Wenxin Duihua 文心對話

A Dialogue on
The Literary Mind / The Core of Writing

Edited by Simona Gallo

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Decoding and Recoding Signs and Images in the *Wenxin Diaolong*: from Title to Titles

文心雕龍的標識，圖像解碼和重新編碼

Simona Gallo 賈西媚

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> Because meaning is an effect of relations and differences among signifiers along a potentially endless chain (polysemous, intertextual, subject to infinite linkages), it is always differential and deferred, never present as an original unity [...].
>
> Lawrence Venuti

ABSTRACT

The linguistic and cultural challenge that the translators of Liu Xie's masterpiece courageously accepted can be immediately perceivable within the *Wenxin diaolong* chapter titles, through which different approaches to translation – such as de-codification and re-codification of signs and images – come to existence. This contribution is meant to be a preliminary comparative study on the strategies adopted for the translation of the *Wenxin diaolong* chapter titles. First, a table of the original titles, followed by several translations into three European and alphabetic languages – namely Italian, English and French – has been created. The table, presented hereunder, allows for a multi-perspective comparison, articulated into an unbiased discourse that takes into consideration the unavoidable shift in the architecture of the titles, as well as the semantic patterning and the lexical choices.

Keywords: Wenxin diaolong chapter titles, comparative study, approaches to translation, alphabetic languages, shift.

摘要

劉勰的代表作《文心雕龍》的譯者所面臨的語言與文化方面的挑戰從《文心雕龍》每個章節的題目中可見一斑。因此需要通過不同的翻譯方法——例如通過編纂和重新編纂符號和圖像——來展示。這篇文章是對《文心雕龍》章節標題所採用的翻譯策略的初步比較研究。

首先是原始標題列表，接著是三種已經被譯成的歐洲語言一即義大利語、英語和法語。這裡展示的表格，可以進行不同視角的對比，闡述了一種不帶偏見的話語，並且考慮了標題結構中不可避免的變化，以及語義模式和詞彙的選擇等因素。

關鍵詞：《文心雕龍》章節標題，對比研究，翻譯方法，字母語言，轉化。

1. Reflections on translation

In his reflection on the paradigm of translation, Paul Ricoeur (2004) mentioned that there are two main ways to conceive the act of translating, one strict, the other broad. Following Antoine Berman (1995), Ricoeur stated that translation may be interpreted as the rendering of a verbal message into another language, and this is the case of interlingual translation (Jakobson 1959); and recalling George Steiner (1997) for the broad sense, he said that any effort of intellectual understanding of the message's meaning can *already* be considered as an act of translation. The latter sense is summed by Steiner in the equation "understanding is translating" (*ibid.*), that in Ricoeur's interpretation can involve any intralingual translation and hermeneutic process.

A point of intersection of the two approaches may be read in Jiří Levý's declaration:

> A translation is not a monistic composition, but an interpenetration and conglomerate of two structures. On the one hand, there are the semantic content and the formal contour of the original, on the other hand the entire system of aesthetic features bound up with the language of the translation. (Levý in Bassnett 2002, 16)

In her work, *Translation Studies* (Bassnett 2002), Susan Bassnett points out that translation is not merely a linguistic act, but also a semiotic one, whereby a process of decoding and recoding takes place (Bassnett 2002, 24). This sounds particularly true when taking into account two linguistic codes that do not share the same writing system, such as any European alphabetic language and Chinese. Therefore, the issue of decoding and recoding what is densely expressed by what sinologist Léon Vandermeersch (2013) calls a "graphic language" may raise the problem of the (un)translatability of the *wen* 文, before its inherent meaning. From this point of view, since the graphic aspect of a character cannot be reproduced, we could assume that there is an unbridgeable gap between the codes, which translation is unable to solve. Conscious of all this, the translators of the *Wenxin diaolong* worked on the "constitutive shift"[1]: committed to recreating the icastic power of the *wen* 文, they noticeably spent great efforts transcending the paradox of equivalence[2] without identity (Ricoeur 2004, 14) or even the fact that "there can be no fully exact translations. Hence, there can be no fully exact translation" (Nida 2012, 126). By doing so, they overtly accepted the challenge to translate the linguistic and cultural *(un)translatable*.

