Manipulation in Poetry Translation

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Abstract

Traditional poetry translation studies often emphasize on the reproduction of the form or meaning and the translatability of poetry, not beyond the constraints of linguistic analysis. This paper sets out to discuss English translation of Chinese poems within a larger social, political and cultural context. According to André Lefevere, the leading representative of "Cultural school", translation is a rewriting or manipulation of an original text mainly influenced by three social and cultural factors, that is, ideology, dominant poetics and patronage. Translation doesn't go on in a vacuum and is bound to reflect a certain ideology and poetics. Translators from different social-historical backgrounds are manipulated by different ideology, poetics and patronage, and often rewrite the original to different degrees to meet the target cultural demands in different times.

Keywords: Manipulation, Ideology, Poetics, Patronage, Poetry translation

1. Theoretical Review

Traditional translation theory tended to stress linguistic equivalence and maintained that equivalence to the original is the basic and fundamental quality that a translated work should possess. This source-oriented approach dominated the study of translation for a considerable period. Around in the 1950s and 60s, culture-orientation started to emerge in social sciences, such as literary criticism, which is one of the most important developments to impact on translation theory by shifting its focus from the author and the original work to the reader and the context of reception. This shift is very important to translation theory since in the first place a translator is a reader of the original work, and his or her interpretation of the original is thus both authorized and contextualized. Translation studies were no longer confined to the text itself, instead in close connection with the social and cultural context. The descriptive, target-oriented and inter-disciplinary turn in translation studies provided an impetus for manipulation theory. Manipulation stresses the translator's role and the various constraints at the receiving end rather than the equivalence to the source. According to Hermans (Hermans, 1999, p.8), the name was proposed by André Lefevere who attempts to study translation from a sociological perspective, that is, how translational activities operate and function in the target society. For Lefevere, any work is not translated in a vacuum, which serves the needs of the ideology and poetics of a given society. Ideology and poetics, for him, are the two major factors that constrain the production and the reception of translation. He thought society is a super-system and literature is one of the subsystems, or "system of systems". There are two control factors influencing the interaction between literary system and other systems. The first operates within the literary system, represented by "professionals", such as critics, reviewers, teachers and translators. The other, outside of the literary system, is called "patronage". The first factor functions within the literary system, but according to the parameters set by the second factor. Lefevere's theory of manipulation successfully places translation within a larger social, political and cultural context and allows us to observe the way in which translation interact with the target environment. His theoretical framework has been employed by many scholars to study specific cases and has been proved quite enlightening and fruitful. It is therefore believed that this framework will help throw some new light on the study of poetry translation. As for poetry translation, one of the most prevalent discussions on it is whether the form and meaning in the original can be well reproduced in translation from the perspective of linguistic analysis. Different scholars hold different ideas to

themselves, for example, the Chinese translator Xu Yuan-zhong said, "a poetic translation should be as beautiful as the original in sense, in sound and, if possible, in form" (Xu Yuan-zhong, 1988, p.6). Witter Bynner thought it was possible to achieve "verbal parallelism, but nothing…of the pattern of tone and rhythm" (Bynner, 1978, p.9). James J.Y.Liu once said, "Admittedly, the music of poetry can never be fully reproduced in translation, even with two related languages like, say, French and Italian, let alone two widely different ones like Chinese and English" (James J.Y.Liu, 1962, p.20). Obviously it's difficult to translate poems from Chinese to English because of the difference of language, poetical conventions, cultural context and so on. Fortunately we can still enjoy many good translations of Chinese poems due to translators' efforts. But why different translators interpret the same poem in different ways? Is it the pure accidental choice of translators or the choice manipulated by a certain social and cultural factors? And how do the translations function in the target culture and interact with the target literary systems? This essay sets out to answer the questions by discussing poetry translation from three main control factors: ideology, poetics and patronage raised by André Lefevere.

