

The Transformation of Lu Xun's Translation View

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Abstract. In Lu Xun's translation career, Lu Xun's translation view wasn't consistent. Instead, it experienced transformations in several aspects, from target language form, choice of source text to the most important ones translation strategy. This paper mainly discussed the transformations of Lu Xun's translation view in his translation career.

Lu Xun, a great writer, ideologist and revolutionist, not only created abundant literary works, but translated numerous foreign works from abroad, ranging from science fictions, theoretical works, novels, etc. while doing translation works, Lu Xun also advocated lots of arguments about translation on the papers and magazines at that time, making significant contributions to the theory of translation in China.

Throughout his life, Lu Xun experienced transformation in his thought of translation, free translation at early stage, then holding on to literal translation firmly until the last, with some people even call it "stiff translation". At the same time, Lu Xun also advocated the importance of retranslation and translation criticism. The worry about China and Chinese people, the eagerness to awaken and enlighten the oppressed people play the decisive role in the transformation of translation strategies, choice of source texts, and language being used.

1. Translation View at Early Stage

The earliest works of translation about Lu Xun dates back to 1903, 《哀尘》, translated from French writer Victor Hugo. The second works of translation was 《斯巴达之魂》, which told the story of how the people of Sparta fight against foreign aggression. Although Lu Xun himself regards it as translation works, "numerous scholars, even Lu Xun himself, couldn't find out its origins about the so-called translated works".^① From 1903-1906, Lu Xun didn't give "any special views"^② Translation strategy in this period mainly aimed to introduce ideas and thoughts of foreign countries, with the emphasis on the convey of meanings rather than being faithful to the source text.

His later works included the following ones: 《月界旅行》, 《地底旅行》, 《说镭》《物理新论》《世界史》《北极历险记》《造人术》《红星佚史》《裴多菲诗论》.

As for the reason why Lu Xun employed such method was not hard to identify. The first influential factor was the social environment at that time. During the first years of the 20th century, China has witnessed great sufferings from foreign suppression and throughout the years all the scholars as well as the intelligent people demanded change and reformation to transform the state of the nation at that time. As far as the writers and thinkers at that time are concerned, they hoped and tried to borrow the advanced thought and ideas from abroad to enlighten, evoke the public to stand up to fight and reform their suppressed status. One of the representatives at that time was Liang Qichao who played a significant role in introducing Western social and political theories in Korea such as Social Darwinism and international law. Liang wrote in his well-known manifesto, *New People* (新民说):

“Freedom means Freedom for the Group, not Freedom for the Individual. (...) Men must not be slaves to other men, but they must be slaves to their group. For, if they are not slaves to their own group, they will assuredly become slaves to some other.”

Liang believed that translation had a very clear aim that is to “save the country from fire and backward status” “The translation of foreign books is the essential thing to make our country being more powerful. That is quite obvious!” (“拯焚救溺之用” , “必以译书为强国第一义, 昭昭然也! ”)

③

Lu Xun, actually, was deeply impressed by Liang's view. According to his younger brother Zhou Zuoren, the beginning of Lu Xun's career as a writer was that “After reading Liang's works: *New Novel* and *The Relationship between Novel and Politics*, then Lu Xun was deeply influenced by Liang's views.” ④

The second factor was the popular translation strategy at that time, which emphasized the convey of meanings, regardless of being faithful to the original text or not. One of the representatives at that time was Lin Shu, who did the translation by listening to the oral interpretation of others. Since his words were very fluent and easy to understand, his translation works were extremely popular among young people. Lu Xun loved reading Lin Shu's works a lot. Consequently, his own translation also adopted similar thought and strategy. Lu Xun himself also expressed his regrets later. “I was just beginning to learn Japanese at that time, so I didn't know the grammar quite well. But I rushed to read the books and translated it without truly understand its

content. Lots of information in those translated works was very vague and the translated works, especially for the one *The Soul of Sparta*, were very doubtful. When I read my works now, I feel quite embarrassed”.^⑤

2. The Transformation

Lu Xun's translation views wasn't consistent from the very beginning, instead his translation views experienced great transformations, from language being used, choice of source text, to translation strategy.

2.1 language used in the translations

In Lu Xun's early translations, *wenyan* (classical Chinese) was used as the medium. Such evidences can be found in his translation 《斯巴达之魂》. Then, in the translation of《月界旅行》),《地底旅行》), Lu Xun chose the mixed language mode-*baihua* (vernacular) and *wenyan*. And then in 1919, when he began to translate 《一个青年的梦》, he used *baihua* as the medium, and steadily stayed in this main road.

2.2 Choice of Source Text

At the early stage, Lu Xun chose most of the works from France, Russia and Japan, and in 1909's published work *Stories from Abroad* (《域外小说集》), he showed much works from Eastern Europe, both the small countries like Czech or Poland, and the few big countries such as Russia and India that were suppressed by the Powers and struggling for their new political system.

At later stage, Lu Xun's translation focus finally turned to the Soviet Union—the first socialistic and Marxist country in the world. The publication of *On Arts* (1929) (《艺术论》), *Destruction* (1930) (《毁灭》), *Dead Soul* (1935) (《死魂灵》), etc. were all from Soviet Union.

Second, in the genre of the translation texts, his choice changed from the science fiction to short stories, poems, fairy tales, dramas and at last to the literary critics.

2.3 Translation Strategy

The publication of *Stories From Abroad* (域外小说集) marked the transformation of Lu Xun's translation view from free translation to literal translation, in which Lu Xun challenged the unfaithfulness and arbitrary alteration to the original texts by applying literal translation. In his letter to Zeng Tianshe (Jan-16th, 1932), Lu Xun wrote the following lines “*Stories From Abroad* was published in 1907 or in 1908, when I was still in Tokyo with my brother. What was popular in China at that time was foreign novels translated in classical words translated by Lin Qinnan. The translated works were pretty good but with a lot of mistranslations, for which we felt very unsatisfied and decided to correct it and put forward our works.”^⑥ Since then, Lu Xun held the view

of literal translation for the rest of his lives. He laid much emphasis on the faithfulness to original forms, and the uniqueness in his literal translation is that he emphasized the faithfulness at the level of grammar. Literal translation in his mind is closely related to sentence structure. So in his translation, Lu Xun preserved grammatical structures of source language in his Chinese version. For Lu Xun, this is one of the feasible ways to preserve the original mood and flavor in Chinese version or "preserve the exoticism(保存洋气)". Lu Xun explained his view in the following lines: "If we divide the short sentences into several pieces, the tone for the original text would get lost. For me, I have no alternative but to translate the sentences literally, well, you may see there are no other ways to accomplish it. The only hope lies in the reader to read through the articles anyway."⑦

3. Conclusion

Lu Xun, as a great writer and translator, didn't carry out the translation view consistently. Instead, in his translation career, he experienced transformations not only in his choice of different source text, but also in the applying of target language from *wenyan* to *baihua* eventually. What's more important, he adopted free translation at the very beginning, and then transformed to literal translation firmly at last. As for the reasons why Lu Xun decided to carry on changes vary. The mostly discussed one is that his eagerness to enlighten and evoke Chinese people through translated works. In Lu Xun's own words, translators are like Prometheus to "steal fire" (窃火) to bring light and hope to Chinese people.

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