

Salvation and Enlightenment: The Translation, Introduction and Influence of The Social Contract in China

Qiu Jin *

History College, Hebei University, Baoding, Hebei, 071000, China

* Corresponding author Email: jinq20@outlook.com

Abstract: Rousseau and his "Social Contract" emerged as a focal point of interest for the Chinese intellectual circle during the political crisis in the early 20th century, as they sought inspiration from Western theories. This paper focuses on Rousseau's work "The Social Contract" (referred to as "Min Yue Lun" at that time) and examines its translation and dissemination in China, also delves into the impact of different translations on intellectuals from various classes and to reveal its evolution. Through the analysis of translators including Chomin Nakae, Yang Tingdong, and Ma Junwu, this study observes that these translations not only have demerits but also were initially regarded merely as the tool of revolutionary or salvation. However, over time and changes in politics, "The Social Contract" gradually transformed into a powerful ideological resource, propelling China towards modernization. By studying this topic, readers can not only understand the importance of Rousseau's social contract theory in the Chinese ideological circle, but also infer the process of the dissemination and acceptance of other Western ideas in China through the reactions of intellectuals.

Keywords: The Social Contract; Ma Junwu; Yang Tingdong; Translation.

1. Background

Rousseau's "The Social Contract" significantly impacted the French Revolution. Introduced to China in the early 20th century, "Min Yue Lun" (The Social Contract) sparked debate in ideological and political circles. However, diverse translator ideologies led to significant divergence in the translated versions of "Min Yue Lun" (The Social Contract). Domestic intellectual circles have extensively studied the extent to which Rousseau's ideas are faithfully represented in each version of "Min Yue Lun" and the impact of social contract theory in China [1-4]. Yet, there has been limited exploration of the respective influences of different translations. Therefore, this paper intends to examine the ideological divergence of different groups under the influence of multiple translations (or original works) from a more comprehensive perspective, and further explore the differences and similarities.

2. The Social Contract and Early 20th Century China

In China at the early 20th century, although the power still nominally controlled by the Qing Dynasty, was already in danger. Amid internal and external troubles, intelligents began to seek opportunities for change and theoretical guidance from the West. Among them, France before the Great Revolution, as the country most similar to China at that time, naturally attracted the attention of Chinese intellectual circle at that time.

2.1. Lack of Theory

The defeat of the Sino-Japanese War of 1895 completely negated the principle of "Chinese principles with western usage" that the Qing government had adhered to in the past, and declared the failure of the Self-Strengthening Movement.

The transformation of the political system became a new demand of far-sighted people at that time, and the reform movement flourished accordingly.

However, during this period, the opportunity for the reformers to enter the political arena was that they felt a serious crisis. Therefore, responses to this effect are not actually supported by any systems theory. On the one hand, the political slogans promoted by the reformers were limited to superficial and even formal "Western Culture"; according to statistics, a certain number of Western books were translated and introduced at that time, mainly on the themes of history, science and technology, and political ideas had not yet entered the field of vision of the ideological community. On the other hand, around 1898 Reform Movement, nearly a hundred kinds of societies were established, but their organizations were either region-centered, or subject-centered, and even developed in the form of "anti-footbinding" while political idea-certain never appeared, which shows that people at that time lacked understanding of Western political theory.

Under such circumstances, the introduction of foreign ideas and theories into China was like bringing rain to a long-drought land, which was enough to deeply shock the laymen. When Wu Rulun first read "Tianyan Lun" translated by Yan Fu, he wrote it three times in amazement and said: "The translator of this book does so out of a deep concern that our nation might be harmed by competition and that the millennia-old Chinese heritage could face extinction, hence, an unwavering determination to pursue governance by the people." [5]; When Huang Zunxian first learned about Rousseau's thoughts in Japan, he first wrote to Liang Qichao and said, "It was quite surprised when first heard it", but soon he became excited, devoting himself, and said "The mind changes dramatically due to this". Huang Zunxian even studied the history of Western revolutions to the extent of "Reading from morning till night, even while on the way."

