

SPECIAL ARTICLE

“Changes in Korea’s Outbound Literary Translation: Who, How, and Why?”

A focus group discussion centered around a revised sociological model

Cheong Ho-Jeong¹

Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Korea
angelhjchg@gmail.com

Lim Hyun-Kyung

Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Korea
lunaires@hufs.ac.kr

Jeon Min-Chul

Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Korea
Kaleidon@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: This paper summarizes the results of a Focus Group Discussion held in September 2021 to celebrate the inauguration of the international journal *InContext: Studies in Translation and Interculturalism*. Organized under the title “Changes in Korea’s Outbound Literary Translation: Who, How, and Why?”, the event was a response to the growing significance of and interest in Korea’s literary works worldwide, and marks the first time to employ the format of a focus group discussion in Translation Studies (TS) research in Korea. In a single-moderator event, seven discussants participated as representatives of stakeholders of translation: translator, journal editor, literary grantor institution, and literary agent. Following three brief presentations, the participants shared their expertise and experiences as prompted by the moderator on nine specific issues.

Section 2 outlines historical developments in Korea’s outbound literary

1 The first and corresponding author.

translation practices, and the structure of the Focus Group Discussion. Section 3 discusses the theoretical background of the organization of the event and proposes a revised sociological model of translation adapted from Bourdieu’s field theory of cultural production. A summary of the three brief presentations and the subsequent discussion of the nine issues ensues in Section 4, and the conclusion in Section 5 includes suggestions for future research directions.

Significant findings include: (1) Although distinctively visible shifts are under way from the traditional, grant-centric system to a more market-driven one, the continued preference for keeping grant-funded translation projects in place reflects the still peripheral position and lack of economic ‘capital’ of translated literature in the literary system of Korea. (2) In the initial dissemination of Korean literature overseas, the use of the umbrella term ‘K-LITERATURE’ can be deemed useful, but authors need to compete individually based on their respective uniqueness and strengths while showing thematic universality. (3) Being a native speaker of the target language (TL), an alleged requirement of a competent translator much-touted in TS in Korea, did not draw the consensus of all participants. Several participants were of the opinion that a translator’s passion for literary works and the author under translation was a more critical factor in motivating her to complete literary translations.

KEYWORDS: literary translation, focus group discussion, field of outbound literary translation, Bourdieu, translatorial *habitus*

논문초록: 본 연구는 국제 저널 <INContext: Studies in Translation and Interculturalism> 창간 기념으로 2021년 9월 개최된 포커스 그룹 대토론회 결과 보고 서이다. ‘한국문학 아웃바운드 번역의 변화: 누가 · 어떻게 · 왜?’라는 제목으로 개최된 이 토론회는 한국문학에 대한 세계적 중요성과 관심이 확대되는 상황에서 준비된 행사로, 국내 번역학계 최초로 포커스 그룹 토론회 형식을 도입했다. 단일좌장 형태로 진행된 이 토론회에는 번역사, 저널 편집자, 지원기관, 문학 에이전트를 각각 대표하는 토론자 7인이 참여했다. 3인의 짧은 발표 후, 참여자들은 좌장의 진행에 따라 9가지 세부 주제에 대한 전문지식과 경험을 공유했다.

본 연구 2장에서는 한국문학 아웃바운드 번역의 역사적 발전과 변화, 포커스 그룹 토론의 구조, 참여자 프로필을 소개한다. 3장에서는 토론회 구성의 이론적 배경으로 부르디외(Bourdieu)의 ‘문화생산 장 이론’을 수정보완한 사회학적 문학번역 모델을 제안한다. 4장에서는 토론자 3인의 짧은 발표와 9개 세부주제에 대한 토론 내용을 요약하고, 5장에서는 후속연구 방향을 포함한 결론을 제시한다.

본 연구의 주요 결과는 다음과 같다. (1) 전통적인 그랜트 중심에서 시장 중심 시스

템으로의 가시적 변화가 확인되었으나, 참여자들이 여전히 그랜트 기반 번역 프로그램 존치를 선호한다는 사실은 한국 문학시스템 내에서 번역문학이 여전히 주변적 지위를 차지하며 ‘경제자본’ 부족을 겪고 있음을 보여준다. (2) 한국문학의 세계적 전파 과정에서 ‘K-문학(K-LITERATURE)’이라는 집단적 브랜딩의 사용이 유용할 수 있으나, 궁극적으로는 개별작가가 저마다의 개성과 강점을 무기로 경쟁하면서 주제의 보편성을 입증할 필요가 있다. (3) 번역사의 도착어 원어민 여부를 아웃바운드 번역능력의 필수 요건으로 논의해온 한국 번역학계의 기존 시각과 달리, 참여자들의 의견은 엇갈렸다. 이들은 번역대상 작품 및 작가에 대한 번역사의 열정이 보다 근본적인 문학번역의 동기라고 지적하기도 했다.

핵심어: 한국문학번역, 포커스그룹 토론, 아웃바운드 문학번역 장, 부르디외(Bourdieu),
아비투스(*habitus*)

1. Introduction

1.1 General Description of the Event

This paper summarizes the results of a Focus Group Discussion entitled “Changes in the Outbound Literary Translation in Korea: Who, How, and Why?”. Organized to celebrate the inauguration of the international journal *INContext: Studies in Translation and Interculturalism*, the event was noteworthy in three aspects with respect to the field of Translation Studies (TS).

Firstly, the selection of the discussion theme, i.e., outbound translation practices for Korean literature, with the term ‘outbound translation’ meaning ‘translations from Korean into foreign languages’, was a timely response to the growing significance of and interest in Korea’s literary works worldwide, not only in conventional genres such as novels and poems, but also in relatively peripheral genres such as comics and webtoons. In addition, the approaches employed in the event markedly distanced themselves from the typical ones in literary translation research in Korea. Rather than the conventional textual parameter-centered approaches such as syntactic, lexical, and stylistic explorations and analyses of translation strategies in general, the new foci of the Discussion featured extra-textual inquiries and macro perspectives in understanding translation. This involved attention to the translators as

pivotal producers of texts and to the internal structure of the field of literary translation that the translators find themselves in, i.e. influenced by the competitive dynamics forged among the field’s agents. Thirdly, research in literary translation in Korea has been treated relatively isolated from the mainstream discussions since literary translation is considered to be done by those whose set of qualifications differs from that of technical translators and, therefore, belongs to a separate tradition. The existence of influential grantor institutions supporting literary translations has led the discussion to occur elsewhere as well, not necessarily involving TS researchers. The event thus bridged the schism between TS research and the literary translation practices of Korea by bringing together important stakeholders engaged in the production of literary translation.²

In terms of the event organization, the format of a focus group discussion was employed for the first time in TS research in Korea. In order to highlight the roles of, and interplay among, different actors in outbound literary translation in Korea, representatives with similar experiences, i.e., translators, literary agents, academics/critics, and grantor organizations, were chosen as discussants. They then gathered to freely voice their experiences and expertise to come up with a wide spectrum of collective insight. As contrasted with usual conference talks in which a single presenter or presenter group introduces their research findings, followed by limited discussion, it was anticipated that more diverse and reality-based opinions could be obtained from discussants with similar professional backgrounds when encouraged to voice their opinions freely by the moderator.

