

# Translation And Politics- An Analysis Of Zhu Guangqian's Aesthetic Translation Thoughts After 1949

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## **Abstract:**

*As a kind of discourse right, translation is an effective way of self-shaping, improvement and re-creation of social ideology and ideological culture, as well as a kind of political act. In the history of Chinese aesthetic translation, Zhu Guangqian played an extremely important role. Two distinctly different stages can be used here to divide his aesthetic research and translation practice: translation for academic service before the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and translation for political service after the founding of PRC. After 1949, Zhu Guangqian's translation practice was deeply influenced by the atmosphere of the times. Translation and politics were inseparable. This paper takes Zhu Guangqian's academic career after 1949 as a case study, devoted to explore his aesthetic translation under political circumstances according to historical facts, including three aspects: the dramatic shift of aesthetic research and translation thoughts, the academic path of combining translation and research, and the aesthetic translation thoughts of unity in thought and language.*

**Keywords:** *Politics; aesthetic translation; translation thoughts; academic path*

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## **I. Introduction**

As one of the most important representative aestheticians in the history of modern Chinese aesthetics, Zhu Guangqian's achievements in aesthetic research are closely related to his translation and introduction of western aesthetic works. His academic research can be divided into two distinctly different stages with 1949 as the boundary. "In the early stage, Croce's intuition theory was Zhu Guangqian's main theoretical source. Integrating various other latest theoretical achievements, such as psychological distance theory and empathy theory, he formed the first idealist aesthetic system in China. His translation at this stage serviced academic research." (Gao Jinling, 2008). In the later period, he took learning Marxist-Leninist aesthetics and transforming his own thoughts about Western aesthetics as his priority, actively responded to the "Great Aesthetic Discussion" in 1950s and 1960s, translated and introduced a large number of aesthetic and philosophical classics, and combined translation with scientific research to serve politics. This dramatic shift in the content and approach of research is hard to explain from a purely academic point of view, and has much to do with the political context.

The current research on Mr. Zhu mostly starts from his aesthetic thoughts, which have been discussed quite largely and thoroughly in the academic circle. Some scholars have studied his translation thoughts: Professor Liu Quanfu (2005) analyzed Zhu Guangqian's translation activities and translation thoughts with *Talk on Translation* as his research object. Professor Jiang Wangqi (2022), guided by Zhu Guangqian's translation standards of

“faithfulness and conformity” and his translation thoughts advocating translation criticism, discussed the intrinsic implications of Zhu Guangqian’s translation thoughts from his translation practice. In addition, some scholars have studied Zhu Guangqian’s translation activities from the perspective of his translation of Marxist theories and works. However, few referred to the relationship between his aesthetic translation thoughts and politics. Only Professor Gao Jinling (2008) has discussed Zhu Guangqian’s Western aesthetic translation after 1949 from the perspective of translation and politics in depth. In his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas pointed out that aesthetics belongs to the “public sphere”. “The public sphere first emerged in literature and art, and then extended to the mass media, eventually affected politics.” (Hou Jingjing, 2021). As an important part of ideological construction, translation of western aesthetic works must therefore be controlled by the state machine in political orientation. Consequently, this paper takes Zhu Guangqian’s academic career after 1949 as a case study and explores the relationship between Zhu Guangqian’s aesthetic translation and politics according to historical facts, which is of great significance for deeply understanding the history of Chinese translation and guiding contemporary translation practice.

## **II. Politics’s Influence On Zhu Guangqian’s Aesthetic Research And Translation Thoughts**

Since November 1948, when Zhu Guangqian wrote his last two freely published articles, *On the Psychology of Fear* and *What I Want to Say to the Youth*, he could only wait for the arrival of the new era with trembling. In the winter of 1950, Zhu Guangqian was arranged to participate in the Northwest land reform visiting group and went to the countryside of Xi’an for nearly a month, which made Zhu Guangqian deeply convinced of the work principles, style and ability of the Communist Party, feeling that Chinese politics had reached unprecedented achievements, even the capitalist countries like Britain, America and France were far from it. He reviewed some of his political activities before liberation and characterized himself as reactionary and petty-bourgeois.

