

# **Han Suyin's translation philosophies in the context of Mainland China since the 1950s**

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**Abstract:** As a significant member of the Chinese translation community, Han Suyin's views on translation evolved through the years in tandem with the changes in Mainland China. Covering the historical and cultural contexts of Mainland China between the 1950s and the early 21st century, this article examines the development of her translation philosophies through three distinct phases. The first (1950s–1970s) sees her translation philosophy influenced by Chinese national politics and the Cold War; the second (1980s–1990s) reflects her beliefs in translation as an art as well as a creative process; the third phase (1990s–2000s) is characterized by Han's influential nurturing of other translators, and her patronage of translation scholarship as a means of spreading Chinese literary culture. Her views and works not only contributed to the development of the field of translation studies but were dynamic and progressive. Most of her views are still of practical relevance today.

**Keywords:** Han Suyin; translation activities; translation philosophies; historical and cultural contexts; practical relevance; People's Republic of China

Han Suyin has been lauded as a “bosom friend of Chinese translators” and “bridge” between Chinese translators based in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the rest of the world because of her commitment to the translation field in China. Interestingly, although she was born in China and resided there for much of her childhood, Han left China before the founding of the PRC. It was only in 1956 that she first visited the PRC and met with the then-Premier, Zhou Enlai, forging such a strong and lasting friendship with him that she subsequently became something of a cultural ambassador for the PRC. The visit also marked the start of her involvement in the development of the translation sector in China, an involvement I have divided into three different phases. In the first phase, following her interviews with Zhou, Han was actively involved in various general “cultural” and political translation activities, introducing to the world significant Chinese leaders and their sociopolitical ideologies. This proved to be very valuable for China, as it opened a channel of communication between east and west during the Cold War. The Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1976 disrupted the development of the translation sector in China, resulting in a stifling of talents

in the field even as a “cultural fever” spread throughout the nation and fostered a historic “fourth wave” within the translation sector.<sup>1</sup> Understanding the implications of the issue, Han provided funds and set up competitions for the training and nurturing of translators in China; this marks my second phase. The third phase of Han’s involvement in translation activities developed from the start of the 1990s when she began focusing her efforts on promoting Chinese culture to a global audience after seeing the imbalance in cross-cultural communications between east and west.

In what follows, I will provide a critical overview of these three phases, arguing in the process that an awareness of the dynamics of translation – in various forms – is key to understanding her work. Currently, critics and academic commentators place more emphasis on Han’s literary fiction, journalism, and life experiences than on her translation philosophies and activities. Yet translation is an abiding concern of Han’s and is deeply intertwined with the development of Sino–western relationships and shifts in mainstream Chinese ideologies, which can be observed through the three phases of her translation activities. An analysis of Han’s activities through these three phases reveals her deep understanding of the needs of the Chinese translation sector and shows how this awareness underlies many of her creative decisions. During her writing career, Han contributed significantly to the development of the Chinese translation sector, and this neglected “institutional” history is also my focus here.

### **The first phase: The Cold War and the cultural translations of Chinese society and its leaders (the 1950s to the 1970s)**

Han made her return to China and first trip to the PRC in 1956, during which she was feted and accorded a formal welcome by then-Premier Zhou Enlai, his cabinet, and the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries. In 1957, she published “Revisiting Beijing” in the American newspaper *Vacation*; the article was circulated world-wide. *The New York Times*, *The Times*, *The World*, and *Asahi Shimbun* all published and reprinted her articles on her subsequent visits to China, though this led to many westerners labelling Han as a communist (Yang 2007, 2). However, it was precisely because she was seen as being a leftist that she was given much freer rein by the Central People’s Government in her works than other authors and translators in China then. Throughout the Cold War, when China was governed according to the totalitarian dictates of Maoist ideology, westernized leftists and pro-communists were less scrutinized so that they could help bridge the east–west gap by conveying the messages of the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to sympathetic constituencies in the west. Han did exactly this – she traversed the two Cold War worlds, intending to establish diplomatic ties with the USA and India with Zhou Enlai’s authorization. In the years following her high-profile return visit to China, she expounded China’s stand on global politics

internationally through various conferences and speeches.

