

Comparative Study of Chinese and Western Translation Theories and Practices

-- Taking the period around the May Fourth Movement as an example

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Abstract: The period from the Opium War to the 1930s was the third upsurge in the history of Chinese translation. During the same period, the West experienced the European Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and translation activities were also flourishing. These two periods witnessed the remarkable development of translation theory and practice in China and the West respectively. On the Chinese side, Yan Fu's "Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance" and Lin Shu's translation practice are representative, emphasizing the fidelity, fluency and artistry of translation. The West, on the other hand, takes Tytler's "Three Principles" and Dryden's translation theory as benchmarks, focusing on the accuracy, naturalness and elegance of translation. The purpose of this study is to compare these major translation theorists and their theories, to explore the differences and similarities between China and the West in terms of translation standards, translation methods and translation purposes, and to further analyze the historical background, cultural traditions and philosophical concepts behind these differences and similarities. Through historical comparison and document analysis, this paper constructs a clear structure of the paper, from the introduction of the background to the theoretical analysis, and then to the discussion of the reasons, a comprehensive and systematic presentation of the translation theory and practice in the golden age of modern Chinese and Western translation.

Keywords: Chinese and Western Translation, May-Fourth Movement, Translation Theory.

1. Introduction

In the epoch spanning the Ming and Qing dynasties, China underwent a pivotal transition from the zenith of feudal prosperity to a gradual descent, with the May Fourth Movement serving as a seminal juncture that heralded the dawn of modern ideological enlightenment and cultural rejuvenation. Analogously, the Renaissance and the subsequent Age of Enlightenment in Europe constituted pivotal eras that facilitated the emancipation from the shackles of medieval feudalism, propelling society towards modernization and the embrace of scientific rationality.

The period discussed in this paper is from the Ming and Qing Dynasties to the May Fourth Movement. The representative figures of this period are Yan Fu and Lin Shu. Translators pay attention to the introduction of new ideas and new methods, pay attention to "expressing spirit and meaning", and pass on "Tao" rather than introduce "articles carrying Tao". Both Yan Fu's method of reaching the purpose and Lin Shu's method of translation contain the modern "Tao" of the West with authentic ancient "literature", and explain the western spirit with thorough domestication strategy, reflecting the traditional Chinese aesthetic view of "forgetting words".[8] During the period from Ming and Qing Dynasties to May Fourth, Chinese society faced the impact of Western powers, and translation became an important way to understand the world and absorb new knowledge. The translation activities of the missionaries not only brought scientific and technological knowledge, but also promoted the exchange and collision of Chinese and Western philosophy, such as the introduction of the Elements of Geometry and the western transmission of the Four Books and Five Classics, which laid the foundation for the later ideological liberation. In Europe, translation activities also flourished from the Renaissance to the Age of Enlightenment. The retranslation

and dissemination of ancient Greek and Roman classics greatly promoted the development of humanistic thought and stimulated Europeans to think deeply about humanity, science and freedom. During this period, translation works in natural science, philosophy, art and other fields emerged in an endless stream, such as Da Vinci's artistic ideas and Galileo's scientific discoveries, which were recognized by Europe and even the world through translation.

2. Representatives of Chinese and Western Translation Theories and Their Theories

During this period, many outstanding translators emerged in both China and the West. Yan Fu is the founder of modern Chinese translation theory. His theory of "faithfulness, faithfulness and elegance" has far-reaching influence. "Faithfulness" means that the translation should be faithful to the original without deviation or omission; "Da" means that the translation should be smooth and easy to understand; "Elegant" means that the words in the translation should be appropriate and concise and elegant. This theory is still an important criterion in Chinese translation circles. Secondly, Lin Shu translated more foreign novels than anyone else.[3] Lin Shu, also known as Lin Yutang, emphasized the artistry of translation and put forward three criteria for translation: faithfulness, smoothness and beauty. He believes that translation is not only the conversion of words, but also the transmission of artistic beauty. Lin Shu's translated works are not only numerous, but also of high quality, which has exerted an important influence on the translation of modern Chinese literature.

