

Analysis of The Good Earth from the Perspective of Manipulation Theory

Tingting Wang^{1,*}, Feng Wen²

¹School of Foreign Languages, Huangshan University, Huangshan 245000, China

²Changjun Banmahu High School, Changsha, China

Abstract

Manipulation theory is recognized as the soul of the cultural turn. It has exerted significant influences on translation studies home and abroad. This paper first gives an introduction to the manipulation theory, and then an analyses of the translations of The Good Earth will be made .

Keywords

Manipulation Theories, The Good Earth, Lefevere, Ideology.

1. Introduction

In the latter half of the 20th century, translation studies in the West began to penetrate various fields. Meanwhile, quite a few international cultural scholars and philosophers such as Foucault, Derrida, Spivak, Even-Zohar, Niranjana, etc., all diverted their interest to translation studies and put forward lots of insightful ideas; in contrast, a host of noted translation theorists in international translation circles, for example, Susan Bassnett, Andre Lefevere, Laurence Venuti, started to study translation from a broader cultural perspective. These two phenomena represent respectively, the translation turn of cultural studies and the cultural turn of translation studies. The cultural turn broadens our horizon and makes us realize that translation studies should not only be limited to the internal or microscopic study, it should also include the external or macroscopic study. In the surging tide of the cultural turn, a school named the Manipulation School came into public attention. Before this theory, many translation studies focused on the language or literary elements, but less attention was paid to the extra-language factors. Manipulation Theory calls translation scholars to take into consideration the influence and constraint of target society and cultural factors on translation. As for translation studies in China, Manipulation Theory has good applicability, especially for the translation of foreign literature in contemporary China. This paper firstly introduces the Manipulation theory, and then analyze the Good Earth under this theoretical framework.

2. Lefevere and his Manipulation Theory

Lefevere's Manipulation Theory is in fact a triad of ideology, patronage and poetics. The Belgian American scholar Andre Lefevere(1945-1996) was an internationally renowned literary critic, a scholar of comparative literature and translation theorist. During his short lifetime, he had published over one hundred papers and had been enjoying great fame in the circles of comparative literature and translation studies.

Lefevere borrowed the concept of "control factor" from literary criticism and the idea of "professional" and "patronage" from the polysystem theory. It is from these concepts that Lefevere developed his Manipulation Theory. So the following paragraphs will be dedicated for a detailed discussion of the factors inside the Manipulation Theory and the inter-relation between its factors so as to give a clear picture of this theory.

According to Lefevere, there are two main control factors or manipulation factors “that sees to it that the literary system does not fall too far out of step with the other sub-systems society consists of” [1]. The first lies inside the literary system and the second outside the literary system.” In concrete terms, the first factor is represented by “the professional”. “Inside the literary system, the professionals are the critics, reviewers, teachers, translators. They will occasionally repress certain works of literature that are all too blatantly opposed to the dominant concept of what literature should be its poetics and of what society should be ideology” [1]. And he continues to say that “the second control factor, which operates mostly outside the literary system as such, will be called ‘patronage’ here” [1]. Up to now the most important control factors in Lefevere’s theory have come up, control factors inside the literary system, including poetics and ideology and control factor outside the literary system, patronage. So, each of these three control factors will be discussed respectively below.

2.1. Ideology

Ideology is acknowledged as “one of the most complicated in content, the most ambiguous in meaning, the most bizarre in nature, and the most frequently used categories in the history of western thought in the 20th century” [2]. There is a multiply of definitions about ideology.

How does Lefevere define ideology? Lefevere himself has also attached different understandings to the concept of ideology. In the beginning, he claims that ideology is “what society should (be allowed to) be” [1]. Earlier Lefevere had defined ideology simply as ‘world view’, but he also refers approvingly to Fredric Jameson’s concept of ideology as “that grillwork of form, convention, and belief which orders our actions” [3]. In his posthumous paper “Translation Practice(s) and the Circulation of Cultural Capital: Some Aeneids in English”, Lefevere defines ideology as “the conceptual grid that consists of opinions and attitudes deemed acceptable in a certain society at a certain time, and through which readers and translators approach texts.”