2. Manipulation of Ideology

By "ideology", Lefevere understands, "a set of discourses which wrestle over interests which are in some way relevant to the maintenance or interrogation of power structures central to a whole form of social and historical life" (Gentzler, 2004, p.136). This term is taken by him in a sense not limited to the political sphere; rather, "Ideology would seem to be that grillwork of form, convention, and belief which orders our actions" (Lefevere, 2004, p.16). Ideology is the key notion in Lefevere's theory of manipulation, which refers to the translator's ideology which he/she willingly accepts or the ideology imposed upon the translators by patronages. If translations are not in conflict with culture's ideology (standards for acceptable behavior in the target culture), they are easier to be published and accepted in the target culture. Therefore ideology always determines the choice and reception of the subject matters of original texts in translation. For instance, before the early 20th century, most eastern countries were considered inferior to the western world and eastern literature was always ignored and treated as "low" literature. However, the first decades in the 20th century were actually the prosperous period for the Chinese poems translated and accepted in America. Why did this happen? There were some social and cultural reasons for this phenomenon. As we all know, during the first two decades, the world experienced great changes in political and economic area, which led to changes in every aspect of life including changes in literary system. The most important event during this period was the First World War (1914-1918), which had a profound impact on the whole society. Shortly after the war there appeared an economic boom, but the unexpected economic crisis befalling America in 1929 fragmented many people's dream, so that"excitement and enthusiasm subsided to make way for disillusionment"(Chang Yaoxin, 1990, p.217). Meanwhile western faith, which is closely connected with Christianity, seemed to be pulling apart after the war. It seemed that "there was no mythical center with god expelled from the universe… with nothing to mediate between man and his cosmos" (Chang Yaoxin, 1990, p.217). When the loss of faith was intensified, a new remedy must be found to eliminate people's chaotic and fragmented sense of life and remain the stability of the whole society. Rightly in the Tang poems permeates the sense of "oneness in man, nature and eternity" (Bynner, 1978, p.4), which can help westerners find an inner peace and a good will toward life. On the other hand, after the First World War America broke through its isolation geographically and proved its economic and political position in the world. American intellectuals were eager to broaden their vision, some of whom took great curiosity in the mysterious eastern civilization. Therefore Chinese civilization, "to be not only the oldest civilization still vigorous but to be a civilization profoundly informed as to lasting values" (Bynner, 1978, p.11), aroused great interest in western world. No wonder Chinese poems, the essence of Chinese classical literature and traditional culture, caught western intellectuals' eye. Therefore the first upsurge of the English translation of Chinese poems appeared in America in the early 20th century. Many translations of Chinese poems are published during this period, such as Ezra Pound's *Cathay* (London, 1915), Amy Lowell and Florence Ayscough's *Fir-Flower Tablet* (New York, 1921), Witter Bynner's *The Jade Mountain*: *Three Hundred Poems of the T'ang Dynasty*(1929), W.J.Bainbridge-Fletcher's *Gems from Chinese Verse* (Shanghai, 1918) and *More Gems from Chinese Verse* (1919), J Whitall's *Chinese Lyrics* (1918), J. L.French's *Lotus and Chysanthemum* (1928).

As we have mentioned, ideology is considered by Lefevere as one of the three major factors exerting tremendous influence on translators, possesses a much broader sense than we might expect. It is not limited to the political sphere and can also be understood here as systems of ideas based on value judgments and attitudes, or the propositions and assumptions people hold, that influence people's thoughts and behaviors. Lefevere pointed out, "The ideology dictates the basic strategy the translator is going to use and therefore also dictates solutions to problems concerned with both the 'universe of discourse' expressed in the original (objects, concepts, customs belonging to the world that was familiar to the writer of the original) and the language the original itself is

expressed in." (Lefevere, 2004, p.41) For example, when Bynner translated names of place and persons in Tang Poems, he tried to make a careful adjustment by eliminating the names not highly important to the sense of a poem. In other ways he substituted some general geographical terms for specific place names in the original. In the case of Du Fu's poem "Both Sides of the Yellow River Recaptured by the Imperial Army", Bynner translated the lines as "Back from this mountain, past another mountain, / Up from the south, north again----to my own town!", in which the general geographical terms "this mountain", "another mountain", "south", "north" are used to replace four specific place names in the original: "Ba Xia", "Wu Xia", "Xiang Yang, "Luo Yang". Though Bynner's translation is easier to be understood by the western readers since they are unfamiliar with Chinese names of places, the places in the translation are located so roughly that target readers can't feel the sharp shift from water route to land route as Chinese readers can. As Burton Watson said, in a country as old as china, place names naturally come to have rich historical or legendary associations and "their mere mention in literature is sufficient to call up scenes of departed glory, fierce battles, the excitement of a bustling city, or the loneliness of the frontier" (Watson, 1971, p128). From this aspect, Bynner's translation strategy in dealing with names of places still has some shortcomings. Similarly when translating other terms, natural and familiar in Chinese, but exotic or quaint in English, Bynner often employed the ones westerners are familiar with. Taking the translation of instruments as an example, he translates "Hu Jia "(a kind of ancient instrument used by ancient people in the northern border of China) into "Flageolet", and translates "Bi Li"(another kind of ancient instrument in China) into "Reed-pipe". Obviously the terms of western instrument completely destroys the atmosphere of the original poem. It should be noted here that Translators are always caught in the paradox between his ideology and his status as a professional. They can't produce a text opposite to their ideology, at the same time they must convince other professionals that they are worthy of being a translator. Nobody can escape one's own ideology, which suggests that claiming objectivity is "dishonest" (Gentzler, 2004, p.138). Faithful translation is utopia to be thought as the only translational strategy possible or allowable, because translation always takes place within a certain social and cultural context.

