

Queer in Translation: From the West to the East, from Theory to Activism

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Queer, meaning strange or not normal (especially not heterosexual), is often used as a substitute for homosexual (gay or lesbian), and also as an inclusive term for all the sexual and gender minorities. The early 1990s witnessed in the West a phenomenal rise in the number of works examining the cultures of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgenders, and other gender and sexual communities. Subsequently, the rubric 'queer theory' or 'queer studies' came into being to cover such studies. Translation of queer theory or works of queer studies in China started in the late 1990s. There have been at least three Chinese translations of the term "queer", namely 怪异 *guaiyi* [strange difference], 酷儿 *Ku'er* [cool child], and 奎尔 *kui'er* [Quaile]. The Chinese terms embody different perceptions of and attitudes towards sexual and gender minorities. Translation of queer theory seems to have empowered the queer community in China. A typical example is the annual production of the American feminist play *The Vagina Monologues* made by a group of students at Fudan University in Shanghai from 2004. Their production of the play resulted from their learning feminist and queer theories, and many of the students themselves are of queer identities. More importantly, the students kept including local stories of queer people for their annual production, showing courage and determination to make gender and sexual minorities visible and remove the stigma attached to them. This study discusses the implications and receptions of the Chinese translations of the term queer and relate them to the queer-informed Fudan production of the play. Up to now, queer translation studies have largely been dominated by Anglo-American scholarship. It is important to expand the geopolitical boundaries of the field to shed light on the notion of translation as a living and lived praxis without which cross-border solidarities and resistances are not possible.