In 1952, “the movement of ideological remolding of intellectuals”officially entered the climax. As a representative of the transformation from idealism to Marxism, Zhu Guangqian’s special identity, research field and academic orientation made him become a key criticized subject in this movement after liberation. The political atmosphere in the 1950s and 1960s formed a specific academic atmosphere, making it gradually the first step to find the basis of Marxist classics when scholars conduct academic debate or academic research (Wang Youxin, 1990:103). “Translation has always belonged to the superstructure, and the content and methods of transmission are both related to political intentions.” (Xie Xusheng, 2018). Superstructure and Ideology manipulate the shift in Zhu Guangqian's aesthetic translation.

### **Superstructure’s manipulation to Zhu Guangqian’s translation of Western aesthetics**

“The influence of the superstructure on translation is mainly realized through the reward and punishment to translators as well as the prohibition and publishment to translations.” (Gao Jinling, 2008). Political organizations can monitor translators by granting or depriving them of political and economic treatment, so as to achieve the purpose of translators actively or passively choosing certain translations and translation methods to serve socialist construction. In July 1949, the All-China Federation of Literary and Art Circles (ACFTU) was founded, and Zhu Guangqian was excluded from it. From April to December 1950, he was placed under government control for eight months. In 1952, he became the only key criticized object of the Spanish Department of Peking University. In 1953, a new salary scheme was introduced, and he was unexpectedly awarded the rank of seventh professor, fallen from the first. This is the first low wave of Zhu Guangqian’s life after liberation, and Zhu Guangqian’s right to engage in Western aesthetic research and translation was actually deprived of. With the beginning of the Great Cultural Revolution, he was branded as “a bourgeois reactionary academic authority”, deprived of teaching, translation and research rights, moved to a cow shed and cleaned toilets. He was constantly being criticized,

writing self-reviews, and living in poverty. "This change in living conditions and academic status represents the new society's re-orientation to Zhu Guangqian." (Gao Jinling, 2015)

The superstructure plays a decisive role in the prohibition and publishment of translations chosen by the translators. During this period, most of the materials translated by Zhu Guangqian for *the Western Esthetic History* were lost in "the Great Cultural Revolution", for they did not meet the political needs of the times. In the second half of 1968, Zhu Guangqian was basically liberated and went to "the United Nations Document Translation Group of Peking University" to accept ideological education. In addition to sweeping the floor and flushing the toilet, he also undertook the translation tasks every day. Except for the translation of the second and third volumes of *Hegel's Aesthetics*, ten years have almost been fruitless.

### **Political ideology's manipulation to Zhu Guangqian's translation of Western aesthetics**

After 1949, ideology and superstructure were highly unified. Ideology served the political needs. The whole society, including the private sphere, was under the control of the state machine and ideology, and the translation of Western aesthetics in China was also developing in a way conducive to socialist construction and the dissemination of Marxist-Leninist thought. The influence of ideology on the translator is imperceptible, which eventually makes the translator self-restrict in the selection of academic translation materials and translation methods. The purpose of translation is always to serve the political needs. The translation strategy and translation content are inevitably imprinted with ideology. (Xie Xusheng, 2018)

In terms of the source-text selection, Zhu Guangqian's principle of Western aesthetic translation is to see whether the original work can "solve some important current problems in literature and aesthetic education, and serve the socialist cultural cause." (Zhu Guangqian (6), 1996:8). Zhu Guangqian once mentioned that the translation texts of some works at that time divided the whole chapter and paragraph of Marx and Engels's work, reversing the context, so that readers could not see the whole of the original work and the internal connections before and after. For example, the worst compilation of the *Marx and Engels on Literature and Art* is the Russian four-volume version (the commonest used Chinese translation text), which does not mention dialectical materialism and historical materialism at the beginning, but mentions "general problems of artistic creation", and a lot of space is about "revolutionary tragedy" and "tragedy and comedy in real life", which is confused and piecemeal, and the title is often wrong. For instance, the statement that art originated from Game Theory was imposed on Marx and Engels. "Re-editing and translation are important task in our current literary and art world." (Zhu Guangqian (10), 1996:498-499)

