

# Global Translations and the Quest for Soft Power

## —The Case of Contemporary China

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Postcolonial criticism has since its inception argued that when the colonizer talks about the colonial subject his or her statements are undoubtedly an expression of hegemony and control. For instance, the infamous book *Chinese Characteristics* (1894) written by the missionary Arthur Smith has long been criticized for orientalizing China. Scholars such as Lydia Liu, Paul Cohen and Prasenjit Duara have continuously pointed out that Chinese voices need to be heard to write a history that is no longer hegemonial. In fact, the strengthening of translingual and transcultural debates is a relevant step to establish a truly global academic community where power hierarchies have been flattened or even overcome. Until today this ideal has not been realized. A quick look at the academic publication market reveals a not only a persisting Western centrism where North American publications dominate, but also a troublesome asymmetry in terms of translation. Much more Western publications appear on the Chinese book market than the other way around. As a result, thereof, institutions such as Chinese Fund for the Humanities and Social Sciences have in recent years started to provide funding for translating more Chinese academic books into foreign languages (not limited to English). In the reading of Foucault and the postcolonial critique, such efforts can be read as expression of resistance and ideological subversion, is however not unproblematic. This paper discusses the necessary conditions for these books to be read outside China and to strengthen Chinese soft power in academic discourse in the humanities. I will focus on questions of conceptual language in translation and highlight the need to engage with both Euro- and Sinocentrism when reading translations.