

De-propaganda: Exploring the Operation Mechanism of America's Book Translation and Dissemination Programs during the Cold War Period

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Abstract

During the Cold War, the United States government, together with some private organizations initiated book translation and dissemination programs to disseminate American culture and promote the infiltration of American ideology and values into other parts of the world. Through analyzing the disseminator of the book translation, books selected for translation, translation and editing strategies, and translated books circulation, it is found that both government and private organizations made efforts to hide their real intention, and the propaganda disguised as book translation and trade aimed to improve their propaganda effect, so as to better serve America's global cultural expansion strategies.

Keywords

De-propaganda; Propaganda; American Book Translation and Dissemination; Operation Mechanism.

1. Introduction

The Cold War is essentially a cultural and ideological war waged by the United States against the Soviet Union. In this war without gunfire, books and other cultural products have become tools for shaping the national image of the United States and infiltrating culture, ideology, and values into other countries. As a weapon of psychology and propaganda war, American foreign book projects have been widely concerned by academic circles. Early research focused on the practice of American book publishing and external promotion. (Lacy, 1954; Jennison, 1956; Rutter, 1956; Griffith, 1956; Smith, 1956; Filstrup, 1976; Cole, 1981) With the rise of research on the history of the new Cold War, scholars began to examine the instrumental role of books in shaping the American national image and cultural diplomacy during the Cold War from the perspective of international politics. (Curtis, 1984; Maack, 2001; Wilson, 2004; Robins, 2007; Cull, 2008; Barnhisel, 2010/2015; Beibei Chang, 2010/2015/2019; Tengjiao Hu, 2013/2016) However, the relevant research focuses on the overall operation mode and effect of American overseas library projects and lacks sufficient attention to the translation and publishing projects. At present, the few studies on book translation mainly focus on the operation of Franklin's translation project from a private institution in the United States (Laugesen, 2010; Arrabai, 2019; Yun Wu, 2020). Limited scholarly research exists on the translation program spearheaded by the United States Information Agency (USIA). Based on this, this paper puts the book translation projects of American public and private institutions into their overall cultural publicity strategy and tries to analyze the dissemination motivation and operation mechanism of the American book translation program from a more macro perspective.

2. Complicity and Synergy between Government and Private Institutions in the Context of the Cold War

At the beginning of the Cold War, the USIA joined forces with the American Library Association, the American Book Publishing Council, and the Ford Foundation to participate in this cultural cold war to cooperate with the psychological war launched by the US government against the Soviet Union. In this propaganda war aimed at seizing “minds and souls”, the US government's official publicity agency, the USIA, along with private organizations such as Franklin Books, have successively launched overseas book translation and publishing projects to serve the cultural strategy of shaping the national image and infiltrating cultural ideology by promoting the export of American books.

2.1. Official Organization: Translation Program of the USIA

The official Books in Translation Program in the United States started in the late 1940s. The program was initially implemented by the International Information Administration, a subsidiary of the State Council. Since 1953, the project has been managed by the newly established US Information Agency (USIA), which is one of the three major programs of the United States to export ideology through cultural products during the Cold War. (Barnhisel, 2010: 193) In the early days of the Cold War, the USIA selectively translated and published American books and put the translations into American overseas libraries for local readers. As the translation program expanded, the USIA targeted overseas book markets. Through funding local publishers, they promoted the translation, publishing, and sales of American books in other countries. The early book translation program led by the USIA was mainly oriented to European countries such as Germany, Yugoslavia, and Poland. Since the 1960s, the project has rapidly expanded to countries and regions in the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America.

