

# The Chinese-English Translation of *Sun Tzu's Art of War* from the Perspective of Bourdieusian Sociology

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The paper introduces the three core concepts of Bourdieu's sociological theory and their application in translation studies. The paper then examines and discusses the English translation of *The Art of War* from Bourdieu's sociological perspective and the perspective of ephemerality. A comprehensive and objective description of the different translations of the same original text in different historical periods, the strategies of the translators, and the social, historical and cultural factors affecting the translation process can lead to a deeper understanding and proper orientation of translation.

*Keywords:* Bourdieu, sociology, field, habitus, capital, *Sun Tzu's Art of War*

## Introduction

After the linguistic turn and the cultural turn, translation studies began to take a "sociological turn". This is mainly due to Bourdieu's sociological theory. The three core concepts are field, habitus and capital, which are often introduced into translation studies. This paper combines the English translation of *Sun Tzu's The Art of War* with field, habitus and capital, thus further highlighting the sociological nature of translation behavior.

## Field, Habitus and Capital

### Field

For objective social structures, Bourdieu adopts the concept of a field, which refers to "a social space with its own unique laws of operation".

He likens the field to a physical field in which particles are subject to "gravitational and repulsive forces" in the field, a "system of relations" (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 106), and the focus of study is on "the fundamental role of objective relations rather than on the particles themselves".

"The various fields are interrelated". For example, the circle of scientific researchers can be considered as the scientific field and the social network formed by business people as the business field. People in the scientific field have scientific and technical degrees from higher education institutions, rich theoretical knowledge and research experience, while people in the business field have a wide range of interpersonal relationships and rich business management experience. This is the relative independence between the different fields.

## **Habitus**

Participants implicitly and coincidentally accept unwritten norms in the course of continuous social interaction. In the process of socialization, such as family education, schooling, work, and communication, people gradually learn, internalize, and reinforce the social laws they perceive, creating a “system of dispositions”. In other words, they internalize social conventions in their own thinking and behavior, which in turn directly or indirectly influence their environment to a greater or lesser extent.

As individual, people have formed habitus (Bourdieu, 1991). Habitus is a product of history, in which individuals evolve, change or maintain their way of thinking, habits and resulting behaviors during the process of socialization.

## **capital**

Different fields require different qualifications. So how can these qualifications be summarized and classified? Bourdieu draws on the concept of “capital” in economics to answer this question. He argues that capital can be categorized into three basic forms: economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 47). Economic capital is similar to capital in the traditional sense of economics and refers to money, stocks, etc., which can obtain goods or services directly. Cultural capital refers to the cultural and educational resources that people acquire in social life, and is specifically divided into physicalized capital, materialized capital, and institutional capital (Carrington & Luke, 1997). Social capital refers to the various interpersonal relationships and social obligations of individuals in society (Wang, 2011, p. 8).

## **Translation with Field, Capital and Habitus**

### **Translation with Field**

New fields often develop in the process of borrowing and interacting with neighboring fields. Translation fields are no exception. For example, the several peaks of translation activities that have occurred in Chinese history can be seen as the mutual construction of a translation field and a related field.

In the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties, missionaries realized that in order to truly enter the Chinese religious field for long-term missionary work, they had to gain the support of the Chinese ruling class and the approval of the Chinese emperor. In a letter to a priest in Rome in October 1596, Matteo Ricci said, “By whatever means, we must first obtain the favor of the Chinese emperor to grant us the freedom to preach, and if this can be done, I dare say we will soon be able to naturalize hundreds of thousands or millions of people” (Ricci, 1986, p. 219). So, they began to make friends with some local officials, and when they found that the Chinese scholars were interested in advanced Western technology, they used the maps and scientific instruments they brought to attract the eunuchs. In order to gain the support of more high-ranking officials for their missionary work, they began to cooperate with the Chinese scholars to translate some scientific and technological works, thus entering the translation field.

To examine the rules within the field of translation, we often need to observe its relations and interactions with other related fields, which is the first aspect of Bourdieu’s sociological approach.

### Translation and Capital

In the commercialized translation field, translators with only limited cultural capital were often at a disadvantage. Guo Moruo, for example, had his translations rejected repeatedly. At that time, it had become a trend for intellectuals to sell their translations to booksellers for profit and position. The reason for refusal was that he was not yet famous and did not have enough connections or social capital to compete with booksellers for capital. It was not until 1919, when he met Zong Baihua, the editor-in-chief of *XueDeng*, which is a supplement of the *New Journal of Current Affairs*, that this embarrassing situation was changed.

He translated the soliloquies and preface poems of Goethe's *Faust* one after another, and was thus invited by Zhang Dongsun, the chief editor of the *New Journal of Current Affairs*, to translate the entire text of *Faust*. Thus, it was because Guo Moruo had established some social relations with the editor-in-chief during this period and gained some social capital that he was able to complete his translation activities successfully.

### Translation and Habitus

Translators' habits affect not only micro aspects such as their translation strategies and phrasing, but also macro aspects of their choice of texts.

Take Hu Shih's poetry translation as an example, from 1918 to 1928, this was a rather important period for Hu Shih's poetry translation. Hu Shih's poetry translation underwent significant changes in ideological themes and poetic forms, and his outlook on life and literary philosophy gradually matured, which fully reflected the reshaping of Hu Shih's habitus and constant changes in accordance with the changing social environment and conditions. The shaping effect of habitus made Hu Shih's translated poems show innovative aspects, boldly departing from the mainstream literary and translation norms, secularizing the subject matter.