1.2 Organization of the Event

The event was held on September 16, 2021, organized by both the Language and Intercultural Studies Institute (LISI) at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (HUFS) and the Korean Association for Public-Sector Translation and Interpretation (KAPTI) at a HUFS conference hall. The event was conducted

2 Target language (TL) publishers and editors affiliated with them were not represented in the discussion. The event focused on listening to the voices of those on the text production end. This issue will be addressed in Section 5.

for 2 hours 40 minutes and, because of the COVID-19 distancing rules, streamed real-time to over 100 virtual attendees via the Zoom platform provided by the organizers. It was a single-moderator focus group discussion with seven discussion participants, with the director of the LISI serving as the moderator. Since three of the participants were non-native speakers of Korean³, simultaneous interpretation was provided to facilitate discussion and for the Korean audience.

In opening the discussion, the moderator raised two issues: why Korea’s outbound literary translation and changes it currently faces matter at this particular period in time, and why the focus group discussion was chosen for the forum. After three short presentations by three of the seven discussants on the visibility and the nature of changes in the outbound literary translation in Korea, the moderator prompted the group to discuss the specific topics in the order they appear in Table 3, below, in more depth.

To facilitate the discussion, the discussants were sent a list of questions prior to the event containing common questions for all as well as *ad hoc* questions specific to their expertise. Also provided was an overview of the event’s background, basic themes and points of interest. Table 1 shows the list of questions provided to the discussants.

Table 1: Common and *ad hoc* questions

Common Questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Visibility of shifts in Korea’s outbound literary translation, from the grantor-centric system toward a market-centric system 2. Translation commissioners’ influence upon translators’ decisions and their translation process 3. Factors influencing the work of translators 4. Literary translation assessment and criticism in Korea 5. Other issues related to individual experiences
<i>Ad Hoc</i> Questions ⁴

3 Although all three non-native participants were fluent in Korean, they opted for answering in English for more efficient communication, which was then interpreted in Korean. All Korean participants spoke in Korean.

4 No *ad hoc* questions were transmitted to LT/P-K, who has already been vocal in TS research. Instead, the background and the purpose of the event were briefly conveyed, asking him to prepare to share his insights at the event.

LA-B ⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roles of literary agents • Decision-making on what and who to translate
LA-K	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role division between literary agents and TL publishers • Translation quality assessment and revision model being employed; your involvement in the process, if any
ED-I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Translator selection criteria • Editing model and criteria, scope of editor discretion • Significance of end-readers and publishers in editing • Challenges facing translators (relating to commissioners/publishers, translation strategy adjustment requests)
GI-K	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roles played by the KLTI as a governmental grantor organization • Issues of selecting which authors to translate by whom • Ideal models for incorporating TQA, editing, and translation quality control
LT-K	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges facing literary translation from Korean (e.g. text understanding, reformulation, principles and extent of mediation) • Experiences in translation assessment, criticism, or revision requests on your translations
LT-K	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Translation practice divide between graduates from technical translation education institutions and translators in the field of literary translation • Challenges of literary translation market entry • Motivation to become a literary translator and future plans
LT/P-A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges facing in literary translation from Korean (e.g. source text (ST) comprehension, reformulation, principles and extent of mediation)
LT/P-A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues including relationships with translation commissioners, translation processes, and post-submission work • Sharing experiences in translation assessment, criticism, or revision requests on your translations

1.3 Summary Structure

Section 2 outlines historical developments in Korea’s outbound literary

5 The abbreviations in this column signify the codes of the discussant profiles. (See Table 2.)

translation practices and the structure of the Focus Group Discussion. Section 3 discusses the theoretical background of the organization of the event, and proposes a revised sociological model of literary translation adapted from Bourdieu's field theory of cultural production. A summary of the three brief presentations and the subsequent discussion of the nine issues ensues in Section 4. The conclusion in Section 5 includes suggestions for future research directions.

The summary is presented in chronological order, based on detailed notes taken during the event and on a review of the recorded remarks made by the participants⁶. The outcome was then analyzed, with a focus on translators and other agents in the field of outbound literary translation in Korea. The structure of the proposed model, together with key concepts involved, will be described in more detail in the theoretical background section.

2. Topic and Format of the Discussion

2.1 Korea's Outbound Literary Translation and Changes

'Outbound translation' refers to translating a text produced in a country's local language into foreign language(s) (Cheong, 2007, pp. 206). Unlike its inbound counterpart playing an integral role in 'importing' foreign cultures, it is the key channel for the international dissemination and transfer of local culture. In modern Korea, inbound literary translations used to predominate, and the primary sources of inbound translations were (1) works of world-famous literary authors from the western hemisphere, including England, Germany, France, and Russia, (2) works of Nobel Prize in Literature laureates for greater literary diversity, and (3) more recently, works of authors with new global recognition, such as Haruki Murakami. These inbound translations served to transplant the so-called 'advanced cultures,' including their literary

6 While the chronological order of these remarks mostly matched that of topics covered, some of the comments were relocated within the summary of the discussion since they had more to do with other topics than what was discussed at the moment or were about outbound literary translation in general.

legacies, onto Korean soil and to ‘enlighten’ the general public⁷. While the first modern outbound translation of Korean literature dates back to as early as 1892⁸, a solid tradition of outbound literary translation remained virtually non-existent until the 1990’s and, therefore, Korean literature in translation did not attract much attention overseas. This was due in part to the lack of competent translators and an unsystematic approach to the task (Park, 2009).