As one of the main tools for the U.S. government to carry out cultural propaganda, the funds for the book translation program of the USIA mainly come from the appropriation of the U.S. Congress. With the support of legislations such as the Smith-Mundt Act and the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act, the USIA's translation program secured substantial funding. This financial support enabled the agency to sponsor and promote the translation and publishing of a vast number of American books in various locations worldwide. According to an investigation report of the International Book Committee of the Library of Congress, the USIA funded the translation and publication of 123,664 American books from 1951 to 1980, covering literary works, biographies, technical and scientific reading materials, university, primary and secondary school textbooks. (Curtis, 1984:91) The Books in Translation Program of the USIA is an important part of the practice of American cultural publicity during the Cold War. The program was oriented towards local intellectual elites and opinion leaders as its target readership, aiming to influence these intellectual elites and thereby shape the public opinion in the target countries to align with favorable directions for the interests of the United States.

2.2. Private Institution: Franklin Translation Program

Franklin's translation program was implemented in 1952 and ended in 1978. The program ran through the fierce period of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. Franklin Book Program, which implements the translation program, is a private and non-profit book promotion organization planned and established by the International Relations Committee of the American Library Association and the International Trade Committee of the Association of American Publishers. This institution is named after Franklin, the earliest American publisher, and entrepreneur, to highlight the function and orientation of institutional book publishing and market development. Franklin's early goal was to promote the export of American books by subsidizing and training local publishers and helping American publishers in expanding into those overseas book markets that they have not yet ventured into. Under the

proposal of Verner Clapp, assistant librarian of the Library of Congress, the book program shifted its focus to the translation program. By aiding local publishers in acquiring the translation rights of American books and providing corresponding financial support, the program aimed to promote the translation, publication, and dissemination of American books in developing countries. (Smith, 1983:225) Under the background of the Cold War, Franklin's book translation and dissemination served as a crucial component of the United States overall cultural strategy in foreign relations, constituting a significant part of its public diplomacy practice.

Although Franklin called itself an independent and non-profit organization, it had a close association with the United States government. The initial funding of \$500,000 for the establishment of Franklin came from the International Information Agency, a subsidiary of the U.S. Department of State. (Filstrup, 1976:432) Franklin believes that being perceived as an affiliate of the U.S. government would be highly detrimental to its operation. Therefore, Franklin has been working hard to explore funding sources for the program, especially to win the support of the countries to which the books are translated and exported and the private foundations in the United States. Under the leadership of Datus Smith, local government funding once accounted for 65% of Franklin's operating funds, while contributions from U.S. foundations reached 18%, including a single donation of as much as \$1 million from the Ford Foundation. (ibid:432) Although Franklin was strongly supported by the local governments, American foundations, and enterprises, the American government has always been the most stable and lasting fund provider for Franklin's translation program. In the past 30 years of operation, Franklin Translation Program has translated more than 3,000 American books into local languages in the Middle East, Asia, Latin America, and Africa. With a distribution of tens of millions of copies, it has become an important cultural tool for the United States to output American culture and values to other countries. (Robbins, 2007:646).

2.3. Collusion and Cooperation between Government and Private Institutions under the Background of the Cold War

In 1947, the United States Congress unanimously adopted a post-war psychological warfare strategy, launching a worldwide "war of minds and hearts" with the Soviet Union through various overt and covert propaganda means. (Beibei Chang, 2010:61) After President Eisenhower took office, the cold war between the United States and the Soviet Union quickly became fierce. In the State of the Union Address in 1958, Eisenhower called for a "total cold war" by harnessing the collective strength and resources of American society to confront the threats and challenges posed by the Soviet Union. Under the mobilization of American political elites and the incitement of the media, an extremely anti-communist social atmosphere has quietly formed. Under the background of the cold war between the United States and the Soviet Union, American officials and non-governmental organizations reached a certain degree of consensus on how to win the cold war and coordinated and cooperated in multiple fields. For this reason, both the USIA and Franklin targeted readers as local intellectual elites and opinion leaders, trying to influence the attitudes and judgments of local people by influencing their thoughts and thinking patterns. (Barhisel, 2015: 99).