2.2. The "Social Contract Theory" that Traveled to China.

In the 1880s, the Chinese began to know Rousseau's thoughts, but this understanding was limited to the private records of diplomats and was not widely disseminated, nor did it trigger in-depth discussion.

Rousseau's social contract theory asserts the equality and freedom of all individuals, emphasizing that a nation results from a collective agreement among the people. It maintains that if people lose their freedom, they have the right to reclaim it through revolution. However, the book was swiftly suppressed upon publication, making it less prevalent among the public. Its primary influence on the French Revolution is seen through Jacobin leaders, particularly Robespierre. In essence, its role in the French Revolution was indirect, rather than direct.

Back then, Chinese intellectuals had limited knowledge of global politics. Instead of focusing on Rousseau or his specific impact on the French Revolution, they were more willing to believe that it was Rousseau's ideas that awakened the anger of the French people and then promoted the revolution. For example, the novel "Dawn and evening chats" serialized in "Yinhuan Suoji" said that it is indeed because of the teachings of Enlightenment thinkers that "people have completely woken up and realized that they were oppressed", and then "Huge riots broke out in the capital, and eventually the people ousted the monarch" [6]. Ma Junwu, the translator of "Ming Yue Lun", and Liang Qichao, who wrote a lot about Rousseau, also unanimously regarded Rousseau's social contract thought as the driving force of the French Revolution.

Due to these misinterpretations, "The Social Contract" acted as a revolutionary catalyst upon its introduction to China. Consequently, its practicality became the foremost concern for scholars at the time. Translators decorated and exaggerated this idea to varying degrees according to their respective political needs, thus establishing a connection between this Western concept and the evolving fabric of Chinese society.

3. The Evolution of Translation

At the beginning of the 20th century, there were three translations of "The Social Contract". Due to the differences in the educational background and political stance of the translators, the three versions all produced intentional or unintentional misinterpretations of the original work. But in general, with the deepening understanding of Rousseau's thoughts and the French Revolution, the translation and introduction of Social Contract Theory has gradually become more accurate and modern.

3.1. Chomin Nakae

Chomin Nakae's translation was the first Chinese translation of "Theory of Social Contract" and was originally published by the reformists' "Shanghai Tongwen Publishing House. [The initial publisher of "Minyue Tongyi" is often mistakenly attributed to the "Shanghai Tongwen Translation Book Company" in domestic academic research. However, this publisher, lacks any other recorded publications and may have been misremembered. In Shanghai, there are two other publishing houses with similar names: "Datong Translation and Publishing House" and "Tongwen Publishing House." The latter focuses on traditional classics and is unlikely to publish "Minyue Tongyi." While "Datong Translation and

Publishing House," founded by Kang and Liang, specifically translated reform-related works, including those related to Japan. Upon investigation, it was confirmed that the Datong Translation and Publishing House indeed published this book in 1898.]

Chomin Nakae received traditional Confucian education since childhood, then learned French. After working as a translator for a period of time, he went to France from 1871 to 1874, and then returned to Japan to engage in enlightenment-related undertakings in China. Although he is known as the "Oriental Rousseau", he is not as radical as Rousseau. Instead, he tried to building a bridge between Chinese and Chinese academics and Western thought, which can be seen in his translation of Social Contract Theory.

Nakae's "Minyue Tongyi" was translated in the mid-to-late 1970s. At that time, the Japanese government was promoting comprehensive westernization, and Nakae had a conflict with the then Ministry of Culture as he wanted to include the studies of Confucius and Mencius in the curriculum of Tokyo Foreign Languages School. And therefore, resigned as the principal of the school, and instead devoted his efforts to the "law school" he founded, and during this period he began to translate "On Civil Covenants".

In terms of translation content, this translation uses ancient Chinese translation, and some terms are interpreted as more understandable words in the context of Confucian culture. For example, when he translated the concept of "general will", he explained it as "the same thing for everyone", and the word "the same thing" also appeared in the commentary on "Mencius" in the section explaining "reason", "mind" Readers who are familiar with Confucian classics can easily connect the Western concept of "general will" with the traditional "righteousness". In addition, the "droit" (modern translation of rights) in the original subtitle "principles du droit politic" (principles of political rights) has no equivalent in ancient Chinese, so Jiang Zhaomin translated it as "yuanzheng" (original politics) in the translation, cleverly avoiding the introducing new concepts, which quite different from the direct transliteration of new nouns in later translation activities.

