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The Comments on Ezra Pound

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Abstract: As one of the representatives of Western literary theories, Ezra Pound not only made outstanding contributions to the development of the Western translation theory, but also promoted the communication between Chinese and Western poetics. His translation practice is rich and far-reaching. He also proposes the creative translation method. For example, Pound's translation of ancient Chinese poetry can show remarkable creativity. Therefore, after sorting out relevant materials, this paper gives a brief introduction to him, his translation theories and translation practices, and also concludes his translation thoughts and his immense influence on the translation field, aiming to provide case references for translators to study and enrich their understanding of the representative figures of the Western literary theory.

Keywords: Ezra Pound; Translation Theories; Translation Practices; Influence.

1. Introduction

Ezra Pound is not only a poet and translator, but also a critic. He is well known both at home and abroad as one of the most influential figures in 20th century literature (Zhu Chaowei, 2002:78). Born in Hailey Town, Idaho, he had a rich educational experience and made several trips to Europe. He settled in London in 1908 and once became a major figure in the London literary arena. He created many translations works and gained fruitful academic research results. He spent more than 40 years creating *The Cantos*, a long epic, which had aroused many in-depth discussions among scholars. This masterpiece is still deeply studied by the majority of scholars (Ning Xin, 2000:125).

In terms of translation practices, he spent a lot of time in doing these well. Besides, his research fields were very broad, covering a wide range of classical Chinese poetry and Confucian classics. Under the influence of Chinese poetics and Confucianism, his translation practices embodied his unique translation thoughts and theories. Moreover, his translation thought has already formed a good system, which has played a positive role in promoting the translation of Chinese ancient poetry and the dissemination of Confucianism. However, people haven't fully learned about him yet. Therefore, this paper briefly introduces his translation practices and his translation theories, and summarizes his translation thoughts and his influences on literature, in order to provide a case reference for the study of translators and enrich the research library of translators.

2. The Practice of Ezra Pound

Ezra Pound's translation practices mainly include the translation of classical Chinese poetry, the translation of Chinese Confucian classics, the publication of translated literary texts, and the absorption of academic nutrients from traditional Chinese poetics (Gao Bo, 2018:84). His translations of Chinese Confucian classics mainly refer to the translation of Chinese into English, including *The Great Learning*, *The Confucius Analects*, *The Doctrine of the Mean* and *The* Book *of Songs*.

2.1. The Translation of Classical Chinese Poetry

Since the early 20th century, Ezra Pound has devoted himself to translating and introducing classical Chinese poetry to the world. Some of his translations of ancient Chinese poems are collected and published in *Cathay*. The publication of this collection of poems immediately sets off a frenzy of translation of Chinese ancient poetry in the British and American poetry circles and even made Chinese ancient poetry nearly take up the British and American poetry circles for a time. His translations include "A Farewell Song" "Seeing Meng Haoran Off from Yellow Crane Tower" "The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter" and other works. He once made a deep study of Li Bai's poetry. However, because of their different literary backgrounds, it was inevitable that there were some inappropriate translations in his works. In his translation of poetry, he deviated from the popular sentence patterns, poetic styles, and language norms at that time, and caused a revolution in aesthetic structure psychology, imagination set, and aesthetic principles.

2.2. Translation of Chinese Confucian Classics

Ezra Pound is a firm believer in Confucianism, so he has a strong interest in Chinese Confucianism. In contrast to the ideas of Western centrism, he believed that the ideas in Confucianism were to some extent superior to those in Christianity and believed that these Confucian ideas could purify the minds of people in Western societies and build a harmonious society. As early as 1908, Pound had recognized the wisdom of the ancient Chinese sages in Allen Upward's translation of *Lun Yu* and L Cranmer-Byng's translation of *The Saying of Kung the Master*. At the same time, he began to look for an alternative to Christianity for the West in Confucianism. He also wrote an article in the "New Times" praising Confucianism for its deep thinking on social issues and its respect for the value and personality of the individual (Li Yuliang, 2009: 90).

In the process of translating Confucian classics, he always kept in mind the original intention of rebuilding Western morality through Confucianism and tried to put it into practice. For example, he used the translation of *The Book of Songs* to publicize Confucian moral thoughts and political policies in Western society and contributed to changing the moral

thoughts of Western society, as well as the social condition.

