

## **Passion, Power and Poetry ---Chen Jingrong's Path to Poetry Translation in the 20th Century from the Perspective of Socio-Translation Perspective**

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**Abstract:** Chen Jingrong, a Distinguishable Poetess in the 20th Century in China, Has Long Been Invisible and Neglected as a Female Translator in Domestic as Well as Oversea Translation Studies. Actually, Her Translation of Works in Various Genres, Especially the Poems, Has Impacted Greatly on the Literature, in Particular the Advancement of Chinese New Poetry. Hence, This Study Focuses on the Complicated Tangles of Her Composition of Poems, Her Love or Marriages, and Her Translations Before and after the Establishment of the New China, in Which Socio-Translation Concepts Including the "Field", "Capital", "Habitus" and "Network" Are Adopted with an Attempt to Untie and Unveil Those Complex Ties in That Ever-Changing Society. This Paper Explores Social Factors Concerning Her Access to the Poetry Writing and Translating, Her Translating Approaches and Strategies, the Influence of Her Translations on Her Poetry Creations. It Could Be Concluded That one's Traits in the Society, Not Only Emotional But Also Physical, Would Trigger one's Inspirations in Literary Writing and Translating.

### **1. Introduction**

#### **1.1 Why is Chen Jingrong Selected?**

In Early 20th Century, When a Scarcity of Women Received Traditional Education, or Even Foreign Language Education, Let Alone Grew Up to Be Translators, However, Some Females Still Stood out, Like Xue Shaowei, Chen Hongbi, Zhang Zhaohan, Xue Qiyong, Huang Cuining, Huang Jingying, Yang Jiwei, Wu Ruonan, Shen Xingren and So on, Who Translated a Range of Novels, Dramas, Children Literature and the Like. Increasing Heed Has Been Drawn to Them in Translation Study Circles of China Along with Other Countries, Except for Chen Jingrong as a Translator<sup>1</sup>. Chen Jingrong, Born in 1917 and Active in 1930s and 1940s China, Was an Outstanding Modern Poet in China, Leading a Poetry School Named "Nine Leaves" [1]. She Wrote over Three Hundred Poems Collected in Diverse Volumes, and Also Published Volumes of Prose, Translations and Essays. Her Composition as Well as Her Translation of Poems Has Impacted Various Poets Especially in Modern China, and Therefore This Paper Would Focus on Her Translation of Poems Via Presenting Her Life Stories, Her Social Experiences, Her Inspirations, and the Like under the Framework of Sociology of Translation, a Burgeoning Paradigm in Current Translation Studies [2].

#### **1.2 Why is Sociology of Translation Adopted?**

Since its rise in 1960s, translation study has undergone three turns, or paradigm shifts, from linguistic to cultural and then to sociological. Meanwhile, related researches have been expanded from micro perspective like linguistic characteristics of translated texts towards macro perspective like life story of translators, contexts or even the whole society. The systematic study of translation from a sociological perspective emerged in the 1990s, among which Bourdieu's theory of social fields, Luhmann's social systems theory and Callon and Latour's actor-network theory are the most marked ones [3]. However, unlike the binary opposition in the previous studies, it shifts from one dimension into two dimensions by combining macro and micro perspectives together, focusing on both social and cultural elements that influence the selection, production, and distribution of translation, and textual factors like language conversion, text production and translation strategies.

This study would adopt core concepts in sociology of translation, including the field, the capital, the habitus and the network, respectively from Bourdieu and Latour, so as to present both the panorama of a female translator's life story under diverse social backdrops and feature her translation of poems [4].

## **2. Her Access to Translation Field-Budding Romance, Courage and Poetry between 1932-1939**

Some scholar depreciated Chen's unlucky romances as follows: Chen's first two marriages, both with more established older male poets (with Cao Baohua (1906-1978) from 1936-1939 and with Sha Lei (1912-1986) from 1940 to 1945) turned out to hinder rather than encourage to her literary pursuits. <sup>2</sup> However, I do not quite agree with that conclusion, for in her first "marriage"(not being married officially), Cao Baohua could be regarded as the key for her entry to the hall or field of poetry, let alone the field of translation [5]. Field, according to Boudieu(1984), "A field is a setting in which agents and their social positions are located. The position of each particular agent in the field is a result of interaction between the specific rules of the field, agent's habitus and agent's capital." It could be taken as the stage for a poet or a translator [6]. Hence, without Cao's guidance, Chen's talents might never be unearthed for the following three crucial factors:

