

An Exploration of Gary Snyder's English Translation of Han Shan's Poems from the Perspective of Manipulation Theory

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Abstract: This essay delves into Gary Snyder's English translation of Han Shan's poems from lens of the manipulation theory. The manipulation theory, originated in the field of translation studies, argues that translations are not mere reproductions of the original texts but are shaped by various ideological, cultural and historical factors. From the perspective of Lefevere's manipulation theory, translators and their translation activities are inevitably manipulated by three elements: ideology, poetics and patronage. Han Shan, a Tang Dynasty poet renowned for his Zen Buddhist-influenced works, has gained significant attention from translators including Snyder, a leading figure in the American Beat Generation and a profound student of Zen Buddhism. In examining Snyder's translation, the essay explores the embodiment and influence of ideology, poetics and patronage. By employing Manipulation of Translation, this essay aims to provide a nuanced understanding of Snyder's translation and sheds new light on how translators, like Snyder, can serve as cultural mediators, shaping our understanding and appreciation of foreign literary works.

Keywords: manipulation theory, Gary Snyder, riprap and cold mountain poems, translation theory.

1. Introduction

There are numerous translations of ancient Chinese classics abroad, such as the translation of *The Analects of Confucius* published by the British missionary James Legge, French sinologist Henri Maspero's translation work *Selections from Chinese Literature*, and the translation of Han Shan's poems by Gary Snyder during the Beat Generation. Translation theories have also evolved constantly, ranging from linguistic schools to cultural schools and later deconstructionism, post-colonialist translation theories and so on. These theories advocate that translations are influenced by social and cultural factors, and within cultural schools, the manipulation school particularly argues that translations are products of a specific era and influenced by a particular culture.[1] Gary Snyder writes a translation of Han Shan's poems in the Beat Generation era, and the poets and ideologies of the Beat Generation have exerted profound influences on the Gary Snyder's translations.[2]

2. Manipulation in Translation

In 1984, Hermans proposed "manipulation" as a new paradigm for translation theory research in his book *The Manipulation of Literature*. He pointed out that "from the perspective of target literature,

all translations imply some degree of manipulation of the original text for a certain purpose”. [3] This was considered the embryonic form of the manipulation school in the translation field. Later, in 1992, Lefevere proposed that translation is a rewriting of texts, and this rewriting manipulates the transformation of the original content, which in turn influences the society and culture behind the readers through the translated text.[4] Lefevere systematically expounded on the manipulation view of translation, and the translation community recognized the formal formation of the “manipulation school”. Lefevere believed that translation is a linguistic practice conducted in the context of two different literary traditions, subject to both internal and external factors. The internal factor is the translator, who tends to make the translation conform to the ideology and poetics of a specific era and region and influence the evolution of poetics in that era through their translations. The external factor is the influence of sponsors, which comprises three elements: ideology, economy, and status. Therefore, ideology, poetics, and patronage are the main contents of Lefevere’s manipulation theory of translation. From Lefevere’s perspective of translation manipulation theory, translators and their translation activities are inevitably manipulated by these three elements, and therefore, corresponding translation strategies must be adopted to ensure that the translation is recognized by the target language culture.

Therefore, this article aims to explore the following questions:

1.Has English translation of Han Shan’s poems by Gary Snyder been influenced by ideology, poetics, and patronage?

2.How do these influences manifest in English translation of Han Shan’s poems by Gary Snyder?

We will conduct a comparative analysis of Gary Snyder’s personal background, the original Chinese text, and his English translation of Han Shan’s poems within the theoretical framework to answer these two questions.

