Cultus

Past and present
in translation collaborative practices and cooperation

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An introduction

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1. Preamble

In recent years, the landscape of translation studies has undergone a transformation as scholars increasingly recognise and emphasise collaboration as an integral aspect of the translation process. While historical translation studies have traditionally focused on the solitary translator, contemporary research challenges this singular perspective and highlights the collaborative nature of translation (Cordingley and Frigau Manning 2017; Folaron 2010; Malmkjaer 2013; O'Hagan 2013). This changing understanding recognises that the notion of the solitary translator is culturally determined and that translation processes inherently involve multiple agents (Bistué 2016).

Despite this shift in perception, there remains a significant gap in research: a comprehensive history that explicitly focuses on the cooperative strategies and collaborative efforts of translators and language mediators. This gap prompts a critical examination of collaborative practices throughout history, shedding light on the dynamic and evolving nature of cooperation – or the absence of it – in the fields of translation and intercultural communication.

The conceptualisation of translation as a solitary enterprise dates back to the 1960s, when Eugene Nida introduced a division of translation into

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[1] The first two sections of this Introduction were written by Mirella Agorni, the third one by Giovanni Iamartino.

decoding and encoding phases, with a solitary translator mediating between the source and target languages. While recognising the complexity of the translation process, Nida's model reinforced the prevailing perception of translation as an individual enterprise. Paradoxically, as a leading figure in collaborative efforts to translate the Bible, Nida himself contradicted the solitary agency he advocated. This paradox embodies the historical development of Western translation thinking, which has often emphasised the individual translator and his cultural and time-based positioning (Delisle and Woodsworth 1995, 2012).

Contemporary studies have challenged this bias, recognising translation as inherently collaborative. However, despite advances in specific areas such as early modern cultural exchange, feminist collaborative practices and audiovisual translation, a coherent and comprehensive history that focuses on collaborative strategies and practices remains a significant gap. In the context of the recent global pandemic, where the need for cooperation and collaboration has become paramount, the study of collaborative practices in the historical landscape of translation and language mediation takes on added relevance. This effort goes beyond mere archaeological exploration; it becomes a moral imperative, prompting scholars to examine the historical foundations of collaborative translation in the light of the contemporary need for collective action.

In the following pages, we undertake an in-depth journey that explores the impact of collaboration, cooperation (or its absence) in the historical context of the development of translation and intercultural communication. Our focus goes beyond traditional individual-centred narratives, exploring the strategies and practices of collaboration that have shaped the path of translation in different eras. Our aim is to uncover a spectrum of effective – or sometimes ineffective – collaboration strategies employed by language mediators throughout history. Through this interdisciplinary exploration, we aim to link historical and contemporary perspectives, offering a deeper understanding of collaborative translation practices and their impact on the evolving landscape of translation studies.

2. Contributions to the journal issue

Once the role of collaboration as a fundamental element of the translation process has been acknowledged, it is opportune to look more closely at some of the collaborative practices that have emerged throughout history

in order to identify the effective strategies used by language mediators. Indeed, the articles in this issue of *Cultus* contribute to a broader understanding of collaborative translation, as they focus on a variety of historical periods, cultural contexts, and methodological approaches.

The first two contributions deal with the collaborative nature of Chinese Buddhist translation. **Tianran Wang** explores the collaborative nature of Chinese Buddhist translation from the second to the fifth centuries, a practice that has endured for nearly 1,000 years. Drawing on historical sources, the article examines collaborative Buddhist translation during its formative years, emphasising a linear-cyclical process. Wang challenges the conventional notion of translators as confined to the 'in-between' and expands the connotation of 'translate'. In this context, the position and dichotomy of source text (ST) and target text (TT) are reinterpreted. A case study is used to illustrate the conflicts inherent in collaboration. The research sheds light on the nuanced dynamics of Chinese Buddhist translation, presenting it as an evolving process that goes beyond traditional perceptions of translators and the translation process. In a way, **Lifei Pan**'s article complements Wang's by examining the collaborative translation of Buddhist texts and focusing on the historical development from ancient Chinese gatherings to contemporary organisations. The translation of Buddhist scriptures into Chinese, beginning in the Eastern Han Dynasty, is regarded as China's first large-scale translation project, evolving from individual foreign monks to more organised efforts. The study contrasts this historical context with the translation of Chinese Buddhist scriptures into English in the 19th century, marked by the establishment of organisations such as the Buddhist Text Translation Society and Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai. Using the Lotus Sūtra as a case study, Pan examines the practices of ancient Chinese translation societies and compares them with their modern counterparts. The research highlights both the enduring benefits of ancient methods for contemporary translators and the emergence of new forms of collaborative translation.