In his lifetime, he adhered to the concept of "creating while translating", so he translated many Chinese Confucian classics and officially published these works. For example, in June 1937, Pound's translation of the *Confucius Digest of the Analects* was published by Milan, with 245 volumes. On March 18, 1947, The New Directions Publishing Company published Pound's translation of *Confucius: The Great Digest, The Unwobbling Pivot,* and *The Analects* with 929 volumes. In May 1949, this book was reprinted in India by the Indian Press in 1,100 volumes. In the fall of 1951, the New York Square Series Publishing Company published *Confucius Analects* again. At this time, there were some changes from the previous translation. On February 15, 1956, the Peter Owen Company in London republished the book with 1,500 volumes. On September 10, 1954, Harvard University Press published Pound's translation of *The Classic Anthology Defined by Confucius.* In fact, the contents of this book were the same as his translation of *The Book of Songs*. This book's preface was written by Achilles Fang, a Chinese scholar who was teaching at Harvard at the time. In September 1959, the New Directions Publishing Company republished this book, but changed its name to The Confucian Odes: The Classic Anthology Defined by Confucius with 10,000 volumes (Gao Bo, 2019).

2.3. Absorb Academic Nutrients from Chinese Traditional Poetics

As the representative figure of Imagism, Ezra Pound once put forward the concept of imagery poetry and Vorticism in the theory of poetry. Since the Western theory of imagery had something in common with the imagery in Chinese poetry, he did not blindly adhere to the original text and pursue the accuracy of the translation, but transplanted the local culture and artistic conception in traditional Chinese poetry into English to serve his own poetic theory (Imagism and Vorticism) in the process of translating Chinese poetry. In addition, his translation theories and views were deeply influenced by Chinese traditional poetics. In the process of translation, he tried a new language style and translation strategy to serve the concept of imagery poetry (Wu Linna, 2020:72).

In a word, he derived the theory of "poetic image" from classical Chinese poetry. He not only broke the strict structure of traditional poetry, but also contributed to the historic breakthrough and development in British and American modern poetry. He made great progress in broadening people's vision and absorbing oriental and ancient culture in translation practices.

3. Translation Thoughts of Ezra Pound

From the perspective of Pound's translation practices, the core of his translation thoughts is to ignore the actual existence of the original text, emphasize the communication and interaction between the translator's life ontology and the original text's life ontology, and excessively promote the value of the translator's individual artistic experience of the original text. In Pound's view, the process of translation is equal to the process of the translator's pursuit of life ontology to encounter the original life ontology, while the translation is the harmonious blending state of this two life ontology after their passionate encounter. The original text is not only the object that the translator focuses on, but also the object that the translator will create. Translation is the perfect crystallization of translation and creation. For this reason, from the perspective of translation, Pound's translation is not faithful to the original text. From the perspective of creation, Pound's translation is a kind of beautiful creation, which is always loved by people (Zhou Jianxin, 2011:154).

According to his core ideas, we can find that his translation thoughts are very abundant and of great significance to translation practice, so this paper will further set forth his thoughts. His translation thoughts are mainly divided into four aspects.

First of all, the thought of translation is equal to creation. He believes that the whole process of translation is an exchange of reflection and innovation. He mentions that translation should not be a word-to-word grammatical translation, but a kind of experiment. Therefore, Pound's poetics is also known as the poetics of translation. In addition, he also believes that translation methods should not fully conform to the fixed one, but should incorporate innovative ideas of poetics into it, so that the modern idea is always running through the translation process (Wang Guiming, 2005:21). For example, his translation of *Cathay* was not completely faithful to the original text, but properly created the text while translated. During this translation process, he paid more attention to the images in the poem.

The second one is Pound's view of linguistic energy. The so-called energy is the core of poetry, it is the indelible part of poetry, which needs to be sought in the emotion that is energized by the words. Poetry is a kind of complete condensed object of poetic experience and poetic emotion. Therefore, it must be close to the thing itself, so as to survive. Only in this way can poetry be endowed with poetic beauty. To some extent, beauty refers to the passionate emotion in the original text. The translation of poetry is to seek the equation of human emotions and add the greatest energy to the word. The ideal translation of poetry should obtain the ideal "effect" and reproduce the beauty of things themselves. Pound's definitions of literature are also much the same. At first, he put forward that literature is a kind of language, so there is no substantial difference between poetry and literature. Secondly, he proposes that language has energy, and this energy can be renewed at any time. It can be said that Pound not only uses language to definite literature, but also uses linguistic energy to ensure the relationship between poetry and literature. A poem that ensures itself with linguistic energy is bound to be a poem full of power, such as the *Cantos*. In *Cantos*, the most intuitive expression of linguistic energy is the diversity of language (Yan Qinghao, Yan Kui, 2016:33).

