

# Comparative Study of Translation between China and the West

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**Abstract:** In recent years, with the acceleration of globalization and the exchange and integration between different cultures, translation has played an increasingly crucial role as an important cross-cultural communication tool. As an important field, Chinese Western translation involves the mutual transformation and cultural exchange between Chinese and Western languages, and has significant theoretical and practical value. This paper aims to conduct a comparative study of Chinese and Western translation studies, explore the differences and similarities in theoretical viewpoints and methods between the two, in order to deepen the theoretical understanding and practical application of Chinese and Western translation studies. In the historical development of Chinese and Western translation studies, Chinese translation studies has accumulated rich experience and achievements in translation theory and practice with its long history and unique traditions. Western translation studies, with its systematic and theoretical characteristics, have formed various important translation theory schools and methodologies. The exchange and influence of Chinese and Western translation studies have promoted the integration and mutual reference of theories, providing important ideological support for the development of Chinese and Western translation practice.

**Keywords:** Comparative Study; Translation of China; Translation of the West; Cross Cultural Communication.

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## 1. Introduction

Translation, as a cross-cultural communication tool, has a profound history and extensive applications. With the advancement of globalization and the increasing frequency of exchanges between countries, the study of translation studies has become increasingly important. Studying translation studies has important background and significance for promoting cultural exchange and understanding, advancing literature and cultural dissemination, addressing the needs of multilingual communication, facilitating academic exchange and interdisciplinary research, and improving the effectiveness of language education and learning. Studying translation studies not only helps deepen our understanding of translation activities, but also provides theoretical support and guidance for practical applications and disciplinary development.

Cultural exchange and understanding. Translation, as a bridge between cultures, helps promote communication between different languages and cultures. By studying translation studies, one can gain a deeper understanding of the ways of thinking, values, and habits of different cultures, and promote mutual understanding and integration between them.

Literature and cultural dissemination. Literary works are an important component of culture, and translation plays a crucial role in the dissemination and promotion of literary works. The study of translation studies can help translators better understand the literary value and artistic style of the original work, accurately convey the author's intentions, and enhance the international influence of literary works.

Sustainable development and social needs. With the development of globalization, exchanges and cooperation in various fields such as business, technology, and politics are becoming increasingly frequent. Translation plays an important role in these fields, providing multilingual communication solutions for businesses and organizations. Studying translation studies can help improve translation quality and efficiency, and meet the multilingual

communication needs of different fields.

Interdisciplinary research and academic exchange. Translation studies, as a comprehensive discipline, has close connections with multiple disciplines such as linguistics, literature, cultural studies, sociology, etc. Studying translation studies can promote communication and cooperation between various disciplines, and drive interdisciplinary integration and innovation of knowledge.

Language education and learning. Translation plays an important role in language education and learning. By studying translation studies, we can delve into methods and strategies for language learning, and improve language expression and cross-cultural communication skills of language learners.

## 2. The Historical Development of Chinese and Western Translation Studies

### 2.1. Translation and Translation Studies

Translation practice has a very long history, but there is much controversy in both the East and the West over the definition of translation and translation studies.

Since ancient times, there have been numerous definitions of translation. Firstly, let's start with the traditional definition. From the perspective of dictionary interpretation, translation refers to: (a) The action or process of turning from one language into another; also, the product of this; A version in a different language (the act or process of converting from one language to another); Also refers to translated works; Text expressed in another language or to turn from one language into another; To change into another language retaining the sense; Convert one language into another while preserving the original (Oxford English Dictionary); (b) Fanyi ① expresses the meaning of one language in another language (also refers to the use of another expression between dialects and national common languages, dialects and dialects, ancient and modern languages); Expressing symbols or numbers representing

language and characters in language and characters People who do translation work "(Revised Modern Chinese Dictionary). (Xu Jun, Murray, 2009).

