



# A comparison of translators' translation ideas and strategies under different times' demands

## A case study of Gitanjali in Chinese translation

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**Abstract.** At present, many scholars have written analyses and research on literary works and their translations, most of which are carried out around the translation methods and translation styles of translators, while there are relatively few studies on translators and their translations based on the differences and needs of The Times. Based on the four Chinese translations of Tagore's famous Gitanjali, this study will compare the translations of four translators over a wide period under the condition of unification of works and languages, to more specifically analyze the translation needs of texts in different times and the translation characteristics of translators under the influence of The Times. To make up for the gap in contemporary translation in comparative literature worldwide, it is conducive to the cross-cultural communication of literary works.

**Keywords:** Chinese-English translation, Comparative literature, Cross-cultural communication, Gitanjali

## 1 Introduction

At present, many scholars in China have conducted analysis and research on the translation of a certain literary work, most of which revolve around the translation method and translation style of the translator. However, there are few studies on translations or translators based on the differences and needs of The Times. Most of the current academic papers in China still study works from the professional perspective of translation studies, and lack comparison and analysis of The Times in which translators live. At the same time, the reasons and functions of the translation are rarely compared and analyzed from the perspective of sociology and other humanities.

In foreign countries, some scholars in related fields have made a rough study of the translator's translation strategy and thought under ideology, external constraints, and historical context. Still, there is a lack of inductive analysis of different translations of a specific work in the same language.

Based on the four Chinese translations of Tagore's famous Gitanjali, this study will compare the translations of four translators over a wide period under the condition of

unification of works and languages, to more specifically analyze the translation needs of texts in different times and the translation characteristics of translators under the influence of *The Times*. To make up for the gap in contemporary translation in comparative literature worldwide, it is conducive to the cross-cultural communication of literary works.

The ultimate goal of this study is to sum up what factors affect the translation style of Gitanjali translators in different times, and how their translation strategies and ideas reflect the characteristics of *The Times*. This provides more translation perspectives and ideas for later translators to carry out literary translation, explores the translation rules of translated works at different times, and promotes the dissemination of cross-cultural literary works.

This study will be divided into two aspects: text analysis and non-text analysis. In text analysis, corpus and language analysis models are used to collect and classify texts and to analyze the translated expressions at different times from the linguistics perspective. The non-textual analysis explores four translators of various eras, including but not limited to investigating their life, experience, education level, translation experience, and historical background, to analyze the influence of ideology, external constraints, and historical context on their translation strategies and thoughts.

This research mainly adopts various methods, such as investigation, observation, literature, and interdisciplinary research. In terms of text factor analysis, firstly, appropriate corpus and language analysis models are selected to extract and analyze the corpus of four different Chinese translations and make a table for comparison. Thus, we can find out the rules of their translation style at the text analysis level. Secondly, questionnaires are issued to understand the understanding degree of different groups to different Chinese translations of Gitanjali and their preferences for different translation methods, to summarize and analyze the factors that make groups prefer literary translations in a modern environment. In the aspect of non-textual factor analysis, I read research papers on different aspects of the four translators, to summarize the potential influences on their translation styles or ideas, and try to analyze their translation strategies from interdisciplinary perspectives such as sociology, psychology, and religion.

## **2 Textual Factor Analysis and Non-textual Factor Analysis**

This study is divided into two aspects: textual factor analysis and non-textual factor analysis. In textual factor analysis, Hanlp is used as a language analysis model, and the Chinese translation of Gitanjali by Bing Xin, Xiao Xingzheng, Wang Li, and Wu Yan is input for data analysis, to summarize the translation strategies and translation habits of four Chinese translators. The non-textual factor analysis adopts the form of a questionnaire survey, extracts some sentences from the Chinese version of Gitanjali by Bing Xin, Xiao Xingzheng, Wang Li, and Wu Yan, and conducts a questionnaire survey for readers to collect their translation preferences, thus summarizing the relationship between readers' translation preferences and the translation habits of the four translators. In addition, Non-textual factor analysis also investigates and analyzes these four

translators from interdisciplinary perspectives such as sociology and psychology, to find out the potential interdisciplinary factors influencing their translation strategies.