The 1990’s marked a turnaround in that a more systematic assistance structure was established and more funds began to flow into the thus-far futile attempts at sharing Korean literature with a wider world. The first governmental institution, albeit small in its fledgling years, i.e., the Korean Literary Translation institution (KLTI), opened in 1996, paving the way for systemically offering governmental grants to attract translators’ attention to new professional opportunities and setting standards for honoring exemplary translations. The launching of the Daesan Foundation (1992) is the private sector’s parallel⁹ to the KLTI. With the financial incentives made available by these institutions, Korea’s outbound literary translation has begun to attract interest among translators and to flourish.

Shin Kyung-sook’s *Please Look After Mom*¹⁰, a novel that successfully embedded the universal theme of love and loss among family members in Korean culture, was arguably the first work of Korean literature to garner global attention. Following its winning the Man Asian Literary Prize in 2012, Han Kang’s *The Vegetarian*¹¹ won the International Booker Prize in 2016. Other recent instances of international award-winning translations of Korean literature include Kim Hye-soon’s *Autobiography of Death*¹² (2019 Griffin Poetry Prize; 2019 Lucien Stryk Asian Translation Prize), Yun Ko-eun’s

7 An interesting issue to be explored in this regard is the fact that around the dawn of the 20th century, when *Daehanjeguk* (Great Korea Empire, 1897-1910) reigned over the Korean Peninsula, literary translations played a crucial role as an instrument of social enlightenment movements, introducing information on advanced political regimes and cultures to the general public. The most frequently used translation strategy was adaptation based on the naturalization approach.

8 *Printemps Parfumé*, the classical novel *Chunhyangjeon* (The Tale of *Chunhyang*), translated into French by HONG Jong-u and Joseph-Henry Rosny.

9 The fact that the International Communication Foundation, which was launched in 1982, began to give financial support to aspiring outbound literary translators in 1997 should also be noted.

10 Translated by Chi-young Kim.

11 Translated by Deborah Smith.

12 Translated by Don Mee Choi.

*The Disaster Tourist*¹³ (2021 CWA Daggers), and Kim I-deum's *Hysteria*¹⁴ (2020 National Translation Award in Poetry; 2020 Lucien Stryk Asian Translation Prize).

What seems to lie behind the sudden quantitative surge of Korea's literary translation and its raised overseas presence is a move away from the sole dependence on the grant system toward a combination of the market-oriented demand-supply system initiated by TL publishers and the grant-centric system. The increase in the volume of translations initiated by literary agencies, both domestic and foreign, or directly by TL publishers, and the increase in the number of conspicuous achievements of these agencies appears to attest to the fact that a strong shift is occurring in the landscape of Korea's outward literary translations in addition to translations primarily supported by the grant system.

Against this backdrop, it is critical to listen first-hand to diverse voices of the stakeholders who are actually engaged in the field in order to understand the changes that are happening, if any. Therefore, the issues explored in the Discussion were:

- 1) Are there any changes visible/perceptible to those involved?
- 2) If so, what shifts have occurred in Korea's outbound literary translation in terms of actors, motivations, and specific processes involved?
- 3) How do respective stakeholders perceive those changes?
- 4) What are the issues to be aware of in helping promote Korean literature abroad?

2.2 Focus Group Discussion

The focus group discussion format was adopted for two purposes: to bring together various stakeholders in the field of outbound literary translation in Korea and to facilitate the free exchange of their viewpoints, experiences and motivations. As a group interview involving a small number of demographically similar participants who have common experiences, the format can be used to solicit participants' reactions to specific questions and

13 Translated by Lizzie Buehler.

14 Translated by Jake Levine, Soeun Seo and Hedgie Choi.

help better understand their perceptions of shared experiences (Flick, 2006). The employment of the focus group discussion itself is significant in TS in general and in Korea in particular, since the forum format has only rarely been used in TS research in limited cases¹⁵, and never previously used in the Korean TS research community.

3. Theoretical Background

Decisions regarding the criteria for the selection of the discussants and for the questions to be addressed were based on theoretical frameworks prevalent in TS. Whether changes have occurred in Korea’s outbound literary translation can be understood basically in terms of the systems theory (Even-Zohar, 2005) and the concentric circles model of Lefevere (1992). According to the polysystem theory, the apparent yielding of the previously prioritized inbound translation to outbound translation can be explained by the competition within the system of translated literature inside a wider literature system of Korea. The assumed shift from grantor-centric translation toward market-oriented translation where TL publishers take greater-than-before initiatives can be accounted for by the changing internal structure of the competition among different stakeholders in the ‘patronage’ circle (Lefevere, 1992). How much significance the translator alone should assume remains unaccounted for in both theories, however. At this point, we can utilize the insights of Pierre Bourdieu (1992), and a new sociological model developed from Bourdieu’s theory can be instructive in this regard.

Since the “rupture with exclusively text-bound approaches” (Wolf, 2007,

15 The use of the focus group format is a relatively recent phenomenon in TS. Nisbeth Brøgger (2017) adopted the focus group method to qualitatively examine the rationale of Danish medical translators for their translation choices and demonstrated the strong influence of contextual constraints on their processes and products. In a pilot qualitative research study on the role of ergonomics in translators’ workplaces, Peñalver and Santamaría Urbieto (2020) organized a focus group representing four different professional profiles in the Spanish translation industry. Sakamoto (2019) conducted a focus group study on 16 translation project managers working for language service providers in the United Kingdom to understand how they perceive the impact of translation-related technologies on their business practices. Li (2002)’s empirical study on the learning needs of students in Hong Kong took the form of a focus group discussion followed by a questionnaire survey.

p. 3) in TS, the relationship between a translation and the society in which it is embedded have attracted increasingly greater attention. Admittedly, translation is not a purely linguistic process/product (Marinetti, 2011, p. 26) but is the reflection of history, society and culture, and variables such as power, politics, ideology, ethics, and individual agency (Wolf, 2010, p. 337). Because of this close tie with society, translations need to be explored in social contexts, and this in turn requires a move beyond text-bound approaches.

In the 1970's, the theory of polysystem as “a dynamic sociocultural structure, in which centre and periphery fight over which ‘norms’ or ‘models’ will be dominant and shape the centre” (Ben-Ari, 2013, p. 144) attracted the attention of the TS academia. According to this conceptualization, translated literature, together with non-translated literature, constitutes a literary system within the larger polysystem of a society, and assumes different significance in society over time. Despite its limitations in recognizing the respective roles of, and accounting for the interplay among, different agents involved in translation and its social contexts, the theory led to the recognition of the dynamic hierarchical structure in a system of systems.