Professor Yang has made a new definition of translation studies: Translation Studies focuses on the entire process of translation (including object, subject, process, result, and impact), as well as the history of translation, translation theory, and methodology. Its deep concept is to promote communication and progress, and reduce contradictions and harm. It emphasizes both the universality of theoretical research and the application of theoretical research (including translation practice, translation criticism, and talent cultivation). It is an independent, open, and comprehensive humanities and social science. (Yin Yan'an, 2010).

Translation studies is the scientific study of translation. Translation studies should not be limited to translation activities themselves, but should include all fields related to translation activities. Due to the fact that translation (referring to interlingual translation) involves two languages, comparative or contrastive methods are always indispensable when studying translation. Overall, the specific research objects of translation studies should first include: (1) the essence of translation; (2) Principles and standards of translation; (3) Translation methods and techniques; (4) The process and procedure of translation operation; (5) The various contradictions that arise during the translation process, such as the contradiction between purpose and means, the contradiction between content and form, the contradiction between the author and the translator and the target readers, and so on. (Tan Zaixi, 1988).

From a content perspective, translation studies mainly consist of three components: (1) general translation studies; (2) Shu Te Translation Studies; (3) Applied Translation Studies. General translation studies mainly study the general laws of human language, culture, and translation, the general process of translation, the position of translation in the entire scientific system, and its relationship with other disciplines. It explores the nature, function, standards, and general responsibilities and conditions of translation from a macro perspective, and studies the history of translation from the perspectives of diachronic and synchronic translation studies, including not only the national and regional history of translation, but also the world history of translation. Then, based on this, a general translation theory involving general languages is proposed. Shu Te Translation Studies is different from ordinary translation studies in that its scope is relatively small, mainly studying the issue of mutual translation between two specific languages, involving the comparison of these two languages and cultures, revealing the regular and irregular, corresponding and non corresponding, integrated and conflicting things between them, and then proposing theories that can guide the mutual translation of two specific languages. It can be said that this is a theory of comparative translation studies or comparative translation studies. Applied translation studies mainly study how to apply the theories of general translation studies and special translation studies to translation practice, translation teaching, translation criticism, compilation of translation reference books, and machine translation. From a micro perspective, it explains the purpose, function, standards, procedures, and methods of translation, as well as their interrelationships, in order to test the practical application of general translation studies and special translation studies. The application of translation studies is directly related to translation practice, and therefore is the

most concerned part for most translators. (Tan Zaixi, 1988).

At the same time, it should also be pointed out that translation studies have their own unique characteristics because "(1) the study of translation must involve language (or other non-verbal symbol systems), and language is a social behavior of human beings with too many variable parameters. Therefore, it is difficult for translation studies to produce strict formulas based on the study of specific phenomena like mathematics and physics; (2) actual translation does not involve language as a system, but rather language or discourse that appears in special forms in specific situations, and the forms of discourse are constantly changing. Translation studies can only provide a macro description of them, and it is impossible and unnecessary to cover all aspects; (3) Translation studies and linguistics are closely related and share many common ground, so their independent disciplinary status has a certain degree of relativity. (Tan Zaixi, 1988).

In summary, translation studies is a discipline that studies the process, theory, and practice of translation. It covers multiple disciplinary fields from linguistics, cultural studies, pragmatics, cognitive science to sociology, and focuses on theoretical exploration, methodology, and practical applications of translation.

## 2.2. The Origin and Development of Translation Studies in China

The development of translation theory in China roughly corresponds to the history of translation. The history of translation can be mainly divided into the following periods: firstly, the ancient period from the translation of Buddhist scriptures to the translation of science, technology, and religion in the Ming and Qing dynasties. The second is the translation theory in the late Qing and early Ming dynasties. The third period is the Republic of China era. Fourthly, after the establishment of the People's Republic of China. Translation is the most direct expression of language and writing, and language and writing can best reflect national characteristics. The development of translation theory cannot erase national characteristics, nor can it sever the historical context. Deepening the development of theory requires both horizontal introduction and vertical inheritance.