Such a translation method subconsciously promotes the understanding of Chinese and Japanese readers, but at the same time it misleads readers to a certain extent. For example, when discussing "the rights of the strongest" [7], Nakae naturally attributed "force" to "tyrants and corrupt officials", saying, "The tyrant and the corrupt officials, who use their power and power to abuse me, are like diseases and thieves, so why not resist them?" [8] Attributing the accusations that should be directed at all autocrats only to the "tyrants and corrupt officials" criticized by traditional Confucianism shows that Confucian taste has greatly harmonized the idea of social contract, and it also shows that Nakae believed that only tyrant is necessary to launch a counterattack, which is qualitatively different from Rousseau's original intention.

Despite intentional or unintentional misinterpretations that make the translated version more conservative than the original, it nonetheless successfully restores Rousseau's logical process of reasoning. Readers can comprehend and accept the idea that "the people have the right to revolution" through reading the book. Therefore, for late 19th-century China, this translation can still be considered a conveyance of advanced Enlightenment ideas with a substantial impact on society.

3.2. Translation by Yang Tingdong

Born in 1978 in Jiangsu, Yang Tingdong gained admission to Nanyang Public School through the imperial examination. Given that the imperial examinations then covered subjects like economics and arithmetic, he likely received a modern education as well. After that, he soon went to Japan at public expense and learnt law and politics at Waseda University. In 1900, Yang Tingdong, Lei Fen gathered other students who were studying politics and law in Japan to establish the progressive publication "Yishu Huibian" and engaged in the translation of various Japanese books, including "Social Contract" which he named "Luso Min Yue Lun".

It can be seen from Yang Tingdong's later social activities that he was very keen on political activities. After graduating and returning to China, Yang Tingdong initially devoted himself to the publishing industry. However, with the rise of the Railway Protection Movement that demonstrated the power of local assets, he quickly became involved and further participated in the constitutional movement. It is worth noting that Yang Tingdong initially spoke out about revolution and robustly opposed the royalists of Kangliang when just came back from Japan. However, when the government preparing to establish a constitution, he quickly involved in it and even joined the more conservative "Xianzheng Shijin Hui". It can be seen that Yang Tingdong has not established a firm belief in any Western political thoughts. Instead, he pays more attention to these thoughts as slogans and banners. This is also reflected in his "Lusuo Min Yue Lun".

"Lusuo Min Yue Lun" was translated in 1900. At that time, while not widely circulated, there had several translations of Social Contract Theory being published in Japan. By comparing the texts, it can be basically confirmed that Yang's translation was actually a translation of Hazama Naoki's translation. [9] This translation was initially published in "Yishu Huibian", but this journal soon folded due to lack of funds. Yang later commented that it was "not widely spread". But two years later, the book was republished as a separate volume.

According to content, Yang Tingdong's translation has many discrepancies with the original work and facts. First of all, in the author's introduction at the beginning, Yang Tingdong reshaped Rousseau's image through some deliberate rewriting. In Yang Tingdong's introduction, Rousseau's controversial experience was completely hidden. For example, his complicated relationship with Mrs. Warren was simply summarized as a patron, and his struggle before being forced to leave Venice as he was framed for theft was also completely disappearing, instead showing an unruly image, "Rousseau, refusing to accept the accusation of arrogance and self-satisfaction, was angered and subsequently expelled by the Count. He had no choice but to retreat to Paris."; Compared with deliberately depicting the cynical image of Rousseau, Yang Tingdong's translation of the social contract theory were quite sloppy. Not only did he automatically extend the "natural obstacles" in the original text to "tyrant and corrupt officials", and "giving orders" directly wrote "abusing citizens", he did not even notice that the translation was completely misinterpreted by confusing "state" with "sovereign". "Thus, the people have inherent responsibilities towards the country that they must perform, and the people also have responsibilities towards the monarch that they must perform." [10] This indicates that, when translated Rousseau's works, Yang paid more attention to his rebellious spirit and image as a revolutionary pioneer than to

his ideological propositions.