2. "Wenxin diaolong" chapter titles

One of the perspectives through which this can be demonstrated is the one focusing on chapter titles, only two sinograms artfully selected by Liu Xie to concentrate the meaning of the entire chapter. This contribution takes into consideration chapter titles and the different strategies adopted by several well-known translators to re-code them from Chinese.

The table below (see *Tab. 1*) lists in comparison the original Chinese version of the fifty chapters of the Wenxin diaolong with some of its best-known and more representative translations into three European languages, specifically into Italian, English and French, and namely:

A. Italian version, translated by Alessandra Cristina Lavagnino, entitled *Il tesoro delle lettere. Un intaglio di draghi* (Liu Xie 1995);
B. English version, translated by Vincent Yu-chung Shih, entitled *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (Liu Xie 1959);
C. English version, translated by Siu-kit Wong, Allan Chung-han Lo, Kwong-tai Lam, entitled *The Book of Literary Design* (Liu Xie 1999);
D. English version, translated by Yang Guobin, entitled *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (Liu Xie 2003);
E. French version, translated by Chen Shuyu, entitled *L'essence de la littérature et la gravure de dragons* (Liu Xie 2010).

As this table was elaborated by the current author on the occasion of the International Symposium "*Wenxin Duihua* 文心對話 – Dialogue on *The Literary Mind / The Core of Writing*"[3], held at the University of Milan in May 2014, I chose to include the Italian column (Liu Xie 1995) first.

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[1] Defined by Popovič as "an inevitable shift that takes place as a result of differences between two languages, two poetics and two styles" (Bassnett 2002, 142).

[2] Along with Popovič definition of "equivalence" (Bassnett 2002, 33).

[3] Organized by the Department of Studies in Language Mediation and Intercultural Communication and the Confucius Institute of the University of Milan. The integrity of the original wording has been maintained.

Table 1

	文心雕龍	(Liu Xie 1995)	(Liu Xie 1959)	(Liu Xie 1999)	(Liu Xie 2003)	(Liu Xie 2010)
1	原道	L'Origine nel Dao	On Tao, the source	The Way the Origin	Tracing the Origin to the Dao	*Yuan Dao* - L'origine de l'écriture
2	徵聖	Le testimonianze dei Saggi	Evidence from the Sage	The Sages the Oracle	Venerating the Sages	*Zheng Sheng* - Les critères des sages
3	宗經	La deferenza ai Classici	The Classics as literary sources	The Classics the Forefather	Modelling on the Classics	*Zong Jing* - Suivre les classiques
4	正緯	Corretta lettura degli Apocrifi	Emendation of Apocrypha	Putting the Cabala in Order	A Proper Understanding of Apocrypha	*Zheng Wei* - La correction des apocryphes
5	辯騷	I giudizi sul "Li Sao"	An analysis of Sao	Isolating *Sao* Poetry	Evaluating *Sao*, or the *Songs of the South*	*Bian Sao* - L'évaluation des élégies de Chu
6	明詩	Illustrazione della poesia	An exegesis of poetry	Understanding *Shi* Poetry	Illuminating Poetry	*Ming Shi* - Le traitement des poèmes
7	樂府	Yue fu	Musical poetry (*yüeh-fu*)	The *Yuefu* Poems	*Yuefu*, or Poems of the "Music Bureau"	*Yue Fu* - Le poème chanté
8	銓賦	La verità sul *fu*	Elucidation of *fu*	Explaining *Fu* Poetry	Interpreting *Fu*, or Rhyme-prose	*Quan Fu* - L'interprétation du *fu*
9	頌讚	*Song* e *zan*	Ode and Pronouncement (the *sung* and the *tsan*)	Eulogistic Songs and Summaries	Hymn and Eulogy	*Song Zan* - L'éloge et le conseil
10	祝盟	Invocazione agli spiriti e alleanza solenne	Sacrifical prayer and Oath of agreement (the *chu* and the *meng*)	Prayers and Oaths	Prayer and Oath	*Zhu Meng* - Les prières des vœux et les serments
11	銘箴	Epigrafe e ammonizione	Inscription and exhortation (the *ming* and the *chen*)	Inscriptions and Punctures	Inscription and Admonition	*Ming Zhen* - L'inscription et l'avertissement
12	誄碑	Elogio funebre e stele	Elegy and Stone inscription (the *lei* and the *pei*)	Laudations and Epitaphs	Mourning-Song and Epitaph	*Lei Bei* - L'élégie et l'inscription lapidaire

