

Translation and Cross-Cultural Reception: A Comparative Study of the Initial Translations and Retranslations of *The Idiot* and *The Brothers Karamazov* in Chinese

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Abstract—Dostoevsky's works are deeply embedded in Russian cultural traditions. This study compares and analyzes the treatment of Russian cultural elements in the first translation by Geng Jizhi and the retranslation by contemporary translator Rong Rude in *The Idiot* and *The Brothers Karamazov*. Drawing on Wills' text-to-text reception theory, the paper explores how the Russian cultural elements in the original works are rewritten and reception. Through a comparative analysis of the cultural elements in both the first translation and the retranslation, this study also tests the retranslation hypothesis, which claims that the first translation is more focused on adapting to the target culture, while the retranslation is closer to the source text. The findings show that the first translation alters religious and cultural elements to varying degrees, with the preface emphasizing the humanitarian spirit of the work, while paying relatively less attention to the value of religious philosophical ideas. In contrast, Rong Rude's new-century retranslation is more faithful to the source text and provides detailed annotations on Russian cultural elements. The preface of the retranslation places greater emphasis on the multiple interpretations of the work, striving to restore the text's various values, though the author's religious ideals are still subjected to cultural filtering. Therefore, the retranslation hypothesis is partially valid in terms of cultural reception in this case.

Index Terms—Dostoevsky, translation, reception, *The Idiot*, *The Brothers Karamazov*

I. INTRODUCTION

Translation, as an essential bridge for literary works to transcend linguistic and cultural boundaries, is "an interpretative and communicative process involving the reformulation of a text using the resources of another language" (Hurtado, 2001, p. 41). Translators are both recipients of the source text and conveyors of the target text. The content delivered to readers depends on how translators interpret and receive the original text.

In the source-text-oriented models of translation, the principles of "equivalence" and "faithfulness" were regarded as the primary guidelines in translation studies. Reception aesthetics, however, posits that a text is an open and unfinished structure, and its meaning is constructed by the reader. Readers' preconceived notions and cultural backgrounds shape their expectations and interpretations of the text (Farhadipour, 2016). From the perspective of reception theory, mistranslation and misinterpretation are not merely errors in understanding the source text but are instead cultural reinterpretations influenced by the translator's horizon of expectations.

There is a close interactive relationship between translation and reception. In reception-oriented translation studies, the main challenge lies in tracing back from the target text to the source text in order to analyze the translator's decisions and their understanding of the source text, while also taking into account the historical and socio-cultural context at the time of the translation's publication. The existence of multiple retranslations of the same source text provides an opportunity to examine the evolving reception of a specific text and author in a particular target culture over time (Walsh & Cadera, 2022).

Retranslation is a common phenomenon, defined as "the act of translating a work that has previously been translated into the same language, or the result of such an act, namely the retranslated text itself" (Gürçağlar, 2009, p. 233). Retranslation focuses on the repeated translation of a text into the same target language and culture. The constantly changing social environment and the evolution of translation norms are often regarded as the main factors influencing the decision to retranslate a particular text.

Berman (1990) proposed the "Retranslation Hypothesis", suggesting that the process of retranslating literary texts can be viewed as a progression toward versions that most accurately capture the meaning of the original. Hornby (1988) argued that literary translation is a communicative act, and no translation can achieve the stability of the original work. Over time, within constantly evolving cultural systems, translations may lose their communicative function as literary works, thereby creating a need for new translations. In 2000, Chesterman further elaborated on the "Retranslation Hypothesis", stating that the initial translation of a literary text tends to be more oriented toward the target language. However, as time passes and the target culture gains a deeper understanding of the source culture, subsequent

retranslations may focus more on preserving the foreignness of the original text by adopting a foreignization strategy. Nevertheless, later studies have demonstrated that the "Retranslation Hypothesis" does not apply universally to all contexts of literary translation (Paloposki & Koskinen, 2001).