### (1) During the period of ancient translation theory

The translation of Buddhist scriptures, which has lasted for thousands of years, has left precious theories for ancient translation theory. The Preface to Fa Ju Jing, written by Zhi Qian during the Three Kingdoms Period, pointed out: "It is not easy to convey the truth because of different names and objects; it is easy to know when you want, and it is not easy to lose." He first proposed that it is not easy to translate things, which also reflects the early qualitative school's view of translation. Dao'an in the Eastern Jin Dynasty proposed that "five lost versions, three not easy", pointing out that there are five situations in translating Buddhist scriptures that will lose their true colors, and three situations determine the difficulty of translation.

Later Qin monk Jiumoluo Shi first raised the question of how to express the style and language interest of the original text. The eminent monk Huiyuan of the Eastern Jin Dynasty proposed the translation concept of "Juezhong", which is a moderate method between literary quality. The "Dialectical Theory" written by Yan Cong, a famous monk of the Sui Dynasty, is the first officially translated treatise in Chinese history that exists today. The most famous of these is the

discourse on the "Eight Preparation Theory", which states that as a qualified translator of Buddhist scriptures, one should possess eight principles. Xuanzang, a famous monk in the Tang Dynasty, proposed the concept of "five types of non translation", which is transliterated as "translation without translation". He specifically identified five situations of non translation. At the beginning of the Song Dynasty, the eminent monk Zanning summarized the six examples of translating words and sounds, Hu language and Sanskrit language, re translation and literal translation, rough and refined language, elegant and vulgar Chinese language, and direct language and secret language.

The translation of Buddhist scriptures during the late Ming and early Qing dynasties sparked a second wave of translation, with the first book translated by missionaries in China being the "Tianxue Shenglu" orally taught by missionary Luo Mingjian and recorded by Chinese. Afterwards, Xu Guangqi proposed the translation ideas of "seeking knowledge and truth" and "focusing on key points and urgent needs" in the preface of the translation of "Elements of Geometry" co translated with Matteo Ricci. Li Zhizao translated the first Western logic translation book, "Ming Li Tan," and referred to his own translation as "Chuanyi. Wang Zheng helped Jin Nige revise the book "Western Confucian Ear, Eye, and Mind" on phonetics. He referred to the three types of books on Western language, technology, and philosophy as "Zi Ear, Eye, and Mind", "Zi Hand and Foot", and "Zi Heart" respectively. During this period, a brilliant translation treatise called "Fanqing Shuo" emerged, written by Wei Xiangqian in the early years of the Qianlong reign. It can be regarded as the earliest internal publication research monograph in China.

(2) Translation Theory in Late Qing Dynasty and Early Republic of China

During the late Qing Dynasty, Feng Guifen was the first to extensively discuss translation issues. In her article "Discussions on Western Learning," she emphasized the importance of the translation industry and was the first to propose the establishment of a translation agency. In his works "On the Method of Translating Books" and "On the Benefits of Translating Books", British translator Fu Lanya elaborated on his views on the unification of scientific and technological translation names. In Ma Jianzhong's book "Proposal for the Establishment of a Translation Academy", the standard of good argumentation is proposed, which is close to modern equivalent translation theory. Liang Qichao proposed the three meanings of translation content, unified translated names, and translation talents in his book "On Translation". The most outstanding translation theorist of this period, Yan Fu, proposed the most famous "faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance" translation theory in modern China. At the same time, Lin Shu emphasized the importance of emotional activities for translators in translation activities, believing that translators should have psychological communication with the original author or characters in the work. Luo Zhenyu summarized the eight aspects of book translation in the "Regulations on Book Translation", including fundraising, classification, naming, book purchase, collaboration, specialization, rewards, and copyright. Hu Yilu's detailed and unique insights further enriched the translation studies of this period, with thirty examples from the three ends

(3) Translation Theory during the Republic of China Period

During the Republic of China period, most translators were literary figures who contributed to the maturity of translation

thought in just a few decades. Zheng Zhenduo first introduced and commented on the principles of translation by British translator Taylor Taylor, and explored issues such as retranslation. Mao Dun creatively proposed the concept of "Fengyun Translation", emphasizing from the perspective of translation aesthetics that the original text's charm cannot be lost.

