

The Reciprocal Promotion of Community and Translation in Chinese and English Culture

Renjie Li

Nanning Normal University, China

Abstract

Translation makes communication between different languages possible, and in the process of communication, the common pursuit of great ideas further deepens the desire for communication. Both Chinese and Western cultures have long histories of collective thought, and the historical blending of Chinese and Western ideas has also proven that there is a mutually reinforcing relationship between collective thought and the act of translation. This article will illustrate the inner essence and relationship between community and translation.

Keywords

Community, Translation, Literature.

1. Introduction

Human activities are always accompanied by cultural exchanges, regardless of the size of the groups involved, and such exchanges signify progress. There are various forms of communication, including but not limited to warfare, trade, and migration. Regardless of the form, the essence of cultural exchange lies in the transmission and reception of information, but the importance of good forms in promoting cultural exchange cannot be ignored. As one of the most primitive media for carrying civilization, written language is an important tool for understanding the essence of a civilization. Written language serves as the material shell of thoughts, and without understanding written language, one cannot grasp the true connotations of the thoughts behind a language. Due to the influence of different historical and environmental factors, the languages and scripts used by different ethnic groups may vary in size. At such times, the importance of translation activities begins to emerge. As an ancient civilization with a long history, China has a rich cultural heritage, and the translation of Chinese culture to foreign languages also has a long history. According to the "New Bibliography of Chinese Literature Translated into Western Languages," compiled from 1736 to 2018, nearly 512 Chinese classics were translated into English, covering a wide range of genres. This illustrates the attention and affirmation that Western civilization has for Eastern civilization. The establishment of this fact requires a foundation of spiritual community. Based on a deep spiritual community, different cultures can seek peaceful development, and cultural exchanges can form dialogues.

2. Community in Different Culture

2.1. Community in Chinese Culture

During the late Western Jin Dynasty, the situation was chaotic with frequent warfare, yet development remained the main theme. Amidst ongoing integration of warfare and exchanges, Buddhism facilitated the formation of Central Plains culture. As a foreign religion, Buddhism was more readily accepted by the northern Hu tribes. During the Sixteen Kingdoms period, many rulers sought ways to invite esteemed monks to their countries as advisors. By the time of the Southern and Northern Dynasties, Buddhism gradually gained acceptance among

northern civilians, and the dissemination of Buddhist culture by Northern Wei undoubtedly accelerated this process.

During this period, the translation of Buddhist scriptures progressed rapidly. Eminent monks such as Dao'an, Kumarajiva, and Sengzhao, supported by imperial authority, translated a large number of Buddhist scriptures from Sanskrit into Chinese. These included the "Agama Sutra," "Prajnaparamita Sutra," and "Lotus Sutra," which not only promoted the spread of Buddhism but also enriched traditional Chinese culture. In addition to the north, people in various southern regions were deeply influenced by Buddhism, venerating Buddhist ideals and even saying "to worship the emperor is to worship the Buddha."

In subsequent evolution, the blended culture influenced by advanced Central Plains culture gradually converged with Han culture, becoming a new factor in Han culture. The reason why Han culture can accommodate cultures from other ethnicities lies mainly in its human-centered, inclusive ideology.

Benedict Anderson believes that language plays an important role in the formation of nations. Through language, an individual can imagine themselves as part of a culturally similar group without encompassing the entire world population. Qin's King Zheng implemented the policy of "uniform script and standard carriage" after unifying the world, greatly promoting the formation of a collective consciousness among the Chinese nation. Since King Zheng, successive Chinese dynasties have based their rule on unifying the world. Even during the Yuan and Qing dynasties, ruled by minority ethnic groups, their cultural foundation originated from Han culture. Texts carrying culture played a catalytic role in promoting the dissemination of Han culture.

Works such as "The Injustice to Dou E" by Guan Hanqing of the Yuan Dynasty and "Dream of the Red Chamber" by Cao Xueqin of the Qing Dynasty are all monumental works in Han literature. On one hand, such literary works consolidate and elevate the collective consciousness of the masses. Eagleton believes that literary language embodies the taste and perspective of a nation, reflecting both the culture of a nation and the existence of a deep community. Taking the interactions between Liu Laolao and the Ning and Rong families in "Dream of the Red Chamber" as an example, Liu Laolao's speech and actions reflect a profound understanding of human nature and dealing with situations. Although from different social classes, we should not judge the humor of their dialogue with modern perspectives. In the context of that time, the humor in dialogue depended on the feudal imperial system, where the participants recognized themselves as belonging to different social classes, forming a clearly hierarchical community. On the other hand, the further use of literary language promoted the development of national languages, enabling them to more accurately express the thoughts of a nation and strengthen national cohesion.

