

Study on Lu Xun's Translation Activities from the Perspective of Eco-translatology

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Abstract

Recently the academia tends to regard Lu Xun as a translator more than a writer. Lu Xun's translation activities are closely related to Chinese historical and social environment in his time. It should be studied from the perspective of eco-translatology. This paper first introduces Lu Xun's translation activities and the social and historical environment at that time. Then, it summarizes the specific features of Lu Xun's translation activities, for example, the original texts, the translation strategies and the translation knowledge. At last, this paper analyzes the specific feature from the perspective of eco-translatology.

Keywords: Lu Xun's translation activities; Eco-translatology; adaption

1. Introduction

When the study on Lu Xun's works is further lucubrated, it is easy to find that his achievement in translation is unique. Lu Xun proposed a translation strategy of "rigid translation". He holds that "If a translator insists faithfulness in his works, his readers may find some sentences difficult to understand. But they can understand those sentences after meditation. If

a translator puts fluency in the first place, his readers may be misled." In this thesis, the author will study on Lu Xun's translation activities and analyze his translation strategy and philosophy from the perspective of eco-translatology.

2. Literature Review on Lu Xun's Translation Activities

In recent years, a growing number of scholars are studying Lu Xun, especially on his characteristic as a translator, for the academia tend to regard him as a translator more than a writer. Gu Nong points out that "Lu Xun has more translation works than creation works during his life." Lu Xun committed himself throughout his life to the goal of "transferring temperament and reforming the society" by translating. Most of Lu Xun's works are translated from Japan, Russia, Spain and some minor countries. His famous translation works are *Origine de Fantine* (1903), *De la Terre à la Lune* (1903), *Voyage au Centre de la Terre* (1903), *An Unscientific Story* (1906) and *Ghost Of Sparta* (1903), *A Young Man's Dream* (1920), *Symbolism of Depression* (1924), *Thought, Landscape, Figure* (1928) and *Dead Souls* (1935).

Chinese scholars started their researches of Lu Xun's translation from his lan-

guage. Liang Shiqiu notes that if a translator applies “rigid translation” during translating, the whole article will be hard for readers to understand. Let alone learn from the articles [1]. People will be unwilling to read such kind of translation works. Huang Bangjie indicates that Lu Xun’s “rigid translation” strategy can not meet the need of present translation work [2]. What we can learn from Lu Xun is his spirit to fight with the backward thought at his time. Yang Jinhao decries the translation of Marxism works is too “rigid” to understand [3]. The public are unsatisfied with those translation works and regard them as sealed books. He also holds that it is not difficult for translators to be faithful to the original works. However, the most important factor is accuracy.

Gu Jun from Beijing Foreign Language University and Wang Yougui from Fudan University are among the few ones who major studying on Lu Xun’s translation activities. In Gu Jun’s book *Study on Lu Xun’s Translation Activities*, he makes a throughout review and comment on Lu Xun’s translation activities. He lists the influencing factors of Lu Xun’s translation theory and translation philosophies [4]. In Wang Yougui’s book, he talks over Lu Xun’s unique influence on Chinese translation history and the history of Chinese and foreign culture [5].

Besides China, Japan is the country with the longest history and most scholars studying on Lu Xun and his works. That is because Lu Xun had studied in Japan for about 8 years and he began translation activities in Japan. Most of Lu Xun’s translation works were from Japanese. The first comment on Lu Xun’s work, which appeared in a Japanese magazine, can date back to 1909. A famous Japanese expert on Chinese literature Aoki Masaru said Lu Xun was “a promising writer” in his book called *Sinology*. In 1931, Ichiro Chang analyzed the local-

ness in Lu Xun’s articles in detail. His long article *Chinese Rising Literature and Lu Xun’s Translation Works* was later translated into Chinese. Takeuchi Yoshimi was the most influential scholar in studying Lu Xun’s works, who wrote *Lu Xun in 1943*. Since then, all the study on Lu Xun would refer to this book. It was translated into Chinese in 1986 and caused great attention immediately.

American scholars have made great achievement studying on Lu Xun. Edgar Snow was Lu Xun’s friend and the first one to study him. Edgar Snow once said “Lu Xun’s influence on history will surpass on literature, and his achievement in translation can also surmount that in creation. Lu Xun will become a famous writer and rank in the most influential writers in the contemporary world in the near future.” William Lyle was an expert studying Lu Xun. His work *Lu Xun’s Realistic View of Translation* (1976) has great influence on foreign modern and contemporary literature research.

