

A Study of Lin Zexu's translation activities in the Late Qing Dynasty

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Abstract: Translation activities in different periods are part and parcel of the whole history of translation and play a pivotal role in the development of translation. The author will study Lin Zexu's translation activities in the late Qing dynasty that involves three main fields in translation, including western journal, western books and foreign affairs. The study of Lin's translation activities focuses on the period, at the height of Lin's translation activities, of banning the opium trade in Guangdong. Therefore, the author will mainly study the influence of Lin's translation activities in that period on China at that time and the significance and contributions of translation history. To conclude, the study shows that Lin's translation activities is of great significance in history, which makes him the first person to carry out the translation of foreign newspaper, the first person to organize the translation team with Chinese as the main body to translate foreign books, the first person to organize his team to translate the Chinese-English diplomatic note and the first Chinese to open his eyes to the outside world in modern China. ^[1]

Keywords: Lin Zexu's Translation Activities; The Late Qing Dynasty; The Period of Banning The Opium Trade In Guangdong

Introduction

Lin Zexu, an outstanding thinker and great patriot in modern Chinese history and a pioneer who began to open his eyes to the outside world in modern China, not only opened up the horizons of the Chinese people and allowed them to see the western world outside of China, but also advanced the modernization of the Qing dynasty that pursued the policy of "closing the doors". During the Opium War, he advocated the formation of a translation team to engage in the translation of foreign newspapers and books, which opened a glorious page of the history of modern translation in China. Lin's contributions to translation and to the country can be attributed to the historical environment at the time, his enlightenment, good use of talents, good learning and effective organization. Besides, there is also an indispensable medium—translation that cannot be ignored. ^[2] He organized professional individuals to translate a large number of materials and books involving western history, geography, politics, economics, military affairs and culture with a view to transform the Chinese people's world outlook by spreading new ideas and save backward China.

In 1839, Lin Zexu went south to Guangzhou to carry out the campaign to ban the opium trade. At that time, China had almost no idea of the western world. Lin Zexu also was no exception. However, he was in the center of internal and external power and was also responsible for banning smoking, so he realized the importance and necessity of understanding the "foreign situation". But there were no professional translators in China. If translators were needed in their affairs, they mainly relied on some western missionaries and these missionaries took a western position. So, it is difficult to guarantee the fairness and objectivity. In this case, Lin recruited Yuan Dehui, Liang Jinde, Lin Ashe and Ya Meng to form a professional translation team, which is mainly responsible for collecting and translating information about foreign situation.

1. Lin Zexu's Translation Activities

Lin Zexu recruited Liang Jinde, Yuan Dehui, Lin Ashi, and Ya Meng to form a translation team and gave them generous treatment. In addition to the four core members, there are more people for consultation and discussion, including scholars, local officials, and foreigners who are familiar with foreign affairs. Their translation totally includes western journals, western books and foreign affairs.

2. Xu's Translation Activities from Three Perspectives

2.1 Western Journals

After Lin arrived at Guangzhou, he was stuck in a dilemma. The Jesuits who came to China at the end of the Ming dynasty and the

beginning of the Qing dynasty have already presented the whole China to the westerners by reading lots of books. In the 19 centuries, people in the Europe can stay up-to-date on news and events about China through media like letters, newspapers, diaries and report of foreign missionaries, merchants and officials in China, which formed a stark contrast with the Chinese people's knowledge of the west. With the deepening of the campaign to ban opium trade, he gradually gained a clear and objective understanding of the West. The translation of newsprint representing the voice of Western powers in China has become an important way for him to achieve this transformation.^[3] In this regard, his first action to know about foreign situation was to set up and issue a journal called Macao Newsprint. Actually, the content of the journal was from Canton Press and Canton Register. These two newspapers introduced and commented on China's national conditions, opium trade, the relations between China and foreign countries from the perspective of the west. So, these two newspapers undoubtedly became the main source of obtaining the latest thoughts and trends of foreigners in China. Lin ordered his translation team to translate the selected passages of these two.