During this period, the representatives of western translation theory were Tytler and Dryden. Alexander Fraser Tytler proposed that translation should meet three principles:

I. That the Translation should give a complete transcript of the ideas of the original work. II. That the style and manner of writing in a translation should be of the same character with that of the original; III. That the Translation should have all the ease of original composition.[1] These principles have laid the foundation for western translation theory. John Dryden is an important figure in the 17th century English literary world, and has made great achievements in poetry, drama, translation and literary criticism.[9] He put forward three translation methods, namely Metaphrase, Paraphrase and Imitation, which provide important reference for the later development of translation theories.

3. Comparative Study of Translation Standards

Translation criterion is an important criterion to measure the quality of translation, and it is also a criterion that translators must abide by in their translation activities. Among them, Yan Fu's theory of "faithfulness, Da and elegance" and Tytler's three principles of translation have far-reaching influence in the translation field and are highly comparable.

3.1. Interpretation of Translation Theory

"Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance" are the three translation standards put forward by Yan Fu, which have played a great guiding role in the translation practice of later generations. "信" is faithfulness, "达" is expressiveness, the translation first needs to be faithful, and then requires smooth, so that the reader can understand. "Ya", is from the Analects of Confucius · Narrating ("论语·述而") in the "子所雅言, "诗", "书"执礼, 皆雅言也." He said "ya" is "using the pre-Han character syntax." [2] The translation should have literary flair and conform to the expression habit and cultural aesthetic of the target language.

In 1790, Tytler expounded in his seminal work on the Principles of Translation that an exemplary rendition ought to adeptly convey the full range of merits inherent in the original text into an alternate linguistic framework, thereby enabling readers of the target language to apprehend and experience the translated work with an equal degree of clarity and intensity as those proficient in the source language. [5] This statement of Tytler has caused a great response in the translation circle and is a milestone in the history of western translation. Tytler's three principles put forward requirements for translators from three aspects: meaning, style and spirit. And it's worth mentioning that Tytler says the three are ranked in order of importance. When the three come into conflict, the first thing to give up is the third, and then the second. At no time should we sacrifice the ideological content of the original text for the sake of the beauty and fluency of the translation.

3.2. The Difference between the Two Theories

In terms of fidelity, Yan Fu's "Xin" and Tytler's first principle both emphasize the fidelity of translation, that is, the translation should be faithful to the ideological content of the original. However, Yan Fu's "Xin" focuses more on the accurate transmission of meaning, while Tytler further requires the fidelity of style, including the linguistic features and stylistic style of the original work.

In terms of readability, both Yan Fu's "Da" and Tytler's third principle require the translation to be smooth and natural and easy for readers to understand. But Yan Fu's "Da" focuses

more on the smoothness of the translation, while Tytler emphasizes that the translation should be as natural and smooth as the original, so that the reader can not feel the traces of translation when reading.

In terms of aesthetic pursuit, Yan Fu's "elegance" reflects the pursuit of artistic translation, which requires the translation to have literary talent and conform to the cultural aesthetic of the target language. However, this standard is often difficult to grasp in actual operation, and it is easy to fall into the misunderstanding of excessive modification. In contrast, Tytler's principle does not directly refer to aesthetic pursuit, but its second principle of maintaining style and technique actually implies the requirement of aesthetic consistency.