In this context, the works of Dostoevsky provide an excellent case study. With his profound philosophical depth, masterful artistic expression, and meticulous exploration of the human soul, Dostoevsky has garnered widespread acclaim and recognition worldwide. His works have been retranslated numerous times in various countries, driven not only by the need to adapt to changing linguistic norms of different eras but also by the ever-evolving expectations of readers across different periods. For example, Boulogne (2019) found an increase in the number of Dostoevsky retranslations in the Dutch book market over the past 10 to 15 years. By conducting contextual and textual analyses of early and recent Dutch retranslations of Dostoevsky's works, Boulogne explained the phenomenon of retranslation, particularly the recent surge in Dutch retranslations of his works. Historical analysis revealed that the first Dutch retranslation of Dostoevsky tended to favor acceptability more than the initial translation. As a result, Boulogne argued that Gideon Toury's concept of norms offers a better explanation for this phenomenon than the Retranslation Hypothesis. However, since translators may choose to deviate from norms, norms alone cannot provide a comprehensive explanation.

Since Dostoevsky's short story *An Honest Thief* was first introduced to China in 1920, his works have been retranslated by different translators at various times (Ding, 2006). Although numerous studies have been conducted on the translation of Dostoevsky's works, most of them focus on translation techniques, style, and the history of translation, with relatively little attention paid to reception-oriented translation studies.

This study takes Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* and *The Brothers Karamazov* as examples, comparing the early translations by Geng Jizhi and the contemporary retranslations by Rong Rude to examine how the Russian cultural elements in the original works are received in different periods. Specifically, this study will address the following three core questions: 1) How are religious elements in Russian culture, Russian cultural vocabulary, and the paratexts rewritten in the first translations and 21st-century retranslations? 2) What factors influenced the reception of the original texts in the early and 21st-century translations? 3) Through a comparative analysis of the first and 21st-century translations of both works, does this study validate the retranslation hypothesis?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the field of translation studies of Dostoevsky's works, research can be categorized from both the perspectives of translation studies and comparative literature, both of which emphasize the significant role of translation in the dissemination of Dostoevsky's works.

In translation studies, researchers focus on comparing the translation styles of different translators. For example, Ye (2004) conducted a comparative study of the translation styles in three different versions of *Crime and Punishment* published in 1979, 1982, and 2000. The aim of the study was to deepen the understanding of the original text's style, with the goal of enhancing future retranslations by incorporating the strengths of previous translations and creating a version that is more consistent with the original style. Yan (2019) explores the application of domestication and foreignization strategies in literary translation, using Geng's translation of *The Idiot* as a case study. Zha (2015), taking *The Brothers Karamazov* as an example, illustrates Geng's translation style from three aspects: vocabulary, sentence structure, and rhetoric. Pieter (2022) analyzed the French translation of *The Brothers Karamazov* from the perspective of narrative theory. The first translation in 1888 by Kaminski and Maurice selectively adapted the original text and repositioned characters to construct the narrative. Although the 1906 retranslation by Bienstock and Torkay was anti-narrative and a simplified version that weakened the original's features, the comparison showed that the first translation had a higher degree of fidelity in certain aspects.

In the field of comparative literature, studies often explore the translation or retranslation history of Dostoevsky's works in specific countries or regions from a historical perspective. For example, the research by Gürses and Şahin (2023) focuses on the translation and retranslation history of Dostoevsky's works into Turkish. They discuss the relationship between copyright, commercial interests, and plagiarism in Turkish retranslations, and explore the value and impact of retranslations in the age of artificial intelligence on the translation ecosystem. The study suggests that factors such as state intervention, author-editor involvement, and digital technology have influenced the value of Turkish retranslations, and that machine translation will also have a significant impact on this in the future. Karakepeli (2024) focuses on the role of translation in the reception of Dostoevsky by Greek readers, analyzing the translation history of his works since they were introduced to Greece in the late 19th century and how translation and retranslation, along with related actors, have contributed to the canonization of Dostoevsky in Greek culture. Ding (2012) suggests that the Chinese translation of Dostoevsky's works began in the early 1920s, flourished in the late 1920s, gradually matured and deepened in the 1930s, and by the 1940s, the framework for translating Dostoevsky's works in China was largely established. Throughout this process, significant contributions can be identified in terms of media influence, translation sources, and the contributions of translators.

