

Study on Lin Shu's "Mistranslation" From the Perspective of Translation Ethics*

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From the appearance of ethics, it has the similar meaning of morality, but the latter one emphasizes more on the study of human's behaviors, while the ethics would focus on the discussion of moral ethical norms for individuals and the whole society. As one of the most influential translators in late Qing China, Lin Shu makes his great efforts on introducing western literature and new thoughts to China. Referring to the study of Lin's translations, it always mixed with praises and criticisms, therefore the "faithfulness" in his translations or not would be the main point to discuss. From the perspective of translation ethics, it is mainly explored the cause of "mistranslation" in Lin Shu's translated works in late Qing China.

Keywords: Lin Shu, "mistranslation", translation ethic, late Qing China

Introduction

Lin Shu was an influential translator of the late Qing China. He translated a total about 180 foreign literature works in his 30 years translation career since the translation of *La Dame aux Camelias*, including more than 40 pieces world famous who played an important role in the field of modern literature and translation no matter in quality or quantity of translated works. On one hand, as a classical scholar of Tongcheng School unknown as a foreign language engaging translation of western novels, he initiated the translation of Chinese literary over a long period, high yield, and wide influence, who became a legend in the history of Chinese translation. On the other hand, he was accused a lot due to his "mistranslation" (Qian, 1981, p. 15) and omissions in many works, and we have to say it is another legend since the two completely opposite evaluation towards him and his translations.

Ethics Regression in Translation Study

Literature is not only closely related with history, tradition, culture, and social environment, but also with politics and philosophy, while literature interpretation is also inseparable from history and tradition.

In recent decades, translation study has successively experienced into two of linguistic-based and culture-based phases, making people know more about translation study with cultural turn. Therefore, the translation is no longer a simple language conversion, but the conversion of different cultures. In the international symposium on philosophical issues in 1984, the French contemporary translation theorist Antoine Berman

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launched a fierce criticism on the thought with the center of "meaning convey" that dominated the western translation for a long time. He put forward the concept of "translation ethics" (Chesterman, 2012, p. 139) and advocated it be a research direction of translatology, pointing out that is to respect the original and its differences in language and culture with the aim of associating with "the other" in written level and enriching itself through the referral of "the other". Furthermore, in the book *On the Ethics of Translator* by the Anthony Pym, "ethic" changes at any time in accordance with the need of customers, industry standard and cultural norm of original language or target language. Therefore, translators are given a great choice in the premise of the professional ethic. Years later, in *Translation Dilemma: Towards an Ethic of Differences* by Lawrence Venuti, he admitted Berman's ethic gave him a lot inspiration and believed "a good translation is using the target language to represent the exotic in the foreign text" (Venuti, 1998, p. 127). However, unlike Berman, he found

Translation is an evitable process of naturalization, in which the foreign text is marked with language and cultural value easily be understood by specific group of locals. Translation is not only a representation of unique foreign culture, but also a process involved of shaping the local character at the same time since it services for a specific cultural group. (Venuti, 1998, pp. 127-131)

Translation ethic in the new century has entered a brand new stage. The top academic journal *The Translator* published a special issue titled with "Return to Ethic" in which the guest editor Pym pointed out straightly in the instruction "translation study has returned to ethical issues" (Pym, 2007, p. 130). Subsequently, Andrew Chesterman believed that as a cultural exchange activity, translation would be inevitably to appear ethical issues when cross-culture communication is between different ethnics or countries. Compared with translation ethics of western scholars, Chinese scholars also proposed the translation ethics school. However, people have different interpretation to distinguish them. Wang Dazhi once expressed that the former is about regulation on translation fact and standardization on translation behaviour (Wang, 2007, p. 35), which services for translation behavior and the subject of translation as well. However, the latter includes both the normative research and descriptive research of translation rules or phenomenon.

It is obviously to find the translation ethics should be included rules and norms in translation, descriptive problems of translation phenomenon. However, it neither refers to "inter-mediator" (such as promoters, sponsors, and publishers involved), nor social environment involved (such as historical background) and audiences. In contrast, Peng Ping's interpretation of translation ethics academic is more comprehensive and objective, who has expressed the theoretical system to study the relationship between ethics and translation, which extends its sight to the ethics field and then studies it from the angle of ethics. From this perspective, translation ethics is the study of ethics and norm initiating with translation itself and accepting suggestions from its readers and social historical environment. In general, translation ethics school should include translator's ethic, readers' ethics, and the ethic of inter-media factors while the ethical relationship between translator, publisher or patronage, and so on.