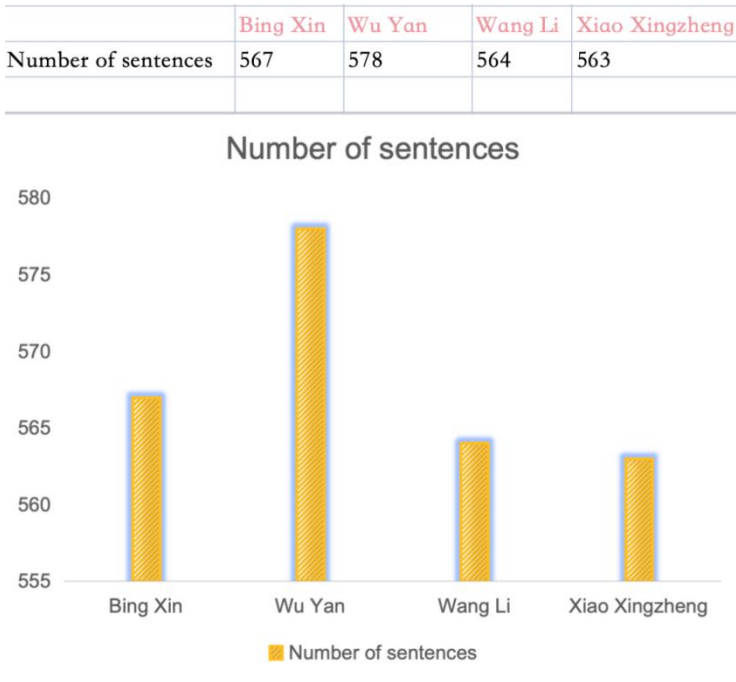
## 2.1 About Textual Factor Analysis Using Hanlp

HanLP is an open-source natural language processing model based on NLP technology, using PyTorch and TensorFlow dual-engine driven, with enhanced analysis capabilities for Chinese. It can be run in a Python or Java environment, to achieve several functions including word segmentation, linguistic annotation, dependency grammar analysis, text similarity analysis, etc.



Fig. 1. Number of words

As seen from this Fig.1, the number of words used in Wu Yan's translation is much higher than that used by the other three translators. Gitanjali in the original English version has a very high lexical density. In translating English into Chinese, translators intentionally or unintentionally make the translated verses easier to understand for readers, and they try their best to enrich the semantic meaning of the translated verses. The rhythm is bright, which strongly connects with the long-standing aesthetic concept of the Chinese nation. For example, the word "Endless " is translated as "永生" in Bing Xin's version, while it is reflected as "无穷无尽" in Wu Yan's version, making it more catchy and inevitably increasing the number of words used.



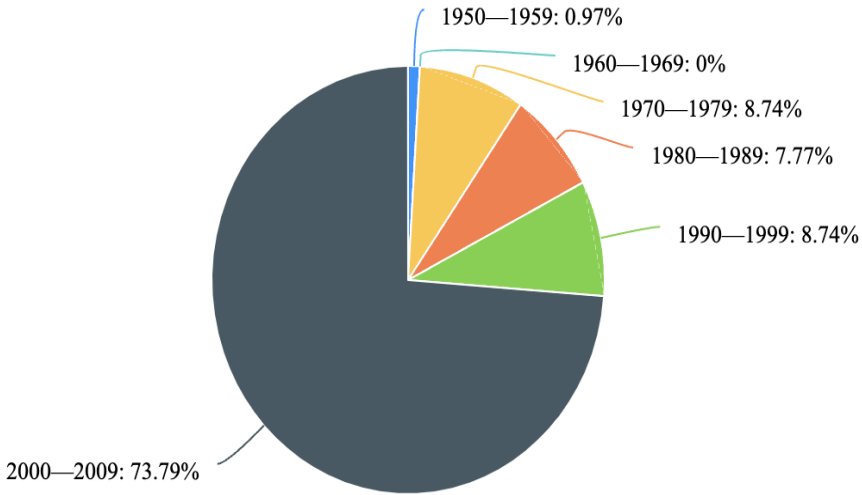
**Fig. 2.** Number of sentences

As seen from this Fig.2, the number of sentences Wu Yan uses in his translation is far more than that of the other three translators, which means that Wu Yan's version will contain more information and be more difficult for readers to understand. Reading the translation, it can be found that Wu Yan's translation will pursue more written and expressive features. For example, "Loss its limits in joy " is translated into "消融在无边快乐之中" in the Bing Xin version. In contrast, Wu Yan's version is translated into "乐无止境" concisely and comprehensively, which is more concise and written. However, due to the written elegance of Wu Yan's pursuers, the overall length of his translation is larger than that of other translators.