In summary, existing research has rarely explored the translation and retranslation of Dostoevsky's works from the perspective of reception. This study attempts to analyze the initial translations and 21st-century retranslations from the perspective of translation and cross-cultural reception.

The theoretical foundation of this study combines Wills' (2018) Reception Theory and Lefevere's (2001) "Translation Manipulation" theory. Wills views translation as a "text-to-text reception" and encapsulates it under the core concept of "rewriting." He argues that the translation text is where reception occurs, and that a translation is both the result of reception and the starting point of new reception. Lefevere (2001) proposed that translation should be viewed as a rewriting of the original text, essentially a manipulative act aimed at making the source text more accessible to the target culture. Furthermore, he pointed out that translation is "the most influential form of rewriting because it projects the image of the author and his work into another culture, thereby profoundly impacting the subsequent reception process" (p. 9).

This study starts from Wills' "text-to-text reception" theory to explore the reception of cultural elements in the original text by Geng's initial translation and Rong's retranslation. It also uses Manipulation Theory to analyze the cultural and ideological differences behind the translation rewriting. Additionally, a comparison of the translations from the two periods can verify whether they align with the retranslation hypothesis.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study conducts a comparative textual analysis of the translations based on the "Translation Description Approach" proposed by Lambert and van Gorp in 1985. This approach encompasses preliminary data (such as title page information, paratexts), macrostructure (such as text division, chapter titles), microstructure (such as vocabulary, grammatical patterns), and system context (such as intertextual relationships and norms). The study selects Russian cultural elements in the vocabulary and prefaces of the Chinese translations of *The Idiot* and *The Brothers Karamazov* as the focus of analysis, aiming to explore how the translations receive the Russian cultural elements present in the original works. Given that *The Idiot* contains approximately 600,000 words and *The Brothers Karamazov* contains around 700,000 words, with elements of Russian culture scattered throughout the texts, this study does not aim to quantitatively analyze all cultural elements. Instead, it focuses on a selection of representative terms for in-depth analysis.

The Idiot and *The Brothers Karamazov* were first published in 1869 and 1880, respectively, and have since gone through numerous reprints in different versions. The Russian translations selected for this study are all the retranslated versions by Mir Publishers in 2008. The first complete Chinese translations of these two works were both directly translated from Russian by Geng and published in 1946 and 1947 by Shanghai Kaiming Bookstore and Shanghai Morning Light Publishing Company. For the 21st-century versions, this study selects the translations by Rong, a professional literary translator whose works encompass both Russian literature and English literature. His translations of Dostoevsky include *The Brothers Karamazov* (2006) and *The Idiot* (2004), along with several short stories such as *White Nights*.

Since *The Idiot* and *The Brothers Karamazov* are replete with Russian cultural and religious elements, and both Geng and Rong have translated these two works, they serve as the focus of this study. As key translators from different periods, Geng and Rong exhibit distinct translation styles, reflecting the translation and cultural reception trends of their respective historical contexts, making them highly comparable.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Differences in Religious Elements

One of the best ways to reflect how the translation received the religious thoughts of the original text is in the translation of the core concept of "God." Early translations often employed paraphrasing to align with the ethical mindset of Chinese tradition. A typical example is that Geng translated "провидение" (God) (Dostoevsky, 2008a, p. 220) in *The Brothers Karamazov* as "良心" (conscience) (Dostoevsky, 1947, p. 377). Given that most Chinese people have relatively weak religious consciousness and place greater emphasis on ethical standards to regulate personal behavior, this translation better fits Chinese moral concepts. In contrast, 21st-century translators typically choose to stay faithful to the original text, translating it directly as "God," thus more accurately conveying the religious context of the original work.

