

A Comparison between John Fryer's and Xu Guangqi's Translation

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Abstract

Both John Fryer and Xu Guangqi were famous translators in China. They translated a lot of books for the behindhand society to change and make progress. Though John Fryer lived in the late Qing Dynasty and Xu Gunagqi was in the late Ming Dynasty, they had a lot of similarities in translating.

Keywords

John Fryer; Xu Guangqi; Translation; Comparison.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. John Fryer

John Fryer, also known as Fu Lanya, was an English sinologist who was first Louis Agassiz Professor of Oriental Languages and Literature at the University of California, Berkeley. He was a professor of English at Tung-Wen College, Peking, China and the head of the Anglo-Chinese School in Shanghai, China, and established the Shanghai Polytechnic and Institute for the Chinese Blind there. John Fryer was a British missionary in the late Qing Dynasty who came to China and was employed by the Translation Department of Kiangnan Arsenal. He has been engaged in the translation work for over 28 years, not only having translated a great deal of Western scientific works into Chinese, but also having contributed greatly to the standardization of the scientific terminology translation.

During the Westernization movement, Fu Lanya, an Englishman, interpreted 113 kinds of scientific works. With the same enthusiasm and dedication as a missionary, he introduced and propagated scientific knowledge to the Chinese people, and was even called the "missionary of science" by the missionaries. He devoted his best years to China. He said, "I've used half of my life to wish that Chinese people could use western culture to enrich their own culture and become wealthy and powerful."

1.2. Xu Guangqi

Xu Guangqi, also known by his baptismal name Paul, was a Chinese agronomist, astronomer, mathematician, politician, and writer during the Ming dynasty. Xu was a colleague and collaborator of the Italian Jesuits Matteo Ricci and Sabatino de Ursis and assisted their translation of several classic Western texts into Chinese, including part of *Euclid's Elements*. He was also the author of the *Nong Zheng Quan Shu*, a treatise on agriculture. He was one of the "Three Pillars of Chinese Catholicism". The Roman Catholic Church considers him a Servant of God. On April 15, 2011, Vatican spokesman Federico Lombardi announced the beatification of Xu Guangqi.

Born in Shanghai, Xu passed the first level of civil service examinations at the age of nineteen, and the highest level in 1904. He spent the majority of his time in positions of high office serving the Ming court. Xu was greatly interested in the European technology, geography, astronomy

and mathematics. Xu collaborated with Matteo Ricci on the translation of several classic Western texts into Chinese, as well as several Chinese Confucian texts into Latin. Xu Guangqi became the first native of China to publish translations of European books into Chinese. Together, Xu and Ricci translated books on mathematics, hydraulics, and geography. In 1607, they translated the first six books of *Euclid's Elements*, using the Latin commentary on Euclid's Elements first published by Clavius in 1574. Ricci would explain the contents of the original text to Xu Guangqi, who would then write down what he understood. Chinese scholars credit Xu as having "started China's enlightenment."

2. JOHN FRYER'S AND XU GUANGQI'S TRANSLATION IDEAS AND PRINCIPLES

Both John Fryer and Xu Guangqi were famous translators in China. They translated a lot of books for the behindhand society to change and make progress. Though John Fryer lived in the late Qing Dynasty and Xu Gunagqi was in the late Ming Dynasty, they had a lot of similarities in translating.

2.1. John Fryer's Translation Ideas and Principles

2.1.1 Three Basic Principles

John advocated that a good translator should follow three basic principles in translating, especially doing the translation of scientific works. He also used these principles to restrain himself while doing the translation work.

First, the translator should know well about the work being translated. Only if the translator know well about the original text, could he/she express the meaning in target language clearly. While John was doing translation about scientific works, he also spared no efforts to learn about science. He believed that the logic and accuracy in the science is very important. If he could know well about the science, then his understanding about science could help him to polish his translation. For example, if a concept is difficult to express in target language but the translator could understand the concept in source language, and then the translator's understanding in source language could help to translator in a more appropriate way. The translator understand the source text more accurately, the translation will become more expressive.

Secondly, the translator should be very familiar about the language that he/she may use in the translating process. That's why John Fryer would like to ask a Chinese people to help him do the translation. Though John was very good at Chinese and could speak Chinese very fluently, he still advocated that a work should be translated by two people with different language background. That's a good way for the translator to improve the quality of the translation and correct any mistakes without delay.

Thirdly, the translator should strive for accuracy in translation. Most of John Fryer's translation works are about science. Scientific knowledge is objective. Scientific knowledge relies heavily, but not entirely, on observation, experimental evidence, rational arguments and scepticism. So does the translation works of scientific knowledge. Therefore, it's very reasonable to set up this principle for the translator.

2.1.2 Suggestions for Chinese Translators

John Fryer came to China in late Qing Dynasty. During much of that time, China was the single, undisputed superpower in East Asia, with neighboring lands such as Korea, Vietnam, and an often-reluctant Japan trailing in its cultural wake. And he knew China need to learn new things to make the country become stronger. Improving science and technology strength seemed to be one of the best ways to improve a country. Therefore, unlike other foreign missionaries to spread Christian culture, John helped Chinese people to translate scientific works.