	文心雕龍	(Liu Xie 1995)	(Liu Xie 1959)	(Liu Xie 1999)	(Liu Xie 2003)	(Liu Xie 2010)
13	哀弔	Compianto e ode funebre	Lament and Condolence (the *ai* and the *tao*)	Commiseration and Condolence	Lament and Condolence	*Ai Diao* - La complainte et les condoléances
14	雜文	Forme diverse [Replica, Sette, Collana di perle, ecc.]	Miscellaneous writings	Miscellaneous Rythmic Prose	Miscellaneous Writings	*Za Wen* - Les écrits divers
15	諧讔	Facezia ed enigma	Humor and Enigma (the *hsieh* and the *yin*)	Puns and Parables	Jesting Rhymes and Puzzles	*Xie Yin* - L'humour et la métaphore
16	史傳	Storiografia e Commento, o biografia	Historical writings	Scribal Hermeneutics	Historical Writings	*Shi Zhuan* - Les écrits historiques
17	諸子	Le "Opere dei Maestri"	Speculative writings	The Philosophers	Philosophical Writings	*Zhu Zi* - Les écrits des grand penseurs
18	論說	*Lun* e onorazione	Treatise and Discussion (the *lun* and the *shuo*)	Argument and Persuasion	The Treatise and the Speech	*Lun Shuo* - Les essais et les discours
19	詔策	Proclami e decreti	Edict and Script (the *chao* and the *ts'e*)	Imperial Edicts	The Edict and the Decree of Enfeoffment	*Zhao Ce* - Les décrets et les rapports impériaux
20	檄移	Dichiarazioni di guerre e proclama di riprensione	War proclamation and Dispatch (the *hsi* and the *i*)	Declaration of War and of Disquiet	The War Proclamation and the Dispatch	*Xi Yi* - L'appel au combat et la lettre officielle
21	封禪	Sacrifici al Cielo e sacrifici alla Terra	Sacrifices to Heave and Earth (*feng shan*)	The *Fengshan* Sacrifice	The Sacrificial Address to Heaven and Earth	*Feng Shan* - Les écrits des sacrifices au Ciel et à la Terre
22	章表	Memoriali di ringraziamento e di richiesta	Memorial, part I (the *chang* and the *piao*)	Memorials Illuminative and Manifestative	Laudatory Address and Statement on Government Affairs	*Zhang Biao* - Les mémoires impériaux (I)

	文心雕龍	(Liu Xie 1995)	(Liu Xie 1959)	(Liu Xie 1999)	(Liu Xie 2003)	(Liu Xie 2010)
23	奏啟	Memoriali	Memorial, part II (the *tsou* and the *ch'i*)	Reports to the Throne and Statements	Report and Memorandum	*Zou Qi* - Les mémoires impériaux (II)
24	議對	Opinione e replica	Discussion and Answer (the *i* and the *tui*)	Debates and Answers	The Discussion and the Examination Essay	*Yi Dui* - La discussion et la réponse
25	書記	La lettera [e altre forme minori]	Epistolary writing (the *shu* and the *chi*)	Notes and Letters	Epistolary Writing and Miscellaneous Records	*Shu Ji* - La correspondance e le rapport administratif
26	神思	Il pensiero poetico	Spiritual thought or Imagination (*shen-ssu*)	Magical Imagination	*Shensi*, or Imagination	*Shen Si* - La pensée et l'imagination
27	體性	Stile e personalità	Style and Nature (*t'i-hsing*)	Style and Personality	Style and Natural Endowments	*Ti Xing* - Les genres littéraires et la nature de l'auteur
28	風骨	"Vento" e "ossa"	The wind and the bone (*feng-ku*)	The Affective Air and the Literary Bones	"Wind" and "Bone"	*Feng Gu* - Le charme et l'essence
29	通變	Continuità e mutamento	Flexible adaptability to varying situations (*t'ung-pien*)	Continuity and Change	Continuity and Change	*Tong Bian* - Comprendre le changement
30	定勢	Definizione della maniera	On choice of style	Stylistic Force	Choosing the Style, or Natural Tendency	*Ding Shi* - Le choix du style
31	情采	Emozioni e bellezza	Emotion and Literary expression	Substance and Style	Feeling and Art	*Qing Cai* - Les émotions et les expressions littéraires
32	鎔裁	Gettare in forma e tagliare	Casting and cutting, or, on editing of ideas and rhetoric (*jung-ts'ai*)	Modelling and Tailoring	Casting and Cutting	*Rong Cai* - Les détails et la concision