However, there are some exceptions. In an early version of *The Idiot*, the phrase "Слава богу" (Thank God) (Dostoevsky, 2008b, p. 109) was translated as "谢天谢地" (Thank Heaven and Earth) (Dostoevsky, 1946, p. 153), and this translation has been retained in 21st-century versions. While the two phrases have similar meanings, the cultural connotations behind them are significantly different. Russia follows Eastern Orthodoxy, worshiping God, while China has a tradition of polytheism, revering the heavens and nature. This difference shows that the translators, when decoding the text, did not directly adopt the concept of "God" but rather transformed it through the lens of their own cultural background. This special case reveals that even in modern translations, religious and cultural differences still need to be balanced using domestication strategies.

In the translation of other religious elements, early translators lowered the text's reading difficulty by introducing familiar concepts and terms from Chinese culture. For example, "четки" (rosary) (Dostoevsky, 2008b, p. 222) was translated as "佛珠" (Buddhist beads) (Dostoevsky, 1946, p. 319), "ряска" (clerical robe) (Dostoevsky, 2008a, p. 61) as

“袈裟” (a type of Buddhist robe) (Dostoevsky, 1947, p. 88), and “игумены” (abbot) (Dostoevsky, 2008b, p. 33) as “方丈” (the head of a Buddhist monastery) (Dostoevsky, 1946, p. 58). These translations, while making it easier for readers at the time to understand, blurred the cultural specifics of Russian Orthodoxy and may even have led to cultural misinterpretations. These paraphrases were heavily influenced by Buddhist culture and might have caused Chinese readers to mistakenly believe that Russians also followed Buddhism. This strategy reflects the translators' consideration of Chinese readers' limited religious background, which was primarily rooted in ethical and Buddhist traditions.

In contrast, 21st-century translations tend to remain faithful to the original text, placing more importance on accurately conveying the text's cultural and religious context. For example, “четки” is translated as “念珠”(rosary) (Dostoevsky, 2006, p. 242), avoiding any misleading Buddhist connotations; “ряска” is directly translated as “教士长袍”(clerical robe) (Dostoevsky, 2006, p. 55), preserving the religious garment's characteristics; and “игумены” is translated as “修道院长” (abbot) (Dostoevsky, 2006, p. 40), making it clear that the term refers to an Eastern Orthodox religious figure. This translation strategy reflects the translators' confidence in modern readers' abilities and aligns with the growing trend in translation to emphasize cultural heterogeneity.

In both *The Brothers Karamazov* and *The Idiot*, the term “юродивый” (Dostoevsky, 2008a, p. 23), originally referring to a “holy fool” in Russian Orthodox culture, is a special role. Holy fools often appear insane but may sometimes speak prophecies. Geng translated it as “疯僧” (mad monk) (Dostoevsky, 1947, p. 25), which conveys the outward insanity of the character but uses the term “monk,” which in Chinese usually refers to a Buddhist monk. This translation could lead to misinterpretation.

Rong have rendered it as “圣徒” (saint) (Dostoevsky, 2004, p. 7), though this does not fully convey the depth of the character's complex nature. “Saint” typically refers to someone revered for their piety and exemplary character, but it fails to capture the unique duality of wisdom and folly that characterizes a holy fool. As a result, this translation weakens the character's cultural depth.

Additionally, due to a lack of understanding of the historical context of Russian sects, early translators often adapted related content to fit the Chinese cultural context. The term “скопеец” (Dostoevsky, 2008a, p. 128) in *The Brothers Karamazov* refers to a sect that arose in Russia at the end of the 18th century, advocating for the castration of individuals to renounce carnal desires and save the soul. Geng translated it directly as “太监” (eunuch) (Dostoevsky, 1947, p. 207), but this translation could cause misunderstandings in the Chinese context, as “太监” specifically refers to castrated males who served in the imperial palace, or eunuchs, a term with different cultural connotations. Chinese readers might unconsciously associate it with the historical image of eunuchs in China, overlooking the specific meaning and background of the term in the original text. This cultural mismatch not only weakened the literary effect of the original but could also mislead readers' understanding of the work. In contrast, Rong, when dealing with culturally specific terms, often provided background explanations through footnotes, preserving the original style while emphasizing the transmission of cultural context and readers' comprehension.