Many European scholars had researched on Lu Xun. Swedish scholar Lennard Lundberg wrote a book named *Lu Xun as a Translator: Lu Xun’s Translation and Introduction of Literature and Literary Theory*, where Lennard emphasized Lu Xun’s achievement as a translator [6]. A German translator Wolfgang Kubin published six volumes of *Lu Xun’s Selections* in 1994 in German. He was the pioneer to introduce Lu Xun and his works in German. English scholar Pony Maiduguri and Kem Lore made minute comment on *Wild Grass* (a famous magazine edited by Lu Xun).

3. Eco-translatology

Eco-translatology is a new method in studying translation. “It can be construed as an ecological approach to translation studies or translation studies from ecological perspective.” It attempts to describe

and interpret translation from an ecological perspective, taking as its conceptual foundation the assumption that translation could be best understood in terms of a harmonious eco-system. Involving ecology and translatology, eco-translatology is also an interdisciplinary study.

Translatology is branch of learning focuses on the laws and arts of translation. As a part of translatology, translation theory is rational knowledge and high abstraction of translation essence, principle, process, method and standards. The theory "Translation as Adaptation and Selection" is based on natural selection and survival of the fittest from Biological Evolution. It holds that translation is an adaptation and selection activity in a translational eco-environment.

It is a new project of studying on Lu Xun's translation activities from the perspective of eco-translatology. The basic idea of eco-translatology is that translators should adapt to translation ecosystem. Hu Gengshen proposes a ternary theory: "original text-translator-translated text". Translator is the middle feature in this theory. That means a translator is the balance point in translation activities. The three features (writer, translator and reader) in translation ecosystem should also be "in harmony". [7] Lu Xun points out that "translators should give consideration to two things in translating, one is trying to be understandable, and the other is trying to maintain".

Mu Wanshu and Cheng Li are pioneers of studying on Lu Xun's translation activities from the perspective of eco-translatology. Mu Wanshu and Cheng Li discuss the adaption and selection during translating, retranslation of classic works, and the translators' adaption to the language eco-environment for the first time. [8]

4. The introduction of Lu Xun's Translation Activities from the Perspective of Eco-translatology

Lu Xun's worldview and life philosophy experienced a gradual change, which leads to different translation styles during his career. Lu Xun lived in the age when China faced huge revolution. During 1905 and 1907 when the revolutionaries led by Sun Yat-sen and the reformists led by Kang Youwei were in debate, Lu Xun stood by Sun's side. Since then, Lu Xun stated his literature career as a "National Fighter". The May Fourth New Culture Movement broke out in 1919. It is a profound anti-feudalism revolution and profound enlightenment movement in Chinese history. Following the Revolution of 1911, the Qing Dynasty was overthrown, marking the end of 5,000 years of imperial rule and theoretically ushering in a new era during which political power rested with the people. However, the reality was that China was a fragmented nation dominated by warlords, who were more concerned with their own political powers and the survival of their own private armies, and by foreigners, who had commercial and semi-colonial interests in China.

The pioneers such as Li Dazhao and Chen Duxiu hold the idea of democracy and science. They attack the autocracy of the feudalist warlord by writing articles, criticize the feudalist rules, and advocate the emancipation of individuality and the independence of personality. As a result, the decline of traditional ethics and the family system was accelerated, the emancipation of women gathered momentum. It is a great age for national awakening and people's self-awareness during the New Culture Movement. Lu Xun was deeply influenced by this movement. He detested the autocracy of the Beiyang government. He was longing for a revolution. He tried to awaken and encourage Chinese People by his articles. In addition,

Lu Xun devoted himself to the study of the Buddhist Scriptures since 1914. He donated money for the inscription of *Bai Yu Jing* (the Scripture of One Hundred Parables). The translating method of Buddhist Scriptures which means to translate the article sentence by sentence, and word by word influences Lu Xun's strategy and philosophy.

4.1. Lu Xun's Translation Activities in the Earlier Period (1903-1908)

Luxun started his translation activities in early 20th century. At that time, a group of advanced Chinese intelligentsias such as Yan Fu and Lin Shu initiated their work of translating scientific novels as enlightenment to Chinese people. Luxun was among the pioneers.

In accordance with the chronology of Luxun's translation works, Lu Xun's earlier translation works during studying in Japan were mainly physical science texts, historical prose and scientific fictions. Those works are *Origine de Fantine* (1903), *De la Terre à la Lune* (1903), *Voyage au Centre de la Terre* (1903), *Ghost Of Sparta* (1903,) *Strong*, and *An Unscientific Story* (1906). He chose these materials for adaption to the social revolution and to enlighten the people at that time.