Building on this system-oriented approach to the relationship between literature and the society it belongs to, André Lefevere came up with a more elaborate model. Beginning as a systems theorist, he introduced ‘professionals’ and ‘patronage’ as two control factors governing how translation is done in a given literary system. Whereas the systems theory accounts for the unequal footing of different literary genres within the literary system in a society and the constant competition over time among different literary genres to assume the central position, Lefevere moved the focus of his attention to the surrounding factors that influence the translation. Specifically, professionals within the literary system, e.g., critics, reviewers, and academics as well as translators, engage in the production and assessment of translations. On the other hand, patronage outside the literary system, composed of individuals, groups or institutions, regulates translations and acts as a gatekeeper between a translation and the readership (Lefevere, 2002).

Although Lefevere's approach provided more recognition to agents in translation, it still leaves big questions unanswered: as the core producer of translated texts, how significant is the role played by the translator in

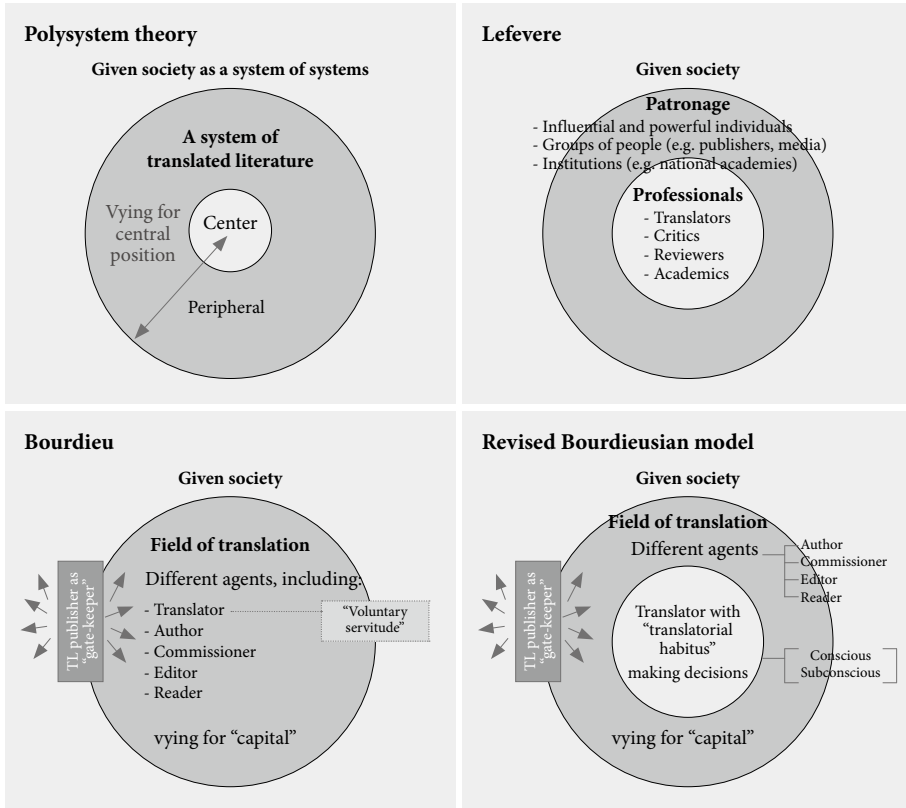
the entire endeavor toward the production of translation, as compared to other agents, and how does she interact with other agents in the translation process. Most of the answers can be found in Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological approach to TS.

The Bourdieu model of literary translation recognizes the translator as a crucial agent in the literary system. An independent actor with her own ‘translatorial *habitus*’, i.e., the broad social, identitary and cognitive make-up or disposition of the individual (Pratt, 1987), she produces translations based on her decisions made on different levels. However, her decision-making is not entirely independent; heavily influenced by family and education, including socialization on the one hand, and being restrained by the literary field she is in on the other, the translator’s translation reflects traces of her *habitus* such as personal traits, age, education level and norms she adheres to. At the same time, the literary field, including translated literature, is the site of a power struggle between the participating agents to obtain capital of diverse kinds available in the field (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 143). When viewed in this vein, translations are influenced by the translator in two ways: as the reflection of the translator’s *habitus* and decisions, and by the process of competition in which the translator participate.

Despite the contribution of the sociological approach in complementing the ‘worrying absence’ of the translator from earlier models, it still failed to fully recognize the translator in her relationship to her translation in two ways. Firstly, the focus of the approach was the relationship between the field and the individuals participating in the struggle that takes place in the field. This has led to the absence of detailed discussion on how the translator’s *habitus* influences the actual fabric of her translation. Secondly, those who further developed the Bourdieu model later relegated the role of the translator in the entire process as something of ‘voluntary servitude’, the translator’s degree of control being ‘nil or negligible’ (Simeoni, 1998, p. 14). The translator should be given more recognition in that the translation is a reflection of the translator’s traits and decisions, both on conscious and subconscious levels, which imbue the translation with her characteristic uniqueness.

The points summarized above led us to propose a revision to Bourdieu’s model to include a greater recognition of the role of the translator as the pivotal agent of the translated text production. This revised approach is schematized below as Figure 1.

Figure 1: Different models of translation in society¹⁶



Based on the above theoretical review, the decisions as to who should be present in the focus group discussion were: (1) the translators as the pivotal agent of the outbound literary translation in Korea, (2) other professionals engaged in the translation production, and (3) those representing patronage, or external factors, including literary grantor institutions.

A total of seven participants were purposively selected: two literary agents, one based in Korea and the other overseas; three practicing translators (two professors and one freelancer); an editor of a journal of literary translation

¹⁶ The Bourdieu model is constructed from Bourdieu's theory; the revised Bourdieu model is adapted from Bourdieu's theory, and is proposed by the lead author of this article.