Overall, early translators focused on reducing cultural barriers by modifying religious elements through ethicalization, and localization. As Bensimon noted, “One of the basic functions of a first translation is to introduce a work into the target culture, making it as accessible and understandable as possible to readers who may not be familiar with the source culture” (Bensimon, 1990, p. 4). This translation strategy was often motivated by the desire to make the complex religious elements in the original more acceptable and comprehensible to Chinese readers. Translators interpreted the original work based on their own cultural backgrounds and modified it according to the cultural ideas they believed should be conveyed to Chinese audiences. By contrast, 21st-century translations are more faithful to the original, more accurately reflecting the religious and cultural differences, although some nuances may still be imperfectly conveyed. This trend reflects an increase in the cross-cultural reception capabilities of modern readers and marks the evolution of translating religious elements from adaptation to fidelity.

B. Vocabulary Reflecting Russian Cultural Characteristics

In early translations, translators often adapted culturally significant items such as tea sets, clothing, titles, and measurement units, reflecting their unfamiliarity with Russian culture and identification with Chinese culture. The translation also encountered a “lexical gap” issue, where some culturally specific words did not have direct counterparts in Chinese. Thus, translators used localized expressions to fill these gaps. However, such adaptations led to the loss and misreading of cultural elements, affecting the original's cultural connotations. For example, the “самовар” (Dostoevsky, 2008b, p. 352) in *The Idiot* refers to a traditional Russian tea kettle, a common item in both royal and peasant homes. However, since there is no direct Chinese equivalent, Geng substituted it with “火炉” (fire stove) (Dostoevsky, 1946, p. 793) without offering any explanation.

Furthermore, early translators often replaced common words in the original with those carrying Chinese cultural significance. For instance, the terms “брат,” “ваш мальчик,” and “у вас” (Dostoevsky, 2008a, pp. 201-204) were translated as “家兄,” “令郎,” and “府上” (Dostoevsky, 1947, pp. 308-341), which in Chinese culture are formal honorifics, adding a layer of respect or humility. Such translations could lead to misinterpretations, as they might evoke unintended associations among Chinese readers.

In the translation of measurement units, early translators also encountered similar issues. For example, “копейка,” the smallest currency unit in Russia, was translated by Geng as the Chinese currency unit “文” (Dostoevsky, 1946, p. 597), which failed to capture the cultural specificity of the original term. In contrast, 21st-century translators used more faithful translations and provided detailed background explanations in the form of annotations. Similarly, the original Russian “12 аршин” roughly equals 195 centimeters, but Geng used the Chinese unit “尺” (Dostoevsky, 1946, p. 144) and translated it as “six feet,” which equals about 200 centimeters. Rong, however, used annotations to introduce the Russian vocabulary, providing readers with a more accurate understanding of the character's height.

Moreover, early translators also localized certain cultural concepts. For example, the term “ростовщик” (the pawnbroker) (Dostoevsky, 2008b, p. 11) was translated as “印子钱” (a specific form of usury in the Qing dynasty) (Dostoevsky, 1946, p. 597), though the Russian context lacked such a practice, which may have misled readers. Additionally, Geng translated the open affair of keeping a mistress as “纳妾” (to take a concubine) (Dostoevsky, 1946, p. 656), which is more aligned with the ancient Chinese practice of taking concubines but does not correspond to the Russian Orthodox Christian monogamous tradition, again leading to potential misunderstandings. 21st-century translations avoided such substitutions and instead used more accurate representations of the original terms.

A notable feature of the 21st-century translations is the use of extensive annotations to provide readers with additional background knowledge. These annotations are not only numerous but also high in quality, reflecting a deep level of scholarly engagement. This indicates a shift towards a more in-depth, knowledge-oriented translation strategy aimed at helping Chinese readers better understand the Russian societal, cultural, and religious context of Dostoevsky's works. Annotations are categorized into various types, such as linguistic, cultural, religious, translation, knowledge-based, and bibliographic, with cultural annotations offering insights into Russian traditions and social institutions, and religious annotations providing explanations of Orthodox Christian doctrines and rituals, addressing gaps in Chinese readers' understanding of religion.