### **2.1 Linguistic Education- the Essential Proficiency in the Translation Field**

Chen Jingrong, at her 15 years old, eloped with Cao Baohua but failed, but two years later, they successfully reunited in Peiking in 1935. Though she ended her education in a middle school, she began to sit in on classes in famous universities in Peiking, like Tsinghua University where Cao studied, to learn foreign languages like English, French and Russian. In the meanwhile, According to the recollection of Xiaohai, Chen also acquired knowledge concerning foreign languages and literature by herself with the encouragement and influence of Cao [7]. Such knowledge, beyond the reach for girls living in that remote county in Sichuan, China, then underpinned Chen's future translation path.

### **2.2 Network-the Stimulants in Literary and Translation Fields**

Cao, who published a series of poetry anthologies and systematically introduced and translated western poems in 1930s, was deemed as an important member in the Crescent Moon Society and a distinguished modernist in Chinese modern poetry. With Cao's introduction, Chen got acquainted with an army of talented scholars and poets in modern China, like Liang Zongdai, He Qifang, Sun Dayu, Fengzhi, Lin Gen, etc. Her works always appeared along with works of Cao Baohua, Xin Di, Lingen and the like on the very magazines, such as Da Gong Ba and Mercury, which was a symbol that she had entered into the literary and translation field concerning poetry and a basis for the later founding of Nine Leaves School [8].

### **2.3 Habitus Formation-the Features in Literary and Translation Fields**

Habitus, "is neither a result of free will, nor determined by structures, but created by a kind of interplay between the two over time: dispositions that are both shaped by past events and structures, and that shape current practices and structures and also, importantly, that condition our very perceptions of these" (Bourdieu 1984: 170). It means that Habitus 'is not fixed or permanent, and can be changed under unexpected situations or over a long historical period' (Navarro 2006: 16). It is true that Chen's poetry concepts had been greatly impacted by Cao in early 1930s, Cao served as an editor of "Poetry and Criticism", the supplement of Peiking Morning, introduced and translated western modern poetics like those of W. B. Yeats, Paul Valery, T.S. Eliot and Ivor Richards. Those modern poetic concepts unveiled a new world to this young girl who had been immersed in Chinese traditional poetic concepts before, and were then deeply rooted in Chen's later poetic compositions and translations, hence gradually shaping her habitus-for instance, Nine Leaves School named in 1980s was well-known for its modernity in Chinese poetry [9]. For instance, in her first published poem in 1932,"illusion", a range of natural images were linked together under her

pen in her meditation-her first trial of combining such Daoist harmony with European Romanticism. Thus, her poems stood out due to the exquisite lyrical fabric as well as the classical Chinese and modernist imageries, techniques, and sentiments in them.

### **3. Her Accumulation of Capitals & Her Maturity of Habitus in Translation-Marriages, Power and Disputes after 1940**

#### **3.1 Her Choices of Materials for Translation-Capitals**

According to Bourdieu (1984), capital is accumulated labor which enables agents or groups of agents to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor. Capital takes four fundamental forms, economic capital, cultural capital, social capital, and symbolic capital. Chen's following experiences actually depict her pursuing for capitals.

Chen's first marriage with Sha Lei after her departure with Cao Baohua lasted for 5 years, in which Chen suffered greatly because Sha Lei, an irresponsible husband and a male chauvinist, barely bore any household duty or family expense, leaving one of their daughters to die in illness and starvation. Chen had no choice but fled to support herself and the single remaining daughter, and pains in that period would be absorbed and internalized as one of cultural capitals in her future creations. For economical capitals, Chen firstly worked as a teacher and editor in Chongqing between 1945 and 1946, and then a writer and translator in Shanghai since the summer of 1946. There she translated diverse materials, including not only poems, but also classical novels and fairy tales, since such a selection was confined to the task set by the publishing house, Luotuo Bookstore, her then employer, and her access to original versions to some extent. Those four years(1946-1949) witnessed her proliferation in both writing and translating, and the appearance of a couple of magazines like Chinese New Poetry -- the early connection with poets in northern China and the following expansion of her literary circle had brought her the chance of co-founding a poetry school and co-editing poetry magazines. Meanwhile, Chen married to Jiang Tianzuo, a communist, and in addition to the backdrop, she turned to translate materials from the Soviet Union. All these facts won her symbolic and social capitals after the founding of the new China, when she, though without any college diplomat, took a position in World Literature as an editor and translator, and of course her proficiency matched and deserved it.