2.2. Community in Western Culture

Since the Jews left the Mesopotamian region, they began a diaspora life that lasted for thousands of years. Alongside them were the ancient Greeks who left home due to wars, and their culture spread far and wide during their wanderings. Losing cohesion in dispersion, they understood the importance of unity better than anyone else. This became one of the important starting points of Anglo-American culture, including in religion and art. For thousands of years, Jews have been seeking their homeland, which has left a cohesive label on this ethnic group, and this label has always influenced this people. After World War II, Jews were allowed to establish a country in the Middle East, named Israel, meaning "God's warrior." Once established, Israel has been in constant warfare with surrounding countries. Despite being originally rootless, Israel has continuously received assistance from Israelis living in other countries in these wars. Among them, Mrs. Meir is a well-known figure among these dispersed Jews. In several wars with Middle Eastern countries, whenever Israel was at a disadvantage, this "Iron

Lady" would start lobbying, and Jewish tycoons living in other countries would often be moved by her, donating money and food to this unknown homeland. The communal thought in ancient Greek culture was more artistic. The longing and love for their homeland led them to create magnificent epics such as the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey." The island of Ithaca in these poems is the embodiment of the homeland for the wanderers, and the longing for loved ones and homeland culture shaped Odysseus and also unified the Greeks. The influence of black culture in contemporary Anglo-American culture cannot be underestimated. British black scholar Gilroy focused on dispersed blacks and proposed the "Black Atlantic" theory, symbolizing the imagined homeland of the dispersed, whether forced or voluntary. When blacks suffered under slavery, Africa had not yet embraced modern civilization, resulting in forced diaspora blacks unable to find their roots. Therefore, the Atlantic they crossed during their journey became a shared spiritual homeland for blacks. In 2021, Tanzanian-British writer Abdulrazak Gurnah won the Nobel Prize in Literature, with the citation praising him for "uncompromisingly and empathetically exploring the impact of colonialism and caring about the fate of refugees caught in cultural and geopolitical rifts." The characters in Gurnah's works are often in a state of diaspora, but they are not isolated individuals; rather, they hover on the edge of existing cultural communities, seeking their own identities, forming a dispersed community.

3. The Function of Community in Translation

Since the time of Plato, the concept of community has been an ancient notion that has been extensively discussed in Western academia. In China, the pursuit of a unified state has been an ideal for every dynasty. In this way, the cultural exchange between China and the West has had a philosophical foundation, providing a guarantee for deep communication.

3.1. The concept of community provides the possibility of translation

Professor Yin Qiping, in his article "Key Terms in Western Literary Theory: Community," first clarified the complete denial of the unitary theory of community, such as "Nancy's argument," and then explained the organic nature of community, believing that community consciousness values seeking common ground while respecting differences. From the history of translating Chinese classics into Western languages, it can be seen that the homogeneity factor in different cultures is an important starting point for cultural exchange. The history of translating Chinese classics into Western languages began in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. The Italian missionary Matteo Ricci translated parts of the "Great Learning" into Latin, Michele Ruggieri translated the "Four Books" into Latin, and the French missionary Joseph de Prémare translated the "Five Classics" into Latin. At that time, in the 17th century, the main recipients of these Latin translations were the ruling class or church personnel who had received Latin education. However, by the mid-17th century, the rise of print capitalism and the religious reform led to the decline of Latin, and the focus of translating Chinese works into Western languages shifted from Confucian classics to novels that were more accepted by the common people. Among them, "Journey to the West" and "Dream of the Red Chamber" and other social realism novels have been translated and published multiple times. Whether it was the early translation of Confucian classics or the translation of social novels after the rise of print capitalism, one important reason why these works were accepted is that the social factors formed by the completely different natural environments and histories of China and the West share some homogeneity. Benedict Anderson believes that great ideas are more likely to evoke a group's imagination of its nation than interests. Looking at classics such as the "Four Books and Five Classics" and "Dream of the Red Chamber," the former elucidates the manifestations of individuals and the state in a harmonious society, while the literary nature of the latter reflects the taste of a society, which is what Eagleton calls the "appropriate way of communication." During the late Renaissance and the beginning of the era of big capital, the pursuit of great ideas created a large

number of masterpieces, and there was a reverent and curious attitude towards Eastern thoughts from distant lands.