3. Manipulation of Poetics

According to Lefevere, dominant poetics consists of two components: literary devices and the concept of the role of literature. The former includes the range of genres, symbols, leitmotifs and prototypical situations and characters and the latter is the relation of literature to the social system in which it exists (Munday, 2001, p.129). The first component exerts more conservative influence on the literary system; while the second component tends to exert more innovative influence. He sees the dominant poetics as tending to be determined by ideology. For the convenience of discussion, poetics here will be subdivided into two smaller categories: literature poetics, which refers to a social group's reading anticipation to literary works in a given time, and translation poetics, which refers to what a social group thinks of translation in a given period, namely, what translation is or what translation should be.

As we have stated, the early 20th century was actually the prosperous period for the Chinese poems translated and accepted in America, which is closely related to the modern English poetry movement at that time, such as Imagism. Since traditional English poetics, characterized with "its iambic pentameter, its verbosity, and extra-poetic padding" (Chang Yaoxin, 1990, p.219) can't express the temper of the new age, intellectuals wanted to break through obsolete themes, abstract preach, verbose expression and constrained form so as to develop a rich rhythm and splendid thoughts. In the first years of 20th century, a group of English and American poets came together to write poetry in a new way, to express themselves through a series of clear, exact images. They were greatly inspired by the Chinese classic poetry, such as Ezra Pound, the leader of Imagism, who borrowed heavily from Chinese poems. His nineteen poems contained in *Cathay*, strictly speaking, are imitations of Chinese poems. As Lefevere said, translations deeply "affect the interpenetration of literary systems" (Lefevere, 2004, p.38) not only by creating the image of one writer or work in another literature, but also by introducing new things into the first component and paving the way to changes in its second component. In Pound's poems, he frequently used deformation and disembodiment borrowed from Chinese poems. In simple words, he omitted some syntactic and logic elements which is necessary in standard English, to highlight the effect of images, such as the line "Desolate castle, the sky, the wide desert". In short, the translation of Chinese poems and the modern English poetry movement interact or influence each other, which exert innovative impact on the evolution of western poetics. It is difficult to distinguish whether the western modern poetry movement enhanced the translation of Chinese poems or it was the other way round. Hence translation plays an important part in the evolution of the literary system, because "the struggle between rival poetics is often initiated by writers, but fought and won or lost by rewriters" (Lefevere, 2004, p.38). Translation is "as important as original writings in the establishment of the poetics of a literary system". (Lefevere, 2004, p.28)

The change of dominant poetics in a literary system may influence the translation poetics greatly. Since the dominant poetics in English poetry tended to shift from regular form to free verse after the modern English poetry movement, the style of poetry translation varied correspondingly. For example, in Giles' translation of Li Bai's poem "Farewell", he adopts the rhyme scheme of end rhyming "ababcdcd" and the rhythm of iambic tetrameter such as the following "Where blue hills cross the northern sky, / Beyond the moat which girds the town, / 'Twas there we stopped to say Goodbye! / And one white sail alone dropped down". Compared with Giles' version, Witter Bynner, who was greatly influenced by modernism in poetry, used free verse in his translation without using strict meter or rhyme, but that are still recognizable as "poetry" with a certain form. He translates this poem as follows "With a blue line of mountains north of the wall, / And east of the city a white curve of water, / Here you must leave me and drift away / Like a loosened water-plant hundreds of miles…" Based on linguistic analysis, both of their translations have advantages and disadvantages. Giles' translation is not as clear as the original and sometimes even not understandable mostly due to his pursuit of rhyme scheme. On the contrary, Bynner's translation reproduced the meaning and poetical flavor of the original poem well, but failed to reflect the strict rhyme scheme of Chinese regulated verses. It seems to be unfair for some English-speaking readers who can only have the impression that all Chinese poetry is written in a kind of rimless verse due to the free verse translation. However, both of their translations won the favor of critics, scholars as well as common readers at their times, because they conformed to the dominant poetics at their own times. The former conforms to the Victorian poetic style, while the latter go with the trend of free verse.