The purpose of the USIA in promoting the dissemination of books translated into foreign languages is to influence the attitude of foreign people. (Collett, 1972:540) Therefore, the book translation program initiated by the USIA selectively translated and published books that are conducive to shaping the United States into a prosperous and dignified country, aiming to counteract the "vilification" propaganda of the Soviet Union on the United States through the overseas dissemination of translations. During the early Cold War period, the implementation of the American book translation program was not that successful. In response to this, Dan Lacy, director of the US International Information Agency, who was in charge of the American book

translation program, proposed to establish a non-profit organization (later known as Franklin Book Program) run by American publishers to promote the export of American books. The executive chairman of Franklin was Datus Smith, president of Princeton University Press. The board of directors was composed of well-known experts from the American publishing industry, the Library of Congress, education circles, and other fields. Among them were renowned scholars well-versed in communication and propaganda, including prominent political scientist and communication expert Harold Lasswell. (Robbin, 2007:641) Franklin aimed to better promote the overall cultural propaganda strategy of exporting books. During the operation of the program, Franklin was strongly supported by American publishing circles, foundations, and other private organizations, which also reflected the convergence of cultural propaganda goals between non-governmental organizations and government departments. The translation program of the USIA focused on the book market in developed countries such as Europe, while Franklin focused on the book market in developing countries such as the Middle East. In the choice of books to be published, the USIA pursued the propaganda effect of the translation, while Franklin paid attention to the long-term cultural influence of the translation. In short, the book translation and dissemination programs promoted by American official and private institutions during the Cold War were seemingly independent but there was a high degree of tacit understanding and collusion.

3. Operating Mechanism of Book Translation and Dissemination under Localization Strategy

From the operational perspective, both the USIA and Franklin's book translation programs adopted a localized operation mode. Neither of them functioned as publishing entities; rather, they mainly played the role of intermediaries or facilitators in the translation and dissemination of books. They promoted the publication and dissemination of American books overseas by helping to obtain the copyright of translation, hiring translators, and subsidizing local publishers to publish translations and sell them. Both of them had an obvious tendency of "de-propagandizing" in the aspects of the driving force behind their translation promotion, text selection, compilation strategy, and translation circulation.

3.1. The Deliberately Inconspicuous Communicating Entities

The communicating entities refer to individuals or organizations that initiate or guide communication activities. (Lasswell 1948: 37) During the Cold War, the main communicating entities involved in American book translation and dissemination were the US Information Agency and Franklin Book Program, among other institutions. However, as the main body of book translation and dissemination, both official and unofficial entities did not appear as publishers or book exporters. Instead, they always stayed behind the scenes in book translation, publishing, and sales, playing the role of a middleman. At the operational level, both the USIA and Franklin follow a similar approach. The first step is to discuss with local publishers to draw up the list of books to be translated and published. After finalizing the list, the USIA and Franklin would be responsible for negotiating with American publishers or authors about the licensing of translation copyright, paying the translation copyright transfer fee, and hiring suitable translators. To ensure that local publishers get enough publishing profits, the USIA also bought a certain number of translations for its overseas libraries to ensure that local publishers and booksellers profit from them and maintain their willingness to continue cooperation. (Barnhisel, 2015:108) Although it plays a key role in book translation and publication, these promoters of translations of American books deliberately keep a low profile. Even in the bookbinding style, they were deliberately consistent with the locally published books to avoid leaving traces of their assisted publication on these foreign-translated books. (Barnhisel, 2010:111).

Despite establishing operation offices in major cities in the Middle East, Asia, Latin America, and Africa, such as Cairo in Egypt and Tehran in Iran, Franklin always tried to hide its relationship with American government departments to avoid being regarded as a propaganda tool of the American government and affecting the expected effect of the program. (Robbins,2007:642) In addition, Franklin's books hid its efforts to promote the translation and dissemination of American books by adopting the localized operation mode of "local selection and local management". In practice, Franklin Books not only employed local people (usually pro-American people who had studied in the United States) to manage it but also entrusted locals with tasks such as editing, translation, printing, publishing, and sales after finalizing the translated text. (Barnett & Piggford, 1969:48) The localized operation mode of Franklin made it look more like a local institution, thus making the real disseminator of book translation hide behind the scenes.