Han also actively engaged herself in China's development and contacted a wide range of people there. As a result, she started writing more monographs and studies of Chinese politics and history, and introducing Chinese leaders and their economic and political plans to western readers. In 1972, the first volume of her biography of Mao, *The Morning Deluge: Mao Tsetung and the Chinese Revolution, 1893–1954*, was published by Jonathan Cape; it was a book that Han wrote and edited by translating numerous Chinese texts.<sup>2</sup> It was followed in 1976 by *Wind in the Tower: Mao Tsetung and the Chinese Revolution 1949–1965*. The two volumes of the biography spanned over 60 years of Mao's life – from his birth to his time as a revolutionary and, eventually, Chairman of the then-newly founded PRC; through a portrayal of his life, Han recounted the history of China's revolution. In relation to her positive treatment of Mao's rise and consolidation of power, reviewers made comparisons with Edgar Snow's highly influential 1937 journalistic account of early Chinese communism, *Red Star over China*.

In 1993, Han published another biography – this time of Zhou Enlai – written in French and titled *Le siècle de Zhou Enlai: Le mandarin révolutionnaire* (The century of Zhou Enlai: The Mandarin revolutionary). Though published in the 1990s, the biography is based on 11 interviews that Han conducted with Zhou between 1956 and 1974. According to Han, her first interview with the charismatic Zhou in 1956, two hours long, “completely changed her life” (Han 1992, 2); there and then she resolved to write a biography of Zhou. In the decade that followed, Han consulted many historical documents, visited historical sites about the revolution, and spoke to the pioneers of the revolution and the relevant foreign personages, all in the hope that through such a comprehensive, accurate and vivid biography, readers could draw their own objective conclusions (Han 1992, 1). To highlight Zhou's devotion to his revolutionary cause, the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs assembled a team of translators who worked with Han on the Zhou biography. They translated the manuscript simultaneously as Han completed the book and published the translation upon its completion in 1992. The team responsible for the translation included Zhang Liankang; Wang Nongsheng, the Chinese Ambassador to Samoa and Papua New Guinea, and member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference; Zou Rongming, Chinese Ambassador to Sweden; Zhang Zhiming, faculty member of the Central Party School of the Communist Party of China; and Cheng Zhenqiu, an English language expert at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

On June 30, 1949, in celebration of the 28th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party, Mao published “On People's Democratic Dictatorship”, a paper that proposes the “Leaning to One Side” (一边倒) policy that saw China aligning itself with the Soviet Union for financial and military aid to reinforce the outcomes of the revolution and fortify the newly founded PRC. The foreign policy of leaning to one side was conceived and decided upon after evaluating

the global geopolitical situation. The pro-Soviet policy resulted in a blind imitation of the Soviets by the Chinese government in numerous domains and spheres, such as politics, economics, culture, and education. (Arguably, Chinese national identity and status experienced a weakening as the division between the Chinese and Soviet identities blurred as a result.) The PRC referred to the Soviets as their “big brother”, a term that highlights a hierarchical difference between the Chinese and their Soviet counterparts, where the Chinese were seemingly a subsidiary of the Soviet Union and there was an increasing rift with the US-led west. The divergence and split were further exacerbated by the Korean War (June 25, 1950–July 27, 1953), which placed the already hostile relationship between China and US-led capitalist western societies under more tension. At the time Han observed critically that the propagandistic message put out by the governing CCP was “appallingly childish and has no influence or impact”; at the same time, “the West had nothing to offer China except hostility, the language of prurient enmity” (Han 1980, 126). These observations led to her realization that the wider world had only a limited grasp of the Chinese political position, and, as a consequence, she set out to introduce to the world the state of affairs and many accomplishments of China (Han 1999, 35).<sup>3</sup> While Han did not effect great changes in the political climate of the time, it can be claimed that her attempts to bridge the gap between China and US-led western societies contributed greatly to a more comprehensive international understanding of Chinese leaders and society. Her efforts helped mediate the escalating tensions and reshaped the biased perceptions stemming from ideological differences between the west and China during the Cold War. This was not simply Han’s personal choice—but also a party line: her interactions with Zhou revealed that the Chinese leaders recognized the need to engage with western leaders and change their attitudes towards and perceptions of China. As Han put it in an interview with Qiu Jian:

society has always been dilatory in understanding and restoring historical truths; perhaps the west needs a long time before they can accept China and its ideologies, but we are patient. We will never wage war; what we need is peace. (1999, 35)

From this perspective, Han’s translation activities during this stage can be interpreted as a form of “cultural translation”; that is, her translations were “not just of texts”, but of “representations and identities” (Pym 2011, 79). They bridged the divide by fostering intercultural communication, operating not just a purely linguistic transfer but a transfer of “insider” cultural knowledge for the target readers (Katan 2009, 75). Han’s espousal of such sentiments leaves us to wonder: how exactly was she able to introduce China to the world in her many speeches and translations during the period from the 1950s to the 1970s? Was her intention broadly intercultural or was she driven by the more propagandist aims of her sponsors in Beijing?

To answer these questions, we must first explore Han's evolving political and cultural identity – in particular, as developed through her membership of the China Writers Association (CWA). Han's membership of the association reveals that she (together with writers like Rewi Alley) was one of the select group of CWA writers and translators who were not of Chinese nationality; it did not even take long after the establishment of the association for them to become members (Han 1999, 35).<sup>4</sup> Why then is her membership significant? While the CWA was intended to sponsor literary activities, artistic exchanges, and rights and interests, as a Chinese government agency it had to reflect Maoist ideological principles. As such, the association exercised political control and leadership over the writers' literary activities, often dictating the way the writers could and should frame their works to fit in with the mainstream ideological narrative. During the National Literary Translation Conference (全国文学翻译工作会议) convened by the CWA in 1954, Mao Dun noted that there were still many issues and flaws regarding translation activities in China then, the first being a severe lack of organization (Mao 1954, 5). Mao argues that this reflects how translation activities in the past were often subject to the tastes and preferences of individual translators and privately owned publishing houses (6). After translation activities came under the purview of the state, errors in translated works were often associated with, first and foremost, the translator's inadequacy in political calibre; problems of language proficiency and content mastery mattered less to the quality of the translated works than the translators' political leanings (Liang 1950, 23). The emphasis on political alignment increased with the start of the Three-anti Campaign (三反运动),<sup>5</sup> during which translators selected and critiqued translated works depending on the compatibility with the government narrative.<sup>6</sup> Translators soon realized that the quality of their translation had become secondary to their political correctness under such a regime (see Cui 2013).

Furthermore, from the 1950s to the 1970s, the Chinese government brought together many scholars and translators – working in numerous languages – to translate Chinese literary classics, as well as more contemporary publications by the leaders, and historical records of the revolution. Was Han, as a member of the CWA, also made to adopt the ideology, or did she embrace it willingly? Was she, as the journalist and China scholar Robert Elgant remarked in 1980, an “outmoded sycophant” (quoted in Fox 2012)?