	文心雕龍	(Liu Xie 1995)	(Liu Xie 1959)	(Liu Xie 1999)	(Liu Xie 2003)	(Liu Xie 2010)
33	聲律	Le regole tonali	Musicalness	The Music	Prosody	*Sheng Lü* - Le ton et la rhyme
34	章句	Paragrafo / strofa e frase / verso	Paragraph and Sentence	Chapter and Verse	Paragraph and Sentence	*Zang Ju* - Le paragraphe et a phrase
35	麗辭	Parallelismi	Linguistic parallelism	Couplets	Parallelism	*Li Ci* - L'art du parallélisme
36	比興	Paragone e *xing*	Metaphor and Allegory (*pi* and *hsing*)	*Bi* and *Xing* - Two Types of Metaphor	Comparison and Metaphor	*Bi Xing* - La comparaison et la métaphore
37	誇飾	L'iperbole	Embellishment as description	Hyperbole	Hyperbole	*Kua Shi* - L'hyperbole
38	事類	Esempi e citazioni	Factual allusion and textual reference	Allusions	Allusions	*Shi Lei* - La citation
39	練字	La scelta dei caratteri	Philology and Choice of words	Language Refinement	Choosing the Right Word	*Lian Zi* - Le choix des mots
40	隱秀	Il recondito e l'eccellente	The recondite and the conspicuous (*yin-hsiu*)	Hidden Grace and the Visible Flower	Concealed and Evident Excellence	*Yin Xiu* - L'implicite et l'aphorisme
41	指瑕	Denuncia dei difetti	Literary flaws	Picking out the Imperfections	Flaws in Writing	*Zhi Xia* - L'indication des erreurs
42	養氣	Come alimentare il *qi*	The nourishing of vitality	Preservation of the Life-breath	Nourishing *qi*, or Vital Energy	*Yang Qi* - La culture de l'esprit littéraire
43	附會	Aggregare e combinare	Organization (*fu-hui*)	Assemblage and Collation	Organization	*Fu Hui* - La rédaction
44	總術	La tecnica della scrittura: conclusoni	Discussion on the art of writing (*tsung-shu*)	Methodology	Summarizing the Art of Writing	*Zong Shu* - Les techniques de l'écriture
45	時序	I tempi e le opere	Literary development and time (*shih-hsü*)	Chronological Order	Literature and the Times	*Shi Xu* - L'évolution de l'écriture avec les temps

	文心雕龍	(Liu Xie 1995)	(Liu Xie 1959)	(Liu Xie 1999)	(Liu Xie 2003)	(Liu Xie 2010)
46	物色	I colori delle cose	The physical world	The Beauty of Nature	The Forms of the Natural World	*Wu Se* - Les couleurs de la nature
47	才略	Sillabo degli scrittori più insigni	Literary talents	Talent	Literary Talents	*Cai Lüe* - Les aptitudes des écrivains
48	知音	Conoscere i suoni	An understanding critic (*chih-yin*)	Understanding Another's Voice	An Appreciative Critic	*Zhi Yin* - L'appréciation littéraire
49	程器	La capacità e il recipiente	The capacity of a vessel (*ch'eng-ch'i*)	Weighing the Vessel	Moral Integrity	*Cheng Qi* - La réalisation de la vertu et de la morale chez les auteurs
50	序志	Disegno dell'opera	------------	Declaration of Intent	My Intentions, or Postscript	*Xu Zhi* - La postface