Chinese scholar Liang Fang mentioned in his article "The Beautiful Footnotes of Translators" published in the Journal of Harbin University that when Tagore translated Bengali poetry into English, the original metrical poetry was changed into prose poetry, which is more free in form, but still rich in music. The author believes that when translating English poetry into Chinese poetry, To some extent, the freedom of form will be unconsciously endowed by translators with their national language features, such as catchy and symmetrical features. To pursue the classical meaning of the original poetry, some written words with elegant Chinese characteristics will be used, which will increase the interest and richness of the translation to a certain extent, and help restore the historical flavor of the original work. But it will also form an invisible increase in space.[1]

## 2.2 About Analysis of Non-textual Factors

In the non-textual factor analysis, the author uses a questionnaire to assist the research. The questionnaire questions include four translators' different translations of the same Gitanjali version, and readers' reading preferences are screened after the information of the translators is hidden. A total of 103 respondents were surveyed.(Fig.3)



**Fig. 3.** Age distribution of questionnaire respondents

In this survey, most respondents were born between 2000 and 2009. In addition, the author also collected information about the reading habits of the respondents. 32.07% of the respondents have the habit of reading 1-2 hours a week, and 26.21% can read 3-4 hours a week. 15.53% of the respondents read 5-9 hours a week, 21.36% rarely or never read, and 5.83% read for more than 10 hours a week.

The author also collected which field of books the respondents like to read daily. People prefer to read literature and art, social culture and suspense, and reasoning books, accounting for 57.82%, 41.75%, and 35.92% of the total number of respondents respectively. The rest of the respondents like to read books on spiritual psychology, economic finance, and religious philosophy. Reading books in the political and military fields was the least popular among respondents, accounting for only 12.62 percent of the total.

Among the respondents in this survey, 79.61% have a bachelor's degree, 6.8% have a master's degree, and 0.97% have a doctor's degree. Only 7.77 percent of the respondents had read Gitanjali's book.

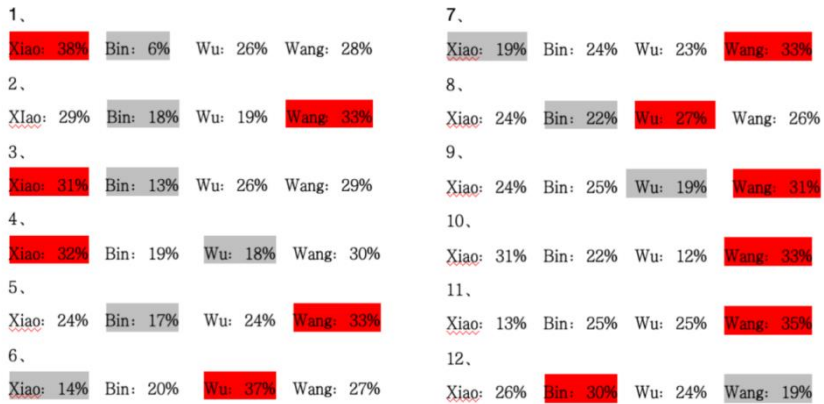


Fig. 4. People's reading preferences in the questionnaire

As seen from this Fig.4, the data from left to right are the translations of Xiao Xingzheng, Bing Xin, Wu Yan, and Wang Li respectively. The red data represents the translator with the highest number of votes (the most popular) in a question, while the gray data represents the translator with the lowest number of votes (the least popular). Through data analysis, we know that among the twelve poems, people prefer Wang Li's version more, which has won the highest number six times; Bing Xin's translation of the poem was not very popular.

According to the questionnaire, it can be concluded that Wang Li's version is the most popular, followed by Xiao Xingzheng's version. It is worth noting that Bing Xin's Gitanjali Chinese translation is a more familiar version in China, which is not favored by the interviewees in the questionnaire, and occupies the longest space in the text analysis above. And Wu Yan's more written version was not as popular.

