

Understanding Contemporary Tibetan Literature and Their English Translations with Complexity

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Complexity thinking not only offers a powerful alternative to the linear, reductionist approaches to translation studies but according to some scholars (eg. Harding, 2019), can manifest the value some social theories (eg social narrative theory) hold for complexity. Drawing on conceptual tools like non-linearity, system, emergence underpinning complexity thinking as well as the potential of social narrative theories to investigate the relationship between agency and structure, the project is to explore the historical trajectory of the English translations of contemporary Tibetan literature (CTL) through narratives as emergent, situated and complex, produced by the interactions of their component parts both with each other and with the whole system of which they are part.

Complexity is rooted even in what is taken as contemporary Tibetan literature. Based on the data chronologically sorted out regarding the English translations of CTL, the study is to examine the change of patterns with particular emphasis on the emergence of representations of Tibet, Tibetan people and Tibetan literature through selections of texts to be translated and the way the texts are framed and viewed. Then by taking these patterns and representations as the narratives, the paper proceeds to investigate the trajectories of the practice of translating CTL into English with the non-linear analyses of the emergence of narratives. Furthermore, case study for different periods will be conducted to investigate the trajectory of translating CTL into English at a local level with due consideration to the changing material reality of life.

This research aims to bring contributions to understanding with complexity the English translations of CTL in particular and to revisiting in translation studies the conceptualization of the relationships between structure and agency in general.

Keywords: complexity thinking; structure; agency; English translations of contemporary Tibetan literature

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