2.2. Patronage

Lefevere defines patronage as “something like the powers (persons, institutions) that can further or hinder the reading, writing, and rewriting of literature” [1]. How does patronage exert its powers on translation? “Power can be exerted by means of sticks (impositional power), carrots (bargaining) and ideas (persuasion)” [4]. Patronage, in Lefevere’s theory, consists of three elements: the ideological, the economic, and the status components [1]. The ideological component chiefly constrains the choice and development of the form and subject matter. It exercises its influence through the combination of “sticks” and “ideas”, that is, through the combination of “impositional power”, political and “persuasion”. Many patrons such as an absolute ruler, a religious body, a party, a royal court, a publisher or a censorship bureau, etc. all can exert their impositional power by a variety of means-editing, refusal of or ban on publication, restriction of readership, punishment of translators, threat on the personal security of translators even the deprivation of a translator's life. The power of the ideological component of the patronage is so influencing and impositional because the patrons embody the state power and are backed by the police, armed forces, and so on. “Persuasion” sometimes means academies, the educational establishment, media and critical journals, etc. infuse the ideology of the ruling class into the minds of translators so that the latter accept the dominant ideology and work unconsciously within the parameters delimited by the patrons. The other two components of the patronage: the economic component and the status component usually exert their power by means of various “carrots” such as a salary, a pension, an appointment to some position, translation prizes and honors, acceptance of the translator into a higher social class and a lifestyle, etc. It follows that the patronage exerts its manipulation by means of cajolery and coercion.

In concrete terms, the patron usually plays a significant role in determining which works to translate, how to translate the works, what translation strategies should be adopted and what translated works are supposed to be like, etc.

2.3. Poetics

Most literature researchers consider poetics a study of poetry, but when it is used in translation study, it has a more extended content. According to Lefevere, it consists of two components: a. literary devices, which includes genres, "The latter concept is influential in the selection of themes that must be relevant to the social system if the work of literature is to be noticed at all [1]". The dominant poetics in the target language may accept, digest, and absorb a translation product, or it may reject and criticize a certain translation.

He explained:

Certain works of literature will be elevated to the level of "classics" within a relatively short time after publication, while others are rejected, some to reach the exalted position of a classic later, when the dominant poetics has changed [1].

Poetics that influences the translator's strategy and a decision may also be represented in the poetics of translation. Translation is a kind of rewriting and involves recreation of literary images in a different language. Since any writing could be explained in poetics, then translation poetics is also needed in explaining translation phenomena.

3. Analysis of the Good Earth from the Manipulation Theory

The case study concerns the three versions of *The Good Earth*, a great work written by Pearl S. Buck (June 26, 1892--March 6, 1973), a well-known American writer. The novel, *The Good Earth* depicts the whole life of Wang Lung, a typical farmer in old China, who struggled to eke out a living from the earth. This book was published in 1931, which quickly occupied the top of the best-seller list. It won the Pulitzer Prize in 1932. Also, it contributed to Pearl's Nobel Prize in Literature in 1938. After being published, this book was rendered into more than one hundred kinds of languages. In China, it was translated into Chinese with many Chinese versions successively. This case study, based on Lefevere's theory, made an analysis of the manipulation of ideology to the translation.

The translating of *The Good Earth* appeared two climaxes: the one in the 1930 and 1940, the other after the reform and opening-up. Why was it rendered again and again?

Wu Lifu(1900-1992) was one of the first translators, whose translated text was published in 1932. In 1933, Hu Zhongchi (1900-1968) translated *The Good Earth* and got it published in Shanghai Kaiming Press. This was the first climax.

However, during the period of the Cold War(1950s-1970s), the relationship between the West and the East was strained, which influenced the acceptance of Chinese readers about Pearl S. Buck. She was regarded in China as a proponent of American cultural imperialism owing to feudalism and bourgeoisie values described in *The Good Earth*.

Due to the improvement of the relations between China and American since the reform and opening-up, many scholars began to make research on Pearl S. Buck and her works.

In 1988, Wang Fengzhen, a distinguished scholar and translator, translated this novel. Since 1988, nine Chinese translations have circulated in China, among which, six translations are translated by Wang Fengzhen. In 2010, he retranslated and got it published by People's Literature Publishing House. This translation is the most popular and the latest one, having the largest number of Chinese readers.

Firstly, from the perspective of ideology, we know that the acceptance and objection of the translations of *The Good Earth* were greatly influenced by the political ideology of China. In the first climax, China was experiencing a great struggle, and Chinese people suffered a lot. *The*

Good Earth introduced the hardship of Chinese farmers, the lowliness of Chinese women, and the turbulent state of Chinese society to the whole world. This book aroused the deep sympathy of the world people, which was needed in China at that time. The translating climax could be served for the politics and the society. All these ideological elements decided the appearance of different translating versions of that time.

