

Writing names in Chinese translations of Nikolai Gogol's *Dead Souls*

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The paper is a case study of a more general problem of rendering Western proper names (mostly of people and places) in the Chinese writing system. It is well known that the syllabic nature of Chinese phonology and script makes it necessary for all phonetic borrowings to undergo the 'syllabization' process. All translations studied in this paper use transcription of Russian names, despite the fact that Gogol's names are often meaningful and rich in connotations.

In the original first names of the characters clearly show their social status, e.g. Selifan (a coachman, the name sounds 'common-folk') or Petrushka (a servant, his name Petr being socially neutral, but the diminutive suffix showing that he is a serf) on the one hand, and the names of landlords that sound more or less 'genteel' (also to different degrees, thus showing subtler social distinctions between them) and include patronymics. The patronymics are rendered in the Chinese translations and seem to be the only way of reflecting social connotations in the names directly in the text. All the rest has to be explained in the commentary, e.g. the name Elizavet (a non-existent male form of the normal Elizaveta [Elizabeth] – thus a peasant woman was formally described as a man in order to be sold; Lu Xun in his translation transcribes the former as Yilishabeitusi [presumably from the fictitious latinized male form Elisabethus] and the latter as Yilishabeiduo).

This is also true of last names and nicknames. Cf. the surname of a boorish Sobakevich (derived from 'dog'), or a narrow-minded Korobochka ('small box'). The colourful nicknames are also mostly transcribed in the text and explained in the notes, though Tian Dawei translates them directly in the main text, cf. Koroviy kirpich ('Cow Dung Brick', literally translated as niushizhuan) or Neuvazhay-Koryto ('Disrespect the Washtub', translated as wulide shuicao 'Impolite Washtub'). Names of historical (Bonaparte) and mythological (Alcides) figures are also transcribed and commented on.

Names of places also present a problem. Gogol mentions a shop-sign 'Tailor from Arsaw', deliberately misspelling *Warsaw* to show that this was in fact a Russian tailor who naively pretended to be 'European'. Most translators either ignored this mistake or reproduced it in a manner that must be non-transparent for a Chinese reader (cf. Axiao for Arsaw in Lu Xun's translation). Tian Dawei found a good solution by writing 花沙

(huāshā) instead of the correct 华沙 (huáshā) and explaining it in the commentary. This still is not perfect, because Gogol also hints at the fact that the first letter had been washed off by rain. One more example: Gogol writes that 'the village of Manilovka ['Luring'] could hardly lure anyone by its location'. All the translators just transcribe the name, and only Tian Dawei comments on it.

Lamentably, the play on the meaning of Chinese characters used for transcribing foreign words (otherwise present in Chinese) was not used in the translations, though it would have been easy for example to write 迷你罗夫卡 Mínlúófūkǎ 'luring-you-toils-man-grip'.

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