem from a liberal humanist way of approaching literature.

The definition of liberal humanism in literary criticism has never been clear, but it can be understood as a criticism that believes in ‘human nature as something fixed and constant which great literature expresses’ (Barry, 3). Major critical names that are affiliated with liberal humanism include I. A. Richards, William Empson and F. R. Leavis, who were ‘involved in the pioneering English School there [i.e., Cambridge] which had a powerful influence on the teaching of English worldwide up to the 1970s’ (Barry, 27). Liberal humanism has always been associated with an image of the authority that is inherent in a hierarchical social and cultural structure. Such an authority determines, based on its own ideological beliefs, what great literature is and what its meaning is. Hence, this manner of literary criticism can, understandably, be problematised politically. Terry Eagleton, for example, writing from a Marxist perspective and rejecting the Cambridge teaching with which he was associated as a student when he studied under Raymond Williams, has pointed out that liberal humanism is ‘a suburban moral ideology, limited in practice to largely interpersonal matters’ (Eagleton, 207). He writes:

The impotence of liberal humanism is a symptom of its essentially contradictory relationship to modern capitalism. For although it forms part of the ‘official’ ideology of such society, and the ‘humanities’ exist to reproduce it, the social order within which it exists has in one sense very little time for it at all. (Eagleton, 199)

Having included these remarks, however, I have no intention to underestimate the kind of scholarship that is demonstrated by a liberal humanist. ‘The strength of the liberal humanist case,’ as Eagleton also remarks, ‘is that it is able to say why dealing with literature is worthwhile’ (Eagleton, 207).

In his widely influential *Principles of Literary Criticism*, published in 1924, I. A. Richards argues that literary criticism must possess a precision comparable with that which is required in science. He says:

A statement may be used for the sake of the *reference*, true or false, which it causes. This is the *scientific* use of language. But it may also be used for the sake of the effects in emotion and attitude produced by the reference it occasions. This is the emotive use of language. The distinction once clearly grasped is simple. We may either use words for the sake of the references they promote, or we may use them for the sake of the attitudes and emotions which ensue.

...

Further, in the scientific use of language not only must the references be correct for success, but the connections and relations of references to one another must be of the kind which we call logical. They must not get in one another's way, and must be so organized as not to impede further reference. (Richards, 211-12)

What lies at the heart of Richards's concerns over the scientific use of language in literature, as presented in the above passages, is his attempt to articulate a practically precise literary language that is capable of analysing, by means of close reading, even poetic or abstract discourses with precise and determinate interpretations. This is so-called 'Practical Criticism', which 'became, in both the United States and England, the central compulsory critical and pedagogic tool of the higher-education (and then secondary) English syllabus – rapidly and damagingly becoming untheorized, and thus naturalized, as *the* fundamental critical practice' (Selden, Widdowson and Brooker, 16). The purpose for drawing upon these commentaries on Richards's method of literary criticism is not to carry out a critique of 'Practical Criticism'. Rather, I would like to point out how influential Richards's mode of approaching and appreciating literature has been throughout the English curricula worldwide. The influence of the Cambridge School on Chinese literary criticism is noticeable. Richards spent a total of four and a half years teaching in China: 'the effect of teaching in Peking in 1929-30 was "profound," recalled Richards of the second sojourn' (Russo, 405). The teaching experience of his disciple, William Empson, was also substantially in 'the Far East, three years in Japan and seven in China' (Empson, 201).

iii) Translation of Joyce and Deconstructionism

The demand for rigor in presenting the authentic characteristics of the original in the practice of translation is another area in which the humanist attempt to reconstruct the presupposed fixed meaning in a literary work can be observed. As Zhao Mei, quoted earlier, reminds us, there is a huge demand for translated books, either from English or from other languages, in China. The work of translation becomes an important job, and the request for quality and ‘authentic’ translations is conspicuous. From a number of academic essays in response to Jin Di’s translation of *Ulysses*, for example, we get some hint of how demanding the job of translation must be. Wang Yougui from Guangdong University of International Studies says, ‘*Ulysses* is regarded as the Mount Everest of English literature; its translation should be no less. Climbers cannot ascend to the top if they are not brave enough, intelligent enough, and persistent enough’ (Wang, 269). Li-ling Tseng from National Taiwan University discusses the ‘Taiwanese reader reception of Jin Di’s text and the *Ulysses* that he produced’:

Because of the successful transcription of the most important ingredients of Joyce’s novel – its humor and jouissance – at which Jin’s translation excels, we are justified in concluding that Jin’s method of attempting a dynamic equivalence has achieved its potential in marrying the source text and the target language. [...] Jin’s text is an inimitable feat rarely achieved in Chinese translation. (Tseng, 252, 260).