In addition, the two translation standards have different emphasis on content. From the specific content of "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance", "faithfulness" refers to "the meaning is not doubled from the original text", and then "the translator will understand the spirit and reason of the whole text, and then write down the words, which will be well matched. As for the original text, the words and reason are profound and difficult to understand, so the front and back are quoted to show its meaning. All these efforts are for expressiveness; expressiveness is the reason for faithfulness." It can be seen that "expressiveness" not only refers to the smoothness of the translation language, but also requires the style and content of the original text to be fully expressed. The relationship between "expressiveness" and "faithfulness" is not like the emphasis on differences in each element in Tytler's three principles. On the contrary, "expressiveness" serves "faithfulness". Let's look at the "elegance" in Yan Fu's "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance". Considering the social environment and translation purpose of translation, Yan Fu advocated the use of syntax before the Han Dynasty, and this sentence is understandable. However, later generations have different opinions on the further interpretation of "elegance". Wang Hongzhi believes that "as for the relationship between 'elegance' and 'faithfulness and clarity', he (Yan Fu) also explained it very clearly: 'Therefore, besides faithfulness and clarity, we also seek elegance. This is not only to achieve far-reaching results, but in fact, it is easy to express the subtle ideas using the characters and sentences before the Han Dynasty; but it is difficult to express them using the characters that are convenient for the people of modern times.' The purpose of 'elegance' is to 'go far' and 'seek clarity.' If we go a step further, since elegance is the reason for clarity, and clarity is the reason for faithfulness, then elegance is the reason for faithfulness." [6] From this point of view, "clarity" and "elegance" are both means to achieve "faithfulness" and serve the realization of "faithfulness".

Compared with the dominant role of "faithfulness" in Yan Fu's "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance", Tytler's three translation principles, which emphasize that the translation should be true to the original text in terms of substance, style, and linguistic expression, seem to focus more on the internal differences of the source text. Specifically, the first principle of the three principles emphasizes the meaning of being faithful to the original text; the second is to be faithful to the style of the original text; and the third is that the fluency of the translation should be consistent with the original text. Therefore, the three principles are parallel to each other, and each principle emphasizes being faithful to a certain aspect of the original text. On the other hand, referring to the interpretation of the

connotation of the three principles in the previous article, it can be seen that when the original text and the translation conflict in different aspects, the handling method of Tytler's three principles is also very different from Yan Fu's "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance". Accordingly, some academics have deduced that if Yan Fu's "faithfulness" also encompasses fidelity to the original text's style, it has already addressed every aspect of Tytler's three translation criteria.

4. Comparison of Translation Purpose and Impact

Around the time of the May Fourth Movement, China's translation activities entered a new stage of development, with far-reaching and extensive purposes and influences. During this period, the main purpose of translation can be summarized as spreading new knowledge, enlightening the people and promoting social change.

4.1. Spreading New Knowledge

China was at a momentous turning point in its history, moving from the old to the new, on the eve of the May Fourth Movement. Many highly educated intellectuals came to the conclusion that the only way to keep the country safe and bring it wealth was to learn about cutting edge Western science and technology, cultural concepts, and political systems. Therefore, they introduced the essence of Western thought into China by translating a large number of Western works, such as literary works, philosophical works, social science theories, etc., laying the ideological foundation for China's modernization process. For example, writers such as Lu Xun and Mao Dun translated a large number of foreign literary works, which not only enriched China's literary creation techniques and language expression, but also promoted the exchange and integration of Chinese literature with world literature.

4.2. Enlightening the People

Translation activities also played an important role in enlightening the people during the May Fourth Movement. Traditional feudal cultural ideas were no longer able to cope with the various crises facing the country, while Western enlightenment ideas provided the Chinese people with a new perspective and way of thinking. By translating and introducing Western ideas such as democracy, science, and freedom, advanced intellectuals tried to awaken the Chinese people's national consciousness and independent spirit and promote the renewal and progress of social concepts. For example, Hu Shi and others advocated the vernacular movement, and through translation and creation of vernacular works, more people were able to master language tools, accept new ideas, and create new culture.

4.3. Promoting Social Change

Translation activities also directly promoted social change in China during the May Fourth Movement. With the widespread dissemination of advanced Western ideas, the Chinese people began to re-examine their cultural traditions and social systems and seek new directions for development. Translation activities not only provided ideological weapons for China's modernization process, but also laid a theoretical foundation for the establishment and development of the

Communist Party of China. For example, the translation and dissemination of Marxism provided important ideological resources for the establishment of the Communist Party of China and promoted China's political structure and historical process.

