

**Review of *The Cultural Turn in Translation Studies* by Wang  
Ning, ISBN: 978-1-032-63819-5, Routledge. 2024.**

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## Book Review

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Since its establishment as an independent field of research, Translation Studies has had more propensity towards the linguistic theories such as the concept of equivalence, quality of translation and models of translation (Vasheghani Farahani, 2013). However, in the 1990s, one witnessed a radical shift from pure linguistic theories towards cultural and literal ones. This massive shift is literally called “cultural turn” and is best exemplified by the seminal works of such scholars as Bassnett and Lefevere (Hmala, 2023).

Indeed, the cultural turn emphasizes the diversity and hybridity of cultures, recognizing the fact that translations often involve the blending of multiple cultural factors in the source and target languages. In other words, this line of research sheds light on the complex nexus between language, culture, and translation and tries to bridge the gap between them (Munday, 2022).

Structurally framed into ten chapters, spanning thematically the issue of cultural turn in Translation Studies, this absorbing monograph makes a considerable contribution to the field and is an effort to push the theoretical boundaries of the mutual interconnectedness of culture and translation with a designated focus on the Chinese language. The author was successful in consolidating various chapters to delve systematically into the concept of culture in the domain of Translation Studies and its pivotal role in Chinese culture. When read in one sitting, it becomes immediately conspicuous that the book presents reasoned arguments for the emergence of cultural turn in Translation Studies.

The first chapter under the title of “The Cultural Turn in Translation and the Turn to Translation Studies in Cultural Studies” functions as an introduction and lays the ground for the theoretical issues as well as the history of cultural and literary perspectives of translation. In addition, it explains, very succinctly, the history of translation as an academic field of inquiry and how it developed out of linguistics. The author professes that in the current stage of globalization and the leading role of English as an international and hegemonic language, the need for translation continues to exist. However, the process of globalization has caused cultures to become more diversified rather than uniform. This is bound, of course, to mean that, it is the essential role of scholars to look at translation through the lens of culture as “translation research that is carried out from the perspective of cultural studies has become a cutting-edge disciplinary” (p. 3).

Following the introductory chapter, the next chapter continues to explore the theories of translation pertaining to Cultural Studies. It offers a thorough insight into the history of Translation Studies. The author is admirably clear in his attempt to provide the prospective reader with a broad delineation of the history of Translation Studies and construct a solid rapport with Cultural Studies. In this regard, Ning refers to the central question of whether Translation Studies is an independent academic field of study or an art which can be gained by some scattered experience. By quoting well-versed and prominent scholars such as Derrida, Nida and Venuti, the author approaches the discipline of Translation Studies from various perspectives running the gamut from literary, cultural, and linguistic to artistic ones and concludes that Translation Studies must be recognized as an academic field of research.

Chapter three moves on to study the cultural turn of translation. This chapter is a considerable coverage devoted to the critical nexus between translation and deconstruction- a theory which is an “invaluable legacy for contemporary translation theories” (p. 29). There is no denying that deconstruction theory

of translation is in the works of German scholar, Walter Benjamin, especially the one entitled “The Task of the Translator”. Recognizing the critical role of Benjamin, the chapter continues to flesh out the theory of deconstruction by reflecting the works of the French scholar Derrida who added significantly to the field. Ning tries to recap the question raised by Derrida: “What is a relevant translation?” The authors conclude that by courtesy of Derrida’s work, the theory of deconstruction gained significance and replaced the earlier dominance of structuralism and made a far-reaching impact on translation.

The sequencing chapter goes on to take a deeper and detailed look at the deconstruction theories of translation. As a matter of fact, chapter four is exclusively focused on one of the areas of the school of Cultural Translation, that is to say, domestication and foreignization - a theory which is in the theoretical context of deconstruction school of translation. It came into fruition through the works of the German scholar, Schleiermacher, and flourished further by the Italian translator scholar, Venuti. He zooms in on translation from the dichotomy of (in) visibility of translator and divides translation into domesticated or foreignized. Venuti apparently claims that the foreignization translation is better as it helps to disseminate diversified cultures through translation.

One of the theories which is directly taken from the Cultural Turn in Translation Studies is postcolonial translation. It is indeed an intercivilizational account of cultural aspects of translation which found its foot in the 1980s through the research of such scholars as Said, Spivak and Bhabha. In chapter five, the author succinctly reports the various aspects of this theory and concludes that although postcolonial theory has been extensively examined in Cultural Studies and is regarded as a strong theoretical framework, in Translation Studies, it has its pros and cons.

Translation Studies has long been influenced by linguo-centric theories and scholars in Linguistics have been preoccupied by the long debate of equivalence, translator faithfulness and source vs. target languages. However, with the advent of comparative literature, new schools of thought (deconstruction as an example) came into being, opening new horizons for the study of translation. For this reason, chapter seven clarifies the interconnectedness of Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies with a designated focus on Translation Studies. The author concludes that the linguistic aspects of translation have now been subsumed by the cultural theories as they are found more pertinent for running research in this line of study.

Chapter eight deals with translation and the relocation of cultures. By relocation, Ning means that by the function of translation/ translators, cultures are relocated from the source text into the target one as a reciprocal process. He contends that translation can play a positive role in “remapping world literatures” (p. 166). To justify this issue, the author refers to Chinese and English languages as a case in point. He concludes that translation of excellent foreign works into Chinese is essential for the globalization of Chinese culture and literature and translation will assist the Chinese culture to gain currency in an international scale.

Under the spell of intersemiotic translation and the groundbreaking work of Jakobson, chapter seven marks the “intersemiotic translation” and the “visual turn in Translation Studies”. Ning argues cogently that “The function of translation... is manifested in two ways: one can translate and explain images in another cultural context with words, and at the same time, the words can also participate in the

construction of a visual culture” (p. 136) by taking two interrelated aspects into account: The aesthetic features of postmodern consumer culture and iconographical turn in contemporary culture. The former takes a Marxist stance and eyeballs into the consumptive features of contemporary culture, whereas the latter examines the combination of textual and pictorial language (image for example) between the source and target texts. The author posits that images are inherently capable of making up for the inadequacy of verbal expressions, and it is therefore the very job of translators to translate them intersemiotically into the target language to be able to convey the meaning into the target language.

The last chapter investigates the role of translation in the Chinese revolution. As the author purports, it leaves no doubt that cultural turn took place a long time ago in China and brought about massive changes in the Chinese revolution and modernization. In this regard, the author considers translation as an instrument of cultural enlightenment in the context of China and holds the view that translation ensued into a massive cultural turn and opened the eyes of the Chinese to the world.

It goes without saying that this volume adds to our knowledge of the essential role of culture in translation. Part of the appeal and strength of this book consists of the fact that it gives a detailed account of the way culture can be studied in relation to translation. Indeed, it is a full-fledged effort to bring the cultural theories of translation to the fore. It is therefore a compelling and must-read publication for seasoned readers in the field. Overall, the book provides an insightful account of the cultural aspects of translation and provides readers with accessible theoretical models for doing research in the domain of culture and translation. Lastly, this book must be appreciated for the high quality of print, which makes it an enjoyable resource to read.

Despite its strengths, it is reasonable to conclude that this book is not presented as a pedagogically sound work of scholarship. Indeed, all the chapters revolve around some theoretical issues, leaving a big room for practical and research-based aspects of cultural turns in translation. For this reason, the current book is by no means suitable for doing practical research in the domain of cultural translation.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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**Mehrdad Vasheghani Farahani** holds a Ph.D. in Translation Studies from Leipzig University, Germany. His areas of research interest include Translation Studies, Corpus Linguistics, and Intercultural Communication.