Sher-shiueh Li from National Taiwan Normal University examines Jin’s translation method:

What a translator from western languages could aim for in his or her enterprise, to borrow Jin Di’s well-known theory of translation, is to re-create in a rendered text at most an ‘equivalent effect’ (*dengxiao*) to that produced by the original, or to create the illusion that the original has already been re-presented through the linguistic exchange. I believe that is only with this knowledge in mind that we can begin to approach Jin Di’s ‘translation’ of Joycean style in *Ulysses*. (Li, 262)

The praise of Jin's translation of *Ulysses* by these three commentators suggests that a successful translation has to be able to render exactly (both figuratively and virtually) what the original text conveys.

However, from a more technical point of view, translation cannot be expected to deliver the same meanings that the original was intended to express. In her essay 'Chinese Translations of Figurative Locutions in *Ulysses*', Susan Fong compares both Chinese translations of the novel to the original to point out the difficulty, or in fact the impossibility, of translating wordplay or punning. 'Translating wordplay is perhaps one of the most demanding [tasks]' she argues. 'Ideally, the translation should bring across not only the meaning(s) but also the form and the ambiguity of the poetic devices' (Fong, 245). She then makes use of a short Bloomian discourse to illustrate this point: 'Sandwich? Ham and his descendants mustered and bred there' (*U* 8.741-42). According to Don Gifford, the celebrated Joyce annotator, Joyce borrows from a comic rhyme from C. C. Bombaugh's *Gleanings for the Curious from the Harvest Fields of Literature* (Philadelphia, 1890):

Why should no man starve on the deserts of Arabia?

Because of the sand which is there.

How came the sandwiches there?

The tribe of Ham was bred there and mustered

(Gifford, 179)

The 'Ham' in this rhyme refers to Ham, 'one of Noah's three sons [who is] traditionally regarded as the tribal father of the Negroid races' (Gifford, 179). Of course 'bred' and 'mustered' here are punning on 'bread' and 'mustard'. Hence, the wordplay of Bloom's internal discourse can never be translated into a language the speakers of which do not share the same culture or allusions. Here are the respective versions that are translated by Jin and the Xiaos, followed by my back-translation.

Jin's translation:

‘三明治嗎？火腿的後代在那兒，加上了芥末夾麵包。’

(Jin's translation:

‘Sandwiches? There are the descendants of ham there, add mustard and place them into a bread’)

The Xiaos' translation:

‘三文治嗎？在火腿和用它做成的食品上塗點芥末，夾在麵包當中。’

(The Xiaos' translation:

‘Sandwiches? Put mustard on ham and the food made of ham, then place them into a bread’)

Neither Jin's nor the Xiaos' translation has succeeded in bringing out the puns. They do not ‘contribute to the humor or wordplay intended in the original and give the reader the impression that Bloom is rather incoherent, which is quite the opposite of the intended impression of him in the original’ (Fong, 246). In saying this, however, Fong does not question the necessity of translation and hence the idea of translatability, but simply laments the incapability of recreating the original meanings that are formed by a complex language situation, that is, wordplay and puns, in another language. The problems or difficulties that are raised by Fong here can further be addressed by drawing on Jacques Derrida's assessment of the concept of translation.

In his approach, called ‘deconstruction’, Jacques Derrida has constantly returned to the issue of translation and provided insightful perceptions on it. Derrida's overall attitude towards translation sounds paradoxical. It can be summed up thus: on the one hand, the impossibility of meaning based on the signification of the signifier (words) against the signified (content) determines an inevitable futility in the desire for perfect or authentic

translation; on the other hand, it is this futile desire that in return makes translation possible and even necessary. Derrida explains this paradox:

In the limits to which it is possible, or at least appears possible, translation practices the difference between signifier and signified. But if this difference is never pure, no more so is translation, and for the notion of translation we would have to substitute a notion of transformation: a regulated transformation of one language by another, of one text by another. (Derrida 1981, 20)

The process of producing this paradox is as follows: ‘translation detaches the word from the meaning and then carries over the meaning into another language where the appropriate word is reattached to it’ (Roffe, 105). Addressing translation by discussing the concept of singularity, Derrida divides translation into two senses which can roughly be understood as the ‘classical’ (or technical) sense, and the philosophical or metaphysical sense. By the ‘classical’ sense, he refers to ‘the transfer of meaning or a truth from one language to another without any essential harm being done’ (Derrida 1985, 120). From a philosophical point of view,

[a] text lives only if it lives *on* [*sur-vit*], and it lives *on* only if it is *at once* translatable *and* untranslatable (always ‘at once...and...’: *hama*, at the ‘same’ time). Totally translatable, it disappears as a text, as writing, as a body of language [*langue*]. Totally untranslatable, even within what is believed to be one language, it dies immediately. (Derrida 1979, 102)

That is, the translatability of a text relies on whether or not it is readable and it is a case of generality. Or, a translatable text is a particular case (*parole*, as with Roland Barthes) that corresponds to the generality or the language system (*langue*) and has therefore no singularity and identity in it. In contrast, an untranslatable text presents a singularity that does not

correspond to the language system on which readers rely to understand a text. In a technical sense, in this regard, Joyce's last novel, *Finnegans Wake*, can be regarded as an untranslatable text, though it can also be argued that it is a text which is already translation, moving between different languages as it does.

