
Third Wave of Globalization: Thirty Years' Influence of Western Theories on Chinese Translation Studies

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Abstract:

Based on articles published in major Chinese journals in the past 30 years (from 1980 to 2009) of China's reform and opening up, this article divides the influence of western theories on the development of Chinese translation studies into 3 periods, i.e.: transition, adjustment and prosperity. The influence of Western translation theories on Chinese translation studies and the attitudes of Chinese translation circle towards Western theories are statistically analyzed with charts and diagrams for over 5,000 articles.

Key Words: Globalization, Chinese translation studies, Western translation theory, Influence

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Globalization has, in its modern sense, undergone 3 phases:

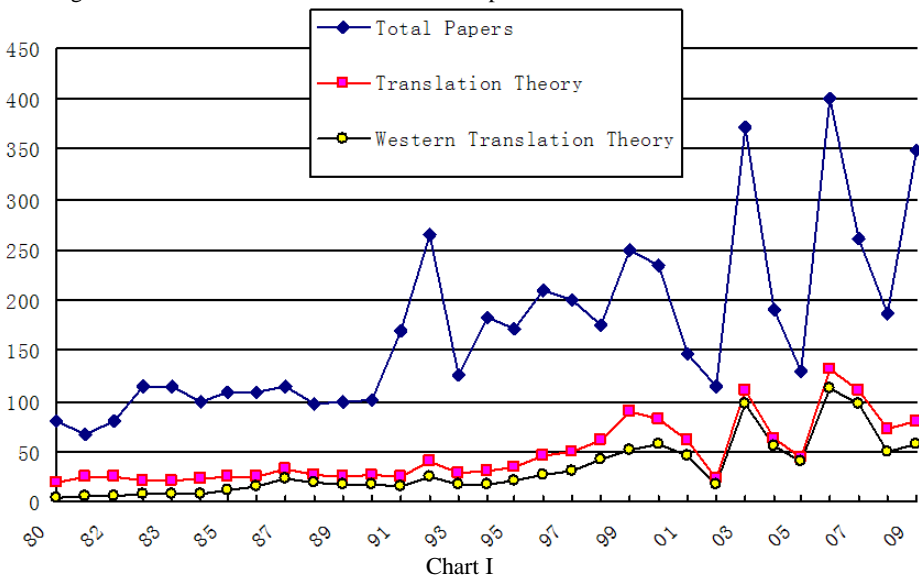
Phase I started when Europeans ventured into the world, pioneered by the voyages of Christopher Columbus in 1492 and Vasco da Gama in 1497-1498, characterized by international trade between Europe and other parts of the world.

Phase II started at the end of the 19th century till the 1980s, when America became the superpower in the world, characterized by the three Ms: mass production, mass communication and mass consumption.

Phase III started in the 1980s, characterized by the revolution of IT which has created an information super highway, integrating the whole globalization system into the Web. (Ho, 2004:95-97; Wang Ning and Sun Yifeng, 2008:16)

It is this third phase that has caused drastic changes to translation and its studies in China.

Since the policy of reform and opening-up in late 1970s, numerous western translation theories have poured into China and imposed great influence on Chinese translation studies. This research is based on 5207 papers on translation studies published in the key journals and parts of journals adopted by CSSCI in China from 1980 to 2009, namely *Chinese Translators' Journal*, *Chinese Science & Technology Translators Journal*, *Shanghai Journal of Translators for Science and Technology*, *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, *Foreign Languages and Their Teaching*, *Foreign Language World*, *Journal of Foreign Languages*, *Modern Foreign Languages*, *Foreign Language Research*, *Journal of Sichuan International Studies University*, *Foreign Language Education* and *Journal of PLA University of Foreign Languages*. The diagram below is drawn to describe the development of Chinese translation studies.



Notes: "Total paper" refers to papers published on translation studies; "Translation theory" refers to papers on translation theory in particular and "Western Translation Theory" refers to articles related to western translation theories..

The above chart indicates that the number of the paper on translation keeps on rising generally, although it has its ups and downs. The causes of translation studies in China are analyzed as follows.

