

On Ma Junwu's Translation Ethics

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Abstract

At present, while there is a lot of research on Ma Junwu's translation thought and practice, there is not so much research on his translation ethics, because the "translation ethics" has only appeared for more than 40 years. Secondly, Ma Junwu rarely puts forward similar opinions or advocacy. In fact, Ma Junwu always adheres to the translator's responsibilities of justice, integrity, faithfulness and responsibility in translation activities, always puts national interests and social needs in the first place in practice, actively spreads foreign cultures and establishes new Chinese social customs. Relying on the research of translation ethics at home and abroad, we can examine the translation ethics upheld and practiced in Ma Junwu's translation, conduct more in-depth translation research on Ma Junwu, and enrich the research of translation ethics.

Keywords

Translation ethics; Ma Junwu; Equality; Good faith; Loyalty; Responsibility.

1. Introduction

At the beginning of the 20th century, it was not only a critical period for Ma Junwu to make a new political choice, but also a heyday of his continuous writing and fruitful harvest. A close look at his writing and the number of his works shows that Ma Junwu is a key figure in the history of modern translation in China, and his translation practice has left an indelible impression on future generations. In recent years, there are many domestic scholars who have carried out various studies on Ma Junwu's translation, including discussing the translator's subjectivity, the author's intention and text, and the political consciousness of Ma's material selection (TU Guoyuan, 2015; Li Hongtu, 2020; Hu Donglin, 2018), as well as discussing the patriotism of his translation, the important role of spreading new ideas and transforming traditional culture (Hu Quanzhang, 2015; Li Yang, 2015). These discussions have laid a foundation for the further study of Ma Junwu's translation, however there are not many studies involving Ma Junwu's translation ethics, and as a new point of view in translation theory research in recent years, "translation ethics" often serves as a topic discussed by translation scholars.

2. Translation Ethics

Due to the transformation from translation studies to the moral level, translation ethics has begun to attract the attention of translation scholars at home and abroad. Western scholars believe that ethics can be used to distinguish good and evil, right and wrong, responsibility and obligation (Thrioux & Kraseman; kraseman, 2011). Translation ethics points out that translators should be responsible for their own translations, and the future translation industry should strive a balance between professional ethics and personal moral beliefs. Domestic scholars believe that translation ethics is a moral principle that translators need to follow in their translation activities (Xu Hong, 2012). Translation ethics here refers to the moral norms

in cross-cultural communication, rather than theoretical system in the sense of discipline. Domestic scholars not only carry out translation ethics research on the macro cultural level and communication strategies, but also make requirements on the micro level of translator's responsibilities and norms of translation behavior. Translation ethics can be studied from the perspectives of personal and professional ethics of translators, honesty and faithfulness in translation. Whether studying translation ethics from the macro or micro level, the focus is still to explore the translator's responsibilities and norms of translation behavior. Translation ethics not only provides a new perspective for translation studies, but also establishes a theoretical framework for exploring Ma Junwu's ethics in translation.

Ma Junwu's consciousness of translation ethics began in the Neo Confucianism period of the late Qing Dynasty, at that time China had witnessed long-standing shortcomings and was deeply imprisoned by feudal autocracy. Faced with the severe challenges of abandoning stupid and backward social habits as well as rebuilding its own culture, Ma Junwu practiced and implemented the concepts of justice, integrity, loyalty and responsibility of translation ethics in his translation practice.

3. View of Justice

"Justice" first appears in *Xunzi*: "The lack of learning and justice but pursuit for prosperity is also a practice for vulgar." This concept originates from the concept of equality in primitive society and expresses the positive description and judgment of (class) code of conduct. Justice is not only an affirmation of the norms of human behavior, but also the basic requirement of social morality. When we are doing translation activities, the concept of justice is an important principle in translation ethics that we should obey. Ma Junwu's view of justice in translation is embodied in bravely pointing out the decadent system and inequality that existed at that time.

Ma Junwu's view of justice is first reflected in his adherence to the justice of the country and the nation, aiming to seek a fair, just and reasonable social order. He witnessed the sad performance of China in the context of national crisis, and clearly realized that the evil of "people's inner minds" is the root of the cultural crisis, and the cultural crisis is the root of the Chinese national crisis. He hopes to inspire and enlighten the people through literary works, and try to change those crises.