We move from the East to 19th-century Europe with Agorni's and Ragazzini's articles. **Mirella Agorni** discusses the potential for collaboration between translation studies and book history, emphasising the interdependence between translation activities and the changing conditions of book production that have expanded the literary market. Scholars such as Littau (2016), Belle and Hosington (2017), and Coldiron (2012, 2015) have explored this interdependence, with Littau highlighting the role of technologies in the production and distribution of translations. Agorni

stresses the importance of considering book format, paratextual elements, and data on the production and distribution of materials in order to understand the translation process over time. Such factors, often overlooked by translation studies scholars who tend to focus on linguistic and cultural adaptation, deserve equal attention. Firmly grounded in translation studies, Agorni's article aims to explore the theoretical intersections between historical translation studies and the discipline of book history. Using the concept of 'collaboration', the author attempts to analyse the relationship between translation and the evolution of the book market. A brief case study on the development of translation theory and practice in 19th-century literature is presented to illustrate the potential for greater interaction between the two disciplines. **Beatrice Ragazzini**'s study, instead, explores a 19th-century academic debate on the periodisation of medieval English architecture, highlighting the collaborative nature of term formation. The article explores how cooperation between experts shaped architectural vocabulary, drawing attention to the translation perspective through a comparison of English and French nomenclatures. Despite the national character of architecture, the study reveals that the formation of terms has been influenced by foreign scholars, fostering international communication and the exchange of ideas. Based on Sager's theoretical framework (1990, 1997), the analysis portrays term formation as a collaborative practice with multiple actors and factors contributing to the evolution of scientific language.

The articles by Kim Grego and Eleonora Federici deal with Italian-American relationships, from different perspectives though. **Kim Grego** investigates the collaborative translation strategy between Italian writer and translator Cesare Pavese and his Italian-American correspondent Antonio Chiuminatto. Focusing on Pavese's role as an 'Americanist', the study examines their correspondence from 1929 to 1933. Pavese repeatedly sought Chiuminatto's expertise, particularly when he had to tackle the translation of American English slang and idiomatic expressions, thus shedding light on their collaborative translation process. The study frames their correspondence within the concept of 'collaborative translation', exploring Chiuminatto's contribution to Pavese's translation activities and its implications for Pavese's role as an 'Americanist'. **Eleonora Federici**'s essay explores the diachronic exchange of feminist ideas and practices between North America and Italy, focusing on the translation of feminist texts from the 1970s through the 1990s. The essay examines key texts that illustrate the intersection of feminist theories and practices across national

borders, navigating different cultural, social and political contexts. It emphasises how translations played a crucial role in disseminating US-born feminist ideas and fostering collaborative practices within Italian feminist collectives in the 1970s. Federici's work traces the legacy of American feminism in Italy by analysing collaborative translation efforts involving translators, scholars, and feminist intellectuals. The essay adopts a diachronic perspective, highlighting influential core texts that shaped Italian feminist and academic discourse from the 1970s to the 2000s. This exploration goes beyond theoretical exchanges and takes on a pedagogical dimension through recent anthologies of feminist writings.

The interplay between translation and ideological positioning also comes to the fore in **Christina Delistathi**'s article on the collaborative translation practices used by the Communist Party of Greece in the 1950s to translate Marxist texts into Greek. The party's aim to dominate Marxist discourse led to the development of a collaborative model referred to as the 'industrialisation of translation'. Inspired by Mossop's (2006) criteria underlying the industrialisation of translation, such as centralisation, division of labour and quality control, the translation process resembled an assembly line. Employees, following the principles of industrial production, added components in sequence to produce accurate translations of theoretical Marxist texts. This assembly-line approach facilitated the codification of Marxist theory and the production of reliable translations, emphasising the centrality of collaboration in both completing translations and ensuring their accuracy.

The following three contributions to the *Cultus* issue deal with the collaborative element in dramatic and literary translation. **Massimiliano Morini** discusses the evolving discourse on collaborative translation, highlighting the emergence of terms such as 'translaboration'. Morini argues that a full understanding of the inherently collective nature of theatrical translation is overdue and predates modern collaborative tools. Morini argues that viewing theatrical translation as the holistic transfer of action and language from a source performance to a target performance involves multiple actors. Until the late 20th century, scholars viewed theatrical translation through an individualistic, textual lens, dismissing the contributions of directors, intralinguistic rewriters, actors, and audiences as mere 'adaptation'. This perspective, rooted in the textual bias of Western translation theory, originated in the Renaissance, when published plays entered the literary domain. Tracing the historical evolution from dominance to decline of the textual view of theatrical translation, Morini