3.2. The Text of De-propaganda

Despite differences in program positioning and operational approaches, the book translation program of both the USIA and Franklin were consistent in serving the American cultural propaganda strategy. The translation program of the USIA was one of the three major programs that the US government tried to export ideology through cultural products (the other two were the information media guarantee program and the overseas library program). (Barnhisel,2010: 193) As Datus Smith, director of the Franklin Book Program, said, the Franklin Translation Program based on the principle of selecting books by local people and aimed at local intellectual elites is the most effective propaganda tool for the United States. (Smith, 1983:257) Although the programs had a clear cultural propaganda goal, both the USIA and Franklin had consciously adopted the strategy of de-propaganda in the selection of translated texts to hide their propaganda motives. Ker and Crowell, members of the American Overseas Book Advisory Committee, suggested that the translation program of the USIA should select valuable American novels, American cultural classics, books reflecting American life, and autobiographies of American celebrities because choosing these books will help to show a full and fair American image. (Barnhisel, 2010:110-117) At the same time, the translation of American books emphasized catering to the demands of local readers and maintaining a balanced approach to book themes and contents. Dan Lacy, director of the book program of the USIA, once candidly stated that selecting books with overly explicit pro-American or anti-Soviet themes could result in a counterproductive propaganda effect. (Lacy, 1954:182).

To weaken its political propaganda intention, the Franklin Book Program selected certain types of books and authors' works as translation materials, especially American serious literature, children's literature, biographies, popular science books, and philosophical works to show American cultural achievements and values to readers in other countries around the world. (Laugesen 2017: 72) Considering that teenagers are more susceptible to cultural and value influences, books for children account for a large proportion of translated books. Works such as *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *King of the Wind*, and *Pinto's Journey*, have been translated into many languages, and the translations have been well-received by local children's readers. (Smith,1983:261) In addition, the Franklin translation program combined the dissemination of books abroad with the needs of local development and paid attention to the practicality and academic nature of books when choosing translation texts. During its nearly 30 years of operation, Franklin has translated and published books on popular science knowledge, health education, and medical care, such as *Scientific American*, *Man and Machine*, and *The Common Sense of Baby and Child Care*. In choosing translation subjects, Franklin Books avoided directly propagandistic texts against the Soviet Union or communism. Instead, they opted for American books that would contribute to local social, scientific, and educational development. The purpose was to reduce the vigilance of local governments and

populations towards the introduction of American books, presenting a propaganda approach focused on achieving long-term influential effects.

3.3. Compilation Strategy Serving Persuasive Propaganda

From the perspective of international communication studies, propaganda is a persuasive communication activity that aims at persuading and influencing foreign audiences. (Yarrow, 2009: 4) During the Cold War era, in response to the differences in target market demand, cultural habits, and readers' preferences, American book translation adopted compilation strategies such as addition, deletion, editing, and rewriting. According to the report of The New York Times in 1965, Franklin helped to translate and publish 2,500 books and distributed 4,300 books, most of which were compiled and rewritten to meet the needs of local readers. (Laugesen 2017: 78).

To cater to the target audience, the translation process involved flexible choices regarding the original content, sometimes requiring bold rewriting and the removal of elements that might offend the target readers. A typical example is the translation of *This I Believe*, where the translator engaged in significant compilation. The book is a compilation of Edward Murrow's radio programs and newspaper columns. The work guides readers to explore life philosophy through the reading and extension of stories and beliefs, leading to the reconstruction and maintenance of their value systems. To cater to readers' value orientation, the Arabic version translated and published by the USIA added articles by Arab celebrities on spirit, religion, values, and political beliefs to enhance the sense of identification among the target readers and improve the publicity and persuasion effect of the translation. To prevent conservative Muslims from contradicting the Christian beliefs conveyed in the book, the translator compiled the title into *Lessons Life Has Taught Me*. In the Arabic translation of Sarah Bolton's *Lives of Poor Boys Who Became Famous*, another translation bestseller, the biographies of Pope Pius XI and other people who might offend the Muslim religion in the original work were deleted. Besides the biographies of Benjamin Franklin, Charles Dickens, Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Edison, and other famous British and American historical figures, some biographies of political and educational leaders in Muslim countries such as Turkey and Egypt were supplemented. At the same time, the title of the Arabic version was also compiled into *Self-made Famous Men from the East and the West*. (Laugesen 2010: 182-183).