3. Influence of Ideology

3.1. The Beat Generation

“The Beat Generation” is a modernist literary movement that emerged in America after World War II. Beat Generation literature emphasizes individualism, opposing all secular conventions and monopoly capitalist rules. Writers of the Beat Generation were generally exposed to Buddhism, which provided them with a reasonable theoretical basis for their dissatisfaction and rebellion, as well as inspiration for their literary creation. [5][6] Gary Snyder had numerous interactions with poets of the Beat Generation and his works were deeply influenced by them. [7][8] This influence is mainly reflected in three aspects:

Firstly, Gary Snyder embraced the pursuit of freedom and rejection of worldly conventions. [9] For instance, the second poem “寄语钟鼎家,虚名定无益” and its translation “Go tell families with silverware and cars ‘What’s the use of all that noise and money?’” demonstrate his disdain for fame, wealth and authority. The 15th poem “手把两卷书,一道将一德。住不安釜灶,行不赍衣械” and its translation “His hand holds two book-scrolls, One the Way and one its Power. His shack’s got no pots or oven. He goes for a walk with his shirt and pants askew. ” depict Han Shan’s attire living conditions, showing his casual and uninhibited nature. The sentence “go for a walk with his shirt and pants askew” resembles unconventional dress style of the Beat Generation, further portraying the Beat Generation’s anti-traditional and self-styled image.

Secondly, Gary Snyder focused on expressing his own genuine feelings, breaking the shackles of traditional forms of creativity. The 6th poem “君心若似我,还得到其中” and its translation “If your heart was like mine You’d get it and be right here.” demonstrate the fact that to appreciate Cold Mountain not only represents its pure environment, but also depends on whether others’ hearts can feel the quiet and pure artistic conception of Cold Mountain.

An indisputable fact is that Gary Snyder embraces the Beat Generation's lifestyle of returning to nature and emphasizes spiritual freedom, distancing himself from the dark realities. One line in the 12th poem “今日归寒山,枕流兼洗耳” and its translation “Today I'm back at Cold Mountain: I'll sleep by the creek and purify my ears.” expresses his aiming at achieving spiritual purification and nurturing the mind. Cold Mountain here does not simply refer to a specific mountain but generally represents the pure natural environment symbolized by Han Shan, further highlighting Snyder's concept of self-cultivation in nature.

3.2. Zen Buddhism

Zen Buddhism has several distinctive characteristics: Firstly, it emphasizes that people can let go of the attachment to gains and losses and return to a pure and untainted state.[10] Secondly, it pursues a method of sudden enlightenment and emphasizes closeness and harmony between human and nature, reflecting its ecological aesthetic wisdom.[11]

The first character of Zen Buddhism is embodied in Snyder's translation as a state of tranquility and a life without conflict. The 5th poem “欲得安身处,寒山可长保”(I wanted a good place to settle: Cold Mountain would be safe) showcase that Cold Mountain is a precious place worthy of residing in for a long time to cultivate one's heart. “十年归不得,忘却来时道” and its translation “for ten years I haven't gone back home” further expresses Cold Mountain's captivation, showcasing Snyder's desire to stay and gain inner peace.

Gary Snyder also absorbed the second character of Zen Buddhism of achieving enlightenment and coexistence. The 7th poem “任运遁林泉,栖迟观自在” “快活枕石头,天地任变改” and its translation “Freely drifting, I prowl the woods and streams And linger watching things themselves.” “Happy with a stone underhead Let heaven and earth go about their changes.” create a serene and leisure atmosphere and emphasizes long duration of his stay by employing phrases such as “freely drifting” and “linger watching things themselves”. When one is experiencing the beauty of natural landscapes and open up new perspectives, totally immersed in such a leisure and comfortable environment, they are more likely to achieve enlightenment and gain inspiration.

4. Influence of Poetics

Gary Snyder embodies three translation perspectives in his translation: cultural philosophy, natural philosophy and philosophy of personality.[12]

Gary Snyder's cultural philosophy is reflected in the preface of *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems* “I hold to the principle of the Buddha-mind. I am glad to see Tao, so I have written this eulogy.” The phrase “Hold on to the Buddha-mind” displays Snyder's worship for Buddhist thoughts and his memorial feeling for Han Shan. The 5th poem “欲得安身处,寒山可长保。微风吹幽松,近听声愈好” and its translation “I wanted a good place to settle: Cold Mountain would be safe. Light wind in a hidden pine—Listen close—the sound gets better.” advocates emptiness and profundity in Zen Buddhism, which implies that one can achieve inner clarity and tranquility through understanding nature. The 11th poem “碧涧泉水清,寒山月华白。默知神自明,观空境逾寂” and its translation “Spring-water in the green creek is clear. Moonlight on Cold Mountain is white. Silent knowledge—the spirit is enlightened of itself Contemplate the void: this world exceeds stillness.” also demonstrate this philosophy. The phrases “silent knowledge” and “contemplate the void.” emphasizes the thought in Zen Buddhism that one can obtain spiritual enlightenment and comprehension of the ultimate truth through spiritual reflection in the realm of “emptiness” and “tranquility”.