From John Fryer's point of view, the Chinese translators should be proficient in Chinese as Chinese is the mother tongue of Chinese people. They should know well about the construction, history and even roots of Chinese. Only in this way could the Chinese translator use Chinese accurately to express new ideas. Also, only in this way could the translation win more people's attention and create larger influence in the society as people are more easy to accept the knowledge that they could understand.

At the same time, if the Chinese translator is doing translation about science, then he/she should know well about the existed scientific terminology in the first place and put forward new terminology to translate western scientific knowledge. If the terminology was made consistent, the relative works could be accepted better by people.

Last but not least, John Fryer advocated that translators should often communicate with each other and change ideas in order to improve the translation quality. Also, he agreed with the idea that the translators should change ideas with the author so that puzzles could be solved during the communicating process, which will help to reduce mistakes and misunderstandings in the translation.

2.1.3 Methods in Translating Scientific Terminology

John Fryer has helped Chinese people translate a lot of scientific works in the history. Here are some methods he usually use in translating scientific terminology. The methods could mainly be divided into two kinds. One is using the existed Chinese words to translate new words while another one is creating new words to meet the requirements of translating. As for the first one, translator could collect nouns translated by missionaries or ask whether businessmen have new expressions about them. As for the second one, the translator could create new words with the help of transliteration by adding new meanings to them. Or use Chinese characters which are seldom used to create pictophonetic characters

2.2. Xu Guangqi's Translation Ideas and Principles

Xu Guangqi was the first native of China to publish translations of European books into Chinese. He was the reason the church was founded in Shanghai, he was the collaborator on translation projects with Ricci and he was a significant protector of the early church. Without Xu, there would have been no Chinese Catholic church, certainly not as it is known today. He met a lot of missionaries in Guangdong province and learned English with them. After becoming acquainted with Ricci, he started to translate western works with him, especially mathematics.

2.2.1 Xu's Attitude towards Translation

Xu attached great importance in translation because he found that China was starting to fall behind other countries. By translating western culture, China can learn new things from it and make use of good ideas to improve China's situation. As for translation works, he preferred to choose scientific works. He was the first one to extend translation areas from religion and literature into science and technology. At the same time, he believed that we should pay attention to moral cultivation as well as scientific knowledge. Though in order to save China, there were a lot of things worth being translated, we should start from the most urgent ones. He also advocated that we should cooperate with foreign people to do the translation and the subject of the translation should be foreigners instead of Chinese people. The ultimate aim of translation should be like this: make our own progress by making use of translation works and try to surpass other countries.

2.2.2 Xu's Methods in Translation

Xu Guangqi was very confident about Chinese culture. Localization was a method he usually used. When doing translation about mathematics, he preferred to use “甲乙丙丁” in Chinese to translate “ABCD” in English so that the target readers could accept the knowledge more easily. He advocated that the core strategy in translation career should be “translating, integrating and

exceeding". Translating is the measure, while integrating is the bridge and exceeding is the target.

2.3. A Comparison between John Fryer's and Xu Guangqi's Translation Ideas

2.3.1 Similarities

Both John Fryer and Xu Guangqi had a partner to do the translation together. On the one hand, they can solve difficulties together during the translation process. On the other hand, they can make up for the deficiency of language. For example, if the source language is difficult to understand, then the partner could help them to understand it in a better way. If their partner had difficulty in expressing new ideas in Chinese, then they could help the partner to find appropriate expressions in Chinese.

They all preferred to translate works about science. Both of them thought if China wanted to make progress and became powerful, advancing science and technology was one of the best ways. Their original thinking about translation was also the same which is to help China become more powerful.

2.3.2 Differences

While Xu Guangqi was doing the translation of western books, he also attached great importance in China's own culture, especially the Confucianism. He thought our own culture had its own advantages and we should make good use of it. Technology was surely important, but the mindset and spirits of a nation were also important. But John Fryer didn't emphasize the importance of Confucianism as his focus was on how to help Chinese people to save their own country by making use of western culture.

While doing the translation, John Fryer preferred to create new words by Chinese. But we can't find this characteristic on Xu Guangqi. Most of John's translation was about science which was exactly China's disadvantage. China used to pay much attention to literature instead of science or mathematics. The knowledge of this kind is not enough to explain new ideas from western. Therefore, John's creating method was very useful. As John came to China in the late Qing Dynasty while Xu was in Ming Dynasty, John knew a lot about Xu Guangqi's translation, therefore, John's translation was improved on the bases of Xu's.

3. CONCLUSION

Both John Fryer and Xu Guangqi has achieved a lot in the translation and helped China to become powerful by translating western culture. Though they were in different dynasties, they had many similarities in translation. For example, both of them had a partner in translating. They all have serious attitude in the translation of scientific works. And both of them agreed that Chinese and English were equal and could be translated. We should learn from their attitude and methods in translation so that we could make more contributions to China, even to the world.

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