The truth is that Han was never subjected to the ideological political manipulation experienced by some of her Chinese counterparts largely because of her identity as a foreign author and her life experiences. Her view was that “China [ ... ] means the Chinese people” (Han 1980, 153); she performed her translation activities because she identified with the Chinese people, although her political statements on reform and socialism suggest political sympathy as well. Her status as a foreigner provided her with some concessions and protected her against political persecution whenever she criticized certain social

phenomena of the nation. She pointed out that, at that time, “an official in China, whether communist or not, was simply not accustomed to being contradicted” (152), and that another 20 years were needed before all such confusions would be sorted out, after which she believed that China would be democratic (153). Han was never a blind supporter of the country or the party; she had her own stance and views, as evidenced by her refusal to write the biography of Mao Zedong’s wife, Jiang Qing (Han 1991, 165).<sup>7</sup> She communicated subjective opinions about the situation in China, such as when she introduced the Hundred Flowers Campaign to the west, and openly discussed them, whether they were mildly critical of the regime or not. While Han was not able to completely shatter the ingrained stereotypes held by western societies, her efforts significantly contributed to intercultural understanding; to some degree, her political biographies of the CCP, its leaders, and Chinese society “decolonized” or “de-orientalized” western public consciousness of China. It can also be argued that Han’s positive portrayals of Chinese leaders were born out of her admiration of the leaders’ charisma and not out of her compliance with the ideals of the CCP. When we compare her translations and writings about Zhou to the works of other (China-based) translators during the 1950s to 1970s, there is a stark difference. Whereas the other translators had to fit in with the larger narrative set out by the state, Han focused more on Zhou’s charisma and his strong moral code.

### **The second phase: Translation as an art form and a creative process (the 1980s to the 1990s)**

The Cultural Revolution saw a long hiatus in the nurturing of translators in China, resulting in an alarming variation in the quality of available translations. Yet, following Mao’s death in 1976, a new openness and a surge in translations of foreign texts ushered in the historic “fourth wave” of translation activity in China. Many western literary works were being rapidly translated, though without regard for the quality of the translations. During this time, Han made significant contributions to the improvement of the PRC’s translation sector. She established the Translators Association of China in 1982, with which she maintained a cordial relationship, setting up the Han Suyin Award for Young Translators (韩素音青年翻译奖) in 1989; both the association and the award helped with a systematic training of translators in China. In particular, the young translators award, set up to nurture talents in the field, helped promote the sector and has since become one of its cornerstones. Its emphasis on bilingual proficiency has also become a guidepost for translators in China. Han also served as the first consultant for the *Chinese Translators Journal* in 1995. During her term, she frequently met with the leaders of the Translators Association of China and the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, and editors from the *Chinese Translators Journal*.

During this period, Han constantly spoke with practising translators, teachers, and students about her beliefs about translation and vision for translation in China. On June 14, 1986, she spoke with Jiang Zhuangfang, Chair of the Translators Association of China; Ye Shuifu, Deputy Chair of the Translators Association of China; Song Shusheng, Director of the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau; Ye Junjian, famed translator; and select members of the Translators Association of China. During the seminar, Han opined that “translation is an important task”, that “China has seen huge improvements in the translation scene”, and that “literary translation is no simple task”. She also claimed that “the publication market in Europe is being invaded”, that “the quality of translation by the United Nations is very high”, and that “Chinese must translate their books”. Aside from these views, Han also argued for the “inseparability of literature and scientific language” and discussed issues relating to “machine translation” and “day-to-day conversations”. In particular, she evaluated Chinese translations as “being highly accurate and faithful to the source text, though more needs to be done in terms of its poetics and aesthetics”. Han also posited that “translation is an art, not dissimilar to writing and creative work, and is an extremely complex task involving multifaceted knowledge and a good grasp of cultures”.<sup>8</sup> On March 6, 1992, she spoke with the directors and chairs of the Foreign Affairs Office of Shanghai (上海市外事办公室), the Shanghai Interpreters’ Association (上海市外事译协), the Shanghai Translators’ Association (上海市翻译家协会), and the Shanghai Science and Technology Translation Society (上海市科技翻译学会), where she emphasized that the transmission of knowledge and information is intricately linked with translation in modern society. Han posited that translation is both an art and a scientific discipline requiring research and study. In her eyes, scientific translation and literary translation should be studied as a single field, given that modern literature often includes scientific knowledge. Han also expressed her hopes to see more translations of science fiction, as they contain many new terms that deserve attention and deliberation, and to study more intently the history and development of translation across the globe (see Han 1992, 22).