De la Terre à la Lune and *Voyage au Centre de la Terre* are two important works of Lu Xun's earlier translation period and are of great reference value of his earlier translation philosophies. These two books were both translated from Japanese copies. Compared his translated texts with the original works, it is easy for us to find that Lu Xun had made many changes to the original works, among them the most obvious change is abridging. Lu Xun got the style of the translated novels close to the traditional Chinese chapter novels through abridging, addition, adaption and combination. That means in his initiating translation career,

Lu Xun did not adhere to the original works word by word. This translation strategy was influenced by the great translators Yan Fu and Lin Shu.

4.2. Lu Xun's Translation Activities in The Middle Period (1909-1929)

After various exploration and painful failure in his earlier age, Lu Xun realized that revolution or reform was a great course that could only be achieved by joint efforts of the whole nation other than the work of some certain spiritual leaders alone.

During the middle period, his translation works were mainly short novels. Some of the important translation works are *A Collection of Foreign Novels* (1909), *A Young Man's Dream* (1920), and *Symbolism of Depression* (1924). Lu Xun also took the responsibility of editing work of *Modern Novel Translations* and *Modern Japanese Novel Translations*.

Since translation of *A Collection of Foreign Novels* (1909), Lu Xun had gradually changed his translation philosophies, because he was not satisfied with the "free translation". When translators were translating texts with free translation method, they tried to convey their idea in Chinese style. People were easy to accept foreign culture and ideologies. While the foreign cultures lost their original taste after decoration. In this period, so as to convey the exact information from foreign countries, Lu Xun insisted his translation philosophy of "literal translation". Lu Xun said "Except some certain places I have to paraphrase, the whole articles are literally translated." His translation philosophy of "literal translation" embodied translators' central status in translating. Translator should judge their position in the translation eco-environment and place "faithfulness" in the first place.

4.3. Lu Xun's Translation Activities in the Later Period (1930-1936)

In the later years of Lu Xun's translation career, China was in the tide of ideological emancipation and individuality liberation. Prose was the most appreciated means for the writers to convey their thoughts and feelings. Lu Xun followed the trend and moved his attention to prose and full-length novels.

The most famous translation works were *Thought, Landscape, Figure* (1928) and *Dead Souls* (1935). At this period, Lu Xun proposed "rigid translation" philosophy and insisted this idea to the end of his life. Lu Xun proposed this kind of translation strategy because Chinese people thought China to be the center of this world. Free translation hindered Chinese modernization. While rigid translation is able to maintain the original flavor of foreign cultures so that we can learn from them. Lu Xun holds "If a translator insists faithfulness in his works, his readers may find some sentences difficult to understand. But they can understand those sentences after meditation. If a translator put fluency in the first place, his readers may be misled."

Lu Xun had experienced many great changes of Chinese society. His translational and writing philosophies were also different in different periods. "Rigid translation" was the most important philosophy and method he applied in his translation activities.

Lu Xun's translation activities show that his translation strategy and philosophy has gone through "free translation" to "literal translation", and to "rigid translation" at last. These three periods are 1903-1908, 1909-1929, and 1930-1936. These three periods respectively meet three ages in Chinese history, the late Qing Dynasty, the New Culture Movement, and the Thirties Age. Lu Xun faced adaption, selection, and maintenance in his translation career. This reflected Lu

Xun's translation activities were influenced by the social eco-environment. Lu Xun's translation activities are not only influenced by the social and historical eco-environment, but also influenced by Shaoxing dialects. The previous scholars failed to analyze Shaoxing dialects' influence on Lu Xun's translation. The author find many Shaoxing dialect words such as "今朝" ("today" in Shaoxing dialect), "孬头" ("fool" in Shaoxing dialect), "伙" ("friend" in Shaoxing dialect) and "尽够" ("enough" in Shaoxing dialect) appear in the dialogues. All these words and phrases are the evidence of Shaoxing dialects' influence on Lu Xun's translation works.

5. Conclusion

The author of the thesis analyses Lu Xun's translation activities from the perspective of eco-environment. She puts the analysis back to the age and place Lu Xun lived and gets that Lu Xun's translation strategy and philosophy is influenced by the eco-environment at his time. The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the influence that eco-environment has casted on Lu Xun's translation. Besides achievements, during the course of writing this thesis, the author faced difficulties such as limited resources and information, so this thesis leaves many questions unsettled and much room for improvement. In the future studies, scholars are recommended to research into more aspects influencing Lu Xun's translation activities. In the other side, it is recommended in the future research that more strategies should be applied.

6. References

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