In terms of translation methods, Zhu Guangqian most commonly uses the method of multi-language and multi-translation texts, which Zhu Guangqian attributed to "brainstorming". Its ultimate goal is to "breaking through the difficulties of translating classic works". This kind of "brainstorming" is mainly manifested in two aspects in Zhu Guangqian's translation: "First, I will pay more attention to what others have done wrong. Secondly, other people also occasionally have the good points, for example, after our own translation, comparing with others, always makes a little change to ours." (Zhu Guangqian (5), 1996:406). Besides that, Zhu Guangqian is not only proficient in English, French, German and Russian, but also masters Italian. In the translation of *Hegel's Aesthetics*, he used German, English, Russian and French versions for reference. Comparing several Marxist-Leninist classics versions with their translations, he put forward detailed suggestions for amendments to the Chinese versions that he thought were inadequate, and sent them to the Compilation and Translation Bureau of Marxist-Leninist Works of the CPC Central Committee for reference. "The theory of human nature", "Humanism" and other propositions, he later advocated, were the foundation laid in the careful study and translation of Marx's works at this time. (Wang Youxin, 1990:111)

### **III. The Combination Of Translation And Research--Zhu Guangqian's Unique Academic Approach To Political Challenges**

“The key difference between Zhu Guangqian’s aesthetic career and that of his predecessors and descendants lies in his different academic path, which is a close combination of translation and research to absorb foreign resources.” (Gao Jinling, 2008:46), which is closely related to the environment of the times at that time. The influence of superstructure and ideology on translation is mainly realized by translators, who have subjective initiative, adopting certain translation strategies in order to serve politics and take the characteristics of disciplines into account simultaneously. Zhu Guangqian took a close combination of translation and research, and fought against dogmatism in aesthetics by means of adaptation, annotation, interpretation and deletion, appendix and supplement, preface and postscript, etc. within the limits allowed by ideology at that time. The characteristics of the times and the discipline characteristics of Aesthetics make it inevitable for him to choose the approach of combining translation and research. (Gao Jinling, 2008)

In terms of the characteristics of the times, the 20th century is an extremely active period of cultural exchange and shock between China and the West, and it is impossible to completely reject foreign things. the times require translation, and translation also needs to be combined with the requirements, levels and research tasks of a certain era. Aesthetics, as an independent discipline, was born in the West, still a new one in China. The actual situation in China at that time was just as Zhu Guangqian pointed out: “What China needed at that time was not the aesthetic system of a certain person, but the general situation of aesthetics...” (Zhu Guangqian (10), 1996:533). And this academic path suited the needs of the Chinese academic community at that time, achieving great success, and this success paved the way for him to continue along the above academic path: “This booklet, that is, *Twelve Letters to Young people* now seems naive and ridiculous, but at that time became a best-selling book... Since then, I have established a friendly relationship with the majority of young people, and I no longer worry about having nowhere to publish and no one to read my articles.” (Zhu Guangqian (10), 1996:523). In addition, the quality and quantity of Western aesthetic translation in China in the 20th century are still far behind the needs of the situation, so in order to have a deeper and more accurate understanding of the situation of foreign literary theory, researchers also need to do their own translation. As one of Zhu Guangqian’s most important works after liberation, most of the quotations in *the Western Esthetic History* were translated by Zhu Guangqian himself. (Gao Jin Ling, 2008:48)

In terms of disciplinary characteristics, the intermediary status of Aesthetics and the great difference between the Chinese and western aesthetic systems require the quality of scholars engaged in aesthetic research and translation to be very high. (Gao Jinling, 2008:48). In addition, Chinese and Western aesthetics and theories of literature and art have their own sets of terms, and ideological systems. In order to introduce foreign aesthetics and theories of literature and art, having comparative study and integration with the inherent theories of China, translation and research should be closely integrated. From the above simple analysis, we can see that the formation of Zhu Guangqian’s academic path has a certain inevitability.