(also a translator); and a representative of a Korean grantor institution. The profiles of the participants are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Participant profile

Code	Description	Nationality (working languages)	Remarks
LA-B	Literary agent	British (English and Korean)	
LA-K	Literary agent	Korean (Korean and English)	
ED/T-I	Editor of a literary journal; Literary translator	Indian (English and Korean)	Winner of a Korean translation award
GI-K	Representative of a grant institution	Korean (Korean and English)	
LT/P-A	Literary translator; Professor at a Korean university	American (English and Korean)	Winner of an American translation award
LT/P-K	Literary translator; Professor at a Korean university	Korean (Korean and English)	
LT-K	Literary translator	Korean (English and Korean)	Winner of a Korean translation award for up-and-coming translators

The discussion topics chosen to show the interaction among different agents in the field of translated literature on both micro and macro levels were: (1) roles and significance of different agents, (2) selection of both the works to be translated and the translator, (3) translating process and the interaction among agents, (4) changes in the field and their background, and (5) ways to promote further dissemination of Korean translated literature overseas. Table 3, below, shows the list of the topics.

4. Presentations and Discussions

4.1 Brief Presentations

Presentation 1

In the first presentation, LA-B began by acknowledging the role of the grantor institutions in the dissemination of Korean literature to the wider world. However, she recognized distinct international market forces, i.e., demand or lack thereof, emerging as a new driving force in the industry since outbound translation in Korea has already “reached its ‘tipping point’ whereby market forces have taken over”. Sales turnovers indicate “which books, themes, authors and translators were most successful and/or had most appeal,” and the changes in the scenery of Korea’s outbound literary translations is already visible such that “it isn’t just overseas publishers who lead but, rather, the market demand or lack thereof.”

She observed that the Republic of Korea has been comparatively proactive in its support for translating its authors via giving grants, as part of, and even before, the *Hallyu* project to introduce its culture to the wider world. However, she warned against a possible drawback of the grant system, i.e., the institution’s control over the selection of authors, agents and translators, among others. If combined with the Confucian structures of the Korean society, this might lead to favoritism whereby older writers of the canon could be given priority in funding or attention at the expense of more inventive, younger modern writers.

LA-B also pointed to the winner-takes-all system of publishing in outbound translations. Larger publishers tend to be unwilling to take risks on unknown authors whereas smaller indie publishers are more likely to take risks with relatively unknown authors. In this context, she thinks, the grant system should be maintained to supplement the poor conditions translators find themselves in, or to offer incentives for smaller indie publishers so that they can relatively easily pursue translations of lesser-known authors they deem worthy of their attention.

Presentation 2

ED-I based his presentation on a survey he conducted among his colleagues of aspiring foreign translators engaged in Korea’s outbound literary translation

as well as on his own experiences. He largely divided the grant system into ‘translator-driven’ and ‘publisher-driven.’ In the former, the funding is provided to the translator regardless of whether or not the book to be translated has been picked by an overseas publisher. In the latter, the funding is provided only to books already commissioned by translation publishers. In discussing respective benefits and drawbacks of both systems from the translator’s perspective, he reported on his respondents’ opinions that the translator-driven grants allow a translator more freedom of choice in what to work on in contrast to the publisher-driven grants, which oftentimes end up offering less monetary compensation to the translator.

What was noteworthy was ED-I’s discussion of a third category, i.e., ‘grants for planned translation,’ in which a grantor-organized committee pre-selects what to translate and then commissions competent translators to do the task. The objective of this type of grant translation is to have works translated so as to enable them to find their place in the global literary world, including works from Korea’s canon. The works chosen in this category are those deemed capable of contributing to the proliferation of Korean literary traditions abroad, regardless of their possible appeal to overseas readers. One of ED-I’s respondents supports efforts along these lines in that it guarantees a chance for foreign readers to discover new authors or new works of Korea, and the presenter himself believes this type of grant is critical as long as other types are offered in tandem.

Presentation 3

The third presentation, by LA-K, was primarily focused on the significance of translation in enriching world culture, saying that translation is as important as creative original authoring. While securing competent translators for literary translation is critical, it is as significant to produce translators who are familiar with the relevant industry and who are able to communicate with other actors in the industry. It is also important to guarantee an industry environment where competent translators can survive and prosper. Considering that the larger the translation market gets, the greater chances translators can have to flourish, all the stakeholders involved in the translation industry and market, i.e., authors, literary agents, translators, and publishers, both local and international, should cooperate and communicate with one another to create synergy with which to further fuel the market growth.

LA-K claimed that the changes to the landscape of the translation publication industry arrived with 2005 seen as the watershed year. Whereas the grantor institutions up until then played a leading role in the dissemination of Korean literature worldwide, literary agents and international publishers began to emerge as important actors in promoting Korean literature abroad. Although he was hopeful that outbound translations of Korean literature would eventually become ‘self-sustaining,’ he also was in favor of the maintenance of the grant system since grants will continue to be a necessity until Korean literature becomes more financially successful overseas.

He concluded by welcoming the trend that the academia, including TS, and the relevant industry are moving towards greater cooperation. He emphasized the need to broaden the scope of outbound translations to include non-literature, humanities, history, and general non-fiction, and to further cooperation between TS and the publication industry in finding and nurturing competent translators.

4.2 Group Discussion

The discussion topics can be grouped into nine issues. The list of the topics addressed is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: List of topics

	Topic
1	Changes in the outbound translation of Korean literature: Are they actually visible?
2	‘K-LITERATURE’ vs. ‘works by individual authors’
3	How to raise the stature of Korean literature overseas?
4	Who is a competent outbound literary translator?
5	Selection of which authors to be translated
6	Ideal translation process and respective actors’ roles
7	Translation assessment and the role of criticism

8	Translation commissioners and their influence on the translation process
9	Suggestions and closing remarks

Details of the discussions, by issue, are as follows.

T1. Changes in the outbound translation of Korean literature: Is it actually visible?

The first discussion issue was whether the shift from grant-centric translations towards private sector initiatives-oriented ones was visible within the market. All of the discussants agreed that the shift is visible and distinct. However, most of the discussants reported a preference for the maintenance of grant-funded translation. As its justification, they pointed to the fact that the translated literary market is extremely competitive, representing only 2.7% up to 3% of the total publishing market in most of the English-speaking countries. The average living standards of the literary translators are very low worldwide unless they are well established translators or have other sources of regular income. Considering that translations of Korean literary works constitute an even smaller share of the global translated literary market, while the shift was visible, grants still remain a necessity.

