

THE INFLUENCE OF IDEOLOGY ON THE TRANSLATION OF MAO ZEDONG'S POEMS

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Mao Zedong's poems hold an important place in the history of Chinese literature. From the perspective of manipulation theory, the paper aims at exploring the influences that ideology exerted on the translation of Mao Zedong's poems. These influences have manifested themselves mainly in such aspects as the organizing of translation activity, the selection of source texts, the comprehension of the texts and the freedom translators enjoy to render the poems.

Keywords: Mao Zedong's Poems, Ideology, Translation

毛泽东是诗人，也是国家领袖，因身份特殊，其诗词作品对外译介的策略不同于其他诗人，受意识形态影响的印记明显。这些影响主要表现在：中央成立专门的专家小组负责译文定稿、第一个外文单行本在前苏联诞生、毛泽东诗词在亚非拉发展中国家广受好评、改革开放后毛泽东诗词的翻译出版呈多元化格局。

[关键词] 毛泽东，诗词，翻译，意识形态

1. Introduction

Translation is viewed as a product of history, society and culture, and there always exists a social context in which translation activity can't escape the influence of non-linguistic factors. Andre Lefevere, one of the major advocates of the "cultural turn" in Translation Studies and one of the most influential thinkers of the discipline, connected the study of translation with power and patronage, ideology and poetics, and he put forward that translation study is a social, historical study in nature, thus social background and ideology must be considered. In the light of manipulation theory of the ideological influence on translation, the paper studies the influences that ideology has exerted on the translation of poems written by Mao Zedong (or Mao Tsetung).

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2. Mao Zedong's Poems

As a prominent statesman, distinctive strategist, brilliant thinker and great leader of the Chinese Communist Party and the New China, Mao Zedong (1893-1976) has influenced generations of people throughout the world. However, his unique status that distinguishes him from his predecessors and contemporaries lies not merely in his remarkable revolutionary accomplishments but also in his extraordinary literary achievements. The poetry Mao created during his political practice of more than five decades is a peak of classical Chinese poetry and occupies an important place in the history of Chinese literature.

Mao's poems not only inherit the fine qualities of classical Chinese poems but also make some innovations. Though a lover and master of classical Chinese poetry, a traditional genre of Chinese poems, Mao is free from the fetters of the traditional rules of poem writing. He fills the old bottle with new wine. He proves convincingly that classical Chinese poetry can fully reflect modern life and serve the realism by filling classical Chinese poems with fresh new ideas and artistic conceptions conforming to the traditional tonal pattern and rhyme scheme.

Mao's poems are not only a brilliant record of history but also a crystallization of wisdom. Mao was called an oriental philosopher in the 1900s, and his poems abound in philosophic implications. It is easy for one to learn the basic principles of nature and humankind in some of his poems.

Mao was a poet as well as a revolutionary. On the one hand, with his rare literary talents among leaders in the world today, Mao's classical poems attain a very high level of art. On the other hand, his poems are not average literary works, but the poetic representation of Mao Zedong Thought, and his rich experience of revolutionary struggles also provide an inexhaustible source of his own poetry writing.

Mao's poetic works is a vivid reflection of his literary or artistic ideas, and a harmonious integration of revolutionary realism with revolutionary romanticism. With the lofty ideas, profound philosophy and artistic representation, it is no wonder that people worldwide highly cherish Mao's poems.

3. The English Versions of Mao's Poems Published in China

Mao's personal charm and the great appeal of Chinese literature have inspired quite a few people at home and abroad to translate Mao's poems into different languages. Of all the foreign versions the world have read, those made by Chinese translators are undoubtedly the most authoritative.

So far as the English versions are concerned, the scene is stimulating. The earliest version is *18 Poems of Mao Zedong* published in *Chinese Literature* Vol. 3, 1958. This version was co-translated by Ye Junjian and Yu Baoju and the source texts were published in *Shikan* or *Poetry*, a prestigious magazine of Chinese poetry. Closely following this, in September 1958, *19 Poems of Chairman Mao* was published by Foreign Language Press

in Beijing. In addition to those in *18 Poems of Mao Zedong*, the poem *The Immortal—Reply to Li Shuyi* was included in the English version for the first time.