1. TRANSLATION STUDIES IN 1980S

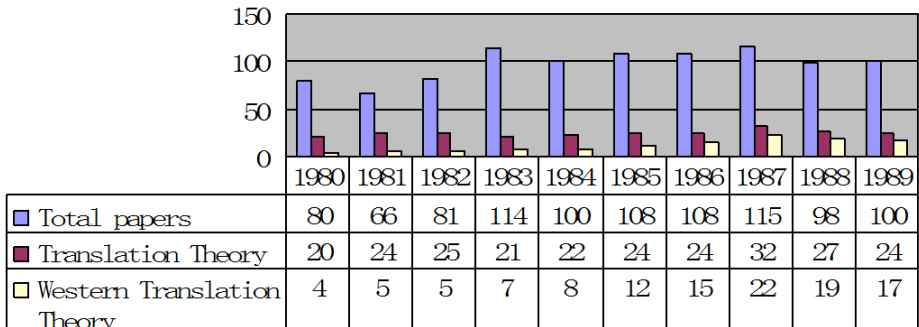


Chart II

It is a period of transition for Chinese translation studies in 1980s. As shown in Chart II, papers on western translation theory kept on rising and as a watershed, it went beyond half of the total papers on translation in China after 1985.

Traditional translation theories had overwhelming dominance in Chinese translation studies before 1985, which were generalized by Chinese scholar Luo Xinzhang as "From 'following the source text closely' (案本), to 'faithfulness' (求信), to 'spirit resemblance' (神似), and to 'sublimation' (化境)" (Luo Xinzhang, 1984). In the journals, "Spirit and form resemblance" (神似和形似), "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance" (信达雅), and "literal translation and free translation" are the hot key words at this period, as it was published in *On Spirits resemblance* (Liu Yingkai, 1983), *Spirit Resemblance in Form Resemblance* (Xu Shenghuan, 1984), *A New Interpretation of "Elegance"* (Lao Long, 1984), and *Literal Translation and Free Translation in the Translation of Scientific Materials* (Dong Shiliang, 1984). Likewise, the object of the study focused on Chinese translators mainly. And the methods were usually drawn from the writers' experience and instinct.

However, the western translation appeared in Chinese translation circles sporadically. The publication of *Brief Introduction to Nida's Translation Theory* by Lin Shuwu (1981) marked the beginning of the introduction of western linguistics-oriented translation theory into China.

Since then, Chinese scholars started to learn from the western translation theory, which helped Chinese translation studies march to modernization (Li Linbo, 2007:11).

After 1985, the study of western translation theory outnumbered that of traditional Chinese translation theory and increased year by year, which made a change for Chinese translation studies. Out of many western translation theories, Nida's is the most popular. From 1980 to 1989, there are 27 papers on Nida's translation theory, accounting for 27% of the total paper on translation studies. Tan Zaixi, Jin Di, and Lao Long were pioneers, who played important roles in the introduction of Nida's translation theory. Meanwhile, Chomsky's linguistic theory, which was applied to translation studies by Nida, together with Peter Newmark's, Georges Mounin's, Barkhudarov's and J. C. Catford's translation theories all drew wide attention from Chinese translators during this time.

It was after 1985, four or five years after western translation theories were introduced that translation studies transformed greatly. Before 1985, the traditional Chinese translation theory was the mainstream in China. The interception of the western translation made a change. While learning from western theories and criticizing and inheriting tradition, modern translation studies evolved gradually. In other words, the previous mainstream was doubted and denied and the models and principles disassembled. The translation studies were struck by a new force, and then new principles were established. Divorcing the traditional model became a trend. It was the transitional period for translation studies in China. The new goal was to establish a linguistic mode based on western modern linguistics and western linguistic theories of translation. Afterwards, translation studies based on linguistics became the mainstream in China. New approaches and features, different from those of western translation theories, came into being. In the last two decades of the 20th century, the direction of the new mainstream was made clearer by a deeper and wider range of researches. (Li Linbo, 2007:12)