In 1905, China officially established the Chinese Revolutionary League. At the conference, Ma Jun Wu united with Manchu to oppose the government. Ma made it clear that they opposed the traitorous Manchurian government, not the innocent Manchu people. If Manchu people with similar aspirations wanted to join, they also welcomed them. It was because Ma Junwu and the participants had a sense of justice that they were able to choose the right path for China's modern democratic revolution. It was also during this period that Ma Junwu published dozens of articles attacking the shortcomings of the society at that time, translating and introducing new western learning methods and opening up the wisdom of the people. Ma Junwu did not choose to stand idly by in the face of the autocracy of the monarchy causing the weakness of the country and the decline of the people. In the context of the abundant literature works in the Qing Dynasty, Ma Junwu hastily translated the *Histoire mondiale de la France* and advocated freedom, equality and fraternity. In order to change the stereotype of autocratic countries that people are servants of king; females are servants of males, Ma Junwu translated *the Rights of Women* by the British sociologist Spencer, and translated Mill's *Females' Oppression Theory*, depicting the declaration and proposition that male and female had equal rights. Ma Junwu also translated *the Principles of the Republic*, depicting the folly and pity of safeguarding the monarchy, exposing the suffering of the French people trapped in the tyranny, thus launching the education for the Chinese people of pursuing freedom and equality and resisting injustice.

Ma Junwu's criticism of autocratic state power and feudal ethics was the embodiment of his view of justice, which was a rare theory of inspiring people at that time.

4. View of Good Faith

Honesty is a basic moral code generated by people's daily behavior and formal communication. The basic connotation of honesty is to abide by promises, keep promises and be free from deception. It requires people to follow the principles of keeping promises when getting along with others. Translation ethics requires the translator to be honest when engaging in translation activities. The translator has formed an ethical relationship of honesty with the original author and the target readers since he has accepted the translation task. Once the translator abandons the principle of good faith, the translation cooperation will come to an abrupt end. Ma Junwu has always adhered to the view of good faith in his translation career, which is reflected in his honesty to the political needs of society and the translator's foreign language level.

4.1. Be Faithful to the Political Needs of Society

Confined by feudal despotism, to successfully establish the republican system, we must spread and establish the idea of freedom and equality. The spread of new ideas is a great impact on traditional ideas. To let Chinese people better understand the modern theory of freedom, Ma Junwu specially translated *On Liberty* written by the British scholar Mill. In the process of translating the book, Ma Junwu points out the current shortcomings of our country. In the part of translating national power, he points out that "the weak people in the country are like insects and birds, while the tyrants and corrupt officials are like beasts and hungry birds", which coincided with the tragic situation of our country at that time. During the translation activity, the translator should be sincere and serve the society. In the part of the law of limiting monarchy, he points out that "the hero of patriotism starts a revolution, which is called being able to love and protect freedom". Ma's translation of *On Liberty* in China's political and moral reform is like a mirror, alerting the world to attach importance to moral transformation and creating a new national spirit. In addition, Ma Junwu's translation of *On Liberty* also involves the freedom of religious belief, freedom of thought, speech, publication, career choice and other freedom concepts. He also points out that the constraints of established customs on the thoughts of Chinese people. It can be seen that reforming morality and opening up new trends have always been the main line through the selection of materials for Ma Junwu's translation, and it is a kind of behavior sincere to the social and political needs of the time to arouse the attention of the world to the transformation of national inferiority through the translation of relevant works.

4.2. Be Faithful to Translator's Foreign Languages Level

The view of good faith in translation ethics requires translators to have the professional quality of "morality and faith", so translators must be honest with their foreign languages ability when carrying out translation activities. For individual translators, the foreign languages they master and their proficiency leave various impacts on translation. Translators' language ability is related to their translation ability, and good foreign language skills are the key. After returning from Japan, Ma Junwu was welcomed by the Qing government for joining Sun Yat Sen's anti-Qing revolution. In order to protect himself, he had to go abroad again. It was at this time that Ma Junwu came to Technical University of Berlin in Germany to study and became the first person in modern China to obtain a German doctorate. During his study in Germany, Ma Junwu formed systematic knowledge and progressive democratic thought, which laid a good foundation for his translation of the German poet Goethe's *Mignon* and *the Song of Armin*. Subsequently, Ma Junwu kept on writing and compiled the *Dehua Dictionary*, which can be