The author believes that the longest or more written length is not an inevitable factor in determining readers' reading preferences. In this questionnaire, young people and respondents with a bachelor's degree account for the majority. The author speculates whether contemporary people's reading preferences have something to do with the age of the translator and the work. The four translations were released at different times. Bing Xin's version was first published in 1955, followed by Wu Yan's version in 1986, Wang Li's version in 2004, and Xiao Xingzheng's version is the closest to the present, published in 2019. It is worth noting that the most popular versions of the survey were published after 2000.[2]

There is no doubt that different times and regions will greatly affect translators' translation strategies. Chinese scholars Zou Zhan and Gao Xiaopeng published in the Journal of Xinjiang University, From Comparative Literature to Translation Studies: As mentioned in the article "Problems and Reflections", after World War II, the European ideological circle began to reflect on nationalism, the international geopolitical pattern was sharply divided and restructured, and the United States established its dominant position as the biggest beneficiary of the two World Wars. In the 20th century, American literature also rose to prominence, and its stars shone brightly, occu-

pying an important place in the world literary circle. This kind of national cultural confidence in the field of literary creation makes the American literary research community begin to reflect on the "narrowness" of the French school of comparative literature and emphasize that it should break through the vision limitation of Eurocentrism and include the literature of different countries without factual connection into the field of comparative literature research. Besides pure language translation, translators must also master the two cultural systems in the current era. It is also mentioned in this article that when translating literary works, translators usually consider whether the translation meets the needs of the ideology and "intended readers" in the target language. Secondly, for the translation to be accepted in the context of the target language, it is necessary to consider the expression habits and poetic characteristics of the target language. Finally, sponsorship involves ideological elements, economic elements, and status elements, which to a large extent affect the manipulation of the original translation and exercise certain power over the translation. It can be seen that translation is an extremely complex interlingual practice, not carried out in a vacuum, but an elliptical refraction of the source language culture and the target language culture.[3][4]

### **3 The Reflections of Four Chinese translators, Bing Xin, Wu Yan, Wang Li, and Xiao Xingzheng, are based on Their Backgrounds and Times**

Bing Xin (1900-1999) is a well-known modern Chinese poet, writer and translator. From the 1930s to the 1980s, Bing Xin was actively involved in translating English and Chinese, translating more than 50 literary works involving 8 countries. Her works are rich with unique imagination, and she is passionate about beautiful nature. She believes that it is necessary to pay attention to the smoothness of the work under the premise of extreme restoration. In Bing Xin's translation of *Indian Fairy Tales*, to enable Chinese children to understand the story content better, Bing Xin has deleted some long names and annotated some Indian historical and cultural backgrounds, to facilitate the reading of the public. After the May Fourth Movement, China began to promote using vernacular Chinese. The works translated by Bing Xin had the fluency of vernacular Chinese and the simplicity of classical Chinese, which greatly contributed to the cross-cultural communication of China at that time and also played an important role in promoting the education of China at that time, with rich characteristics of *The Times*. [5][6]

Wu Yan, whose real name was Sun Jiajin (1918-2010), translated foreign literature after the founding of New China. Besides *Gitanjali*, Wu Yan also translated many of Tagore's classic works. After the "ten years of turmoil" in China, Shanghai Translation Publishing House was established. Shanghai Translation Publishing House took the lead in collecting famous foreign literary works such as *Pride and Prejudice* among foreign literary classics. His translation concept was "Don't be too ambitious and not too ambitious". He broke the shackles of thought and expanded the selection of topics

of Shanghai Translation Publishing House while traveling in Beijing and Shanghai, which provided a lot of spiritual food for the book shortage era.

Little is known about the personal background of Wang Li and Xiao Xingzheng, except that Xiao Xingzheng was born in Fujian, China in 1964, and translated Gitanjali and Indian sorrow songs, and little is known about Wang Li.

The historical background and personal experiences of Bing Xin and Wu Yan may be more special. Both translators were in an important stage of China's development before the millennium, and Bing Xin's translation style was influenced by vernacular and classical Chinese, which itself has a certain classical beauty. Wu Yan's pursuit of translation can not be high-minded, and he has experienced ten years of turmoil, so in translating words and sentences, he pays more attention to the characteristics of writing.[7]

## 4 Conclusion

There are many methods for literature and translation studies, and it is very effective and necessary to analyze textual and non-textual factors. In particular, when summarizing and combining the translation characteristics of translators at different times, translators' translation strategies will have a great impact on the cross-cultural expression of the original works. It also has different purposes and meanings of The Times. The translations of different times were born under different conditions, so the translations are not the same. They are produced at different times, and in different historical contexts, and each represents the demands of The Times, so it also has its value.[8]

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