Reconstructing Nineteenth-century translator networks: Methodological issues and promise

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Abstract

This paper outlines the construction of a social network database and visualization tool for Chinese-English translator networks in the nineteenth century, concentrating first on methodological problems that needed to be overcome in order to construct the database and second some of the advantages of such an approach to the study of translators. First, there were problems with asymmetrical information (the amount of information available regarding different translators) leading to potential bias regarding centrality and marginality. Second, there were problems with standardization of information and categorization. Third, there were issues with resources (the amount of time and energy needed to input all of the data), and finally there were issues with setting up the visualization of the data.

Even with such problems, however, the project has been very successful in several ways. First, it clearly demonstrates the degree to which Chinese-English translators in the nineteenth-century were interconnected, both directly and indirectly (through a shared common contact); many of the translators shared multiple connections with each other, often through both professional and kinship networks, suggesting that professional ties often led to kinship ties through marriage. While there are some outliers with relatively little connection or mostly negative connections, this density of the network speaks to the relatively small size and homogeneity of the translators. Although we do find particularly dense clustering within two large groups – missionaries and civil servants – ties also cut across these and other groups, showing a tight-knit community of sinological experts in this period.

Biography

James St. André is Associate Professor and Director of the Centre for Translation Technology at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. Recent publications include *Conceptualising China Through Translation* (Dec 2023) and "Implications of computer code translation for translation studies" (*Translation Studies* May 2023), as well as articles in *META, TTR, The Translator, Translation and Intercultural Studies*, and the *Journal of Translation Studies*.