

Patronage and the Professionalization of Chinese Translators During the 1930s–1960s: A Case Study of Fu Lei

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During the 1930s–1960s, translation emerged in China as a profession as the result of the deepening social division of labor. This study follows closely Fu Lei's career path to show that the successive patronages that he received made it possible for him to undertake translation as a permanent profession. Two stages are identified in his career according to changes of the patronage structure. Before 1949, Fu Lei had to publish his translations by his own means or to look for different publishers as patrons which ensured a wide variety of choices of the source texts according to tastes and demands of the market and a standard edition of the translations. After 1949, the state reorganized the publishing industry and established professional organizations of translators in an effort to delimit parameters of the translators' work and step up regulation of the profession. The new situation complicated the translator's relationship with the seemingly pervasive power of the state patronage on which he relied for his livelihood. The patronage contributed to the consolidation of his professional identity. However, he was obliged to focus solely on the translation of Balzac and negotiate with the publisher concerning the choices of texts by taking into consideration multiple factors: the ideology, the system of values, the theme and artistic value of the works, the expectation of target readers etc. He contested overtly the validity of a standard grammar in the literary translation and creation imposed by the patron. Despite the constraints, Fu Lei maintained in the translations his idiosyncratic style of writing and continue his aesthetic pursuit.