Lu Xun's contribution to translation studies lies in his "hard translation" philosophy, which enriched the local language with awkward language. Zhu Shenghao translated the Complete Works of Shakespeare, skillfully maintaining the charm of the original work, conveying the grandeur of Shakespeare's plays, and beautifying the Chinese art corridor with Shakespeare's numerous images and dramatic melodies.

(4) After the establishment of the People's Republic of China

The two translators who had the greatest impact on the translation industry during this period were Fu Lei and Qian Zhongshu. Fu Lei proposed the idea of translation spirit and aesthetics, believing that translation cannot be translated literally, and should preserve the spiritual and aesthetic features of the original work. He put forward a translation concept that emphasizes similarity in spirit over similarity in form.

Qian Zhongshu, on the other hand, expressed his translation views through inducement, deception, and persuasion. Lure refers to the role that translation plays in cultural exchange, enticing readers to develop a love for different literature. Error refers to the distance between the original text and the translation, and the translation is inevitably distorted and does not conform to the original text. The highest ideal state of literary translation is to ensure that the translated text does not reveal any hard or forced traces, but fully preserves the original's style.

### 2.3. The Origin and Development of Western Translation Studies

The historical evolution of Western translation theory can be divided into the following six stages based on the emergence of six translation waves in history: ancient translation, religious translation from the late Roman Empire to the early Middle Ages, Western translation in the Middle Ages, Western translation in the Renaissance period, Western translation in the late Renaissance period, and Western translation after World War II.

Western translation began in the third century BC. The translation activities during the ancient Roman period were the first major wave of translation in Western translation history. Has a clear literary activity nature. In the later period of the Roman Empire, religious translation gradually became the mainstream of Western translation. Strictly speaking, the first translation in the West was the Greek Homeric epic "Odyssey" translated in Latin by Andronikos in Rome around the mid-3rd century BC.

Around the fourth century AD, various Latin translations of the Bible began to appear, among which Jerome's translation of the Vulgar Latin Text Bible was considered authoritative. This phenomenon also marks that the translation of the Bible has gained an important position in competition with secular literary translation.

During the 11th to 12th centuries AD, a large number of Arabic works were translated into Latin, marking the third wave of Western translation history. Western translators gathered in the Spanish city of Toledo, making it the academic

center of Europe and laying a strong foundation for the development of academic translation activities in Europe. Its significance is significant and its influence is widespread.

The Renaissance movement that occurred in Europe from the 14th century to the 16th century caused a significant shock in the Western literary world, and translation activities penetrated into various fields such as thought, politics, philosophy, literature, and religion, producing a large number of outstanding translators and a series of outstanding translation works. Luther, the founder of the Reformation, translated and published the first Bible for the general public from 1522 to 1534, ushering in a new era of modern German language development.

From the second half of the 17th century to the first half of the 18th century, translation in Western countries made continuous progress during the late Renaissance, and many excellent translations and translators emerged, such as the works of great literary figures like Cervantes, Shakespeare, and Balzac, which were repeatedly translated into various languages. Translations of Eastern literature have also emerged one after another.

By the end of World War II, the Western political economy had entered a relatively stable and prosperous period. The characteristics of translation have also undergone significant changes with the evolution of the times. Traditional translation mainly focused on the translation of literary and religious works, while during this period, translation expanded to other fields, especially technology and business.