T2. ‘K-LITERATURE’ vs. ‘works by individual authors’

On the issue of the use of the umbrella term “K-LITERATURE” as a distinct brand referring to Korean literature in collectively promoting it to a wider world, LA-K noted that the term can be useful in raising initial interest, especially at a time when Korea’s soft power encompassing ‘K-POP’ and ‘K-Movies’ has created accumulative synergy. However, he warned against its overuse, saying that the label could serve negatively by apparently limiting the diversity and uniqueness of a wide range of Korean authors. Speaking to this topic, LA-B emphasized that authors need to compete individually based on their respective uniqueness and strengths while showing thematic universality so that overseas readers can appreciate the work by a totally unfamiliar author. Most of the other discussants agreed with this line of reasoning.

T3. How to raise the stature of Korean literature overseas

A recurring theme was the critical significance of the translation language or TL acceptability. The TL readers are the end-consumers of translated works, and in the process of reading translations they are compelled to “face places, topics, narratives that are completely foreign” (LA-B) as well as to understand the world of totally unfamiliar authors. If the language of the translation is anything but intelligible and natural, the translation will be received as a bad translation, “killing a book, and seriously damaging the author’s chance of being published again elsewhere in the world” (LA-B). Both LA-K and LA-B argued that the goal of translation is to produce translated works so that foreign readers want to consume them despite their general tendency of wanting to read what is familiar to them. LA-K reiterated the need to recognize the field of translation publication as an industry and to construct a cooperative network linking academia, including TS, the arts community, and the industry through closer communications. To this suggestion, LA-B agreed that translations can continue so long as they remain profitable, and that international access therefore depends on the quality of translation in tandem with the original author’s strengths.

T4. Who is a competent outbound literary translator?

The discussion naturally moved to the next issue of who should be translating. The question of whether or not only a native speaker of the TL should translate is a topic that has been talked about at length in TS. LT/P-K took the strongest position, saying that the most important qualification should be the TL nativeness of the translator¹⁷. Based on his own experience as a translator of multiple Korean poetry anthologies into English, he said it is a way of allowing the foreign readers to take ownership of translations, freely exchanging thoughts and comments on what they think of the literary works, which happen to be translated.

LA-K, GI-K, and LT-K basically agreed that the TL should be the native tongue of the translator, but alternative viewpoints were put forth as well.

17 He pointed out that his emphasis on the translator’s native language being the TL is separate from his recognition of the significance of the strengths of original literary work and of quality translation in disseminating translated works for a wider world and allowing foreign readers to easily access and enjoy translated works at their disposal.

ED-I noted in his discussion-end statement that the distinction between the native and non-native speaker status is increasingly becoming blurred especially for a *lingua franca* like English. Some discussants defined the nativeness of the TL more loosely, saying that if the level of the TL proficiency is as high as that of the native language, it should be considered to suffice, as in cases of B Languages¹⁸.

LT/P-A and LT-K emphasized the greater significance of the translator’s passion and enthusiasm toward the literary work and the author under translation over other technical considerations including the TL nativeness. In sharing his own experience in translating poetry, LT/P-A noted that the market for translation in general and the market for translated poetry in particular is very restricted, and that translating poetry can involve years of unpaid labor. Being motivated not by financial incentives but by a passion for their work, the translator’s passion is the only fuel to override concerns about whether the translator was a native speaker of the source language (SL) or TL. LT-K was particularly in support of LT/P-A’s idea, separating translations for a financial reward and translations for passion. Several other participants, including ED-I, agreed to this.

When the moderator pointed out that the level of translation does not hinge upon whether the translator is a native speaker of the TL, citing specific examples of erroneous, substandard translations by native speakers of the TL, all of the discussants agreed that the TL nativeness alone does not warrant a successful translation and that the translation quality is not the sole responsibility of the translator alone. This point is summarized in further detail in T6.

T5. Selection of which authors to be translated

Regarding the question of which authors to be translated, most of the discussants acknowledged the prevalent role of the grantor institutions in the past. However, GI-K and LA-K observed an ever-increasing role of TL publishers and literary agents from 2011 on.

According to LA-K, the ordinary selection process under the market

18 According to the AIIC (International Association of Conference Interpreters), the language classification consists of three categories: Language A (mother tongue), Language B (second active language), and Language C (passive language) (Thiery, 1978).

force system begins with the translator's submission of English synopses, readers' reports, and sample translations to the publisher. If the publisher's editor finds them 'excellent,' the translator who wrote the sample translation wins the deal. If the editor liked the work but did not find the quality of sample translations satisfactory, they ask for another referral or look for an alternative translator on his/her own.

LA-B introduced another possibility. Sometimes translators work with agents and/or editors/publishers to discuss the authors they champion¹⁹, and if the agent and editors/publishers feel a similar passion for the author under discussion, then the translator, agent and publisher start to work together. LT-A also advocates this way: Translators initiate the process of finding publishers to work with for the translation publication of an author they like. LA-K noted that despite the norm that the publisher chooses competent translators, foreign publishers oftentimes resort to literary agents for translator recommendations when they have limited access to the pool of translators.

T6. Ideal translation process and actors involved

LT/P-A brought up the issue of collaborative translation between native SL and TL speakers. In a poetry translation project that lasted five years, he worked with two other Korean colleagues as he felt it was important to work with female colleagues whose life experience gave them a vantage point to understand parts of the ST that he might not catch or understand. After the collaborative phase of the translation, he edited the manuscript together with them, but then did the most of the final editing alone. The collaborative process did not just involve his co-translators. The publisher was actively involved in the editing process. Having already worked with the author before, the publisher had a strong idea of the kind of voice they wanted from the text, and asked the translator to adjust many aspects of the original translation for fear that the translation might sound "too creative or wild" to the target readership. In working together, the editors and the translator came to an agreement that if these changes were not made, readers might

19 LA-B introduced this term for the translator's role in cultivating interest in new authors by exerting their influence as 'tastemaker'.

misinterpret the excessiveness of the text as erroneous translation rather than artistic intent.

LT/P-A noted that the author, who approached the translator first, was happy with the changed voice in translation. However, other discussants, including LT/P-K and GI-K, noted that this is a rather unusual case since most Korean authors tend to minimize their involvement in the translation process, let alone express their being pleased or displeased. LT-K observed that most Korean authors do not get actively involved in the translation process except for those proficient in the TL, in this case English, who make occasional suggestions.

