

The Translator as Cultural Ambassador: Gu Hongming and Lin Yutang

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Gu Hongming (1857-1928) and Lin Yutang (1895-1976) were two of the earliest Chinese translators who worked from Chinese into English. By the end of the nineteenth century, when Gu Hongming began translating, certain stereotypes regarding the Chinese were already well-established in the English-speaking world. Working within the constraints of English-language publication mediums imposed by such stereotypes, I will argue that both men sought to engage with and at the same time to counter certain facets of these images of China and the Chinese. This paper will consider three questions: what did Gu Hongming and Lin Yutang hope to accomplish through their translation practice? What sorts of translation strategies did they employ in order to achieve their goal? Finally, to what extent can we say that they were successful? In order to answer these three questions, I will examine a variety of texts produced by the two authors, including their translations, prefaces, introductions, and notes, as well as their own original writings in English. I will also look at book reviews, editorials, retranslations, and other reactions to their work by their English-speaking audience.