In general, Yang Tingdong's translation played a limited role in enlightenment, but its passionate words undoubtedly promoted people's anti-Qing sentiments in that background, making "Social Contract" officially enter intellectual circles.

3.3. Ma Junwu's Translation

Ma Junwu was born in 1881 and he entered Wanmu Thatched Cottage founded by Kang Youwei in 1897 [11]. Two years later, he entered the Guangxi Physical Education School chaired by Tang Jingsong, and determined his goal of Western science and technology. From 1901 to 1906, Ma Junwu studied engineering in Japan at his own expense. During this period, he founded the Tong Meng Hui with Sun Yat-sen. He went to Germany to study twice in 1907 and 1913. After obtaining a doctorate from the University of Berlin, he returned to China and later served as the Ministry of Industry minister. Compared with the previous two translators, Ma Junwu not only had closer contact with Western culture, but also participated more deeply in revolutionary activities.

Therefore, Ma Junwu's translation also has more accuracy and ideological value among the three translations. His book is called "Zuben Lusao Min Yue Lun" and was published by Zhonghua Book Company. First of all, this translation was completed by Ma Junwu with reference to the original French work and the English translation by H. J. Tozer, which make It has an accuracy that has never been achieved by previous authors [12]. The word "Zuben"(complete) also reflects the author's pride of the completeness of the book. Above that, Ma Junwu's dual status as an writer of "Minbao" and a doctor of engineering enables his translation to maintain concise language and logical integrity while expressing passionate emotions that are no less than the original. Some scholars believe that from a literary point of view, his translation is even better than the commercial press's He Zhaowu translation currently in use [13].

However, either due to the limitations of personal understanding or consideration of the current situation, Ma Junwu's translation is still a certain distance from the original work. The most important difference between the "Zuben Lusao Min Yue Lun" and the original work should be its interpretation of community. For Rousseau, his thinking did not stop at the social contract. He believed that individual rights could not actually be represented, and the ultimate goal was still to maintain "individual rights." In the process of translation, Ma Junwu simply cut out this point, but instead highlighted the importance of community. He translated: "This is a devotion from subjects to the monarch, constituting a civil act based on public decision. Consequently, it serves as a prerequisite for other matters and forms the true foundation of society. "This shows that in the process of translating "Social Contract Theory" into Chinese, Ma Junwu only used it to establish a modern nation-state, and omitted the "transcendence" in Rousseau's original work that pursuit for modern national realm.

Although the three translations are quite different from each other. "Salvation overrides enlightenment", as also the main theme of Chinese ideological circles in the early 20th century, is reflected in all three translations. Although these translations were intended to convey Western ideas, the patriotic spirit rising in them clearly dominated. Because of this, social contract theory, as a Western thought that is still difficult to understand today, had a profound impact in China at the beginning of the 20th century.

4. From Salvation to Enlightenment

The three translations of Social Contract Theory, whether it was Ma Junwu's most accurate translation, or Yang Tingdong's translation which had the most misinterpretations and was considered "too viscous too read", all had particular influence on China at that time. Besides, due to the particularity of modern Chinese society and the deliberate guidance of the translator, it not only played its original enlightenment role, but also had a more important impact on saving the nation.

4.1. "Social Contract Theory" as a Battle Flag

Due to its connection with the French Revolution, the social contract theory was considered a "national salvation" weapon to stir up revolution when it entered China. Therefore, for a long period of time, the Chinese people's use of salvation has overwhelmed enlightenment.