2.1. *The architecture of the titles*

The table above may be observed from many and various points of view: first, it is worth to briefly commenting on the quantitative profile. As can be seen, the amount of information disclosed in the translation – obtained from the rendering of only two characters – appears to be a variable factor, both within each version and in the comparison of the versions listed in rows. Due to the extreme semantic density and conciseness of the Chinese characters – almost unattainable by European languages – every part had to be untied in its rhythm, form and meaning. Concerning rhythm and form, we may notice general tendencies, instead of rigorous patterns, adopted by the above-mentioned translators. To put it more specifically, more than the others, Lavagnino's version (Liu Xie 1995) together with the one by Wong, Lo, Lam (Liu Xie 1999), seemilgly tend to preserve the shape of the composition, that is, the binomial style and an essential language, while Yang Guobin (Liu Xie 2003) seems to prefer a richer wording to rephrase the concepts. Shih (Liu Xie 1959) often resorts to the Romanized transcription of the Chinese characters, enclosed by brackets after the translation, whereas Chen Shuyu (Liu Xie 2010) methodologically puts the *pinyin* before the French translation, separated by a hyphen.

An interesting example of this situation can be drawn from the comparison of the titles given to chapter 7, *Yuefu* 樂府 (see *Tab. 2*).

Table 2.

7	樂府	Yue fu	Musical poetry (*yüeh-fu*)	The *Yuefu* Poems	*Yuefu*, or Poems of the "Music Bureau"	*Yue Fu* - Le poème chanté

2.2. *Semantic patterning*

The latter example gives input to further considerations. Given that absolute equivalence between different languages may be considered a utopic goal, the translators have devised different strategies to re-code the meaning within the characters. One of them (see *Tabs. 2-5*) is the transcription of the characters in the title, through Romanization or *pinyin*, when a comparable concept cannot be found in the receiving language and culture, as the case of literary genres.

Table 3.

5	辯騷	I giudizi sul "Li Sao"	An analysis of Sao	Isolating *Sao* Poetry	Evaluating *Sao*, or the *Songs of the South*	*Bian Sao* - L'évaluation des élégies de Chu

And also:

Table 4.

8	銓賦	La verità sul *fu*	Elucidation of *fu*	Explaining *Fu* Poetry	Interpreting *Fu*, or Rhyme-prose	*Quan Fu* - L'interprétation du *fu*

Table 5.

9	頌讚	*Song* e *zan*	Ode and Pronouncement (the *sung* and the *tsan*)	Eulogistic Songs and Summaries	Hymn and Eulogy	*Song Zan* - L'éloge et le conseil

Furthermore, there are situations the title appears only partially translated from Chinese (see *Tabs. 6-8*), that may be explained by the semantic displacement.

Table 6.

18	論說	*Lun* e onorazione	Treatise and Discussion (the *lun* and the *shuo*)	Argument and Persuasion	The Treatise and the Speech	*Lun Shuo* - Les essais et les discours

Table 7.

21	封禪	Sacrifici al Cielo e sacrifici alla Terra	Sacrifices to Heave and Earth (*feng shan*)	The *Fengshan* Sacrifice	The Sacrificial Address to Heaven and Earth	*Feng Shan* - Les écrits des sacrifices au Ciel et à la Terre

Table 8.

36	比興	Paragone e *xing*	Metaphor and Allegory (*pi* and *hsing*)	*Bi* and *Xing* - Two Types of Metaphor	Comparison and Metaphor	*Bi Xing* - La comparaison et la métaphore

This happens not only with literary genres, but also with concepts that don't meet any correspondence outside of Chinese language and culture, and that deserve complex explanations into European languages. This is the case of *Dao* (see *Tab. 9*) in the first chapter, and of *qi* 氣, in chapter 42 (see *Tab. 10*).

Table 9.

1	原道	L'Origine nel Dao	On Tao, the source	The Way the Origin	Tracing the Origin to the Dao	*Yuan Dao* - L'origine de l'écriture

Table 10.

