

**Rethinking Activism:  
The Power and Dynamics of Translation in China during the Late Qing Period  
(1840-1911)**

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One significant development in translation studies in the last two decades has been the intense interest shown by researchers in issues pertaining to the different, and sometimes multiple, roles which translators or works of translation can play in actual or potential situations of tension and conflict – political, social, cultural and/or ideological. Equally intense has been the interest in studying how acts of mediation, manipulation, intervention, subversion, and/or transgression are manifested in actual translating and interpreting performances. The findings have in turn led to a radical re-interrogation of conventional notions of translation, such as that of translation as communication, as interlingual transfer of meaning, or as cultural exchange, and have opened up new possibilities of understanding and theorizing the nature of the activity of translating/interpreting. This paper explores one facet of the power and dynamics of translation by examining the use and usefulness of translation in serving activist ends and effecting concrete change – total or partial change, change in the individual or in some supra-individual system, or both. Drawing on a model for classifying social movements borrowed from the anthropologist David Aberle, and focusing on a particular period in the past – the late Qing era (1840-1911) in China – the author analyzes the aims and aspirations of political activists of different orientations, and the complex and intricate relation between translation and activism during that period. The analysis is followed by a more reflective section on the relevance of research on this topic to the present generation of translators and translation researchers.