To cater to the reading habits and aesthetic tastes of target readers, American book translation for international publicity was also very particular about bookbinding, and the cover and illustrations of the translation are correspondingly adjusted during the translation and publication process. In the Iranian edition of the children's series *Goldilocks and Three Bears*, the illustration of Little Bear's Cabin was changed to a typical Caspian-style cabin, while Goldilocks' hair color is altered to reddish brown instead of golden yellow in the original. Similarly, in a translation of a children's book published in Pakistan, a scene in which parents were worried that their child was injured in a car accident was adapted into a scene of a carriage accident familiar to Pakistani readers. (Filstrup 1976: 437).

3.4. Commercialized Circulation of Translated Editions

Effective propaganda requires appearing non-propagandistic. (Saunders, 2013:1) The driving entities behind the dissemination of American book translations are well-versed in this approach. Among them, utilizing a commercialized distribution channel for translated editions was another strategy employed to cover up the propaganda motivation. To achieve this, the USIA strictly adheres to the policy of selling books rather than giving them away. Both the USIA and Franklin's book translation programs mainly used the commercial channels of book trade to distribute translated editions to the local book markets. In actual operation, the promoters of the translation programs purchased translation rights from American publishers or authors and paid translation and editing fees, while local publishers were responsible for printing fees

and paid a certain edition fee to the USIA or Franklin according to the number of books sold. On the surface, the cooperation between them was completely based on the economic cooperation framework of publishing and book trade. (Filstrup, 1976:433).

To increase the local sales of translations, American book translation programs strived to reduce the cost of books to keep the price of translations within the affordability of local readers. Among them, the strategy of the USIA was to require local publishers to publish translations according to the printing specifications of local paperbacks, thereby reducing production costs and subsequently lowering the retail price of the translated editions. (Sussman, 1973: 11) To facilitate the large-scale entry of American books into foreign book markets, the USIA launched the Low-Priced Books in Translation. During 1956-1960, this program successfully sold 50 million copies of American books overseas, enabling American-translated books to rapidly dominate the international book market. (Barnhisel, 2010: 198) Relying on commercial channels to promote the translation of American books not only aligned with the commercial interests of American publishers to explore emerging overseas markets but also helped strengthen the legitimacy of American book dissemination, avoiding local readers' doubts about the dumping of American books and cultural propaganda motives. (Laugesen 2017: 43) In summary, the approach of making translated American books looked the same as ordinary books circulating in the local market and strategically reducing the prices enables these translated versions to enter the overseas book markets through commercialized circulation channels, cleverly covering up the propaganda motivation of their book translation and dissemination.

4. Conclusion

During the Cold War, to support the U.S. government's cultural offensive against the Soviet Union and serve the American cultural propaganda strategy, U.S. government public diplomacy agencies cooperated with private organizations to jointly promote the translation and dissemination of American books. The book translation program opened up the world book market for the American publishing industry and laid the foundation for the establishment of American cultural hegemony after the Cold War. In the specific operational aspects, the translation program of the USIA focused on short-term propaganda goals, while Franklin focuses on long-term goals of cultural influence. Both programs complemented each other and had strong synergy. Franklin's book program translated and published certain types of books that were not covered by the USIA program, and helped promote the cultural publicity activities that the USIA could not implement overtly.

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