In general, the major features of the translation studies in China in 1980s can be summarized as follows:

1. In number, linguistics-oriented translation studies grew gradually, and replaced traditional Chinese translation studies as a dominating strength eventually. The previous translation studies, which were deduced from the translator's experience or comprehension, decreased gradually. Despite it developed vigorously, western translation theories also met with suspicion at the end of 1980s. For instance, it is said "Translation based on the core sentence is not feasible" (Lao Long, 1988), "The dynamic equivalence aims to arouse the same reaction from the readers of the target text as those of the source text, but the absolute equivalence does not exist at all." (Zheng Weibo, 1988), and "Translation should be evaluated by the reader's reaction, advocated in the dynamic equivalence, which is not only harmful but also unapplicable." (Qian Linsheng, 1988)

2. In form, western theories were imported in the form of brief introductions, summaries or direct translations, for example, “*On Practical Translation--A Brief Introduction to H. Kashkin’s Translation Theory*”(Cai Yi, 1983), “*The Process of Translation--A Brief Introduction to Eugene A. Nida’s Translation Theory*”(Qiu Maoru, 1984), and “*A summary of Anna Linova’s Translation Theory*”(Hu Zhen, 1988).

3. In content, at the beginning of 1980s, many of the imported translation theories were greatly influenced by Marxism and the translation studies in China focused on Soviet translation theories and on Russian-Chinese translation. For example, “*Marx and Engels’ View on Translation*” (Lin Fang, 1983), “*Dialectics in Translation*”(Chen Tingyou, 1983), and “*On Practical Translation--A Brief Introduction to H. Kashkin’s Translation Theory*”(Cai Yi, 1983)

To be scientific and rational in research is the motivation of the turn of translation studies in China in 1980s. The scientific, analytical and systematic method of translation studies, upheld by the western translators such as Newmark and Nida, makes Chinese scholar realize the weakness of arbitrariness and subjectivity of Chinese traditional translation studies, which mainly relied on the translators experience and instinct. “The reason why Chinese translation studies made little improvement is because the translation studies has not been approached from linguistics.” (Guo Zhuzhang, 1987) The influence of the western translation theory on Chinese translation studies can also be reflected in the reception of Nida’s translation theory in China. It is stated that “The analysis on the sentence structure, advocated in Nida’s linguistic-oriented translation theory, removed the long standing mystery of Chinese traditional translation theory, brought a scientific method of research in, steered us away from the subjectivity to the objectivity, and turned previous abstruse translation studies into a systematic and regular activity.” (Lv Jun, 2001)

2. TRANSLATION STUDIES IN 1990S

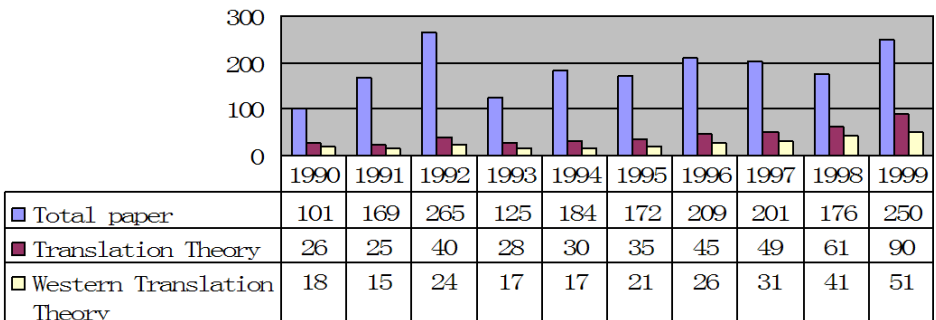


Chart III

Chinese translation studies witnessed a phase of adjustment in 1990s. Western translation theory met with suspicion and its introduction into China balked from 1990 to 1994.

