

Creating Meaning in the Third Cultural Space: The Compilation of a Nineteenth-Century Dutch-Chinese Dictionary

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Abstract

In this study, I apply the concept that “meaning is not located in a source culture or a target culture in a univocal signifying movement; rather, it is being created endlessly in a third cultural space of growing conflict and complexity” (Carbonell 1996, 90) to my investigation of Dutch sinologist Gustaaf Schlegel’s translation strategy. When compiling his Dutch-Chinese dictionary, Schlegel was not simply transferring directly from language A (Dutch) into language B (Chinese), but tapping various sources to find what he called “genuine equivalent.” Schlegel’s dictionary goes beyond his language and culture pair of Dutch and Chinese, citing German and French sources, referencing entries in a Japanese dictionary, and offering comparisons with English interpretations, to provide details that users can understand and associate with. This method helped to create meaning in the third cultural space. This paper analyzes the impact that Schlegel’s knowledge of a complex combination of languages and cultures had on the meaning that was being created in the third cultural space.

Keywords

bilingual, multilingual, Dutch, Chinese, third cultural space