#### **3.2 Her Translation Strategies of Poem Translation-- Habitus**

Chen translated materials in diverse styles, like fairy tales, poems and novels from French, English and later Russian. However, the poem translations are attached the greatest weight to. Her translations of poems were mainly undertaken in 1940s--after the reform and opening up, a poetry anthology named Patterns and Flowers was published, including most of her early translated poems and some freshly-translated poems rendered from works of Baudelaire and Rilke. Such a selection could be attributed to her poetic preference of modernism discussed above.

In addition, her translation habitus is mainly embodied in her translation strategies, namely, "translating like writing". While writing poems, Chen adopted poetic forms freely, because she believed that to compose poems in the form of free verses or rhymed verses depended on the content.<sup>3</sup> Thus, in her poetry translation, she respected the original lines and rendered them in similar forms just like an incarnation of those poets. Just take Rilke's "Autumn" as an example, which was indirectly translated by Chen from an English version named Thirty-one Poems by Rainer Maria Rilke 4:

Lord: it is time. So great was summer's glow.

Lay now Thy shadow on the dial faces,

On level spaces let the free winds blow.

In English lines, there are five feet for each line rhymed in the form of ABA. Though, it is impossible for Chen to translate those lines with identical number of Chinese characters and exact rhyming. However, as a poet, she conserved something poetic in her translations in Patterns and Flowers, the rhythms in each line are almost identical, and meanwhile the vowels at the ending of

“Wei” (meaning “great”) and “Chui” (meaning “blow”) sound similarly. In her poetry translation, we could find that she had never rendered poems with fixed rhymes into those in exactly identical rhyming patterns. That is to say, compared with forms, meanings had been given priority to. While she composed her own poems, she followed the very principle. Most of her own poems were free verses, without regular rhyming at all. Especially several years before and after 1949, her translated works mainly focused on those written by Soviets or poets like Carl Sandburg who composed his poetry primarily in free verse, by adopting the language of the people and speaking to the masses. Her poems, unshackled from forms and tactics, impressed a large quantity of readers for their fresh images, provoking thoughts, zest, and wit. simply put, Chen seemingly recreated those lines while translating.

#### 4. Conclusion

Some scholars doubted whether sociology of translation could illustrate both the macro environment of translation activities and micro details like language and text in them, and doubt it is not too abstract to be applied in real-world translation studies. Actually, from the above analysis, it could be concluded that sociology of translation could also deal with micro textual issues and instruct translation practices in reality. This study unveils that after the dauntless pursuit of true love, marriages and divorces, Chen ,who once composed a book review for *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia Woolf in the name of Mo Gong<sup>5</sup>, finally dwelled lonely in a room of her own to create and translate poems. All ups and downs were woven into her poetry, including her poetics, her access to various fields, her habitus in both creation and translation of poems. Hence, this paper presents a sample of integrating individuals, process, social environment, gender, power, and capitals together, so as to explore a female translator’ dream, love, selections, talent and achievements in vicissitudes before and after the founding of the People's Republic of China.

#### 5. Notes

1) only one related research essay in English: Baudelaire’s Influence on Duo Duo’s Poetry through Chen Jingrong, a Chinese Woman Poet Translating from French, Giusi TAMBURELLO, *Asian and African Studies* XVI, 2 (2012), pp. 21–46. But its focus was on a modern male Chinese poet named Duo Duo; and one related essay in Chinese by Yang Sen.

2) in “The Inferno Tango: Gender Politics and Modern Chinese Poetry, 1917-1980”, by Liansu Meng, a dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Comparative Literature) in the University of Michigan 2010, P125.

3) Chen Jingrong. *Fragments in Learning Poems*. Poetry Exploration. 1981(1).

4) She Once Translated an Excerpt of the Prelude to an English Version of Rilke by Ludwig Lewisohn, in *Chinese New Poetry*, 1948(2).

5) Mo Gong. *a House of One’s Own*. *Ren Shi Jian*(Human World). 1948(5-6): 64-68. Mo Gong is One of Chen Jingrong’s Pen Names.

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