In the 1960s, a special translation censorship group of outstanding Chinese and foreign scholars was officially organized to ensure an elegant and faithful translation of the poems. Through conscientious consultancy and polishing for the sake of both accuracy and expressiveness, the translation group brought out a revised draft—*Mao Tsetung Poems*, which comprised 37 poems and was published by Foreign Languages Press in 1976. Compared with the former versions, this one enjoyed much more praise from the academic community and common readers; as a result, this version was called the “official” version and became the source text for versions of other foreign languages.

Besides, there are some other English versions. In 1978, Wu Xianglin completed his *39 Poems of Chairman Mao* which was published for inside circulation only in Nanjing University. In 1992, Zhao Zengtao published his *Mao Zedong Poems*. As Mao's centennial birth anniversary fell in 1993, several translators came up with their new versions such as Huang Long's *An English Version of Mao's Poems*, Xu Yuanchong's *Selected Poems of Mao Zedong*, Gu Zhengkun's *Poems of Mao Zedong with Rhymed Versions and Annotations*.

4. The Influence of Ideology on the Translation of Mao's Poems

Ideology is “a conceptual grid that consists of opinions and attitudes deemed acceptable in a certain society at a certain time, and through which readers and translators approach texts” (Lefevere 2004, 5). The translation study is a social, historical study in itself, so social background and ideology must be considered. However, there are different ideologies in different historical times and different cultural contexts, and different translators at different historical times have different understandings of the political implications and artistic features in *Mao Zedong's Poems*, so different versions have been produced. In the following sections, the author provides an analysis of the influences that ideology has exerted on different English versions of *Mao Zedong's poems*.

4.1. The Special Translation Censorship Group in China

The English version of *Mao Zedong's Poems* in 1976 was completed by an intellectual collaboration. It was considered the highest achievement of literary translation during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) when the translation of *Mao Zedong's Poems* took on the dual task of literary export and ideological export (Ma Shikui 2006, 19-20). Because of Mao's unique position and special quality of the source text, the way and procedure of translating Mao's poems in this period of time are different from that of other ordinary literary works and the version of 1976 also has different traits from other English versions in some aspects.

i. Selection of poems

Any translation activity has its purpose, either for serving a special group or for the translator's own interests and preference. But whatever they are for, the publication of translated texts must meet the demands of patronage as well as the expectation horizon

of the publisher and society. It is closely related to the acceptance of target readers and target readers' ideology. To translate *Mao Zedong's Poems* into English is to introduce to foreign people its poetic art, Mao Zedong Thought and modern Chinese culture. Foreign translation of Mao's poems can gain its ends of exporting domestic ideology in a relatively acceptable literary form. The 1976 version produced against this special historical background accordingly became the literary text in a special political mission, and its production reflected the requirement of "ultimate version" which represented the source society's authoritative views to some extent.

ii. Political mission

The way and strategy of translation depends on the status of the original writer, the quality of original text and the background of translating action to some extent. As Mao Zedong was the top leader of the New China in the period when the translating action occurred and its participants were all professionals working in China, the way and procedure of translating Mao's poems in this period of time were different from other ordinary literary works. The translation of Mao's poems during the Cultural Revolution was a serious political mission: it was organized by the central government, every move of the translation group was directed by the government and its production was also published by prestigious official publishing agency in China. The attention that was paid to translating Mao's poems is very rare in modern history of translation. The organization of the translation is similar to those of religious and political classics, such as the translation of Buddhist sutras in ancient China, the early translation of *the Bible* in Europe, the translation into Chinese of the works of Karl Marx in new China and the foreign translation of *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*.