On November 19, 1993, Han was invited by the Translators Association of China, the Beijing Translators’ Association (北京市翻译工作者协会), the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (外语教学与研究出版社), and the *Chinese Translators Journal* to speak with the leadership, lecturers, and students at the Beijing Foreign Studies University and other institutions, and members of the Translators Association of China. At the conference, Han encouraged the students to become proficient in both their heritage language and a foreign language to help their nation succeed and prosper. She argued that Mandarin would become more important as the Chinese economy boomed and the political scene reformed, and the Chinese, particularly the young, should realize that they had an immense responsibility and stake in the

development of the country.<sup>9</sup>

A month later, on December 23, 1993, Han expressed her hopes that the students at Hangzhou University (杭州大学) would “put in more effort to learn English” because one would need “more than one language” as China underwent reform; knowing more than one language would help the students “learn from the West” and “refresh their perspectives with the newfound knowledge”. Han was invited by Hangzhou University to give this talk as an honorary professor of the institution.<sup>10</sup> In 1994, Han re-emphasized

her belief that “translation is as important as creative writing, and that it is just a creative process in another form” when presenting at the Beijing Foreign Studies University on the topic of translation (论翻译).

As the above summary illustrates, Han engaged in multiple discussions with Chinese scholarship, given the changes and developments in the field, often talking about the level of content, mastery, proficiency, and capabilities she hoped to see in translators. Her beliefs and views about translation were disseminated through newsletters and proceedings of her talks, seminars, and presentations published by the various cornerstone journals and media outlets in China. Her views can be summarized as: (a) translation is an art form as important as creative writing and should be considered a type of creative process; and for this reason, translators should be given a higher salary, implying that their status in China should be elevated. These views are aligned with the “cultural turn” that first gained prominence amongst western translators in the 1990s and contrasts with established Chinese views on translation. Traditionally in Chinese translation practices, the source text is accorded a higher status than the translated work. Guo Moruo, an acclaimed Chinese translator, has even compared the source text to an “unmarried child”, with translation performing the role of a “matchmaker”; in essence, a “subsidiary” to the act of writing and creating, a position that demeans the role of translation (Chen 2000, 257). The subjectivity and creativity of the translators were disregarded; the artistic value of translations overlooked. The cultural turn in the field of translation studies, first outlined by Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere (1990), helped translators realize that translation is a creative process. The translator’s subjectivity and ideology, the sponsor, the publisher, and even readers all play a crucial role in the final product. In essence, translation is a form of “rewriting” and can exist independently of its source. Han’s views on translation demonstrate that she had a profound understanding of what translation is at its core; her views provided the Chinese translation sector with a new perspective and angle from which to approach their translation activities. She helped translators understand that they can achieve their “pressing” goals of cross-cultural communication and ideological emancipation by purposefully selecting texts that meet the needs and conditions of a China that is undergoing economic reform, translating them using specific strategies. Given the delay in Chinese scholarly adoption of western literary theories of translation, Han’s views also helped Chinese translators to learn “rewriting” methods, such as ellipsis and paraphrasing, to recreate the culture of the source language within their translations.<sup>11</sup>

### **The third phase: Nurturing translators to promote Chinese culture to “go out” (the 1990s to the 21st century)**

Han stopped making long trips back to China after 1997 owing to her increasingly frail health, but she remained concerned with the development of