In addition, the 21st-century translations are more diverse in format. In addition to traditional annotations, they include rich supplementary content, such as images, character relationship charts, and forewords and afterwords. These additions not only aid in the readers' visual understanding of the work but also demonstrate the translator's high respect for the details of the original and deep appreciation of Russian culture. The translation has gradually shifted from an adaptive strategy focused on making the work accessible to the Chinese audience to a greater emphasis on the dissemination of knowledge and cultural explanation, aiming to provide a more comprehensive picture of Russian culture for the readers.

In summary, early translations of cultural elements reflect translators' unfamiliarity with Russian culture at the time. The localization of terms within the Chinese context highlighted the translators' identification with Chinese culture. This substitution strategy aimed to reduce cultural conflict by localizing foreign culture. As Bassnett and Lefevere observe, ideology is associated with “the society in which the translator lived, i.e. the conceptual grid that consists of opinions and attitudes deemed acceptable in a certain society at a certain time, and through which readers and translators approach texts” (Bassnett & Lefevere, 2001, p. 48). However, this approach sometimes led to cultural misreading and diminished the deep cultural meaning of the original work. Dostoevsky's works are deeply rooted in Russian culture. Even though contemporary Chinese readers may have a certain level of understanding of this culture, translators still provide detailed annotations when cultural elements are involved, helping readers gain a more comprehensive understanding of the Russian cultural context in the works.

C. Rewriting of Paratext

The preface, as a form of paratext, serves as a supplement to the main text and can shape the new image of the translation. Typically placed before the main body, the preface often conveys the intention of the translation, which is timely and serves commercial or political functions within a specific context (Genette, 1997). The 1946 edition of *The Idiot* only has a list of main characters, and the 1947 edition of *The Brothers Karamazov* has a short preface written by Geng. Rong's translation of *The Idiot* has a preface, and his translation of *The Brothers Karamazov* has a postscript.

The early translator Geng recognized that the existence of God was the central theme of *The Brothers Karamazov*. In the preface, he mentions, “The dying words of Elder Zosima and the theory of the Grand Inquisitor expressed by Ivan present the arguments for and against this issue” (Dostoevsky, 1947, foreword by Geng, p. III). He also introduces the uniqueness of Dostoevsky's Christian thought, describing it as “a religion of the heart, without transactions. There are no strict church rituals, and faith becomes the element that comforts life, a faith without miracles or authority, existing outside the monastic organization of the church” (Dostoevsky, 1947, foreword by Geng, p. III). Geng's understanding of Dostoevsky's works is accurate. However, Geng was more focused on the captivating surface-level plot, overlooking the philosophical and religious values. He points out,

On the one hand, there are grand philosophical thoughts occupying large portions of the book, while on the other hand, the seemingly popular detective and adventure novel nature, with its captivating and twisting plots, keeps the reader engrossed and reluctant to put the book down... Various plotlines obscure the dryness of the didactic philosophical ideas. (Dostoevsky, 1947, foreword by Geng, p. III)

In addition, in his article *Biographies of the Four Great Russian Writers*, Geng highlights Dostoevsky's portrayal of the sufferings of the underprivileged and regards his works as a symbol of discontent and protest against the realities of society.

Rather than saying that Dostoevsky's works depict cruel events, it would be more accurate to say that they are imbued with compassion and humanitarian color. Whether describing a drunkard, a sick person, a madman, or a cold-hearted selfish person, Dostoevsky can make readers feel deeply moved and bring tears to their eyes. (Dostoevsky, 1921, p. 73)

This appreciation is made from the perspective of sociological criticism, with a clear ideological inclination. It emphasizes the humanitarian spirit and interprets it as a call to resist oppression, thus portraying Dostoevsky as a writer of the people. This reception was heavily influenced by the social realities of China at the time. In the historical context of national salvation, many translators tended to view their works as tools for social critique and for inspiring a spirit of resistance.