42	養氣	Come alimentare il *qi*	The nourishing of vitality	Preservation of the Life-breath	Nourishing *qi*, or Vital Energy	*Yang Qi* - La culture de l'esprit littéraire

In the first example, three translations out of five do not disclose the culture-specific concept of *Dao* 道 (or *Tao*), subject of extensive investigations by literary critics, and a term the public likely have already become acquainted with. It is relevant that Wong, Lo, Lam (Liu Xie 1999) decided to be more explicit by rephrasing Dao into "The Way", in English: the broad distance between the solutions reveal the intrinsic polysemy of the word *Dao* 道. A similar circumstance occurs with the term *qi* 氣 (see *Tab. 10*). The complexity of the meaning behind the word can hardly be resolved in a single corresponding expression, therefore, three different strategies can be identified. The first, adopted by Lavagnino (Liu Xie 1995), is the transcription/rewriting of the Chinese word *qi* 氣 through the *pinyin*. The second is the addition of a concise explanation, as demonstrated by Yang Guobin’s version (Liu Xie 2003), where *qi* is followed by “or Vital Energy”. The same pattern is also applied to the above-mentioned chapter 7 (“*Yuefu*, or Poems of the ‘Music Bureau’”) and to the following case, with the expression *Shen si* 神思 (see *Tab. 11*).

Table 11.

26	神思	Il pensiero poetico	Spiritual thought or Imagination (*shen-ssu*)	Magical Imagination	*Shensi*, or Imagination	*Shen Si* - La pensée et l’imagination

The third solution corresponds to the full translation of the term and the omission of the Chinese: *qi* becomes “vitality” (Liu Xie 1959), “life-breath” (Liu Xie 1999) and “esprit littéraire” (Liu Xie 2010). While the English translators found similar – but not identical – solutions, the French translator Chen Shuyu decided to interpret *Yang* 養 (“alimentare”/“Nourishing”/“Preservation”) as the broader concept of “La culture”, that may only be inferred from the chapter’s context. The latter could be an example of what is called “domesticated translation” (Venuti 1995) – that tends to smooth over the linguistic and cultural gap – whereas the first may be seen as a “foreignized translation” (*ibid.*), that prefers to be faithful to the source text and to preserve its linguistic and cultural flavor. To this respect, it is useful to mention other specific examples marking the difference between domesticated and foreignized translation.

With regard to domestication, on the one side, it may be noticed Shih’s tendency to prosaically reformulate binomials expressing metaphors (see *Tabs. 12-13*).

Table 12.

37	誇飾	L’iperbole	Embellishment as description	Hyperbole	Hyperbole	*Kua Shi* - L’hyperbole

Table 13.

29	通變	Continuità e mutamento	Flexible adaptability to varying situations (*t'ung-pien*)	Continuity and Change	Continuity and Change	*Tong Bian* - Comprendre le changement

And moreover, Chen Shuyu's solutions seem to reveal the author's inclination to dissipate interpretative ambiguities (see *Tab. 14*, and again *Tab. 7*).

Table 14.

49	程器	La capacità e il recipiente	The capacity of a vessel (*ch'eng-ch'i*)	Weighing the Vessel	Moral Integrity	*Cheng Qi* - La réalisation de la vertu et de la morale chez les auteurs

And sometimes, to clarify implicit meanings (see *Tabs. 15-16*).

Table 15.

32	鎔裁	Gettare in forma e tagliare	Casting and cutting, or, on editing of ideas and rhetoric (*jung-ts'ai*)	Modelling and Tailoring	Casting and Cutting	*Rong Cai* - Les détails et la concision

Table 16.

45	時序	I tempi e le opere	Literary development and time (*shih-hsü*)	Chronological Order	Literature and the Times	*Shi Xu* - L'évolution de l'écriture avec les temps

On the other side, Lavagnino (Liu Xie 1995) and Yang Guobin (Liu Xie 2003) give an example of what can be seen as preservation of the semantic patterning by underlining in quotation marks foreign and foreignizing Liu Xie's expressions (see *Tab. 17*).

Table 17.

