

Philosophical Perspectives on Traditional Chinese Translation Theory

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Abstract: In terms of the history of Chinese translation thoughts, the May 4th Movement is the demarcation point of Chinese translation thoughts, which are divided into traditional translation theories and modern translation theories. In the 1930s and 1940s, when a large number of Western philosophical works flooded into China, Chinese philosophers expressed their opinions on the translation of Western philosophical works from a philosophical perspective, which added a new perspective to the traditional discussion and enhanced the breadth and depth of translation thoughts. This paper will analyze and compare the translation thoughts of Ai Siqi, He Lin, Chen Kang and Jin Yuelin, so as to highlight the theoretical contribution of philosophical perspective to translation studies in China.

1. Introduction

In the late 1930s and 1940s, China was facing a national crisis and a complicated political situation, so patriotic intellectuals rallied to save the country and the people. Many of them are engaged in translation of philosophy. They are rich in traditional Chinese studies and have the ability to study Western learning far and wide. They are the only ones who have written books and theories in the Chinese translation circle, and have pushed translation practice towards translation theory. Ai Siqi, He Lin and Jin Yuelin are the most representative. They have formed their unique translation thoughts with the support of rich translation practice. Although Ai Siqi, He Lin, Jin Yuelin and Chen Kang have made great contributions to translation theory, they have received little attention from scholars. Therefore, it is necessary to comprehensively comb and contrast their translation thoughts so as to carry forward their translation thoughts.

2. Introduction of the Four Philosophers Ai Siqi, he Lin, Jin Yuelin and Chen Kang

Ai Siqi is a famous modern Marxist philosopher and an outstanding translator in China. During his lifetime, he wrote many influential philosophical works and translated many Marxist philosophical classics and foreign literary masterpieces. His translation of Heine's Germany--A Winter's Fairy Tale has influenced several generations. His greatest contribution to Chinese translation is that he first put forward the philosophical thoughts of translation, inherited and developed the traditional Chinese translation thoughts, and opened a new page in the history of

Chinese translation thoughts.

Jin Yuelin (1895-1984), native of Changsha, Hunan Province, was published in 1948 in *The Theory of Knowledge*, in which chapter 15 is devoted to translation.

He Lin (1902-1992), Born in Jintang, Sichuan Province, he was a famous Chinese philosopher, historian of western philosophy, famous translator and researcher of translation history. As an outstanding translator of western philosophy, he initiated the arduous cause of translating and introducing the philosophy of Hegel in China, and he is the honorary editor-in-chief of *The Complete Works of Hegel*, a world philosophical masterpiece. He has made an important contribution to the translation of western philosophy in China. His philosophical thoughts on translation have left a strong mark in the history of Chinese translation thoughts.

Chen Kang (1902-1992), formerly known as Chen Zhonghuan. In his early years, he studied Greek philosophy at the University of London and the University of Berlin, Germany, and obtained his doctorate degree. He is proficient in English, German, Greek, Latin and other languages. His translations include Plato's *Parmenides*, the ancient Greek philosopher. It is a very difficult work to read and to translate, and there have been many translations and commentaries in the West for more than two thousand years from ancient times, but none has been satisfactory. Chen's translation has made a contribution to the study of Plato's philosophy.

3. A Dialectical Discussion on Literal and Free Translation by Ai Siqi and Jin Yuelin

During the May Fourth Movement, there was a fierce debate on the basic issue of literal translation and free translation. Most translators maintain that translation can be divided into literal translation and free translation. Philosophers do not make the distinction between direct and free translation. Ai Siqi broke the binary opposition between literal translation and free translation and dialectically analyzed literal translation and free translation from the perspective of philosophy. Ai Siqu stressed that “free translation and literal translation should not be regarded as two absolutely separate things”. Translation should pay attention to the meaning, that is, pay attention to the understanding of the original meaning, “meaning” is the fundamental. In his opinion, translation should be responsible for both the readers and the original work, while literal translation should respect the original work without adding the translator's own opinions. Free translation is the translator's correct understanding of the original work, so that the meaning is accurate and smooth. Therefore, literal translation and free translation should be used at the same time, but in principle, he pursues more accurate literal translation.

Jin Yuelin wrote in *Language*, Chapter 15 of *Theory of Knowledge* that there are roughly two kinds of translation, one is translation meaning, the other is translation taste. Here the so-called “translation conception” means to express all the emotional meanings of the sentence in different languages. The so-called translation meaning is to express the meaning of the bottom idea of the word in different languages. Conception consists of a variety of tastes and feelings which are not the foundation of language, and which are at the same time unavailable to him who is accustomed to the historical circumstances and customs of which he quotes them. Translating the meaning may need art, but translating the conception must have art. Meaning Translation only requires that the letter be reached while conception translation is different for it may have to be re-created. On the one hand, of course, conception translation still belongs to translation, and there is also the problem of faithfulness and expressiveness. However, what one desires to express and achieve is not only meaning but also conception. In his opinion, philosophy and literary translation have different standards. Literature pays attention to the “charm” expressed in it, so when doing literary translation, we should pay attention to the translation of the feeling, while philosophy focuses on the translation of the meaning. Therefore, both Ai Siqu and Jin Yuelin believe that in the process of translation, it is

necessary to use appropriate methods under appropriate circumstances on the basis of the responsibility for the original work, so as to ensure the accuracy and smoothness of the translation.