Similar things also happened in the East. Although China has long accepted and absorbed foreign cultures, due to the Qing Dynasty's policy of isolationism, China failed to catch up with the fast-paced development of the times. Among them, movements such as the Self-Strengthening Movement and the Hundred Days' Reform, although to a certain extent introduced Western cultural products, failed to engage in dialogue with them and maintained a kind of "cultural narcissism" towards the West. The collision of cultural ideas with the West occurred during the New Culture Movement, which was also a period when a large number of Western literature was translated into Chinese, allowing fresh blood to once again spread Chinese culture. At that time, China was severely oppressed by the feudal imperial system, and people's thinking was extremely decadent. However, the generative characteristics of Chinese culture did not disappear. When accepting foreign cultures, intellectuals from all walks of life felt as if they were bathed in a spring breeze, rejoicing for the belated dialogue between Chinese and Western cultures. They stepped out of the strange circle of "cultural narcissism" and gradually moved towards the path of "cultural confidence." During the New Culture Movement, the introduction of Western literature gave birth to a considerable number of literary genres in China, such as the New Sensationist poetry and the Nine Leaves poetry. Without consensus on peace and harmony, even with the introduction of countless works, it would only be like drawing water with a bamboo basket. Therefore, the homogeneity factor between Chinese and Western cultures is an important foundation for forming a community and an important prerequisite for mutual translation between Chinese and Western cultures.

3.2. Translation Facilitates Development under the Premise of Community Thought

Although the world has always been in a state of development, setbacks occur periodically, and to salvage the tired state of development, fresh blood is indispensable. Whether in the East or the West, seeking inspiration from overseas or exotic civilizations to solve domestic development problems is not a new phenomenon, and this process often involves translation.

The Renaissance was an important stage in the development of Western culture. During this period, scholars, thinkers, and artists all demonstrated a strong interest in culture and bold imagination. The long and dark rule of the Middle Ages suppressed people's thoughts, so humanists of this period revived and disseminated a large number of literary works from ancient Greece and Rome. In the mid-15th century, the widespread use of printing in Europe accelerated the dissemination of knowledge. Alongside the Renaissance came the emergence of new religions. Benedict Anderson argued in his book "Imagined Communities" about the relationship between religious dissemination and capitalist printing. After Martin Luther translated the Bible into the vernacular language, the interpretation of religious doctrines underwent significant development, the interpretation authority previously held by the church gradually declined, and the status of Latin also diminished. The world gradually moved towards democracy. Whether it was the intellectual liberation brought about by the Renaissance or the social progress promoted by the religious reform, translation was closely related. As Meiselnic has said, "Europe was born through translation, and lived within translation. Translation is the only foundation on which Europe is built."

In China, progress brought about by translation has also saved the descendants of Yan and Huang from dire situations. Since the Opium War in 1840, in order to save the country from peril, countless righteous individuals have come forward one after another, continuously introducing various masterpieces from abroad, which nurtured a group of famous translators and scholars at that time, including Yan Fu, who translated "Evolutionary Theory." Among all these works, the most profound impact undoubtedly belongs to the translated works of

Marxism-Leninism. "The sound of the October Revolution brought Marxism-Leninism to China." Great ideas, when encountering the right environment, will take root and grow into a forest in the future. The development of Marxist-Leninist thought in China has proven that great ideals and beliefs have similarities. Regardless of where these idealistic individuals come from, under the guidance of lofty beliefs, they naturally become a community.

4. Conclusion

Compared to material wealth like gold and silver, the allure of great willpower is more capable of uniting a nation, because a nation needs a lofty, non-profit-driven spiritual pillar. These pillars are often built on the foundation of language, which is a prerequisite for a nation to imagine a community. Throughout history, it is not difficult to see that world cultural development is gradually trending towards integration, with concepts like the global village and globalization deeply ingrained in people's minds. If the light of ideals does not shine equally on everyone, the shadow of war may perhaps envelop more lives. It is precisely through the shared pursuit of lofty ideals that different cultures can blend together, and mutual translation becomes possible. And through translation, exotic civilizations become a driving force for another country's growth, resonating with its culture due to the alignment of communities, and unleashing tremendous power.

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