Those who were closely related to the idea of civil covenant theory in the early days include Liang Qichao, Yan Fu, Liu Shipai, Sun Yat-sen, Huang Xing, Zou Rong, Feng Ziyou and others. Generally speaking, the largest group of people who have been influenced by social contract theory should belong to the revolutionaries. Not only Ma Junwu himself is a veteran of the Tongmenghui, but also Hu Hanmin, Wang Jingwei, and Zhang Taiyan's disciple Wang Dong, who are contributors to Minbao, often write propaganda articles that related to the French Revolution. Among these recipients, except for Yan Fu and Ma Junwu, they either only speak Chinese, or just had learn Japanese. They unable to directly understand the Theory of Social Contract from the West and basically understand the Theory of Civil Contracts through translations. So, they were deeply influenced by the translations of Nakae and Yang Tingdong, whose first priority was to fight against the corrupt government. It was in Japan that Zou Rong read "Min Yue Lun", and then wrote "Revolutionary Army" with great fighting enthusiasm, "Kill all the monarchs who tyrannize me to restore my natural human rights." Liu Yazhi also wrote a poem, "Embryonic Revolutionary Army, Sweep away the chaff."

The readers of the above translations of The Social Contract are usually active writers. After understanding Rousseau and the Theory of the Civil Contract, they further emphasized the spirit of resistance in the translation. Even Liang Qichao only had a one-sided understanding of the social contract theory in his early days, focusing only on the aspect of it that "Ignited a flame in the hearts of hundreds of millions in Europe" and led to the French Revolution. Sun Baoxuan's impression of "Min Yue Lun" also came from Liang Qichao's "Yinbinshi Ziyou Shu". Therefore, he regarded the idea of social contract theory as an ideological weapon to widely enlighten people's wisdom and incite revolution [14]. It was derived from the minds of thousands of people, so they created their own laws based on their principles, such as Lu Sao's "The social contract" and Montesquieu's "Essential Theory of All Laws". Their contribution to the world is insignificant." In addition, the signatures of many progressive newspapers and periodicals authors at that time were related to Rousseau, such as "Rousseau's Soul", "Rousseau's Disciple", "runner-up of Rousseau", etc. Among them, "Rousseau's Soul" was the name of the author who died in 1911. The author of a statement published by Tian Min Bao, which was shut down for "slandering the government" [15].

In the early days of the dissemination of "The Civil Covenant", translators and readers unanimously emphasized the concept of "the people's right to revolution." The translator gave guidance and emphasis on this, and the readers widely publicized it. As a result, revolutionaries not only developed their own revolutionary discourse but also firmly rooted this perspective in the public consciousness.

4.2. The Exertion of Inner Strength

Although opponents may not have comprehensively understood the social contract theory, their assessments, rooted in revolutionary experiences and Western knowledge, remain insightful. These inquiries effectively prompted intellectuals to re-examine the concept of social contract theory.

As a pioneer in the Chinese intellectual circles, Liang Qichao was not only the first person to understand the idea of social contract, but also the first scholar to begin to reflect on the path of civil contract. Although judging from the results, his attitude towards social contract changed from completely supporting contract theory in the early stage to giving up Rousseau and turning to other ideas after gaining a deeper understanding. The transformation from "Teaching Plan of Rousseau" to "On the Influence of Academic Power on the World" represented that Chinese people gradually began to think about whether the social contract theory could play a real guiding role in China's situation at that time from the perspective of practical application.

Although Yan Fu did not do translation work, he was also an important figure in spreading the social contract theory, but he generally held an opposition stance. First, He believed that the concept of "equality" in Rousseau's thought was purely theoretical and lacked practical significance, as "Talking about politics without historical basis is meaningless" [16]. Following the establishment of the Republic of China, Yan Fu shifted his critique of the social contract theory to its perceived influence on Chinese society, particularly in terms of potential violence. Generally speaking, neither of these views, in essence, aligns with the core of the social contract theory.

The reason Yan Fu made this statement at the time was to align with Yuan Shikai's growing power consolidation, but it inadvertently spurred social contract theory proponents to examine the concept more deeply. After the Qing government's overthrow, the previously dormant theory of the social contract emerged as a central point of intellectual contention. In 1914, Zhang Shizhao and Yan Fu started a debate on the Civil Contract, which Not only did this reemphasize the relatively overlooked key concepts of 'equality' and 'freedom' within social contract theory, but it also engaged in a more dialectical absorption of the ideas of social contract theory with the actual situation in China. During this period, Ma Junwu's review and re-translation of "Min Yue Lun" was also a concrete manifestation of this debate in the intellectual circles.