But what Derrida is concerned about is not to judge whether a text is translatable or not, for 'in a sense, nothing is untranslatable; but in another sense, everything is untranslatable; translation is another name for the impossible' (Derrida 1998, 57). Every text is untranslatable because we can never in the first place grasp its meaning. At the same time, every text is translatable because we are always embarking on a process of grasping meaning. Derrida's point here becomes more intelligible by drawing on his idea of *différance*. We know that the meaning of a text is supposed to derive from each particular context that is constituted by a relationship between different utterances and/or discourses in this context. However, what is appropriated from the relationship between different utterances/discourses, according to Derrida, is not an established meaning but only a *différance* which 'illustrates that language involves at one and the same time the differences between and the deferral of meanings' (Allen, 211). In short, the term *différance* is the integration of two elements, that is, difference and deferral. The act of extracting meaning from a text will immediately and inevitably encounter these two elements: regarding difference, the meaning or the identification of one particular thing has to be based on this thing's difference from other things: an apple is an apple because it is not an orange; regarding deferral, the process of extracting meaning is endless, because the words that explain a meaning have to be explained by other words and so forth. Checking the meaning of a word in a dictionary, for example, is an endless process, because the words that explain this word have to be explained by other words beforehand (or afterwards). Hence, it is not possible to derive a determinate meaning from a text. In this sense, the liberal humanist attempt to preserve an authoritative meaning and to stabilise time after time an orthodox genre or writing style is in vain, nor can effort in seeking out the authentic equivalents in translation avoid being futile.

iv) Joyce's Chinese Allusions: An Intertextuality

Joyce's texts themselves are good examples to illustrate how ideological or communicative meanings in a text are doomed to be neutralised and eventually abolished entirely. Here is a very simple discourse taken from the 'Sirens' episode in *Ulysses*, consisting of two equally simple utterances:

'To be or not to be. Wisdom while you wait.' (*U.11.905-6*)

The two utterances are connected to respective sources, or matrices (literary and non-literary): the first utterance is easily recognised as the opening of Hamlet's famous soliloquy in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*; though the second is not conspicuously and contextually attributable, it comes seemingly from the common saying 'Whistle while you work'. Because the sentence itself possesses its own contextual meaning (no matter what it is), the quotation from Shakespeare cannot possibly work here based on its original meaning. Therefore, the relationship between this discourse (i.e., the Shakespearean quotation) and its literary matrix is destructive. In other words, the futility of the relationship between 'To be or not to be' and *Hamlet* is the consequence of the participation of another discourse, that is, 'wisdom while you wait', within the discursive relationship. The former discourse then is neutralised, which results in what I call a discursive neutralisation.

This discursive neutralisation can be better understood by using Julia Kristeva's idea of intertextuality. Intertextuality in Kristeva does not mean a discursive relationship between different discourses as ideologically 'intended' by the author, nor does it imply a presupposed meaning that is derived from a relationship between the main text and the other texts that are being referred to in the main text. On the contrary, intertextuality denotes 'a permutation of texts [...]: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and *neutralize* one another' (Kristeva 1980, 36). That is, utterances and discourses that intersect one another in a text are not simply juxtaposed, but interpenetrate and neutralise each other. Because the relationship between a discourse and the literary text in which it is situated is

redistributive, the presumed meanings that this discourse conveys based on its former relationships to other texts are necessarily abolished and can only be transformed into new meanings that will have nothing to do with the meanings that these discourses previously conveyed. As a consequence, discourses that are linked together in a new text are hardly compatible but mutually neutralised. What remains in discursive relationships is merely neutralisation and mutual displacement.