the Chinese translation sector. She observed that since the start of the 1990s, Chinese publishing houses had produced series and volumes of books about translations, collections of works by foreign authors, and complete compilations of collected works, of which English texts comprised the great majority (Zha and Xie 2007, 773, 777). Because of the inequality in cross-cultural exchange, she advocated that China should promote its own culture to the world through translation. The ex-editor-in-chief of Yilin Press, Li Jingduan, recalls his conversation with Han, the Chinese writer Feng Yidai, and the US Chinese writer Nie Hualing, and discussion of the idea of “globalizing Chinese writers”.<sup>12</sup> Han felt that writers of earlier generations like Lin Yutang, Mao Dun, Lao She, Ba Jin, and Qian Zhongshu had no issues communicating with foreigners because they were proficient in various foreign languages, but that current writers lacked this multilingual proficiency. For reciprocal understanding between them and the foreign world, translation was a necessary but underused tool (Li 2012). To spread Chinese culture and strengthen China’s hard and soft power, uncovering talents in translation was imperative. This view is paramount in Han’s letter congratulating Lin Tianhuang for the publication of his 1993 *A Companion for Chinese Translators*, where she writes that:

without translation, people will remain ignorant about another’s culture; without translation, diplomatic, economic, cultural, and even technological ties will not be possible – as such, for China to be recognized internationally and to be modernized fully, a strong team of translators is more than just necessary; without high-quality translation works, there will not be progress. (quoted in Lin 2013, 82)

Han’s appeal to nurture translators squares with China’s circumstances at that time. Despite boasting a glorious and rich heritage, China was in no way a culturally powerful country and was, therefore, concerned with strengthening its influence through promoting its heritage and traditions (Wang 2017). Yet, for such a development, a nation needs not only a clearly defined national culture, but also a way to proactively promote it globally. This issue is likely to become more pressing as the PRC develops its current expansive foreign policy.

China grew steadily and established a stronger global presence after the “reform and opening-up” in 1978. The Chinese government therefore decided to translate classic works to showcase China’s heritage and innovativeness. In October 2000, the Fifth Plenum of the 15th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China passed the 10th Five-Year Plan based on the *Recommendations of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China for the 10th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development for the People’s Republic of China*. It explicitly stated the “Going Out” policy, at least

economically. By the time of the Communist Party's 17th National Congress on October 25, 2007, then-Chairman Hu Jintao recommended that China strengthen its cross-cultural exchanges, imbibing the achievements of the world while strengthening and expanding its sphere of influence. At this point, the cultural "Going Out" concept began to strengthen and take flight (Geng 2019, 19–20). Han's earlier appeals for developing the translation sector and her belief that translation could bring Chinese culture to the world undoubtedly paved the way for the government's strategic plans for the nation and may even have helped the movement gain traction. Twenty to 30 years after China underwent economic reform, the nation has gained both economic and political standing globally; this has facilitated the exportation of Chinese culture. Even as the government "focused manpower, consolidated all resources, and invested large sums" in order to promote globalization of Chinese culture, the initiatives "failed to see returns and the tangible results were not ideal" (Geng 2019, 4). In 2000, the literary magazine *Chinese Literature* was discontinued, and the book series Panda Books struggled to stay afloat; even state-published translated works were not well received – the Chinese translation sector was in a unique predicament (3). This raises the question: if going global had become a strategic goal supported by the Chinese government, coupled with the appropriate conditions, the translation sector should have experienced growth – but why hasn't it?

Xie Tianzhen proposes four main reasons for the challenges currently plaguing the Chinese translation sector: (a) a misconceptualization of translation and acts of translation; (b) an inability to adopt different practices for translating into and translating from Chinese; (c) a lack of understanding about the patterns in cross-linguistic and cross-cultural translation; and (d) a poor awareness of the "time gap" and "language gap" between east and west (cited in Geng 2019, 8–13). The "time gap" refers to the difference in exposure times: the Chinese had studied the west comprehensively and in great depth for over a century, while the west had only begun proactively understanding China through literature and culture in the last 20 to 30 years. This "time gap" provides Chinese readers with a significant head start, as they are now able to read and comprehend western literary and academic works with ease, unlike western readers. The "language gap" refers to the difference in ease of learning a language: a Chinese speaker can learn and master European languages, such as English, French, German, Spanish, and Russian, with greater ease than speakers of these languages learn and master Chinese. There is, therefore, a relative dearth of scholars well versed in the language and culture and of readers who can understand Chinese texts with relative ease. This has led to a disconnect between Chinese translators and foreign readers, to whose needs and desires translations do not appeal; in essence, Chinese translators find themselves unable to cope with western demands when performing cross-cultural translations. If this problem is to be resolved, then translators and publishers should be trained, and the strategies undertaken by the translation