Gary Snyder's natural philosophy advocates a state of tranquility and natural leisure. The 16th poem “寒山有一宅,宅中无阑隔” “寒到烧软火,饥来煮菜吃” and its translation “Cold Mountain

is a house without beams or walls”“ In the cold I build a little fire When I’m hungry I boil up some greens.” depicted the casual and extremely primitive lifestyle but actually involves interaction between human and nature that clearly distinguishes from the rich’s large barns and pastures. The last line of the 8th poem “谁能超世累, 共坐白云中”and its translation“ Who can leap the world’s ties And sit with me among the white clouds?” expresses strong aspiration to escape from the mundane world and embrace nature. “The white clouds” evoke the reader’s infinite imagination of natural comfort, further emphasizing harmonious coexistence as well as the desire to achieve self-realization through inspiration of nature.

Moreover, Gary Snyder’s philosophy of personality is characterized by his uninhibited and free-spirited nature. In the 17th poem “平生何所忧, 此世随缘过”, the phrase “why worry” vividly depicts a carefree, unconstrained and uninhibited mentality free from the desire for fame and wealth, and“任你天地移, 我畅岩中坐”, in its translation “ Go ahead and let the world change—I’m happy to sit among these cliffs”, the phrase “go ahead” expresses boldness as nothing from outside can change one’s carefree state of mind. The 19th poem“闲书石壁题诗句, 任运还同不系舟”and its translation“ I idly scribble poems on the rock cliff, taking whatever comes, like a drifting boat”, the action“idly scribble” reflects a free and spontaneous life state without being concerned about others’ judgment.

5. Influence of Patronage

Gary Snyder’s profound friendship with Jack Kerouac promoted the dissemination of his translation. Kerouac recorded Snyder’s translating experience in *The Dharma Bums*, detailing the essence of Han Shan poems and Zen thought.[13] What’s more, in one poetry recital organized by the Beats on the evening of October 13, 1955 at Six Gallery in San Francisco, Snyder recited his translation and made the Western literary world understand Han Shan’s poems. Moreover, 24 Han Shan poems translated by Snyder were published in the *Evergreen Review*, Vol. 2, No. 6, Autumn 1958 and his poetry collection *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems* went through numerous revisions owing to publishing houses. In the meanwhile, sinologists like Burton Watson and Cyril Birch deepened the appreciation of Chinese classical literature through Gary Snyder’s translation and further promoted dissemination of Han Shan’s poetry. Cyril Birch wrote in a letter to Han Shan poetry expert Zhong Ling that he had been deeply convinced that Snyder’s translation could represent Chinese recluse poetry when he learned Han Shan’s poems through Snyder’s translation.[14][15]

6. Conclusion

This article focuses on analyzing the English translation of Han Shan’s poems written by Gary Snyder from the perspective “Manipulation of Translation”. Firstly, the article introduces three components of the Manipulation Theory: ideology, poetics and patronage. Then, it explains how the ideology influenced the translation from the perspectives of the Beat Generation movement and Zen Buddhism. Subsequently, the article explores the influence on the translation from the perspective of translation poetics by elucidating three translation perspectives embodied in Snyder’s translation: cultural philosophy, natural philosophy, and philosophy of personality. Finally, it discusses the impact of patronage on the English translation through four aspects: organizational activities(the “Six Gallery” and so on), promotion by representatives of the Beat Generation(Kerouac), dissemination by publishers(the *Evergreen Review*, Origin Press, the American Poets Society and so on), and the influence expansion of sinologists(Burton Watson and Cyril Birch). In summary, three factors including ideology, poetics and patronage influence the translation of Han Shan’s poems written by Gary Snyder. Grasping and understanding this influence helps us gain a deeper understanding of the poem’s essence and better facilitate cultural communication and exchange.

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