It is this mutual neutralisation and displacement among discourses that prevents each discourse from having a meaning in terms of being connected to literary sources. In other words, the sources themselves are displaced. As Roland Barthes points out, ‘What she [Kristeva] displaces is the *already-said*...i.e., the instance of the signified, i.e., stupidity; what she subverts is authority – the authority of monologic science, of filiation’ (Barthes, 168). According to Kristeva, intertextuality does not acknowledge that the utterance or the discourse in a text produces any meaning that is based on the stabilisation of the signified, because the discourses or narratives that intersect one another in a given text are heterogeneous and can never be determinately and exclusively linked together. Kristeva clarifies how discursive relationships work from the perspective of intertextuality:

If one grants that every signifying practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an inter-textuality), one then understands that its ‘place’ of enunciation and its denoted ‘object’ are never single, complete, and identical to themselves, but always plural, shattered, capable of being tabulated. (Kristeva 1984, 60)

As a result, a discourse becomes double-voiced, rejecting the assertion of single or definitive statements. At the same time, neither can any single discourse develop very maturely, for once it begins to be constituted, other equally developing discourses will come to neutralise it. Consequently, all discourses come to neutralise each other, eventuating in neutralisation in presenting meanings.

As argued earlier, Joyce's texts are replete with cases that exemplify intertextuality, cases that are related to the literary canon and privileged works, to mundane and secular sources and to everything we understand by ideology and discourse. These cases encompass all kinds of culture and national heritage, including, certainly, Chinese culture. The following is another very interesting case that depicts well a particular mode of intertextuality in Joyce. This is a Bloomian reverie in the 'Hades' episode:

A corpse is meat gone bad. Well and what's cheese? Corpse of milk. I read in that *Voyages in China* that the Chinese say a white man smells like a corpse. Cremation better. (U.6.981-84)

A number of discourses appear in this short extract. They neutralise each other, resulting in an abolition of meaning. The sentences form a very complex and ramified case of intertextuality that suggests, in the first place, a deferral of meanings. The context of this extract is Dignam's funeral, at which Bloom fantasises about different kinds of burial. The primary discourse in Bloom's mind is derived from previous discourses that involve a corpse. Then Bloom thinks of a certain text – *Voyages in China* – a book that is displayed on his bookshelf, and which is described later in the 'Ithaca' episode (U.17.1379). The narrative immediately changes from the discourse on the corpse to a new discourse on a book about China. However, the new discourse about China is merely a presupposed representation provided presumably by a white author, whose name, as we discover later in the 'Ithaca' episode, is Viator (U.17.1379). This white author is actually not describing China but giving a Chinese perception of white men, who are regarded, according to this white author, to smell like a corpse. Thus, we have at least eight voices, or discourses, here, namely:

1. Bloom's preoccupation with corpses;
2. the smell of a corpse;
3. a book about China (but it turns out not to be about China after all);
4. the author of the book is a white man; or a white author's account;

5. a representational description of the Chinese;
6. a white man's odour as perceived by the Chinese as reported by a white author;
7. the analogy between a white man and a corpse in the Chinese perception as reported by a white author;
8. cremation – an abrupt discourse that resumes Bloom's earlier reverie about burial methods.

Though these discourses may not have unequivocally neutralised each other, the whole contextual meaning collapses intrinsically based on such a narrative, which can only present a deferral or a labyrinth of meanings. This extract shows how a petit bourgeois like Bloom contents himself with his self-awareness of being knowledgeable. The apparently trivial and commonplace clichés that permeate Bloom's thoughts and speeches throughout the day represent a bourgeois discourse that the text neutralises whenever it begins to develop.

If Joyce's art presents nothing but an intertextuality in which inter-texts or inter-discourses neutralise each other, in which the attempt to dig up buried or presupposed meanings proves to be futile, how can an orthodox or authoritative reading be legitimised? How can a faithful or authentic translation be sought? Even though it is nowadays rather unfashionable in academia to use so-called grand theories to problematise a liberal humanist way of conducting literary criticism – as grand theories such as structuralism and deconstruction have been equally problematised – I hope that the discussion of the reception of Joyce in China in terms of theory is still worthwhile. At any rate, it is foreseeable that more and more activities that are related to reading and translating Joyce will take place in China, and that ongoing debates, such as those amid critical issues like readability or unreadability and translatability or untranslatability, will continue. I think a comment by the distinguished Joycean Jean-Michel Rabaté, given after his summary of the critical approaches to Joyce over the decades, can help conclude this paper:

[U]nder what conditions can something like 'James Joyce studies' become a rigorous discipline? Is there a type of Joycean competence that can be measured and posited as

a prerequisite? Is it enough to have read all the works and most of the critics (not all of them, that would be impossible), or should one commit oneself more actively and join a Joycean reading group or website? Such remarks not only query a type of knowledge but also its transmission and the rites that accompany it (such as the James Joyce symposia, the Bloomsday celebrations, the regular meetings of *Finnegans Wake* or *Ulysses* reading groups throughout the world). (Rabaté, 272)

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