sector revisited and revised. More importantly, being directly involved in cross-cultural translations, translators have full control over the quality of the translations and the direction to take; given that the east and west have an unequal say on the global stage, resolving these problems becomes critical to the translators. Belonging to the less influential culture, translators should not treat translation as a simple linguistic conversion between two languages; instead, they have to work on cultural translation to achieve intercultural communication and understanding, and, eventually, to help globalize Chinese culture. According to the Chinese government, the transmission of Chinese culture serves two main purposes: to raise cultural awareness about China; that is, to help non-Chinese gain an understanding of the Chinese culture, including the language, through translations and cultural visits; and to promote global acceptance of Chinese culture by means of cross-cultural communication and exchanges with the different nations (see State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China 2016). To fulfil these purposes, in particular the latter, the Chinese government sought to foster translators who were not only bilingual or multilingual, but also bicultural or even multicultural. A team of translators well versed in different languages of the world, as Han puts it, would help propel Chinese culture forward. Her more practical approach to translation proved to be valuable for translators as China sought to prioritize the training of translators by deepening their understanding of global culture. In the same vein, the Han Suyin Award for Young Translators that she helped set up has become more important for identifying and fostering skilled translators in future generations. Held annually since 1989 as a measure for the Han Suyin Award for Young Translators, the Han Suyin International Translation Competition (韩素音国际翻译大赛) is the longest-running, largest, and most influential translation competition in China.

Ever since its inauguration, it has helped identify many talented young translators, who went on to pursue a career in translation thanks in part to this competition. Domestically, it challenged existing paradigms within the field and motivated over 200 colleges across China to offer postgraduate courses in translation and interpretation, including numerous PhD programmes, allowing careers to be pursued in less niche areas than before (Zu 2017, 15). Internationally, the competition and award helped the Chinese translation field mature, connect with its global counterparts (Zu 2017) and elevate the quality of translations and translators. Attracting participation from the brightest young translators, the submissions are put through a stringent, double-blind judging process. The pieces for translation are also painstakingly selected by the organizing committee after considering the literary value, poetics, and linguistic ecology of the source text; participants are judged on principles of fidelity (信), expressiveness (达), poetics (美), and relevance (切) (Zu 2017, 15). The source texts selected for competition have often been literary

pieces, but, given the increasing prominence of commercial translation in China, the organizing committee has also considered including business discourses as the source text for translation; the 23rd Han Suyin Award for Young Translators contest, organized by the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, initiated this development. Such a change is necessary, as commercial translation, like economic integration with the international market, is an inevitable activity; undoubtedly, it can be attributed to Han Suyin, who had sown the seeds for mainstreaming translation in China (Zu 2017, 16).

Although Han's practice of translation in China can be classified into three distinct phases, each is a development based on the previous one. The first phase was characterized by the Cold War, during which time Han noticed that the political climate then influenced US-led western perceptions of China between the 1950s and 1970s. This motivated her to bridge the ideological differences of the Cold War through her historical writing and biographies, which were written in English and French but drew on Chinese sources. It was apparent through the translation activities that her approach to translation at that time was intricately linked with her creative development and cosmopolitan cultural identity. As China began its economic reforms in the 1980s, Han's approach to translation gravitated to a theoretical and philosophical understanding. While such an exploration of the field was a product of its time, Han's reflection upon the historical significance of translation was based upon her earlier translation activities and practices in the first phase. Aligning with economic growth and developments in China, Han returned to the practice of translation from her theoretical pursuits, marking the transition into the third phase of her translation activities. She no longer focused on herself as an individual translator, however, but, instead, accessed the resources of the government, the institutes of higher learning and the Translators Association to identify and nurture translators in China. From her individual practice to her reflection and academic pursuits, and eventually, to a nationalistic approach to translation, Han's involvement in translation activities through the three phases reflects a crystallization of her life experiences and world views. Using the history and culture of Mainland China between the 1950s and the 21st century as contexts for Han's translation activities and philosophies, we find that her views on translation were not just following the needs of society, but also forward-looking and helpful in propelling the translation sector onward. Her contributions to the Chinese translation sector are profound and lasting, although they are all but invisible to readers outside China; her translation philosophies have much practical relevance and significance, and from them, contemporary translators can still draw lessons.