As a matter of fact, there are some problems in their translation from the perspective of the current times. First of all, the meaning of the original could not completely be grasped. Secondly, there were some errors of transliteration. Thirdly, the written form of transliteration could not be consistent. The name of country, region and people had different translations in the same newspaper. In a word, these problems reflected the lack of translation talents, experience and standards in the time when China closed the door.

2.2 Western Books

His Translation on western books involved subjects, such as military technology, navigation, history and geography, as well as law. The Encyclopedia of Geography is the first detailed work that introduces western geography and history systematically in modern China. Lin edited and translated the book to learn more about the history and status of western countries during the period of opium banning in Guangzhou, which influenced many scholars who studied foreign history and geography in the future. This book briefly introduced the geographical, historical and political status of the four continents in the world to the Chinese in the late Qing dynasty. It is the first complete and systematic geography book in modern China.

Law of Nations is the first Chinese translation of international laws with definite historical records, marking the beginning of the spread of western laws into the east. Lin organized his translation team to translate the selected passages of the book. Later, the translation of the book was included in Annals of Overseas Countries. The book contains the settlement of international war and hostile measures as well as the importance of safeguarding the national independence. In fact, the background of translating the book is about the case of Lin Weixi. In 1839, a villager at Tsim Sha Tusi, Kowloon of HK was beaten to death by a drunken English sailor. But the British side covered up for the killer and refused to bear the responsibility. At that time, there were no legal provisions to deal with such international judicial events and there were no historical precedents in China. So, Lin ordered his team to translate it. The extraction and translation of the book was a timely help to solve the historical events at that time and set an important precedent for modern China to solve international problems. Also, the translation of the book expanded Lin's knowledge of western laws so that he could justly and forcefully refuted the British side 's cunning.

2.3 Foreign Affairs

The Britain once desired to establish equal diplomatic relations with the Qing Dynasty, which, however, seriously challenged the deep-rooted "Discrimination between Chinese and westerners" in the Qing Dynasty and inevitably became an impossible task. Therefore, in Guangzhou in the early 19th century, there was a peculiar rule: foreigners in China are not allowed to have direct contact with Chinese officials, and all documents must be translated and submitted by the merchant. However, Lin Zexu broke the constraints of the business system to a certain extent. He not only did not refuse foreigners' visits, but even took the initiative to come into contact with them. Therefore, Interpretation plays a significant role in their communications. In addition, Lin also released many public announcements and official documents and correspondence and his translators translated them. The translation basically conveyed the meaning of the original but not expressed the tone of the original. It is quite possible that they translated the first Chinese-English diplomatic note that is a written form of international intercourse in the history.

3. Significance of Lin's Translation Activities

In the late Qing dynasty, China closed its door with arrogance and self-righteousness, insisting on world-centrism. But with the rapid development of economy, politics and military affairs in the western world, they opened up China's door through the opium trade. Faced with these international issues the Qing government had never heard before, the government was in a state of panic. In this case, the cultural collision and exchanges between China and the west must be indispensable for solving the problems between China and the west, which reflected the importance of translation. Lin's translation activities promoted the progress of modern China towards modern civilization.^[4]

Conclusion

Journalism in modern China began with the translation of foreign newspapers and it was Lin Zexu that was the first to carry out the translation of foreign newspaper. In February 1839, he began to organize translation and publish the Macao Newsprint, which was the earliest translated newspaper in China. His original purpose of translating the western journal was to learn more about foreign situation. Besides, He took the brave first step in the compilation and distribution of the newspaper. Therefore, the translation and publication of Macao Newsprint not only met the immediate needs to know the foreign situation at the time, but also opened up a new phase in the development of modern Chinese journalism. Lin was not the initiator of the translation on foreign books. However, he was the first to organize the translation team with Chinese as the main body to translate foreign books, which made preparations for the later development of the Westernization Movement. He was the first to organize his team to translate the Chinese-English diplomatic note. Translation on foreign affairs has experienced a great leap of development from scratch. He was the first Chinese to open his eyes to the outside world in modern China.

To conclude, the translation activities in the period of Opium war has great significance for the development of translation in China and Lin's contribution to translation cannot be ignored.

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