regarded as the leading reference book of modern German and Chinese. In the preface of the *Dehua Dictionary*, he once stated that the original intention of his translation was to facilitate more intellectuals studying in Germany, and also provide a way for compatriots in the motherland to understand German culture and learn German. Ma Junwu wrote the *Dehua Dictionary* out of the translator's integrity ethics. Because he has accumulated a profound language foundation in Germany, Ma Junwu was able to write the dictionary boldly.

5. View of Loyalty

Loyalty is another category of ethical research. Although translation theories and standards differ in content and form, translation theorists such as Nida and Newmark cannot do translation without loyalty. However, translators in our country pay attention to faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance, as well as spiritual similarity and incarnation. Almost all of these principles take loyalty as the primary standard. The principle of faithfulness in the concept of ethics does not mean the complete equivalence in the formation of two languages, but is embodied by all translation subjects in the process of translation. The concept of faithfulness includes loyalty to the target language readers.

Ma Junwu believes that the primary purpose of translating foreign literature is to introduce foreign new ideas and cultures to meet the needs of readers. Ma Junwu's rewriting in the translation of Byron's *the Isles of Greece*, *the Song of the Shirt*, or Mill's *On Liberty* shows that there are many creative rebellions in Ma Junwu's translation in ways that implant his own political intentions and fully demonstrate the translator's subjectivity. This seems to violate the traditional view of ethical loyalty and practice, while Huang Qin and Liu Honghua (2016) put forward the "loyalty rebellion" that to achieve a greater degree of loyalty, it is necessary to rebel against part of the content of the original text, which is a more loyal approach to the target readers. To a large extent, rebellion and loyalty are in dialectical unity. Although Ma Junwu added to the translation of *On Liberty* the information that "he can't bear the danger of his own country and the difficulties of living people" and other information that is not in the original text, local rebellion may not have an impact on the overall loyalty, and his thought of transmitting the freedom consciousness of the original text has never changed on the whole. Even though Ma Junwu didn't achieve complete equivalence in language information and adopt quaint wording in form when translating and introducing *On Liberty*, Ma Junwu completed the requirements of expression and introduced and disseminated the essence of freedom to the Chinese people, which can be regarded as being loyal to the target language readers. Being loyal to readers is a truth-seeking and pragmatic translation view. Ma Junwu determines the level of the text according to the level of the reader and chooses different languages in translation, but this does not mean that he blindly caters to and pleases the public. He is more concerned with how to benefit the public. He divided readers into three categories: one is well-educated groups; The second kind of readers are generally educated and barely able to read; The last category is readers who are basically illiterate and do not have reading ability. He believes that different types and levels of books should be provided for readers with different levels of education. In addition, the pragmatic effect of Ma Junwu's translation is very good. His use of passionate and concise words such as "public enemy of the people" can better arouse readers' empathy, and it is easier to integrate into public discourse. Ma Junwu's translation of *On Liberty* in the above-mentioned additions and changes in form is to combine with the actual situation of our country, based on the education level of Chinese readers at that time and the anti-Qing political context, to clarify the means that patriots need to take to defend freedom. Ma Junwu's translation is also a way to keep the charm of the original while making the translation more authentic and smooth and in line with the norms of the target language.

6. View of Responsibility

“Responsibility ethics” was first proposed by German sociologist Max Weber. After the 20th century, western ethics fields published several works on responsibility ethics, and then “responsibility” was extended to the field of translation. In China, the Confucian thinker Lu Jiuyuan also put forward the idea of “responsibility ethics”, which means responsibility and mission. Ma Junwu has always followed the thought of responsibility and morality in traditional ethics in his translation practice. He has always adhered to the following three original intentions in his translation practice: to open up the wisdom of the people and spread the culture of the other as well as spread other culture.