iii. The Translation Group

During the Cultural Revolution, the translation of Mao's poems was carried out in a collective way. Early in 1960, a translation censorship group was organized, among which were Yuan Shuipai, Qiao Guanhua, Qian Zhongshu, Zhao Chupu, Ye Junjian and English expert Suul Adler. The group was responsible for revising old translations, and translating the newly-published poems. During the period, work of the translation group was stopped several times, and it was not resumed until 1974. Because of Mao's unique position and special quality of the source texts, the visage of translation of Mao's poems is to a certain degree related to the image of China and the leader Mao himself in the foreign culture. Compared to the way of translating other ordinary works, creating an English version of Mao's poems is more complicated in the procedure and more demanding in the quality. In the procedure of creating an "official" version in 1976, the translation activity was regarded as holy and sacred. The members of the translation group were all authorities from different backgrounds. As for the assignment of tasks, Qian Zhongshu, a great scholar who had taken part in the translating of *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, and Ye Junjian, a renowned translator and the editor-in-chief of *Chinese Literature*, were in charge of translating; Qiao Guanhua, working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Yuan Shuipai, a poet and translator and the head of the group, took the duty of elaborating the poems, and Suul Adler polished the English versions. The translation and revision of

the “official” version in 1976 nearly copied the practice of the English version of *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*. It was further proved that translating Mao's poems had its political quality (Wu Xianglin 1978,1).

4.2. The Russian Version in 1957

In January 1957, the Chinese magazine *Poetry*, edited chiefly by Zang Kejia, was published. In the magazine's inaugural issue, Mao Zedong's *Eighteen Classical Poems* was officially published, so was Mao's script of *A Letter About Poetry* written in January 12th 1957. This is the first time when Mao agreed to officially publish his poetry works, which were examined and proved and transcribed personally. The publication begot strong reactions at home and abroad, and it was the former Soviet Union that first introduced it immediately in the world. In September 1957, the earliest foreign translation of *Mao Zedong's poems* in the world, the Russian version of *Eighteen Poems of Mao Zedong*, was published in Moscow by *Pravda*, a leading newspaper and an official organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Soviet Union was the first country that recognized and established diplomatic relations with the new China. In the light of the international situation and out of consideration of strategies, the first generation of leaders of the new China adopted the policy of following the Soviet Union. In the 1950s, the two nations maintained a good relation of fraternal parties and allies and had a close cooperation in the economic and cultural fields. In the early 1950s, the Soviet Union put forward the literary principle of “social realism”. In the whole 1950s, the principle became a political tool with which literary and artistic creations were manipulated. Literary translation was no exception. The mainstream ideology in both China and Soviet Union asked for translators to introduce “artistically excellent” and “politically progressive” literary works. On the scale of political ideology in the 1950s, the so-called “artistically excellent” and “politically progressive” works were those that accorded with socialistic and communistic ideology and reflected realism in the way of production, especially the writing principle of socialistic realism. And *Mao Zedong's poems* was, no doubt, in accordance with this standard for the texts to be translated. Influenced by the political ideology of the time, the translators of the Soviet Union paid close attention to the publication of Mao's poems, and the Russian versions came out shortly after the publication of the Chinese versions.

4.3. Acceptance of *Mao Zedong's Poems* Among People of the Developing Countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America

As a great patriot and internationalist, Mao Zedong not only had a devout care for Chinese people, but also expressed in his poems utmost favor, pity and support for all nations around the world, especially for the weak nations and the people suffering oppression and bullying. In his poem *Kun Lun* produced in the Long March, Mao Zedong wrote:

How could I wield a heaven-high sword,
Cutting you in three to afford
One piece to Europe,
One piece to America,
And the final piece to Asia.
Ah, What a peaceful world we would see,
And alike warm and cold the earth would be !
(Gu Zhengkun 1993, 87-88)

He would use “a heaven-high sword” to rebuild the freezing and snowy Mountain Kun Lun, to make the globe “alike warm and cold” and to realize his lofty ideal of human equality.