4.4. Purpose and Influence of Western Translation Activities

In contrast, Western translation activities have also played an important role in the process of historical development. Their purpose and influence are mainly reflected in cultural inheritance, ideological enlightenment and scientific and technological progress.

In the West, translation activities have always been an important means of cultural inheritance. Since the ancient Roman period, translation activities have undertaken the important task of introducing ancient Greek and other classical cultures into Rome and passing them down. With the evolution of history, translation activities have continuously promoted the inheritance and development of Western culture. For example, in the Middle Ages, Arab scholars translated ancient Greek philosophical and scientific works into Arabic, and then introduced them to Europe through Latin, providing important ideological resources for Europe during the Renaissance.

Western translation activities have also played an important role in ideological enlightenment. During the Renaissance, a large number of ancient Greek and Roman classics were translated into European languages, which promoted the rise and development of humanistic thought. In the Enlightenment era, translation activities further promoted the ideological liberation and scientific development of Europe. For example, Enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire and Rousseau promoted the ideological progress and institutional changes of European society by translating and introducing the works of foreign thinkers.

With the continuous development of science and technology, the role of translation activities in the field of science and technology has become increasingly prominent. Since the Renaissance, translation activities have provided important documentary support for the development of science and technology in Europe. Translation services have become more and more crucial in today's world, as globalization and scientific and technological advancements progress at an accelerated pace, encouraging worldwide collaboration and exchanges in these fields. For example, the translation and dissemination of modern scientific and technological literature has enabled the sharing and exchange of scientific research results in various countries, promoting the common progress of global science and technology.

5. Cause Analysis

5.1. Demand for Cultural Exchange

Tytler believes that "Culture is an all-encompassing concept that encompasses knowledge, morals, art, legislation, customs, abilities, and habits of people in a society." This comprehensiveness of culture has a great influence on the differences between Chinese and Western translation theories.[4] During the historical period from the Ming and Qing Dynasties to the May Fourth Movement, the demand for cultural exchange between China and the West was unprecedentedly high, becoming the core driving force for the formation of translation theory. This demand not only stems

from China's desire to explore the outside world, but also from the urgent pursuit of the path of modernization under the national crisis.

For example, in the late Qing Dynasty, Wei Yuan's Records and Maps of the World ("海国图志") compiled a large number of Western geographical and historical materials. The translation and compilation of these materials not only broadened the horizons of the Chinese people, but also provided an ideological basis for the later Westernization Movement. Similarly, Chronicles of four continents ("四洲志") compiled by Lin Zexu was also an important translation of this period. It introduced the customs and customs of various parts of the world and promoted the initial exchange of Chinese and Western cultures.

With the introduction of Western science and technology, the translation of scientific works such as Elements of Geometry ("几何原本") and A Brief Discussion on Astronomy ("天文略论") not only spread new knowledge, but also promoted the transformation of China's traditional academic system. These translations not only satisfied the society's desire for new knowledge at that time, but also provided a practical platform for translators, prompting them to continuously explore translation methods suitable for Chinese expression habits.

5.2. Social Change: Innovation of Translation Theory and Social Responsibility

Social transformation acts as a pivotal impetus for the genesis and evolution of translation theory. Within the historical epochal shift bridging the Ming and Qing Dynasties to the epoch-making May Fourth Movement, Chinese society underwent a profound transition from a state of seclusion to one of openness, and from the realms of tradition to modernity. This transformational paradigm was manifest not merely within the political and economic spheres, but also exerted a seminal influence on the cultural landscape, fostering a milieu conducive to the advancement of translation theory and practice.