The combination of translation and research is an important reason for the success of Zhu Guangqian's work—*A History of Western Aesthetics*, in terms of what he achieved by combining translation and research in aesthetics in his academic path. The translation of Western aesthetics deepened his understanding of Marxist aesthetics. First of all, there is creativity in translation, which can deepen the understanding of the problem under study: ‘Translating the ideas of others, that is, so as to bring into play or inspire one's own ideas.’ (Chen Yantian, Xue Jinguan, 1984: 131) In the process of studying Marxist aesthetics and writing *A History of Western Aesthetics*, Zhu Guangqian had “three big puzzles” (Zhu Guangqian (6), 1996:27-41), which became a breakthrough for him to think about the relationship between Marxist aesthetics and Western aesthetics after the Cultural Revolution. Secondly, translation is the carrier of Zhu Guangqian's scientific research activities. Many of Zhu Guangqian's insights into Marxist aesthetics are written in the preface, afterword, preface, trek, and notes of the various

translations. What are the problems that this part of the material is trying to solve? How did these questions arise? How did the author solve these problems? Why did he address them in this way? What are the historical roots of such solutions? Which of them are right and which are wrong? Which of them have only historical significance? Which of them still have practical significance? Only when these questions have been clarified can you be considered to have grasped this part of the material. If you can write out what you think in clear and concise language, it is already a scientific research paper. This kind of research translation not only gives people knowledge and helps to open the reader's horizons and ideas, but also their value is no less than academic papers, and in some periods their role is even greater than the so-called academic papers.

In addition, research drives translation. The level of scientific research is the guarantee of translation quality, as Cao Jinghua advocates: 'What is translated is what is researched, or what is researched is what is translated. The best translation should be the result of research.' (Chen Yantian, Xue Jinguan, 1984:173) Translation without the guarantee of scientific research level will distort the original work and spread blackmail. As the level of research on the relationship between Marxist aesthetics and Western aesthetics continues to improve, people put forward higher requirements for the quality of translations: 'To understand Aristotle or Hegel, it is inevitable to catch a glimpse of them only through the introduction of others, and it is necessary to read their original works as much as possible in person.' (Zhu Guangqian (6), 1996:14). The level of scientific research is also a fundamental guarantee to eliminate the adverse effects of mistranslations and restore the original colours of the texts.

At the same time, translation and research influence each other, just like you have me and I have you. The greatest value of translating Western aesthetics lies in introducing foreign ideas to enrich Marxist aesthetics and become part of the local culture. This integration of the ancient and the modern into the Chinese and the foreign is not possible by mere translation; it must be more closely integrated with research. In the course of the editor's work, the effort spent on collecting and translating original materials is at least two or three times more than writing the book itself. The intention is to have a solid historical basis, not to make things up out of thin air or to pick up hearsay. (Zhu Guangqian (6), 1996:17)

#### **IV. Unity Of Thought And Language: Zhu Guangqian's Aesthetic Translation Theory In Response To Political Challenges**

The change of mainstream ideology directly led to Zhu Guangqian's choice of translation objects, from Kant and Croce idealism to Marxism. In the academic circles of China after the 1950s, if the western scholars introduced were not explicitly affirmed by the classical writers of Marxism-Leninism, they could only be the object of criticism in almost all academic works, or at least the core part of which must be denied. (Wang Youxin, 1990:139). Zhu Guangqian criticized Croce's view on the problem of artistic communication and the absolute opposition between image thinking and abstract thinking in art, and stressed that aesthetics and art should be studied from the perspective of Marx and Hegel's theory of practice.