6.1. To Open Up the Wisdom of the People

In the late Qing Dynasty, the Chinese nation was on the verge of national subjugation. The government did not act, and the people lived in confusion. At this time, someone needed to stand up. Ma Junwu was increasingly aware of the importance of translating and introducing excellent foreign works. Such translations not only helped to improve the spiritual outlook of Chinese people, but also their powerfully cultural and political functions can improve the social thought at that time. Ma Junwu, who returned from studying abroad, spread new western learning with his unique insights. In addition to exploring and showing the realistic way to save the country and the people, he also wanted to introduce the Chinese people to the methods of understanding the world and the blueprint of human development. Therefore, Ma Junwu translated and introduced the basic principles of modern western philosophy, sociology and natural science. He believed that the new civilization of Western Europe should be imported to save the nation from subjugation and survive. Ma Junwu also added in the translation preface of the Social Contract Theory that “he is eager to translate the world famous works to China as much as possible”. This shows that his determination to import a new civilization of democracy and science has inspired generations of social heroes. Ma Junwu also selected some frustrated national literary works to translate so that Chinese readers can feel the pain they have experienced, so as to find a way to save the country by literature, thus helping China out of difficulties at that time. Ma Junwu is also an advocate of the poetic revolution. In his poem *Ji Nan She Tong Ren*, he said that only by taking pains to March bravely, can he make a big stride. This is exactly a vivid portrayal of his wise and diligent efforts to open up the wisdom of the people.

6.2. Meet the Needs of Readers

The translator is an important subject of translation activities, and should meet the readers’ reading expectations, which is the greatest respect for readers. Respecting readers’ needs is the key to the success of translation, and it is also an ethical requirement to be responsible to readers.

Ma Junwu expressed his strong patriotic feelings in the translation of *the Isles of Greece*, which also reflected the ideas different from Chinese tradition. He directly transliterated the elusive names of people and places, aiming at the general public. For ordinary readers at that time, it was difficult to read and understand the translation. Naturally, it was difficult to resonate, let alone propagate and remember. However, it is biased to criticize Ma Junwu for not taking into account the expectations of readers. He once said that when I studied in Germany, I had a hope that literature could change temperament and transform society. In introducing foreign new literature, we needed three things, first learn, second capital, and third readers. And we needed to pay attention to reader the most. It can be seen that Ma Junwu always pays attention to readers and meets their needs, which reflects his sense of responsibility to readers. Ma Junwu, in order to meet the needs of readers in translation, give full consideration to readers’ reading

ability and reading expectations, try to introduce foreign cultures, expand readers' knowledge, and bring a sense different from Chinese readers' own language and culture.

6.3. Spread Other Culture

Spreading foreign cultures to target language readers is an important purpose of translation, which greatly promotes the communication and exchange between different cultures and nations. In addition to improving their own knowledge and cultural level, translators also need to boast a certain degree of cultural self-confidence and cultural consciousness, absorb the essence of other culture, and carry forward China's excellent traditional culture.

Ma Junwu was deeply aware of the seriousness of the national crisis, so he turned to the west to find a way to save the country, spread western democratic ideas, and wanted to change China's decadent state and social system by introducing the theory of freedom and equality. Although the fruits of the revolution of 1911 were finally stolen by Yuan Shikai, Ma Junwu's translation awakened countless Chinese people to join the struggle for a new life. Every translation of Ma Junwu has its own political purpose. He often expressed his thoughts and opinions by translating the works of famous western thinkers. Part of the consciousness of Chinese traditional culture came from the reference and comparison of the western culture. thanks to Ma Junwu's diligent work, he introduced the western advanced culture and democratic thought to the people, so China's anti-imperialist and anti-feudal movement was able to take a big step forward.

7. Conclusion

Based on the research of translation ethics at home and abroad and combined with Ma Junwu's practice, the author discusses the translation ethics formed in Ma's translation activities. Ma Junwu upholds the views of justice, integrity, loyalty and responsibility in translation ethics, translates Western civilization to China, builds a bridge of communication via translation, thus waking up the sleeping Chinese people and revitalizing the Chinese national spirit. With the changes of social life, the problems on the ethical level are also changing with ever-changing day. The ready-made translation ethics can not solve all the practical ethical problems in translation, which requires us to explore and study more deeply. Therefore, the author hopes that this paper can attract more scholars' attention to study the translation ethics of Chinese translators, thus enriching the research in this field.

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