From 1945-1988, the boom faded away. No more translation appeared, and some of the previous translations disappeared. Just as stated before, the political state and ideology of China were the cause of such a situation. During this period, the ideological difference between China and America, as well as Pearl's value, who tended to be influenced by the West, so she became hostile to the Chinese revolution and were afraid of the communist movement. All these were out of ideological differences.

Since the reform and opening-up, China adopted an open and tolerant attitude towards the literature, which contributed to the second climax of the translating of *The Good Earth*.

The above part mainly discusses the ideology from the historical background. In the following part, we will analyze it from a more specific point.

According to Lefevere, ideology restricts the rewriter (including translator) by politic, economy and social status. The rewriter would often make some adaptation in order to cater to the mainstream ideology. We take the two full translations of *The Good Earth* as an example: one is the translation of Hu Zhongchi, the other Wang Fengzhen and Ma Chuanxi's.

Example 1:

He commented upon Wang Lung as he shaved his upper forehead, "This would not be a bad-looking farmer if he would cut off his hair. The new fashion is to take off the braid." His razor hovered so near the circle of hair upon Wang Lung's crown that Wang Lung cried out, "I cannot cut it off without asking my father!" And the barber laughed and skirted the round spot of hair.[5]

Hu: Omitted [6]

Wang and Ma:

他边给王龙刮前额边说：“现在时兴剪辫子。”他的剃刀紧擦着王龙头顶上的发圈刮来刮去，王龙忍不住喊道：“没问我爹我可不能把辫子剪掉！”于是剃头师傅哈哈大笑，修齐了他头顶上的发边。[7]

In Hu's translation, all concerning to dreadlocked men and foot-binding women had been omitted. Hu's translated text was published in 1933. "Dreadlocked men and foot-binding women" was the symbol of backward feudalism. Around such a cultural background, Hu chose to omit this part, in order to cater to the revolution. Wang and Ma didn't need to have the same trouble, so they translated this part fully. The two versions show that the social status, or the ideological element, decides the choice of the translation.

Another typical example is about the description of pornography. Hu emitted this part, but Wang and Ma translated it directly.

Example 2:

Each night he went in and each night again he was the country fellow who knew nothing, for her signal of laughter, and then fevered, filled with a sickened hunger, he followed slavishly, bit by bit, her unfolding, until the moment of crisis, when, like a flower that is ripe for plucking, she was willing that he should grasp her wholly.[5]

Hu: omitted [6]

Wang and Ma:

每天夜里他都进去，而且每天夜里他都是个什么都不知的乡下人——在门口颤抖，不自然地坐在她的身旁，等着她发出笑声的信号，然后全身发热，欲火难耐，顺从地一点点解开她的衣服，直到关键时刻，她像一朵绽开的鲜花等着采摘，愿意让他把她整个吞没。[7]

Wang and Ma's translation directly rendered such descriptions. All these are due to the dominant ideology of their times. Just as we stated above, ideology is the top factor, which influences the other two factors: poetics and patronage. Due to the dominant ideology, the dominant poetics varied accordingly. In the 1930s-1940s, the dominant poetics is about the revolutionary text. The Good Earth catered to the current literature system and was accepted by the people. After that, the ideological conflict between the West and China, the dominant poetics was about anti-capitalism or communist literature. That was why The Good Earth was objected by the Chinese culture. Since the reform and opening-up, the open and tolerant culture decided the open poetics, which contributed to the new boom of the translations of The Good Earth.

From the perspective of patronage, we can also explain the difference in the translations. According to Lefevere, critics are one of the patrons. The acceptance of the translations of The Good Earth was influenced by the critics at that time. The Good Earth was criticized by many critics, such as Lu Xun and Hu Feng. The two famous Chinese scholars held that China in The Good Earth was not the real China, which beautified American, which smeared the Chinese. Obviously, the negative comments influenced the translations of this book. However, it should be stated that the dominant ideology is the top factor which has a great effect on the other two factors.

4. Conclusion

From what I mentioned above, we can conclude that the extra-literary factors greatly influenced the translations of literature, which cannot be ignored. The Manipulation Theory can be served as a theoretical foundation for us when we analyze some translations. Based on Lefevere's theory, we can make researches from the three factors: ideology, poetics and patronage. Of course, it should be stated that the influence of these three factors is never absolute, and we cannot expand them unlimitedly. In analyzing translations, the language should not be ignored.

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