#### **2.4. Reflection on the Development of Chinese and Western Translation Studies**

The more important reason for the incomplete and underdeveloped translation theory lies in the subjective aspect and internal factors in the translation industry. These factors are mainly: (1) empiricism, (2) dogmatism, and (3) one-sidedness. (Tan Zaixi, 1987)

Firstly, regarding empiricism, just as literary theorists are generally unable to simultaneously serve as poets or novelists, similarly, translation theorists are also not competent in the practical work of translation. People have come to the conclusion that translation work relies on practice and experience, and on the translator's talent. Under the influence of this ideology, translation theory cannot achieve healthy development. Before this century, only a few translators in the West, such as Cicero, Horace, Jerome, Dryden, Goethe, Pushkin, and in China, such as Dao'an, Jiumolosh, Yancong, Daoyi, Lin Shu, Yan Fu, etc., had shown great interest in the theoretical issues of translation. However, their discussions were mostly limited to the methods and techniques of translation, and their focus was inevitably on experience. Translation theory experts such as Dore and Tetler are rare. Therefore, especially in China, translation theory is quite backward, and its maturity is far inferior to other disciplines such as literary and aesthetic theory.

In addition, dogmatism has also caused certain harm to the development of translation theory. Its main manifestation is the blind acceptance of certain translation principles and methods proposed by authoritative figures, without analyzing them and applying them to all genres of translation. As a result, principles or methods that were originally only applicable to a certain period or genre are ossified into rigid dogmas that can be applied everywhere, which restricts people's thinking and prevents the substantial development of translation theory for a long time.

Finally, we must also recognize that the reason why translation theory is not perfect is that researchers often take a narrow stance and lack a systematic and macro understanding of translation issues. They mostly focus on individual aspects of translation research based on personal interests, such as translation standards, methods, and techniques, treating trees as forests rather than using scientific methods to connect scattered trees into patches and propose comprehensive and systematic theories.

### **3. Future Development and Prospects of Translation Studies**

Translation studies will continue to seek innovation and standardization in its future development. With the advent of the digital age, translation studies will benefit from the development of translation tools and platforms based on cloud computing and big data. These tools and platforms not only provide more comprehensive, accurate, and reliable translation resources, but also offer collaboration and sharing functions, promoting communication and cooperation among translation teams. The development of technologies such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and natural language processing will further improve the accuracy and fluency of machine translation.

In order to ensure translation quality and promote the development of academic research, the establishment of standardization and certification mechanisms will become even more important. Developing unified translation standards and norms, as well as establishing a professional certification and evaluation system for translation, can enhance the professionalism and credibility of the translation industry.

Translation studies will increasingly focus on cross-cultural and interdisciplinary research. This means that translation scholars need to pay more attention to the differences and connections between different languages and cultures, and gain a deeper understanding of professional knowledge and terminology in various fields. This interdisciplinary and cross-cultural research will help the translation academic community better understand and handle translation issues between different languages and cultures.

The most important thing is that the translation academic community should further improve the disciplinary system, strengthen the research on disciplinary methodology, build a diversified disciplinary team, enhance the social transformation of research results, and strengthen interaction with the language service industry, so as to gradually standardize and improve the theoretical construction of translation studies and even the overall construction of the translation academic discipline in China. (Murray, Zou Bing, 2015)

### **4. Summary**

The development of Chinese and Western translation studies has always been an active and constantly evolving field. The development of Chinese and Western translation studies mutually influences and learns from each other. Both are constantly exploring and improving the theory and practice of translation, focusing on the cross-cultural characteristics and communicative functions of translation. Both Chinese and Western translation studies have undergone a transformation from traditional methods to modern methods,

realizing that translation is not only a linguistic transformation, but also a cross-cultural and communicative activity. Translation scholars have conducted in-depth research on the differences and commonalities between different cultures, and advocate for a focus on cross-cultural communication and understanding in the translation process.

Both Chinese and Western translation studies have gradually established a comprehensive translation professional system and standards, including professional qualification certification and the development of translation colleges. In the academic community, translation studies have become an independent discipline and cover many research fields, such as literary translation, legal translation, scientific translation, etc. In the future, Chinese and Western translation studies will continue to integrate advanced technologies and interdisciplinary research to meet the translation needs of the globalized era and promote mutual understanding and communication between different cultures.

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