4. The Discussion of the Dialectical Relationship between Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance

In terms of the relationship between faithfulness, expressivity and elegance, Ai Siqu believes that faithfulness is the first righteousness and expressivity and elegance are the second. He wrote in his long essay "On Translation": "The principle of translation is always based on" faithfulness, "expressiveness" and "elegance" are inseparable to "faithfulness", just like the relationship between attribute and essence, but they are the existence of the second meaning.

The philosopher Chen Kang, who translated the ancient Greek philosopher Plato's *Parmenides*, also discussed the dialectical relationship between faithfulness, expressibility and elegance. He believes that "faithfulness" can be said to be the natural right of translation, while "unfaithfulness" translation is not translation. "Reaching" is only relative. From an objective point of view, the so-called "expressiveness" means that people can get the meaning of the original text smoothly from the translation. "Elegance" can be regarded as ornament in the translation of philosophical works. If the translation of such books faithfully follows the original ideological line to introduce a theory that is not native to China, then "elegance" and "indecent" are only superficial problems. As a matter of fact, only what is not sufficient in content need to be aided by decoration. Chen Kang's point of view is very clear, put faithfulness in the first place while expressiveness and elegance attached to it. When talking about the relationship between "free translation and literal", he wrote, "Our self-made principle is: it is better to retain the original meaning than elegant diction. 'Words without meaning, deeds will not be far' is indeed a famous saying that has been verified in history. However, we still have to add the following two words, that is, writing is superior to its quality, and deeds far away will lead to shame." The translator should take "faithfulness" as the foundation and become the faithful spokesman of the author. It can be seen from the philosophical perspective, "faithfulness" has always been the most basic and the first standard, and "expressiveness" and "elegance" are attributes based on "faithfulness".

5. Discussion on the Significance and Value of Translation

The philosopher He Lin talked about the significance and value of translation. In his opinion, translation has practical value for social civilization and progress, functions for spreading, promoting and flourishing culture, and functions for inspiring creation. He said, "Translation is the beginning of creation, and creation is the end of translation. In translation there is creation, and in creation there is translation. The greatest value and contribution of translation lies in "internalizing external learning". This is China's first step towards the world. According to Chen Kang, the greatest academic value of translation lies in the fact that translators incorporate their own opinions in the process of translation, make readers understand the truth through their own understanding, and enlighten readers from it.

6. Discussion on the Translation Methods of Philosophical Works

Jin Yuelin thought, in philosophical work, some of them are completely rational, so easy to translation, and some philosophical works is not entirely rational, in fact, most philosophical works through the plain language, even is the phrase to express and we usually expressed by the completely different meaning, in this case, the translation becomes difficult philosophical works. Jin Yuelin believes that, some philosophical works, such as epistemology, are almost completely

rational and have the characteristics of heavy analysis and heavy criticism, which are almost scientific. These philosophical works are relatively easy to translate. While some philosophical works are not entirely rational, such as metaphysics, metaphysics and Chinese philosophy, these philosophical works have the characteristics of heavy synthesis, heavy creation and almost religious, which are relatively difficult to translate. In addition, there are some philosophical works that can be translated but do not have the original impetus. For example, some words have multiple meanings and rich meanings, if the meaning of the translation is limited to a certain aspect, the meaning of the original words and sentences will be lost if the meaning of the translation is not reflected. Another example is the original text “the idea expressed by the words, pure thought or pure reason that has been translated successfully. However, it means that the words in the original text or on emotion can cause emotion in the translation is not at all. The emotional sustenance of philosophical words is sometimes the prime motivity, this kind of emotional sustenance cannot be translated and this prime motivity cannot be obtained. Even if we can understand the meaning of the original in a translation, we are not necessarily moved.

7. Conclusion

To sum up, the four philosophers Ai Siqu, He Lin, Jin Yuelin and Chen Kang have many unique viewpoints on translation. They not only reveal the theoretical basis of translation from a philosophical point of view, but also break through the traditional dualistic opposition between literal translation and free translation based on the academic tradition and the translation practice of western philosophical works. From the perspective of philosophers, they dialectically analyzed the essential attributes, translation methodology and translation value of translation, and also dealt with the issues of text types and term translation, which broadened the thinking and paradigm of translation studies on the whole, and played a role in promoting and guiding translation studies later on. In addition, several philosophers have explored the methods of translation from the perspective of philosophy, thus giving us a lot of profound enlightenment. In short, the schools of philosophers on translation studies in this era are worthy of further study.

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