Ethics Interpretation of Lin Shu's Translation

Translation is a social behavior of cross-culture communication; as the actor of his behavior, translators are certainly constrained by their values. Lin Shu's translation activity mainly occurred in the late Qing, which was intervened by the specific cultural background, value system, ideology, and complexity of social norm. And all these constitute issues translation ethics concern. Qian Zhongshu has explained that in *Lin Shu's Translation*, it is

a very arduous journey for one language becoming completely converted to another, during which there are obstacles in all respects. Therefore, the translation is not quite corresponding to the original in terms of meaning or style in which distortion appears "mistranslation". Taking Lin Shu's translations as examples, there are always enthusiastic evaluations with controversial opinions. Most scholars accuse discrepancies in his translation as "mistranslation", while some show tolerance to her but sternly rebuke his collaborators. From this perspective, the collaborators should not be completely blamed for those "mistranslation", in which the most unique part was Lin's intentional expression. Admittedly, the "mistranslation" in Lin's translations for some may be negligence or misunderstanding while the considerable of them are his intentional selection and modification.

"Mistranslation" of Service Ethics

Translation happens when it is required, which means the client has employed the translator to interpret the work for certain purpose. Since the translation is served for specific purpose required by the client, the translator shall be responsible for him.

Lin Shu's translation activity has always branded with commercial service. The direct goal of most patronage is to win the market, occupy readers' view, and maintain positive reputation. In early 20th century, most Chinese did not understand any foreign language due to the long term of secluding the country from outside world policy in late Qing China. It would be difficult to understand for a translation blindly faithful to the original for target readers. In Lin's translations most original titles are replaced by free translation or even new ones, such as *Bingxue Yinyuan* (*Dombey and Son*). However, it is not hard to find that comparing with later visions published subsequently, his title attracted much more attention, which caters to target reader's interest (Yang, 2003, p. 71). Besides rewriting titles to attract readers' attentions, Lin Shu also paid special attention to the fluency and acceptability and modified the content. The differences between western novels and Chinese ones are mainly environmental description and psychological description with frequent cutback and flashback. Chinese ancient novels are mostly coherent stories with detailed plots, using language to promote plot and portray character, which is in line with reading habit of locals. What Lin Shu concerned is the plot by deleting most of descriptions in personality and psychology.

"Mistranslation" of Communication Ethics

In the mode of communication ethics, translation is the cross-language and cross-culture communicative activity, which is not only served for "the other", but also communicates with the other. Pym believes the traditional translation theory is bound by the binary mode, which covers up the real essence of translation. As the coordinator of such a cross-culture activity, translator is the "hybrid" living in the "intercultural space".

Lin Shu added several explanation notes in his translations to promote mutual understanding and communication between resource and target language for cross-cultural cooperation. In Lin's translations, he frequently added such instruction to help Chinese readers to understand culture of resource language on the basis of maintain the original meaning. For example, in *Heinu Yutianlu*, he translated "the married couple was enjoying their honeymoon" into "彼夫婦在蜜月期間，兩情合無間" (Lin & Wei, 1981, p. 125) with the detailed explanation of "honeymoon" as the meaning western man takes his wife travel around for a month after their marriage. Also in the same novel, he translated "Angel" into "恩及兒" with the further explanation "恩及兒者，

天女也，為女中最妍麗無比之人” (Lin & Wei, 1981, p. 140). Strictly speaking, explanations added as mentioned above are also “mistranslation”, which not existed in the original text.

“Mistranslation” of Normative Ethics

Normative ethics believes translation is to comply with the target language and cultural norm (Zhang, 2009, p. 39), meeting readers' expectations rather than disrupt. In order to achieve it, translation should satisfy linguistic culture norm and social culture norm of the target language.

Lin Shu used ancient Chinese prose in his translation, which is one of the reasons for him being popular in late Qing China. Before the Opium War, Chinese knew little about the western civilization who believed Chinese culture was the core in the world. Therefore, ancient prose was very popular, for Lin's translation catered for the aesthetic psychology and reading habit of scholars or even most of target readers' expectations and linguistic cultural norm of the target language as well. As is known to all, the Chinese culture was deeply influenced by the traditional Confucian ethics. Translators use words with ethical trace to interpret resource language in accordance with the social culture norm of target language. Taking the use of ethic filial piety as an example, novels translated by Lin with “Xiao” from *The Old Curiosity Shop* into *Xiaonv Nai'erzhuan* and from *Montezuma's Daughter* into *Yingxiaozi Huoshan Baochoulu*, which is due to his Confucian interpretation of the original ethics. It narrowed the distance between western literature and target readers in line with the normative ethics.

Conclusion

Under the influence of specific history background, social culture, and readers' capability of acceptance, Lin Shu's translations consciously make amount of addition, omission, and rewriting to achieve the purpose of translation, maintain economic interest of himself and sponsors, promote communication of western and Chinese culture, and meet the target readers' expectations, which would maximize the goal of translation by attracting most target readers' attentions. From this point of view, “mistranslation” in Lin's translation is completely with the translation ethics in great extent, which is the part of reasons for his foreign novel translations became popular. Although Lin Shu's “mistranslation” has positive value under the specific background in late Qing China, it also distorted the original information. For his case in translation has just shown that translation itself should be selected by readers, criticized and evaluated by historical background under the frame of translation ethics.

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