At the beginning of 1990s, the linguistics-oriented translation studies gradually found its way into the mainstream of translation studies in China. On the one hand, the branches of the linguistics such as social linguistics, pragmatics and comparative linguistics, were widely applied to translation studies such as *Social linguistics and Translation* (Chen Zhonghua, 1991), *English-Chinese/Chinese-English Translation and Pragmatics* (He Ziran, 1992), and *Comparative Linguistics and Translation* (Fang Mengzhi, 1993). On the other hand, the limitation of linguistics-oriented translation came to light and faced with challenge.

The translation literary school, represented by traditional Chinese translation studies, gathered its strength from 1990 to 1994. Traditional theories were studied in new perspectives. For example, “*What is the Character of the Argument between Literal Translation and Free Translation?*”(Li Quan’an, 1990), “*On Similarity in Spirit and Similarity in Form*”(Sun Zhili, 1992), and “*On ‘Elegance’--Resonance with ‘Faithfulness, Expressiveness, and Closeness’ after Rereading The Preface to the Translation of Evolution and Ethics*”(Liu Luoyi, 1994). Thoughts of some great Chinese translators as Lu Xun, Bian Zhilin, Kang Youwei, Zhou Taofen, Liang Shiqiu, Xiao Qian on translation were reviewed and summed up. Meanwhile, the cultural school of translation became popular as well. The book *Translation, History & Culture: A Sourcebook*, edited by Bassnett and Lefevere (1990) aroused great interest in cultural approach to translation studies among Chinese scholars. From then on, many researches and discussions on translation were conducted from the perspective of culture in China, including *Culture, Language and Translation* (Liu Zhongde, 1992), *Three Points on Culture and Translation* (Wang Bingqin, 1992), and *The Cultural Meaning of Words and Their Translation* (Feng Yuly, 1993).

From 1995 to 1999, the linguistic school of translation studies was challenged by the translation literary school and translation cultural school. The criticism and reflection on the translation studies were the keynotes in the translation circle of China during this time.

Firstly, people from translation literary school were dissatisfied with the linguistic-oriented study. The Chinese scholar Mu Lei (1995) noted the linguistics-oriented translation studies, based on the exchange of the western language, was reasonable and inspiring to some degree, but it ignored the aesthetics of translation so that it could not cover the recreation, the history of translation and the relationship of literature of different nations in translation. So, she claimed to study translation from the view of comparative literature and establish the literary school of translation. In retrospect, Li Linbo (2007) stated that the crucial mistakes of the linguistic-oriented translation studies were taking the problem of art as the ones of language and regarding the problems of aesthetics as the ones of logics in translation.

Secondly, the linguistic school was also challenged by cultural school of translation. Zhang Nanfeng (1995) cited Holmes’ and Snell-Hornby’s words and said: “The linguistics-oriented translation studies have gone to a dead end, because it only focused on the difference and the transference of languages. Although the study contained the rules for the transference of the

mode, the part of speech, and the addition and the omission of the words between the source language and the target language, it evaded the very important problems of culture, the motivation and the purpose of the translation studies.” The above statement hit the nail on the head and echoed by many Chinese scholars.

The review and rethinking on translation studies climbed up to the climax in 1999 and the number of papers on this topic are 15, occupying 17% of the whole through the year. Although it is the period of adjustment for translation studies in 1990s, the introduction of the western translation theory never stopped.

Translation studies in China was characterized by the following aspects from 1990 to 1999:

1. Chinese translation studies almost kept abreast with that of the western world, i.e.: western translation theories were introduced into China simultaneously. Chinese translation studies almost synchronized with that of the western world, such as *Peter Newmark's New Translation Ideas* (Yang Shichao, 1998), and *Western Translation Theories in Recent Decade* (Jiang Xiaohua, 1998).