In the preface to the new translation of *The Idiot*, Rong first highlights the importance of religious philosophy in Dostoevsky's works and associates him with the image of an ascetic. He then provides a detailed review of Dostoevsky's life, particularly emphasizing key experiences such as his Siberian hard labor, the torment of epilepsy, his gambling addiction, and his debt crises. These experiences had a profound impact on his worldview. Rong further explores Dostoevsky's religious thought, pointing out that he idealized obedience and suffering, rejecting radical social reform paths, which has often led to criticism. Rong argues that Dostoevsky's religious ideal is not born of natural cowardice but rather a helpless reaction to his tragic life. Having endured immense suffering, these experiences deeply shaped his view of the world.

From his debut work *Poor Folk*, he displayed boundless sympathy for the little people, suffering for and with them, which remained a central theme in his works. However, he was convinced that the autocratic system was deeply entrenched and could not be shaken, so he turned to religion, viewing suffering in this world as the only path to salvation, promoting forgiveness of the oppressors by the oppressed. (Dostoevsky, 2006, foreword by Rong, R. D, p. IV)

This reveals that Rong continues to interpret and accept Dostoevsky from a realist perspective, praising his humanitarian spirit while viewing his religious ideal as a helpless response to a life of hardship. Although his language when evaluating Dostoevsky's religious ideas is relatively mild, a critical undertone toward these ideas is subtly present. His attitude towards Dostoevsky's religious ideal is even more apparent in the afterword to *The Brothers Karamazov*, where he states,

Dostoevsky believed that the spirit of Christ would ultimately triumph. But can he prove this? In his analysis of sin and the distorted human psyche, Dostoevsky deserves the highest praise. However, whether he succeeded in portraying the goodness symbolized by Alyosha and Father Zosima, the reader must decide for themselves. In the face of an unjust case, who are the true victors—God or the Devil? (Dostoevsky, 2004, afterword by Rong, R. D, p. 916)

In addition, in the afterword to *The Brothers Karamazov*, Rong discusses his understanding of Dostoevsky through four themes: his excellence in portraying character psychology, his prophetic vision of the Russian Revolution, his deep religious belief, and his love for Russia. He encourages readers to approach his ideas with an open mind, "I still wish to urge readers not to treat the brief background materials and character introductions as a guide, so as not to narrow the space for intellectual exploration" (Dostoevsky, 2006, foreword by Rong, R. D, p. IV). This enlightening approach stands in stark contrast to early translators who focused more on emotional and social critique, reflecting the 21st-century translators' emphasis on independent thought and diverse interpretations.

From the prefaces and afterwords, it is evident that early translator Geng, while addressing the religious content in Dostoevsky's works, focused more on the complete presentation of the surface-level story. He praised the humanitarian spirit from a perspective of social concern, aligning with the cultural context of the time, which focused on national salvation. Rong, while introducing Dostoevsky from multiple angles, still shows a tendency toward a opposite reception of his religious ideal. Moreover, Rong places emphasis on the multifaceted exploration of the ideas and humanity in the works, guiding readers to understand the rich connotations of the works from a broader perspective. The attitudes of both early and contemporary translators towards religious content are shaped by ideological differences. As the representative of Russian culture, Eastern Orthodoxy, along with the unique religious ideals imprinted by Dostoevsky in *The Idiot* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, means that their reception in China is inevitably rewritten and received according to the mainstream Chinese ideology. It can even be said that his religious ideals were overlooked and rejected within the framework of a pragmatic view of practice.