4. Manipulation of Patronage

By patronage, André Lefevere means, "any kind of force that can be influential in encouraging and propagating, but also in discouraging, censoring and destroying works of literature" (Gentzler, 2004, p.137). Patrons may be persons (influential and powerful individuals), groups of persons (a religious body, a political party, a social class, a royal court, and publishers) and the media. Patronage, outside of the literary system, is usually "more interested in the ideology of literature than in its poetics" (Lefevere, 2004, p.15), while professionals, within the literary system, such as critics, reviewers, teachers and translators are more concerned with poetics. However, there can not actually be such a clear division. Some are themselves professionals and also representatives of patronage. Patronage basically consists of three elements: ideological component, economic component and status component. Patronage can be either differentiated when the three components are independent on each other, or undifferentiated when its three components are "all dispensed by one and the same patron" (Lefevere, 2004, p.17). In the second case, the patron's efforts are primarily directed at preserving the stability of the social system as a whole. The literature opposing to the authority of patronage will experience great difficulty in getting published through official channels or will be reduced to the status of "low" or "popular" literature. Thus translators usually have to meet the requirement of patronage to get their translations published or accepted in the target culture. A good example is provided by James Legge's translation of Chinese Classics. When Legge, as an active missionary, first tried to start his massive translation project in Hong Kong later in the 1850s, the London Missionary Society and Anglo-Chinese College are the patrons for him. But the support came with two rigid stipulations: first, the expense of printing of the translations at the Mission Press would be borne strictly by the "liberality" of Legge's generous friend, Joseph Jardine, without any demand on the Society; second, "those sentiments of Confucius which are at variance with the Christian truth" would not "be accompanied by annotations in refutation of the one and in confirmation of the other"(Girardot,2002:63). Obviously the Society's stipulation reflects the ideological manipulation, here referring to the religious interference with the translation, which imposes on translators to modify some parts in their translation in conformity with the ideology of the target culture. Possibly for this reason, when Confucian teachings are in conflict with Christian beliefs, Legge always chooses to ideologically distance himself from the former one. Another example is illustrated by the publication of the anthology *Sunflower Splendor: Three Thousand Years of Chinese Poetry* (1975) complied by Irving Yucheng Lo. The anthology was published just at the turning point of Sino-American relationship. Considering the masses' expectation of resuming the relations, American organizations and institutes sponsored the publication enthusiastically, such as The Asian Literature Program from The Asian Society, The Office of Research and Advanced Studies and The East Asian Studies Program from Indiana University. As mentioned above, patronage also acts within the constraint of ideology. However, present-day developments in the literary system in Europe and the Americas show that the undifferentiated patronage is based mainly on economic component or profit motive rather than on ideology as it was in most literary systems in the past.

5. Conclusion

Traditional western translation theories focus on the "equivalence" and"faithfulness" between the source text and the translated text from the perspective of linguistic analysis. The writer and the source text are often considered

to be sacred and infrangible, while the roles of the translator and the readers are ignored in literary translation. However, with the "cultural turn" in translation studies, more and more scholars begin their studies of translation from a cultural angle. They go beyond the limitation of language and focuses on the interaction between translation and culture. Translation is no longer considered as a mechanical activity, but a creative one within constraints of certain social and cultural factors. As for poetry translation, it also experiences the development from linguistic analysis to cultural criticism. The traditional poetry translation studies often emphasize on the reproduction of the form or meaning and the translatability of poetry. Undoubtedly traditional methodology has made an important contribution to the studies of poetry translation, but can't provide the answer to all the questions. Therefore different tools and methodology are required for conducting studies in translation. Lefevere's manipulation theory successfully places translation within a larger social, political and cultural context and stresses the translator's role and the various control factors in translation, which pave new ways to poetry translation studies. He pointed out that there were mainly three social and cultural factors that influence translation, that is, ideology, dominant poetics and patronage. Apart from this, he stated that translation was a kind of rewriting of the original. In order to meet the target cultural demands in different times, translators from different social-historical backgrounds, manipulated by different ideology, poetics and patronage, often rewrite the original to different degrees. It is from his theoretical framework that we can have a comprehensive understanding of translation activities in poetry translation.

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