Working with Non-English Sources in Writing: MLA

The ability to read and understand more than one language is an undeniable asset in academic research. Reading a source in its original language is usually preferable to reading a translation.

This handout outlines some best practices for citing non-English sources in your English writing assignments using MLA.

Why Use Non- English Sources?

Knowing why you are using non-English sources is as important as knowing how to use them.One reason might be if you are researching a non-Western artist or practice: it may be difficult to find many relevant English sources.

One reason might be if you are researching a non-Western artist or practice: it may be difficult to find many relevant English sources. If you were researching Youngsun Suh, a contemporary Korean artist, for example, you would find many more Korean sources than English ones. In this case, it would be an advantage to use Korean sources.

In contrast, if you were writing about the work of English sculptor Henry Moore, there would be many more English sources available than Korean ones. In this case, you would need to think about why you need to use Korean sources when so many English ones are available.

HOW TO INCORPORATE NON-ENGLISH SOURCES

In MLA, the official guidelines are to include a quotation in the original language followed immediately by your translation in parentheses and quotation marks. But if you think your reader will be unable to understand the original text, you can reverse this order and list your translation first. In place of the citation at the end of the quotation, include the words "my trans." with the page number.

In MLA, it is the writer's choice whether you rewrite a non-Roman text into Roman characters: you just need to be consistent across all of your sources. Either of the examples below would be correct in MLA, but combining both of them in the same paper would not be.

Examples

Xiao Feng and Ren JianJun describe Chinese pattern in this way: "Zhong guo fang shi shi zhong guo dang dai yi shu zhong de yi ge zhong yao biao xian xing shi. Ta shi jie yong zhong guo chuan tong wen hua zi yuan de shi jue yuan su, bing ba ta zhuan huan cheng fu he dang dai yi shu yu jing de yi shu xing shi" ("Chinese pattern' is a vital manifestation in Chinese contemporary art. It employ

In an essay about his work, painter Youngsun Suh describes how he came to look to nature for inspiration: "그러나 그 맑고 투명한 세계라는 것 자체를 의심하게 되고 세계의 구조를 발아래 들여다 보려는 욕망을 포기하면서 문득, 나를 둘러싼 중위와 자연의 실체들을 다시 쳐다 보기 시작했다" ("However, when I became suspicious of the clear and transparent world and gave up the desire to peek into the structure of the world, I suddenly began to look at the reality of nature surrounding me"; my trans. 46).

Works Cited

In MLA style, you cite a non-English text in exactly the same way that you cite English texts: give the author's name, title and publication information exactly as they appear in the original text. It is conventional to rewrite non-Roman alphabets (Russian, Korean, Japanese, etc) into the Roman alphabet for names of authors, places and organizations. You would also typically provide a translation of the title (in square brackets) and any other information that your reader may need.

Examples

Clouteau, Ivan. "Activation des œuvres d'art contemporain et prescriptions auctoriales." ["Activation of contemporary artworks and authoritative prescriptivism"]. *Culture et musées* 3 (September 2004): pp. 23-43.

Xiao Feng & Ren JianJun. "中国方式: 中国当代艺术中一个重要的文化现象" ["Chinese Pattern: A Vital Manifestation in Chinese Contemporary Art."]. 华中师范大学学报: 人文社会科学版 [*Journal of Huazhong Normal University (Humanities and Social Sciences)]*, 43-1 (2004): p. 133.

Youngsun Suh. 그림, 그리고 그린다는것 - 徐庸宣 個人展 [*The Study of Drawing Through Portrait Painting]*. Seoul, Korea: The Modeling Laboratory of the Seoul National University, 15.1: pp. 46-49.

Note: Author names in Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese are always written with family name first. In the Works Cited list, you do not need to reverse names as they are already in the correct order, and no comma needs to be added between names.