2. There were more reflection and criticism in the introduction of western translation theory than before, as Chinese scholars gradually were mature enough to make a judgment. The western translation theories, once taken in with little consideration, were selected and criticized now. For example, people realized that “The problems of contemporary translation studies lie in it that Indo-European translation theory was mistakenly regarded as compatible with all languages and the achievements made by the western scholars as Nida, Chomsky and Newmark, are overstated.” (Liu Miqing, 1996) “Some people are too bothered to think twice in their introduction of the western translation theory, which results in the superficial and far-fetched dealing with the new terms. Lack of the new ideas, new perspective and feasible method, the misbehavior cast an undeserved shadow on translation studies.” (Xu Jun, 1997)

3. The comparative study between traditional Chinese translation theory and western translation theory drew people's attention. Several papers were written on this topic, such as *The Comparative Study of Chinese and Western Translation Theory* (Wu Yicheng, 1998), *The Research on the Development of Chinese and Western Translation Theory* (Zhou Yan, 1998), and “*The Similarity between Chinese and Western Translation Theory*” (Tan Zaixi, 1999).

From 1990 to 1999, translation studies in China grew mature, for example people's attitudes towards Nida's translation theory changed from positive to negative. The research collected 60 papers on Nida's translation theory, occupying 14% of the total paper at this period. Just as the Chinese scholar Chen Hongwei (2001) noticed, the criticisms on Nida's translation theory became fiercer from 1990 to 2000 than before. In Chen's words, the dealing with Nida's translation theory, of digesting the theory rather than swallowing it, and criticizing the theory rather than refusing it, showed the maturity of the method of Chinese translation studies.

3. TRANSLATION STUDIES FROM 2000 TO 2009

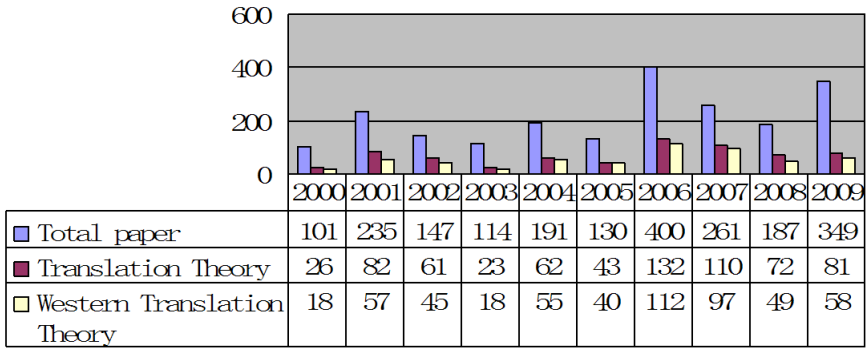


Chart IV

From 2000 to 2009, the translation studies in China saw a period of prosperity. During this period, the number of papers discussing western translation always held a high rate of the total papers. Papers on western translation theory account for 93% of the total in 2005. It seems that an idea cannot be held up without the support of a western translation theory in China.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the limitation of the linguistic-oriented translation theory drove Chinese scholars to take some new approaches to translation studies. In no time, different western translation theories coexisted, complemented and contended with each others in Chinese translation circles at the same time. Zhang Boran and Qin Wenhua (2004) generalized the development of the translation studies in China as: “After the period of stagnation, the researcher’s vision is broadened and it is ripe for a change for Chinese translation studies. Deconstructionism, with the uprising translation schools of culture, manipulation, skopos, hermeneutics and poly-system, swept around the translation studies in China overnight. Mixed with the other disciplines, translation studies turned into an interdisciplinary study. Besides aesthetics and philosophy, semiotics, reception theory, feminism, postmodernism, deconstructionism and new historicism drew much attention and guided the Chinese translation into the area of culture and politics.”

Post-colonialism, feminism, deconstructionism and poly-system are popular approaches to translation studies during this time. And all of them stressed the relationship between culture and translation studies, so they belong to the cultural school of translation studies, which rose against the background of “cultural turn”. “Around 1970s and 1980s, translation studies and cultural study sprang up almost simultaneously, which contributed to the cultural turn in translation studies. Up till 1990s, with the influence of politics, translation studies evolved into a study of post-colonialism and post-imperialism, emphasizing the problems as politics, peoples, races and imperialism.” (Pan Wenguo, 2002)

Empirical research in translation studies became a focus of attention from 2000 to 2009. In 2005, Jiang Qiuxia and Yang Ping (2005) in the article *Taking Stock of the Empirical Approach to Translation Studies* concluded that the empirical research was described as “1. Sample after careful selection; 2. Design of the research process in detail; 3. Data collection and objective analysis; 4. Data—systematic observation—analysis—conclusion”. Many scholars adopted empirical approach to translation studies, such as *Toward Maturity--the “Nida Phenomenon” and China’s Translation Studies* (Chen Hongwei, 2001), *The Empirical Model in Western Translation studies from 1986 to 2006* (Miao Ju, 2006), and *Translation Studies in China during 30 Years from 1978 to 2007* (Xu Jun, Mu Lei, 2009).

