

Inside-out—The Body Translated in China and the West

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Abstract

When the Jesuit missionaries set foot in China to proselytize, their translations of Western anatomies for Chinese readers and of Chinese medicinal texts for Western readers opened up new spaces and new imaginative geographies. While encountering two different perceptions and systems of medical knowledge, one of which was inward looking, the other focused on dissection and anatomy, the Jesuits employed different strategies and linguistic knowledge in their translations to negotiate non-linguistic knowledge represented by the spaces of the body. Inheriting the Aristotelian tradition of natural philosophy and the Galenic interpretation of the human body and the Four Humors, the Jesuits progressed from presenting the Western body and the Chinese body/medicine as a dichotomy in *Taixi renshen shuo gai* 泰西人身說概 (Outline of Western theories of the human body), to the accommodated Latin translation of the Chinese body and pulse by Michał Boym (1612–1959), and then to the outward visual presentation of Western anatomy in Dominique Parrenin's (1665–1741) translation for the Kangxi Emperor.

This paper will first present the different inclinations of the two medical systems—the inward and abstract mapping of the Chinese body and the outward visual presentation of the Western body—and then examine how the Jesuit missionary-translators crossed linguistic and cultural barriers to perceive the space of the human body via the languages and terminologies in their translations. It aims to present the Jesuits' efforts navigating through different medical systems on a shared space of body, while facing criticism and misunderstanding from two differently oriented medical systems and philosophies. It is such negotiations of languages and translated terms for the organs and veins of the human body, and the non-linguistic knowledge of the

shared space of the body, that demonstrate the Jesuits' trans-cultural perception of the human body.

Keywords

Jesuits, translation, Chinese body, Western anatomy, space

1. Introduction

Translation is “a cultural activity that produces ‘new’ spaces” or “creates new ‘imaginative geographies’” (Italiano 2012, 1). When the Jesuit missionaries set foot in China to proselytize, their translations of Western anatomies for Chinese readers and of Chinese medicinal texts for Western readers opened up new spaces and new imaginative geographies. In the preface of Shigehisa Kuriyama’s book *The Expressiveness of the Body and the Divergence of Greek and Chinese Medicine* (1999, 8), he provides a stark visual contrast between the fully developed conceptions of the body from the East and the West by reproducing two drawings: the first from the fourteenth-century Chinese acupuncturist Hua Shou 滑壽 (ca. 1304–1386) and the second from the sixteenth-century European anatomist Vesalius. The Chinese figure is defined by the locations of its acupuncture points and its lack of a specific description of muscles, while the European figure is accented by its anatomical musculature, though “the tracts and points of acupuncture entirely escaped the West’s anatomical vision of reality” (ibid.). While encountering two different perceptions and systems of medical knowledge, one of which was inward looking, the other focused on dissection and anatomy, the Jesuits employed different strategies and linguistic knowledge in their translations to negotiate non-linguistic knowledge represented by the spaces of the body. Inheriting the Aristotelian tradition of natural philosophy and the Galenic interpretation of the human body and the Four Humors, the Jesuits progressed from presenting the Western body and the Chinese body/medicine as a dichotomy in *Taixi renshen shuo gai* 泰西人身說概 (Outline of Western theories of the human body),¹ to the accommodated Latin translation of the Chinese body and pulse by Michał Boym (1612–1659), and then to the outward visual presentation of Western anatomy in Dominique Parrenin’s (1665–1741) translation for the Kangxi Emperor.