Although Zhu Guangqian's theory on the unification of thought and language was formed in the process of sorting out and explaining Croce's intuition theory, inspired by Croce's view that content and form are inseparable and language is art, it is fundamentally different from Croce's. Starting from the theory of unity of thought and language, Zhu Guangqian connected the grammar of language with the logic of thought. "Thought has its substance, which is the meaning, and its form, which is the logical organization. In the same way, the essence of language is the meaning it shares with thought, and its form is the grammatical organization equivalent to logic." (Zhu Guangqian (3), 1996:91). Examining Western aesthetic translation from this perspective, Zhu Guangqian summarized its difficulties in grammatical organization, namely: the first is compound sentences; the second is the passive voice; the third is the difference in complexity between the original text and the translated text. (Zhu Guangqian (4), 1996:296-299). In his eyes, the difficulties of western aesthetic translation are mainly manifested

in three aspects: conceptual terminology, complicated sentence patterns and styles.

On the issue of translation standards, Zhu Guangqian always adheres to the principle of attaching equal importance to thought and language, faithfulness and expressiveness. Different from Croce's untranslatable theory, which derives from his intuitionism (Content = Form), Zhu Guangqian's translation criterion comes from his theory of the unification of thought and language (Thought  $\approx$  Language). "Faithfulness" refers to be faithful to the original text, expressing the meaning of the original texts in Chinese properly, which is not only loyalty in meaning, but also faithful to emotion, thought, style, sound rhythm, etc. Emotional thought and language style must be integrated, at the same time, sound and meaning must also be in harmony. In essence, during this process, the creativity of translation is emphasized. In fact, Zhu Guangqian's advocacy of "faithfulness", in addition to being rooted in his theory of the unification of thought and language, has a lot to do with his seriously political stance on introducing Western culture. Especially for the aesthetic translation, Zhu Guangqian advocated keeping the original style of the author. This is because in aesthetic works, the style of the work is the concrete form of the author's way of thinking, and the meaning of the work is closely related to its style. "The original appearance of Western classics is presented to Chinese readers, so that they can choose what they want to get from and learn from it." (Zhu Shirong, Xu Daoming, 1991:271). That is an important purpose for Zhu Guangqian to translate.

On the basic method of translation, Zhu Guangqian put forward his unique view of "the unification of literal translation and free translation". "In my opinion, the distinction between literal translation and free translation should not exist at all. A faithful translation must express the meaning of the original as much as possible. The fidelity of a translation to the original text is not only literal fidelity. The so-called faithfulness to the original text is not only faithfulness to the surface meaning of words, but also faithfulness to the emotion, style of thought, rhythm of voice, and so on at the same time. Thoughts and feelings are consistent with language and change with each other... Therefore, literal translation must be free translation, vice versa." (Zhu Guangqian (4), 1996:299-300) This proposition is consistent with his insistence on the unification of "faithfulness" and "expressiveness", with "faithfulness" a focus. Zhu Guangqian's translation takes both aspects into account, as he said in the postscript to *the Social Roots of Literature and Art* when talking about his ideal translation method: "As for the translation method, the translator's ideal is very simple, on the one hand, he should try his best to be faithful to the original text, on the other hand, he should also take the habits of Chinese into account, so that the reader can easily understand." (Zhu Guangqian (11), 1996:514). This ideal is the embodiment of "the unity of literal translation and free translation" and "the unity of faithfulness and expressiveness", and it is a proposition closer to the truth that puts aside the one-sided dispute between literal translation and free translation.

## V. Conclusion

Like the development of other disciplines, the historical evolution of Chinese aesthetics has undoubtedly benefited from the nourishment of translation, and in this process, Zhu Guangqian's role and position should be indisputable. In his more than 60 years of academic career, he translated a large number of classic Western aesthetics works, systematically introduced the recent and modern aesthetic trends and schools of thought in the West, and finally formed his own family of opinions on the basis of absorption and critique. During his long and rich translation practice, Mr Zhu Guangqian, while translating and thinking, has accumulated some insights into translation and put forward his own views, making remarkable contributions to the study of Chinese translation theory and the development of translation career. However, an overview of Zhu Guangqian's aesthetic research and translation work cannot be divorced from the twentieth-century era of the collision of Chinese and Western thought and culture, and the specific political atmosphere at home.

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