It can be seen that habitus mainly comes from translators' positioning in the translation field: for example, whether they position themselves as senior translators or young translators, and whether they should follow the traditional formula of becoming famous or be innovative and different; while habitus in macro selection comes more from the shaping of translators in the power field and professional field.

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### English Translations of *The Art of War* from 1905 to the Late 1930s

At this stage, there were two English translations, one by Captain E. F. Calthrop of the British Royal Artillery in 1905 and the other by the British sinologist Lionel Giles in 1910. Due to the differences in field, habitus and capital, the purpose, quality and effect of Calthrop's and Lionel's translations of *Sun Tzu's Art of War* differed significantly.

E. F. Calthrop was neither an authority on Sinology nor a translator. His interest in *Sun Tzu's Art of War* was related to the "recent war" (the Russian-Japanese War of 1904-1905) (Yu, 2001, p. 233). His English translation is a reference to the Japanese version of *The Art of War*. He began to translate soon after learning Japanese, and his translation has a distinctly Japanese style, with a number of Japanese expressions in the translation.

Unlike E. F. Calthrop, Zhai Linnaeus's English translation is considered to be a model for English translations of *The Art of War* and has had a more far-reaching impact in the English-speaking world. This situation of Zhai Linnaeus can also be explained by Bourdieu's sociological theory. Zhai Linnaeus chose Sun

Xingyan's "Ten Commentaries on Sun Tzu" from the Qing Dynasty as the base text, and translated it directly from the original Chinese into English, which is more authoritative and has a more significant symbolic capital.

Born in China, Zhai Linnaeus was influenced by his father, the sinologist Herbert A. Giles, who had a strong interest in Chinese culture and a very solid background in sinology and a rigorous academic attitude, thus his embodied capital was more adequate. In addition to the English cultural field, Zhai Linnaeus is mainly in the Chinese field. Zhai Linnaeus' father is a famous sinologist and he has been influenced by him since he was a child, so Zhai Linnaeus has internalized various rules in the Chinese cultural field, and his habitus must carry the psychological tendency of loving and respecting Chinese culture.

### **English Translations of *The Art of War* from 1940s to 1980s**

The most important event in the world during this period was the Second World War, which had a great impact on the state of the world society at that time and changed the various fields in the social space, as well as the habitus of individuals in the various fields and capital accordingly.

The most influential translation at this stage was published in 1963 by American Commodore Samuel Griffith. Griffith's English translation stood out and became an example of successful translation of *The Art of War* because Griffith's translation followed the law of communication and met the requirements of the basic elements of the communication process. As the subject of translation and dissemination, Griffiths was an American brigadier general, and later obtained a doctorate from Oxford University, and his research direction was Chinese military thought mainly based on "The Art of War".

He is not only familiar with military affairs, but also an expert in *The Art of War* with strong professional authority. Moreover, his good image as a disseminator has a positive effect on the acceptance of the translation. Griffiths accumulated sufficient cultural capital, especially the physicalized capital, which is the guarantee of Griffiths' high-quality translation of *Sun Tzu's Art of War*.

Another reason why Griffith's English translation became a classic and had a profound impact in the English-speaking world was the influence of the power field and the active role of symbolic capital. If World War II had been lost, the Western countries would have collapsed and their regimes would have disintegrated. Accordingly, the power field, which is at the top of all fields in social space, would naturally have done everything possible to make the war a success. Anything that could help win the war would be supported by the government in the power field, and thus the power field had an important impetus to Griffith's translation and a potential positive impact on the acceptance of his translation.

### **English Translations of *The Art of War* from the 1990s to the Present**

The changes in the translation field in China are more significant due to the involvement of the power field. The Chinese government is keen to enhance China's cultural soft power, and thus has elevated "Chinese culture going out" to the level of national cultural strategy.

Lin Wusun used foreignization to translate, preserving the information content of the original text to the greatest extent, even in the form also tried to retain, such as: 一曰道, 二曰天, 三曰地, 四曰将, 五曰法。 Lin Wusun translates it as: The first is the way (dao 道); the second, heaven (tian 天); the third, earth (di 地); the fourth, command (jiang 将); and the fifth, rules and regulations (fa 法).

Lin Wusun's English translation had a relatively large influence among Chinese translations of *Sun Tzu's Art of War* and even among English translations in the world during this period, in addition to the changes in the field, in the habitus of the translators and their readers, his ample capital also had a significant positive impact on the reception of his translation. Lin Wusun was a famous Chinese translator, the director of the Bureau of Foreign Language Publication and Distribution, and the editor-in-chief of the journal *China Translation*. Because of these titles, his symbolic capital could be considered very rich, and he was in a position of power in the translation field and even in the Chinese cultural field, which played a certain role in the acceptance of Lin's translations.

Another famous version is the translation by John Minford in 2002. He confessed in an interview: "I am not a fan of Sun Tzu... I actually translated the book at the suggestion of the publishing company..." (Huang, 2009, pp. 50-51). John Minford, a very famous Orientalist, translated *Sun Tzu's The Art of War* in a very similar way to Zhai Linnaeus.

Because of his rich cultural capital as a famous Orientalist, John Minford also possessed strong symbolic capital, and with the support of publishers, his economic and social capital was also more than sufficient, thus his translations were also highly recognized and had a greater impact on the English-speaking world.

### Conclusion

The paper explores the application of the three most important concepts of Bourdieu's sociological theory to translation studies. The aim is to light the value of sociological theory for translation studies. Based on the concept system of field, habitus and capital in Bourdieu's sociological theory, the thesis explores the phenomenon of English translation of *The Art of War* in three separate periods, making people to examine the influence of social factors on the English translation of *Sun Tzu's Art of War* in a new perspective in different historical periods.

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