As in the case of LT/P-A’s poetry translation, the publisher’s editor gets heavily engaged in the finalization of the translation in question after the submission of the translation. Most of the discussants agree that the TL publisher has the greatest say in the process of the translation, and the editor plays a critical role in improving and finalizing the submitted translation. LT-K also said that the primary source of input was editors and TL publishers, and that she often paid more attention to their input than to input from authors. For LA-K, editors were seen to play a critical role in relation to the discussion of whether the translator should be a native speaker of the TL. Korean literature is judged by the merits of the translation, without regard for whether translation errors have affected the quality of the end product. GI-K and ED-I noted that such translation errors should be the responsibility of the editor. ED-I further mentioned that it would therefore be important to train skilled editors for quality translation.

Despite the significance of their role, it is hard for editors whose language combination does not include the SL of the original to detect erroneous translation segments related to source text (ST) miscomprehension. As evidenced in specific examples the moderator provided, even overseas award-winning translations were found to have not a small number of erroneous translation segments²⁰, either because of inadequate or inaccurate ST comprehensions or misinterpretations in logical connections.

This point led back to the discussion of whether a competent translator should be a native speaker of the TL. Considering the significance of the ST

20 Representative examples provided include *Please Look After Mom* and *The Vegetarian*.

comprehension based on the SL proficiency, a collaboration between the SL and the TL native speakers was emphasized as a viable solution, and LT/P-A especially emphasized its importance especially in the initial translating phase prior to the final editing. By way of conclusion to this issue, all of the discussants agreed that the role of translation criticism is crucial. This issue is taken up again in T7, below.

T7. Translation assessment and the role of criticism

The consensus among the discussants regarding the role solid criticism should play in relation to translated literature was that criticism, in particular “vitriolic criticism of the kind often found on the internet” as described by the moderator in opening this section, was seen as arising from the belief that translation could be performed by anyone with bilingual proficiency. It was argued that constructive yet systematic criticism should be nurtured, and that, in addition to the role of translators and editors, scholars of Korean literature and translation should become more vocal in stimulating critical discourse surrounding outbound literary translations. It was emphasized that with a strong translation critiquing tradition, both erroneous translation and negligent editing consequences can be easily removed. Most of the discussants stressed the need to strengthen the translation criticism in both TS and the relevant industry, and reinvigorate industry-academia cooperation by expanding the role of translation critics in the relevant industry.

A counterpoint was also made by LT/P-K, who argued that Korean academia should not concern itself with criticizing translations of Korean literature since the primary consumers of outbound translations are foreign audiences and, therefore, foreign readers should be left to entertain Korean literature at their disposal, free from local discussions on the quality of translated literature in Korea.

T8. Translation commissioners and their influence on the translation process

Regarding the end product, ED-I explained that editors and TL publishing houses tended to exert more input on the final product than authors. Where publishers were familiar with the author’s style, LT/P-A suggested, they might request that the translator make that style visible, or, as in the poetry translation by LT/P-A, alter the author’s voice in a certain way. They

might request that the translator tone down certain stylistic elements in the interest of TL acceptability, as the excessive use of adjectives and adverbs, however true to the original authors’ style, might be regarded as a stylistic deficiency on the part of the translator (LT-K). All in all, the influence of the TL publisher and their editors as translation commissioners are critical in the finalization of translations, a fact in line with the schematization of their role as ‘gatekeepers’ in the theoretical models above.

T9. Suggestions and closing remarks

Due to time constraints, two of the additional issues listed for the group discussion—how to broaden the horizons of Korea’s outbound literary translation overseas, and literary translation in the context of TS—were only mentioned in passing, and each of the participants was asked to make closing statements.

LT/P-K highlighted the need to promote the use of and study of Korea’s translated literary works at overseas universities since this is an effective and systematic way of creating and expanding its basis in the minds of foreign readers. The government, he argued, should support courses on Korean literature at undergraduate and graduate programs abroad and provide assistance to foreign scholarly explorations in the field.

LA-K reiterated the significance of actors engaged in translation, including industry and market players, working closely together given the interconnectedness of the translation process: Literary works are translated for publishing, which in turn is aimed at generating profits in the market, which in turn also translates into greater readership. In the same vein, he said all actors in the field of outbound literary translation play their respective roles with the awareness that they each play an important role.

LA-B stressed the business aspects of translation and publishing and the contribution of literary agents to unearthing new and diverse authors. LT/P-A welcomed recent trends in the field of outbound literary translation, such as the emergence of authors with their own followings, and genre diversification.

Both ED-I and LT-K pointed to the lack of enough economic compensation for literary translators and emphasized the need to find ways to support aspiring translators. LT-K noted that the divide between literary and technical translations is a strong reason why graduates from key translation training programs are hardly interested in, or rarely engage in, literary

translation, citing its non-lucrative nature.

GI-K concluded by saying that despite some attacks on grantor institutions on the grounds that they exercise undue influence in the selection of literary works and translators to translate and somewhat negligent quality control of grant-winning translations, they have played a significant role in the proliferation of Korea's literature overseas. He predicted the coexistence of both grantor-centric and market-oriented systems in literary translation, and emphasized the need to maintain the 'grant for planned translation' system by grantor institutions.

5. Conclusions

The Focus Group Discussion was organized based on a revised sociological theoretical framework, as adapted from Bourdieu's theory of cultural production. It posited that the translator is the central agent of text production in the field of translated literature and that it is important to understand her interactions with other actors, being influenced by the competitive dynamics in vying for diverse, albeit limited, capital available in the field. Accordingly, seven discussants representing different stakeholders of the field of outbound translated literature were invited. A total of nine topics were chosen to address both micro- and macro-level issues related to the understanding of the translation process and the dynamics involved.

The discussants unanimously noted distinct shifts towards a more market-driven production of outbound translations away from the grantor-centric translation system. The consensus, however, was to prefer the maintenance of the literary grant system until the market forces become able to sustain the outbound translation industry. Their rationale was that translated literature often assumes a peripheral position in the literary polysystem in most English-speaking societies, taking up only 3% of the publication at a maximum, and Korea's translated literature faces a tougher competition for an even smaller share. Whereas the 'translator-driven' and the 'publisher-driven' grants have been dominant up until this point, the third type, the 'grant for planned translations', was advocated among the discussants. Referring to a grant plan in which a grantor-organized selection committee pre-selects literary works and authors deemed worthy

of translating for the dissemination of Korean literature worldwide, it is instrumental, they believed, in introducing new authors and unfamiliar works to a foreign readership.