Mao Zedong’s unbounded feelings became stronger when approaching old age. His many wonderful lines such as “the Golden Monkey wrathfully swung his massive cudgel, / and the jade-like firmament was cleared out of dust”, “only heroes can quell tigers and leopards, / and wild bears never daunt the brave” and “the Four Seas are rising, clouds and waters raging, / the Five Continents are rocking, wind and thunder roaring”, not only showed the heroic spirit and national spirit of Chinese people, but also threw out infinite scorn and indignation to the dirty act of international hegemonism of that time; not only bestowed enthusiastic praise for liberation movement and the storm of people’s revolution in Asia, Africa and Latin America, but also delivered passionate blessing and eager anticipation to national independence and social progress of the third world people.

In June 1960, when Mao Zedong received the delegation from Cuba, Brazil and Argentina, a foreign guest said: “One fact that the imperialists haven’t noticed is that Chairman Mao’s poems are spreading widely in Latin America and becoming very popular”. And he also earnestly requested for Mao creating more pieces (Jin Chen 1997, 15). In his statement after the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, Bhutto, the ex-president of Pakistan, passionately said:

His name will forever be used synonymously with the great, just undertaking of the poor and the oppressed, be a brilliant symbol of people’s fights against opposing the oppression and exploitation and a token of victory to the colonialism and imperialism. And our Pakistan will memorialize immortal Mao Zedong with great reverence for ever. (Jin Chen 1997, 20)

Mao Zedong’s poems left behind the greatest intellectual treasures of opposing the oppression, advancing bravely and unceasingly self-improvement for the third world people, thus met with warm reception of the developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

4.4. The Translator’s Freedom to Translate *Mao’s Poems* After Reform and Opening-up

After the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of CPC in 1978, the starting point from which China implemented the policy of opening to the outside world,

not a few different English versions of *Mao Zedong's Poems* have been published in mainland China. The translation of Mao's poems took on a new pattern of multi-subject, multi-style and multi-publication.

In the wake of reform and opening to the outside world, policies concerning intellectuals and literature have been liberalized dramatically. "Let a hundred flowers blossom and let a hundred schools of thought contend", a policy set forth by Mao in 1956, was received and enriched in the 1978 constitution. With the political restrictions being lifted, art could be pursued for its own sake. More and more literary works came to the fore and a new round of translation activities was triggered. People began to realize the real value of literary translation as a work of art. In this climate of literary liberalism, there came a set of translations of *Mao Zedong's Poems*, which have many new traits as compared with the "official" version in 1976. Under the influence of social ideology in that particular period, the translators of the "official" version consequently attached disproportionate importance to adherence to the political content and philosophic connotations at the cost of the artistic qualities. Poetry is a type of literary genre with the most polished and tersest language as well as the richest connotations. It is the unity of beauty in sense, in sound and in form. How to make target readers fully appreciate the poetry's beauty so as to make the translation pleasant to the ear, the eye and the heart, therefore, becomes a goal pursued by every translator. Three-Beauty Theory of translating poetry, namely beauty in sense, beauty in sound and beauty in form, is put forward by professor Xu Yuanchong and serves as a guiding theory for poetry translation. As a distinguished translator of poetry, professor Xu weighed his words to translate Mao Zedong's poems under the guidance of his theory, through which his pursuit for perfections is revealed. *Mao Zedong Poems* by Zhao Zengtao translated Chinese metrical poems into English metrical verse, and was considered to exactly express "the excellent taste of character of Mao Zedong's poems".

5. Conclusion

It is easy to see that the ideology has exerted great influence on the translation of Mao Zedong's poems. These influences have manifested themselves in its every aspect including the organizing of translation activity, the selection of source texts, the comprehension of the text and the application of translation strategies. As a bridge between different cultures, the translation is not only a linguistic exchange, but a cultural interaction in which ideology interacts with the translation. When commenting on the translated texts the translation critics should not only put the emphasis on the "linguistic fidelity" to the source text but consider those language-external factors from a macroscopic perspective.

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