## Notes

1. The three previous waves in the history of translation in China include

translations of scripture between the Eastern Han and Song dynasties, translations of western technological advancements during the fall of the Ming dynasty and the rise of the Qing dynasty, and translations of western political, philosophical, and literary discourses between the fall of Qing and the May Fourth Movement.

2. The Chinese translation of this book, 早晨的洪流: 毛泽东与中国革命, was produced by Wei Wenshuo and Qi Li and published by Beijing Publishing House in 1979. A later version titled 赤潮: 毛泽东与中国革命 was published by Shanxi People's Publishing House in 1993.
3. Han Suyin visited the PRC in 1999, when she agreed to be interviewed by Qiu Jianjin, a reporter from Xinhua News Agency. As a special correspondent with *Cultural Exchange* (文化交流), Qiu conducted a three-hour interview with Han at the Beijing Hotel (see Han 1999).
4. The exact period of Han's official membership of the China Writers Association is still unknown, and has not been validated. On its founding in 1949, the association was named the China National Literature Workers Association (中国文联), and then renamed the China Writers Association (中国作协) in 1953. Han only arrived in China in 1956, seven years after the establishment of the Association. The "not long after the establishment", as claimed by Qiu Jian, thus becomes a point of contention. However, the fact that Han did join the China Writers Association should not be disputed, given that Qiu's 1999 essay was based on an interview with her, and that Han has always declared her intimate affiliation with the China Writers Association.
5. The Three-anti Campaign (三反运动) (1951–52) was aimed at members within the CCP and bureaucratic officials to weed out corruption, waste, and bureaucracy.
6. In April 1952, *Translation Bulletin* (翻译通报) published a special series on the critique and self-critique of translators in the context of the Three-anti Campaign. In the foreword, the editors claim that the volume was a beginning to the campaign as "part of the ideological remolding in the translation sector, and we still have a long way to go" (Editors 1952, 3).
7. Jiang Qing was a Chinese communist revolutionary, an actress, and a major political figure during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). Married to Mao in Yan'an in November 1938, she was Mao's fourth wife and served as the inaugural "First Lady" of the PRC. She played a major role in the Cultural Revolution and in forming the radical political alliance known as the "Gang of Four".
8. Han's speech was later published in *Trends and Trails* (动向与线索) and the *Shanghai Journal of Translators for Science and Technology* (上海科技翻译). The *Chinese Translators Journal* (中国翻译) also published the seminar's newsletter (see Jiao and Gao 1987, 38; Han 1986, 59).
9. This presentation was published as a newsletter in issue 1 of the *Chinese Translators Journal* (Rui 1994, 18).
10. This talk was held in conjunction with the inauguration of the Han Suyin

Literature Fund (韩素音文学基金). The presentation was later summarized in the *Journal of Hangzhou University* (Jin 1994).

11. An early attempt at systematically researching translation activities as a creative process from a cultural perspective was undertaken by Professor Xie (1999) of Shanghai International Studies University in his *Medio-translatology* (译介学).
12. In his recollection, Li Jingdian mentioned that the conversation occurred in the early 1990s, after he took over as editor-in-chief of Yilin Press, but did not specify the time.

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