The 1980s’ Chinese Translations of The Second Sex and the Situation of Chinese Women in the 1980s’ China

Abstract: This paper examines the three 1980s’ Chinese translations of The Second Sex, focusing on the book title translation, because the titles of these translations all contain the word ‘woman’ or ‘female’, while the titles of the other five Chinese translations published in the 1990s and the new century are simply faithful representation of the source text title. The first Chinese translation published in 1986 is a translation of Book II Woman’s Life Today, a reprint of a translation from Taiwan, entitled 第二性——女人 [The Second Sex—Women]. The added ‘women’ clearly explains to Chinese readers of that time the meaning of ‘the second sex’. In 1988, another translation of Book II was published (hereafter 1988-II). In the same year, an abridged translation of Book I Facts and Myths (hereafter 1988-I) was published for Chinese readers to have access to Book I and have a deeper and more comprehensive knowledge of Beauvoir’s thoughts. The 1988-II is renamed as 女人是什么 [What is Woman], underlining the motif of the work. Interestingly, the 1988-I which consists of scholarly theories was given a very exoteric and eye-catching title ‘女性的秘密’ [Female Secrets]. Then, why the translators of the 1980s foreground ‘woman’ in the title, while the others did not? This study intends to answer the question through examining the situation of Chinese women and the social context in the 1980s’ China to further shed light on the feature of translation as a hologram.

Bio: Zhongli Yu is associate professor of Translation Studies and lead of Gender Studies Group of Institute of Asian and Pacific Studies at the University of Nottingham Ningbo China. She holds MSc in Translation Studies (University of Edinburgh) and PhD in Translation and Intercultural Studies (University of Manchester). Her research interests include gender/women/feminism in/and translation, translation of women’s/feminist writing, translation of practical texts (e.g. museum texts), interpreting in war settings, and translation education. She is the author of Translating Feminism in China: Gender, Sexuality and Censorship (Routledge, 2015) and ‘Translation as adaptation and selection: A feminist case’ (Perspectives 25(1), 2017).