28	風骨	"Vento" e "ossa"	The wind and the bone (*feng-ku*)	The Affective Air and the Literary Bones	"Wind" and "Bone"	*Feng Gu* - Le charme et l'essence

2.3. *Lexical choices*

Another interesting aspect of the comparative analysis, directly linked to abovementioned cases, is observation of the semantic cohesion through lexical items. Generally speaking, it can be said that the five versions seem to be convergent. Nonetheless, considering the diverse production contexts and the constitutive differences of the target languages, it may be not particularly surprising that the translators adopted differing solutions for specific terms, as we could see in relation to the transcription or rephrasing of culture-specific concepts and Chinese terms. The following tables offer several examples of "diffractions" or lexical variations (see *Tabs. 18-20*).

Table 18.

4	正緯	Corretta lettura degli Apocrifi	Emendation of Apocrypha	Putting the Cabala in Order	A Proper Understanding of Apocrypha	*Zheng Wei* - La correction des apocryphes

It is to a certain extent curious the choice made by Wong, Lo and Lam (Liu Xie 1999), when replacing *Wei* 緯 – commonly translated with "Apocrypha" – with the term "Cabala" that is strongly connotated in cultural terms and that immediately evokes the Kabbalah of the Hebrew mystic tradition.

Table 19.

40	隱秀	Il recondito e l'eccellente	The recondite and the conspicuous (*yin-hsiu*)	Hidden Grace and the Visible Flower	Concealed and Evident Excellence	*Yin Xiu* - L'implicite et l'aphorisme

Something similar happens in chapter 49, where the translators re-interpret the Chinese title (*Yin xiu* 隱秀) anticipating the metaphoric reference to the blossoming of the poetic composition, illustrated within the chapter.

Table 20.

31	情采	Emozioni e bellezza	Emotion and Literary expression	Substance and Style	Feeling and Art	*Qing Cai* - Les émotions et les expressions littéraires

Another relevant example is offered by chapter 31 (*Qing cai* 情采), where there are significant discrepancies in the interpretation of the two Chinese terms *qing* 情 and *cai* 采[4]. *Qing* 情 is translated as "Emotions" (Liu Xie 1995; 1959; 2010) or "Feeling" (Liu Xie 2003), and even "Substance" (Liu Xie 1999). Conversely, *cai* 采 gives rise to unparalleled interpretations, that are "bellezza" (beauty) (Liu Xie 1995), "Literary expressions" / "expressions littéraires" (Liu Xie 1959; 2010), "Style" (Liu Xie 1999) and "Art" (Liu Xie 2003). This could stand as another exemplary case of the inherent polysemy and the semantic unattainable richness possessed by the Chinese binomial title.

3. Concluding remarks

While comparing the Chinese original with different and differing translations into three European languages, two aspects should be borne in mind. Firstly, the theoretic and aesthetic preciousness of Liu Xie's masterpiece, whose magnificently "carved" language treasures an invaluable semantic richness. This makes the *Wenxin diaolong* a unique work in the world's literary history. Secondly, the unbridgeable gap between languages and cultures, and especially between the classical Chinese and contemporary European alphabetic languages, what brings to the point of the gains and losses in translation process. As Lawrence Venuti stated:

> Both foreign text and translation are derivative: both consist of diverse linguistic and cultural materials that neither the foreign writer nor the translator originates, and that destabilize the work of signification, inevitably exceeding and possibly conflicting with their intentions. As a result, a foreign text is the site of many different semantic possibilities that are fixed only provisionally in any one translation, on the basis of varying cultural assumptions and interpretive choices, in specific social situations, in different historical periods. Meaning is a plural and contingent relation, not an unchanging unified essence, and therefore a translation cannot be judged according to mathematics-based concepts of semantic equivalence or one-to-one correspondence. […] The viability of a translation is established by its relationship to the cultural and social conditions under which it is produced and read. (Venuti 1995, 18)

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[4] Except from the strong resemblance of the French version by Chen Shuyu (Liu Xie 2010) to the English version by Shih (Liu Xie 1959).

In the light of this, each translation strategy concretely represents the translator's substantial effort to disclose the meaning beyond the words. Therefore, their inconsistencies add value to the to the original work, by giving prominence to the intrinsic polysemy of the text.

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