proposes a nuanced understanding of theatrical translation as a complex collaborative process, drawing on theoretical and practical examples. **Pascale Sardin** and **Serenella Zanotti**'s article explores the complex dynamics of trust and mistrust in author-translator collaborations. While the existing literature recognises the tensions in these relationships, the article highlights the difficulty of identifying these issues solely by comparing source and target texts. Instead, the authors suggest that tensions are better revealed in archival materials such as editorial correspondence and revised translator's documents. Focusing on documents from the Lilly Library at the University of Indiana in Bloomington, the study examines both epitextual sources (correspondence with publishers and authors) and genetic sources (translators' manuscripts and notebooks). The aim is to discover how trust develops and is challenged, especially when other intermediaries are involved. The study of the translators William Weaver and Barbara Wright provides insights into the complex interplay of trust and mistrust in translation collaborations. **Leah Gerber** and **Lintao Qi** analyse the journey of literary translations from Australia to China, exploring the dynamics of collaboration involving institutions, individuals and interpersonal relationships. Focusing on mainland China as a target market, the article argues that these translations contribute to an Australian 'national archive', shaping perceptions of Australia and Australianness for overseas audiences. The study analyses the influence of economic support mechanisms, including government-funded literary events, relationships between translators and writers, and support for Australian studies centres in China, on the creation of social, economic and cultural capital. Building on Bourdieu's (1977) framework, the research highlights how these factors influence the dissemination of Australian literary texts in China and explores the intricate connections between translation, national identity and cultural exchange.

The final articles in the collection focus on aspects of collaborative translation that have not been touched upon in the previous contributions. **Sevita Caseres** investigates collaborative practices among English-French subtitlers in the audiovisual translation industry in France. The study takes a human-centred approach, identifying formal and informal types of collaboration and examining the communications of subtitlers within the production network. The research sheds light on the impact of collaborative practices on subtitlers' workflows, roles, working conditions and the sustainability of the profession. The study contributes to a better understanding of collaboration in the French subtitling industry,

highlighting its advantages and limitations. **Joanna Gough** and **Özlem Temizöz** explore the evolution of collaborative translation, particularly in the last two decades, driven by digital communication technology advancements. Their article investigates the impact of evolving technologies on collaborative translation processes, specifically focusing on Concurrent Translation (CT) (Gough *et al.* 2023). CT involves synchronous translation on cloud-based collaborative platforms by trained professionals for commercial purposes. The study, based on a qualitative analysis of a survey involving 804 translators, delves into translators' experiences with this new workflow. It examines how technological changes influence the nature of collaborative translation in terms of proximity, time factors, and configurations of collaborators. The research shows how translators navigate and adapt to the challenges and opportunities presented by Concurrent Translation in the context of advancing technology.

Taken together, these contributions offer specific case-studies and new insights into collaborative practices, enriching the historical perspective and highlighting the interdisciplinary and global nature of collaborative translation efforts.

3. Concluding remarks

In conclusion, our research has traversed the transformative landscape of translation studies, witnessing a fundamental shift in focus towards the collaborative nature of the translation process. The studies presented in this collection emphasise the complex interaction of multiple agents in translation activities. The exploration of the historical roots and evolutionary trajectory of translation theory has highlighted the need to explore the collective dimension of translation processes.

Our aim in this issue of *Cultus* was to uncover a range of collaborative strategies that have shaped translation in different periods, moving beyond traditional individual-centred narratives. Through an interdisciplinary lens, the research bridged historical and contemporary perspectives. The intention was to provide an in-depth understanding of collaborative translation practices and, most importantly, their impact on the dynamic landscape of translation studies. All in all, these essays present a comprehensive view of collaborative translation across cultural, temporal and thematic boundaries. While each contribution is unique, together they contribute to a broader understanding of collaborative dynamics in

translation studies. As a unified body, the collection traces a narrative across historical periods, cultural contexts and thematic areas, revealing the different manifestations of collaboration in the complex landscape of translation.

The interdisciplinary exploration undertaken in these essays seamlessly blends historical and contemporary perspectives, forming a continuum that spans the centuries. The rich historical insights, from ancient Chinese Buddhist translation practices to 19th-century academic debates, provide a basis for understanding the roots of collaborative translation. At the same time, the inclusion of modern phenomena, such as the impact of evolving technologies on collaborative translation processes, positions the discourse in the contemporary landscape.

The themes explored cover a spectrum of collaborative strategies and practices, highlighting issues of trust and mistrust in author-translator collaborations, the complex dynamics of collaborative translation in the audiovisual industry, and the evolving discourse on collaborative translation itself. This diversity of topics serves to emphasise the multi-dimensionality of collaborative translation, highlighting its pervasive nature in different fields.

Moreover, the global scope of the essays underlines the universal nature of collaborative translation efforts. From North America to Italy, from Australia to mainland China, the essays provide a global perspective on the interplay between translation, culture and identity. This global reach not only enriches the understanding of collaborative translation at a theoretical level, but also contributes to a broader dialogue on the role of translation in shaping cultural exchange and perceptions of identity.

In essence, this issue of *Cultus* offers a nuanced view of collaborative translation practices and the many ways in which translators and language mediators have engaged in collective efforts throughout history. It is one that inspires future research on and exploration of the evolving dynamics of collaborative translation practices.

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