During the May Fourth New Culture Movement, Chen Duxiu, Li Dazhao and others published a large number of translated articles in publications such as New Youth (《新青年》) to introduce Western democratic and scientific ideas. These translations not only spread new ideas, but also inspired the patriotic enthusiasm and reform consciousness of the Chinese people. Through translation practice, translators not only pay attention to the accuracy of translation, but also pay more attention to the social effects of translation, hoping to promote social progress and national awakening through translation. During this period, translation theory was also innovated and developed. For example, the dispute between "literal translation" and "free translation" proposed by Lu Xun was not only a discussion of translation methods, but also a profound reflection on the purpose and social responsibility of translation. He advocated the use of literal translation on the basis of maintaining the spirit of the original text in order to more accurately convey the ideological content of the original text.

5.3. Development of Science and Technology: Innovation of Translation Tools and Evolution of Translation Theory

The development of science and technology has provided strong support for the evolution of translation theory. With the

continuous advancement of printing, transportation and communication technologies, the dissemination speed of translated works has been greatly accelerated, and the translation efficiency has also been significantly improved. At the same time, the development of modern science and technology has also created new translation tools and methods, such as computer-assisted translation, machine translation, etc. These new technologies provide translators with more convenient and efficient translation methods.

Although computer-assisted translation technology in the modern sense did not yet appear between the Ming and Qing Dynasties and the May Fourth Movement, improvements in printing technology have greatly promoted the dissemination of translated works. For example, the invention and application of movable type printing reduced the cost and accelerated the printing of books, providing favorable conditions for the widespread dissemination of translated works.

In addition, with the development of modern science and technology, translation theory is also constantly evolving. For example, functional translation theory emphasizes the purpose and functionality of translation and believes that translation should choose appropriate translation methods and strategies based on the purpose of translation. This theory breaks the shackles of traditional translation theory to a certain extent and provides more flexible and diverse options for translation practice.

5.4. The Shaping Role of Cultural Traditions and Philosophical Concepts

Cultural traditions and philosophical concepts have a profound impact on the construction and development of translation theory. The different cultural traditions and philosophical concepts of China and the West are fully reflected in translation theory. Different philosophical thoughts in China and the West have also left indelible marks on their respective translation theories.[7]

The Chinese cultural tradition emphasizes integrity and harmony. This cultural tradition is reflected in translation theory by focusing on the overall meaning and spiritual essence of the original text. For example, the translation standard of "faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance" proposed by Yan Fu, an ancient Chinese translator, reflects the Chinese cultural tradition's pursuit of translation accuracy, fluency, and beauty.

Western philosophical concepts emphasize rationality, logic, and scientificity. This philosophical concept is reflected in translation theory by focusing on the accuracy, equivalence, and scientificity of translation. For example, the "equivalent translation" theory in Western translation theory emphasizes the equivalence between the translation and the original text in terms of semantics, pragmatics, and style.

6. Conclusion

The translation theories of China and the West exhibit discernible convergences and divergences in their respective standards, methodologies, and ultimate objectives. These disparities and similarities underscore the intricate interplay between cultural contexts, linguistic nuances, and the evolving needs of cross-cultural communication. The historical, cultural, and philosophical factors behind these similarities and differences play an important role in shaping them. Chinese translation theory focuses on the reproduction

of integrity and spiritual essence, and emphasizes the practicality and cultural connotation of translation; while Western translation theory focuses on accuracy, equivalence, and scientificity, and emphasizes the linguistic basis and systematic nature of translation. A comparative analysis reveals that the distinctions between Chinese and Western translation theory, while numerous, are primarily superficial. Upon closer examination, the two traditions are found to align closely in their substantive content, foundational objectives, and central theoretical issues.

Studying these similarities and differences not only helps us to deeply understand the historical origins and cultural background of Chinese and Western translation theories, but also provides important inspiration for contemporary translation theory and practice. In the context of globalization, translation, as an important bridge for cross-cultural communication, is becoming increasingly important. Therefore, we need to constantly learn from and innovate translation theories, improve translation quality, and promote communication and understanding between different cultures. At the same time, we should also pay attention to the impact of scientific and technological development on the field of translation, and actively explore the application prospects of new technologies in translation practice.

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