Then, he believes that translators need to pay attention to the details of translation. In 1911, he said that translation provided the mode for the art of poetry, like giving blood to a ghost. In the early Imagist Movement, he took into account the details of translation, like the translation of individual words. He believed that the consideration of details was not only to focus on the black and white lettering on the paper, but also to see these details as carved images (Jiang Hongxin, 2001:79). He strongly advocated the accurate reproduction of details, words, fragments, and depictions of intention.

The last one refers to Pound's thought of translatability. He firstly divides poetry into three categories: poetry of sound, poetry of form and poetry of reason, and then puts forward the criterion of poetry translation is related to beauty and effect. He also adds that the relationship between literature and translation. On the one hand, the development of

literature relies on translation. On the other hand, many excellent translation works are indeed outstanding literary works, which can broaden our literary horizon and guide us to read the original works.

Ezra Pound's translation thoughts have gone beyond the traditional view of translation in the faithful sense and exerted a profound influence on contemporary translation theory and practice, making translation liberating from the traditional concept of equivalence and leading to the development of translation on the road of diversification. This has had a positive impact on the subsequent translation's culture school of thought and the German functional translation school of thought.

4. Translation Theories of Ezra Pound

Theory is the embodiment of thought. Ezra Pound's translation theories are gradually formed on the basis of his translation thoughts. Before the 20th century, Western translation theories mainly focused on "literal translation" and "free translation". But Pound's translation theories emphasize the precise translation of details, individual language, and individual or partial images (Wang Guiming, 2005:19). Therefore, the direction of the Western translation theory in the 20th century has gradually changed under the influence of his translation theories.

His translation theories are mainly reflected in three aspects. First, literary works deliberately create images rather than content or meaning. Secondly, the translator should pay attention to the process of description and the form and energy of language rather than the things described in the process of translation. Finally, translators, just like artists, sculptors, and calligraphers, should accurately reproduce details, words, fragments, and whole images in their translation. The true soul of a work is often hidden in a glance or a moment.

The core of his translation theory lies in creative translation, which is embodied in the following three aspects. First of all, translation is a partial criticism of the original work. As early as 1934, he put forward the idea of "criticism through translation". He believes that translation is to criticize the original text. Different from the view that "translation is criticism", he believes that translation is to criticize part of the original content. In addition, he also thinks that translators should not focus on reproducing all the features of the original text, but should show readers the essential features of the original text and show the unique style of the original text. In the process of translation, even if other qualities of the original text will be affected, the translator should strive to convey the author's ideology and the overall aesthetic effect. This is what he calls "interpretive translation". Secondly, translation is a creative process, which is independent of the original text. From the perspective of him, in addition to "interpretive translation", there is also a kind of "creative translation". Translated works can be regarded as new works with their own independent significance. This opinion is not only an innovative understanding of the relationship between translation and creation, but also a challenge to traditional translation criticism (Wang Guiming, 2005:19). Sometimes, it is obvious that the translator is creating new poetry, discarding old logic and returning to the contemporary thinking of translation. In addition, the translator will also adjust through the mainstream poetics of the target language's culture or the translator's poetic knowledge. In this way, translation is regarded as rewriting, and the translated work gradually becomes independent of the original work and gives new meaning to the target culture. Finally, translation is the transfer of linguistic potential from the original text. Pound's translation theories are based on the view of linguistic potential. The view of linguistic potential often determines the translator's choice of text. In the process of translation, the translator pays more attention to the potential contained in the words rather than the meaning, so that the translator will not only follow the original text, but take the initiative to approach the original text and find out the original author's intention.