The main features of translation studies in the period of prosperity are as follows:

1. Besides linguistics, some other disciplines, such as philosophy, literary theory, psychology, culture, were applied to translation study at this time. Translation studies grew into an interdisciplinary area.
2. Translation studies in China were more rational. The examination of the root, background and the evolution of western translation theory drew widespread attention. Rethinking and summarization on translation studies were seen more frequently in journals, such as *Contemplation on the Approaches to Translation Studies* (Huang Xiling & Sun Yingchun, 2003), *An Ideological Approach to Translation* (Jiang Xiaohua, 2003), *Rethinking the Hermeneutic Approach to Translation Studies* (Geng Qiang, 2006)
3. The comparison between western translation studies and Chinese traditional translation caught people’s eyes. And the Chinese traditional translation theories were reviewed with the help of the western translation theories, such as *Cultural Poly-systematic Approach to Literal Translation and Free Translation* (Zhao Dequan & Ning Zhimin, 2009), *On Fu Lei’s Translation Philosophies: An Eco-translatological Perspective* (Hu Gengshen, 2009) and *An Intertextual Analysis of Lin Yutang’s Orientalism and His Translation* (Wang Shaodi, 2009).
4. The practical function of translation studies drew people’s attention. Many scholars put the translation theory into practice, such as *Impact of Text Translation Concept on Translation Teaching* (Yin Yantong, 2001), *Gestalt Theory and Translation Teaching* (Pan Weimin & Li Wei, 2007), and *A Revelation from the Functionalist Translation Theory to the Pragmatic Translation* (Jia Wenbo, 2007)

And there are still some problems in translation studies from 2000 to 2009, mainly as follows:

1. Lack of creativity. Chinese translation studies learned a lot from western translation theory, but it was too dependent to establish its own school. Chinese translation studies just followed the development of the western translation theory with little originality. (Zhu Jianping, 2004)
2. One-sided view. “The Achilles’ heel of the contemporary translation theory is that almost all of them only revealed one aspect of translation studies or another. None of them could cover

the panorama of the translation studies, just as blind men trying to size up an elephant, each mistaking the part for the whole.” (Xu Jun, 2007)

3. Mystifying translation studies. The flourish of translation theories offered a good chance to coin new terms deliberately in pretence of being learned. “Some papers are so hard to read that they have very few readers. Some translators, who enjoy their career for a fairly long time, are startled at the mystery at first; then turn their backs on them.” (Mao Ronggui, 2003) “Western translation theories enriched Chinese translation studies and nourished the exaggeration tendency in the academic research. Some papers take pride in using some mysterious and obscure new terms rather than solve any practical problems.” (Chen Fukang, 2000:475)

4. CONCLUSION

From 1980 to 2009, Chinese translation studies went through the periods of transition, adjustment and prosperity. The influence of the western translation theory on Chinese translation is undeniable. And the western translation theory experienced from being accepted without discrimination, to being suspected and to being absorbed into Chinese translation studies. However, due to some reasons, Chinese scholars are still suffering from the “aphasia” collectively on the translation studies in the world. And the few publications on translation by Chinese scholars in foreign journals, such as *Meta*, *Target*, *Babel* and *The Translator*, only focus on the traditional translation theories and Chinese translators. It is not clear to most scholars at home and abroad what achievement has been made and to what degree the research has been conducted in Chinese translation studies. So it is worthwhile and meaningful to make a systematic and macroscopical description of translation studies in China for 30 years from 1980 to 2009, with the emphasis on the influence of western translation theories.

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