As for the respective roles different actors play in the translating process, authors in general were found to offer little input, either because outbound translation projects themselves represent rare opportunities or because they apparently do not have a sufficient command of the TL to produce detailed feedback. Literary agents serve as a bridge between the source and target literary fields. Despite their focus on the entrepreneurial aspects of literary translation and publishing, they serve to broaden diversity, including introducing new authors. Most of the discussants agreed that TL publishers and their editors oftentimes are the single most important players in the process, selecting which authors are to be translated by which translators. The norm is that the TL publisher finds the translator for tasks in progress; however, literary agents make occasional recommendations when the publisher has limited access to the pool of translators.

Regarding translation quality control, ST comprehension and literary appreciation were recognized as presupposed. As to who is a competent translator responsible for the final quality, however, different opinions emerged: while the TL nativeness of the translator found advocates among the discussants, an equally strong objection was raised: three discussants emphasized the translator’s passion as the only fuel to override concerns about whether the translator is a native speaker of the TL, and one participant noted that the distinction between the native and non-native speaker status is increasingly becoming blurred especially for a *lingua franca* like English.

Many suggestions were made as to ways to further promote Korea’s translated literature worldwide. The umbrella term ‘K-LITERATURE’ may be instrumental in the initial stage of global dissemination; however, the discussants were in agreement that authors should compete individually, utilizing their independent strengths and uniqueness while offering thematic universality. The translated publication industry should be recognized as an industry where academics, including those in TS, the arts community, and those in the industry seek closer communication, constructing an organic cooperation and collaboration structure. The recent trends toward greater diversity in genres should be embraced and welcomed.

The revised sociological model as adapted from a Bourdieu’s

conceptualization of agents in a field was insightful. Different agents with their respective *habitus* vie for diverse capital available in the field, being influenced by the field's competitive dynamics. The translator in particular is recognized as the central agent of translated text production, making decisions, both consciously and subconsciously, as to how to translate a text as a reflection of her traits and experiences. The model facilitated the selection of who should be sitting at the discussion table in what capacities, and of the questions to be addressed in order to gain a complete picture of outbound literary translation in Korea comprising both micro- and macro-level perspectives. To that end, the format of a focus group discussion, the first in TS research in Korea, proved effective.

As for some limits of the discussion structure, TL publishers were not represented in the focus group discussion since the focus of the discussion this time around was to collect first-hand voices from those who are more directly involved in the translation production. Allegedly the most influential agents and the 'gatekeepers' of the field in question, if the TL publisher and their editors were to be placed together with the seven other discussants, the discussion might have slanted to reflect their stronger voice. Another consideration was to keep the number of discussants to a workable number for the given time frame. If TL publishers had been included, the broad spectrum of expert opinions from the translation process perspective might have been sacrificed. It would be important, therefore, that future research should factor in the role of the TL publisher and their editors as well. It is hoped that focus group discussions can be exploited more frequently in TS research as an effective method of qualitative analysis.

Appendix

Common Questions

1. How visible have been the shifts from the grantor-centric system led by the Korean Literary Translation institution (KLTI) or Daesan Foundation toward a market-centric system where the TL publishers take the initiative?
 2. How do translation commissioners influence translators in their translation process? How do these changes in commissioner types affect the selection of translation strategies and translation processes?
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3. What are other factors influencing the work of translators?
4. The assessment and criticism of literary translation have so far been focusing on translation errors. What do you think of the traditional divide between the translation practice/industry and the TS academia?
5. What are other key issues associated with the translation process, criticism, and assessment?

Ad Hoc Questions

LA-B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Overseas publishers are playing a central role in Korean authors’ winning of international literary awards. What is the role of literary agents as their intermediaries? Please share the current status of business, possibilities, and next steps.
LA-K	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How are decisions made on what and who to translate? Who takes the initiative between you and overseas publishers? ● There have been controversies on clear issues found from translated works (e.g. factual/grammatical mistakes as opposed to stylistic choices). As a literary agent, can you share with us your ideas of the right procedure, steps or model for translation assessment and revision?
ED-I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How and on what criteria do commissioners choose translators? ● How and to what extent do commissioners affect the translation process of translators? ● What is your work model as an editor? What are your methods and criteria? Do you receive any guidelines or specific directions from the commissioners? How much discretion do you have? ● In the editing process, do you take into account the end-readers and publishers? If yes, how much is their importance? ● What are the biggest challenges facing translators (e.g. difficulty in relations with commissioners/publishers, requests for adjustment in translation strategy)?
GI-K	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What are the roles played by the KLTII as a governmental grantor organization? ● What are the issues with selecting what to translate by whom? ● What are ideal models for incorporating TQA, editing, and translation quality control? Who should be responsible in what phase of production?
LT-K	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What are specific challenges you face in the process of literary translation from Korean (e.g. text understanding, reformulation, principles and extent of mediation)? ● Please describe your relations with translation commissioners, translation processes, and post-delivery work. ● If you have experience with assessment, criticism, or revision requests on your translations, please share your honest thoughts.

<p>LT-K</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think are reasons why graduates from specialized translation programs still are hard to find in the field of literary translation? • What are the challenges of market entry? What possibilities does the market present? • What led you to become a literary translator? What are your future plans?
<p>LT/ P-A</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are specific challenges you face in the process of literary translation from Korean (e.g. text understanding, reformulation, principles and extent of mediation)? • Please describe your relations with translation commissioners, translation processes, and post-delivery work. • If you have experience in assessment, criticism, or revision requests on your translations, please share your honest thoughts. • What do you think are reasons why graduates from translation education institutes still are hard to find in the field of literary translation?

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Professional Profile

Cheong Ho-Jeong is Professor at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (HUFS), Korea. She received her Ph.D. in Interpretation and Translation Studies in 2004, the first such degree conferred in Korea, on the topic of “Translated Text Expansion and Contraction Phenomena:

A corpus-based study of quantitative target text changes as reflective of translator mediation.” Intending to marry research results with translation practice, she has coordinated large-scale government-funded translation projects and organized multiple translation policy fora with the National Assembly of Korea. Having authored three books and edited two collective volumes, she has served on the editorial board of the journal *FORUM: International Journal of Interpretation and Translation* since 2016.

Co-authors Information

Hyun-kyung Lim is a lecturer at HUFS. As a translator, she works on translation, transcreation and localization. Besides translation, her previous career includes terminology management at CLS Communications and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).

Jeon Min-chul studied architecture and industrial design before receiving his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in interpretation and translation. He teaches interpreting and translation at HUFS. As an interpreter and translator, he specializes in art and video game media, with work experience in engineering and social science.