From the perspective of Pound's translation theories, he has a profound understanding of translation. His translation theories have paved the way for the development of Western translation theory and practice in the 20th century and played an important role in promoting the development of translation theory in relation to linguistics, philosophy, and culturology throughout the 20th century. The translators, translation teaching and translation research studios that emerge later are deeply influenced by his translation theories. In addition, the influence of his translation theories can be seen in many new academic schools of thought that emerge later.

5. The Significance of Ezra Pound's Translation Practices

Ezra Pound's research field is comprehensive, covering classical Chinese poetry, Chinese Confucian classics, ancient Chinese painting, Chinese characters, and others. He has made great contributions to the cultural exchanges between China and the West, as well as the development of literature. In the field of translation, he translated a large number of ancient Chinese poems and Confucian classics and published related translation works. In terms of Confucianism, he studied Confucianism in depth, read related works, and learned from Confucianism. In addition, he also comprehended the true meaning of aesthetics in ancient Chinese paintings.

5.1. Translate Ancient Chinese Poetry and Promote the Development of English Poetry

There are differences between Chinese and Western poetry. The highest state of Chinese poetry refers to the lyrical imagery, while the highest state of Western poetry refers to the dramatic settings. In this difference, Ezra Pound's love for ancient Chinese poetry became even stronger. In his long practice of translating Chinese classical poetry, he translated many works and spread the culture of Chinese ancient poetry.

He believed that the translation of ancient Chinese poetry should adopt creative translation with flexible skills. He also considered that translating a poem actually changes not only the original poem, but also the past thinking in this poem (Guo Jianzhong, 2000:49). His creative translation thought has greatly influenced the creation and development of Western poetry. In addition, his unique understanding of "images" in poetry also led to the Imagist Movement. As an advocate of the Imagist Movement, he made British and American poetry break away from the original shackles of rhetoric and fixed patterns, and also provided a new perspective for the development of the British and American poetry movement.

5.2. Learn from Confucianism and Spread Confucianism and Chinese Culture

As a faithful believer of Confucianism, Ezra Pound loved

Confucianism, studied Confucianism, and translated Confucian classics all his life. In the process of studying Confucianism, he tried to apply the knowledge of Chinese Confucianism to Western society and tried to solve various problems in Western society. He once compared Western Christianity to Chinese Confucianism and argued that the "kindness" advocated by Confucius was better than the punishment system in Western Christianity (Jiang Hongxin, 2001:79). In his translation practice, his translation of *The Great Learning*, *The Analects of Confucius*, *The Doctrine of the Mean* and *The Book of Songs* not only has played a positive role in reviving European civilization, but also has spread Confucianism to Western society and developed a new way for the spread of Chinese culture.

5.3. Study the Ancient Chinese Painting, Understand and Spread the True Meaning of Aesthetics

Ancient Chinese paintings, also known as Chinese paintings, are pictures of ancient Chinese social life described and recorded by artists in the form of paintings during the long process of cultural development in China. Chinese paintings emphasize both form and spirit, and pay attention to the rendering of artistic conception. Ezra Pound was inspired by this aesthetic principle and used it in his own works, such as "In a Station of the Metro".

"In a Station of the Metro" is one of Pound's representative works. Although the poem has only two lines and fourteen words, it is a classic poem. In this poem, Pound borrowed Chinese paintings' methods of applying space, composition, and color to write poems. He not only imitated the painting techniques to construct sentences, but also paid attention to the beauty of artistic conception in Chinese paintings. He believed that the core of poetry was the image, but this kind of image was not a simple mathematical equation, but something related to form and mood. It could be seen that he deeply studied the knowledge of Chinese paintings and successfully applied it in practices. He not only spread the aesthetic knowledge covered in Chinese paintings, but also provided a reference for the creation of Western poetry.

6. Conclusion

To sum up, Ezra Pound had abundant translation practices. He translates many Chinese classical poetries and Chinese Confucian classics, which has a great influence on Western society. For the translation of the above works, he not only formed his own set of new translation theories, but also put forward the unique translation method. With unique characteristics, his translation thoughts illustrate the perspective and method of translation, the view of linguistic energy, and the view of innovation in translation. In addition, he had published several books, of which *Cathay* is the most famous one. He accelerated the formation of imagist poetry theory, promoted the development of European civilization, and had a far-reaching influence on Western society. In short, the study of his translation practices, translation thoughts and translation theories can provide case reference for translators to learn more about the representative figures of Western literary theory and prosper translation studies.

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