Because of these thoughts, the Enlightenment significance of The social contract gradually exerted. In 1912, at the beginning of the founding of the Republic of China, the Acting Senate only proposed to amend the "Organizational Outline of the Interim Government". However, because the five provinces proposed that "a chapter on the rights and obligations of the people should be added", the Senate then invited representatives including Ma Junwu to Five people amended the bill[17]. This change gave the "Outline of

Organization" the spirit of a social contract, and therefore it was renamed the "Interim Constitution of Republic of China".

The Enlightenment significance of the social contract theory not only influenced contemporary politics but, more importantly, it silently accomplished the transformation of the intellectual thinking of that era. As the dispute between Yan Fu and Zhang Shizhao faded following the failure of Yuan Shikai's restoration, and with Ma Junwu's 'The Complete Works of Rousseau's Social Contract Theory' offering a comprehensive and accurate introduction to social contract theory, direct introductions and commentaries on social contract theory became less frequent. However, there was a gradual increase in references to this theory. For example, in "New Youth", Tao Lugong's "Society", Gao Yihan's "social contract and State Fundamentals", Wang Xinggong's "The Origin and Effect of Science" and other articles all mention or directly quote "Mind Covenant Theory"; In addition, according to statistics, Rousseau's thoughts are also quoted to varying degrees in magazines such as "Minduo", "Xueyi", and "Pacific"[18]. The shift from a research object to a citation demonstrates a breakthrough in the domestic intellectual circles' understanding and acceptance of Rousseau and his ideas.

Looking at the longer term, whether it is Ma Junwu's "The Full Version of Lu Sao's Minyi Lun" which has been reprinted eight times, or it has been re-translated again in "Wanyou Wenku" compiled by Wang Yunwu of the Commercial Press, it shows that although the social contract theory gradually withdrew from the center of the political and ideological stage of the Republic of China, but people at that time were already aware of its important ideological value.

In summary, during the early 20th century, the pressing call for revolution among the Chinese populace elevated Rousseau's heroic image and the emergence of "On Min Yue," encouraging resistance against corrupt authority. These concepts served as crucial theoretical assets in the clash of old and new ideologies and facilitated the establishment of a revolutionary discourse. Its ideological importance expanded following the 1911 revolution. While "Minyue Lun" may no longer incite widespread debate due to evolving political and cultural shifts, the ideas it conveys have progressively integrated into the fundamental fabric of Chinese political thought.

5. Conclusion

Amid China's modernization process is in great need of systematic ideological theory, the "social contract theory" is based on relevant contents such as "the people have the right to revolution" and "the importance of national power formed after people's consultation" through the works of Chomin Nakae and Yang Tingdong. The translation quickly aroused a small-scale heated discussion in China, and subsequently spread widely.

Due to the influence of concepts, language and even intellectual background, the translations of Chomin Nakae and Yang Tingdong have certain limitations, and they even deliberately incorporate personal concepts and intentions. As China's political situation changes, the primary task of people with lofty ideals to save the country has shifted from overthrowing the Qing Dynasty to establishing a modern country. During this process, the demand for Rousseau's thoughts in the ideological circle has further increased to correct misunderstandings and gain a more comprehensive

and in-depth understanding of this thought. Thoughts, Ma Junwu combined the French original work and the English translation and translated it again. Although this translation still deviates between salvation and enlightenment, in general, it can basically reflect the original meaning of Rousseau's thoughts.

In terms of influence, "Social Contract Theory" initially attracted the attention of domestic intellectual circles with its strong rebellious spirit and militancy; but through more comprehensive and academic translation, "The Theory of Civil Contract" gradually became a banner. This theory can actually influence the national thinking, and in the New Culture Movement, it basically became the foundation of the Chinese people's political thinking.

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