V. CONCLUSION

This study explored the reception of Russian cultural elements in the Chinese translations of Dostoevsky's works, with a particular focus on the differences between early translations and 21st-century retranslations. Based on Wills' (2018) "text-to-text reception" theory, translation is not only a process of cross-linguistic conversion but also a product of the translator's re-interpretation of the original text within a specific social, historical, and cultural context. By comparing the initial translation by Geng and the retranslation by Rong, this research shows that the treatment of

Russian cultural elements, such as religion and cultural artifacts, aligns with the concept of retranslation hypothesis. Early translators rewrote texts to facilitate Chinese readers' understanding and acceptance of the original works. However, 21st-century retranslations place greater emphasis on preserving the heterogeneity of Russian culture in the original text, striving for a more faithful representation of the original work. In addition, retranslations often include annotations that introduce Russian cultural elements.

The early translator, Geng, modified Russian religious and cultural elements by adapting them to Chinese culture, allowing Chinese readers to understand Russian literature through a familiar ethical and moral framework. This approach, however, inevitably led to a weakening of the depth of the original work's religious thought and, in some cases, caused misreadings. Additionally, the language style of the translation reflects the characteristics of the Republican era, giving the text an archaic tone. Regarding paratext, Geng's preface demonstrates a certain understanding of the religious content, but he is more focused on the storyline. He highly appreciates the humanistic spirit in the work, emphasizing sympathy for the lower classes and a critical stance toward society. This aligns with the urgent need for national salvation and survival in China at the time.

Unlike early translators, the 21st-century retranslations are aimed at contemporary readers, with translators placing more emphasis on the readers' cross-cultural reception abilities. As cultural exchange between China and other countries has deepened, translators have become more focused on preserving the religious and cultural elements in the original work. While striving to remain faithful to the source, they also provide detailed annotations to supplement background information, helping readers better understand the text. Nevertheless, modern translations still feature misinterpretations or incomplete transmission of religious elements. These minor errors reflect the translators' localized ideological bias when facing foreign cultures. Rong, in his preface, emphasizes the complexity of Dostoevsky's ideas and encourages readers to engage in diversified interpretations, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the text. However, when it comes to Dostoevsky's religious ideals, the translators still applied cultural filtering from a realist perspective.

From the perspective of manipulation theory, translation "manipulation" not only reflects external ideological or cultural choices but also involves the translator's reading, understanding, and interpretation process. The rewriting and reproduction of religious and cultural elements, reveals the subjective acceptance and recreation of the original work by the translators within different socio-historical contexts. These translation phenomena highlight the profound impact of culture and ideology on the translation process. Especially in the prefaces and afterwords, the distinct Russian cultural characteristics and rich religious elements in Dostoevsky's works were subjected to varying degrees of cultural filtering by the translators, according to Chinese culture and the prevailing ideology of the time.

The innovation of this study lies in the application of a reception-oriented translation approach to compare the Chinese translations of Dostoevsky's works, addressing the gaps in previous research in this field. Previous studies have primarily focused on empirical discussions of translation history and comparative analysis of translation styles, such as Ding's (2012) overview of the translation history of Dostoevsky's works from 1919 to 1949, and Ye's (2004) study of the styles of three Chinese translations of *Crime and Punishment*. However, these studies have largely failed to delve into how retranslations receive the original text. By comparing translations from different periods, this study reveals the changing ways in which translations receive the original works, offering new perspectives on understanding the influence of shifting socio-cultural contexts in China on translation.

Despite the innovation in reception-oriented translation research, this study has certain limitations. For example, the research mainly focuses on the evolution of translation strategies and textual reception but does not fully explore the post-publication reader response and societal reception of the translations. Future research could extend to the areas of reader reception and translation circulation, exploring the impact of translated works from the perspective of socio-cultural interaction. Additionally, further analysis of the translators' personal experiences and translation philosophies could offer deeper insights into the underlying causes of differences in translation styles, thus providing a more comprehensive understanding of the dissemination and reception of Dostoevsky's works in China.

In conclusion, the translation, retranslation, and reception of Dostoevsky's works in China are not only a classic case of cross-cultural exchange but also an important reflection of the socio-cultural changes in China. Through a comparative study of early and 21st-century translations, this paper reveals the deepening understanding and reception of the original works within the Chinese translation community, providing new directions and ideas for future translation research.

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