Early Modern Translation in Eastern Eurasia from a Global Perspective

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Abstract: In this research I combine three things: translation history, early modern era, and global history. I examine translation of the early modern (circa 1400-1800) Eastern Eurasia (East and Southeast Asia) from a global perspective. Different from the research on translation history by Translation Studies scholars and nation-based historians, I emphasize a broader approach and a global perspective. The former treats the eastern part of the Eurasian continent as a whole, while the latter not only compares Eastern Eurasia to other parts of Eurasia, but also study translation as an important force in civilizational or cultural exchanges. More than just asking questions like "what were and who translated?" I concern with the impact of translation on state formation (specifically social and economic development). Inspired by Joseph Fletcher's "quickening tempo" of the early modern era, my another goal is try to discern and define an "early modern translation" by demonstrating the volume, speed, and content of translation of the early modern era in Eastern Eurasia (and in the whole world) increased or expanded dramatically comparing to the past eras. Last but not least, regarding the driving forces behind the expanded early modern translation, in addition to emphasizing the European drive in Asia, I equally stress Asian dynamism which was independent of European expansionism but has received little attention: the vernacularization (inventing new scripts such the kana in Japan, nom in Vietnam, hangul in Korea, etc.) and/or multilingualism across Eastern Eurasia (which urges us to think about a "linguistic early modernity"). In other words, besides the familiar translations between Western-Asian languages, there were also the ignored translations among Asian languages (inter- and intra-language translations). All in all, I argue that early modern translation is indispensable for understanding early modern Eastern Eurasian history.