Bing Xin as the Most Renowned Chinese Translator of Rabindranath Tagore: A Sociological Perspective

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Abstract

Bing Xin 冰心 is the most recognized and renowned Chinese translator of Rabindranath Tagore. Translation researchers together with critics and readers have attributed Bing Xin's popularity as Tagore's Chinese translator mainly to her literary achievements. In other words, Bing Xin's fame as a top modern Chinese writer is transferred onto her role as a translator. The trust and readership she earned as a writer create an illusion among Chinese readers that Bing Xin's translation is the same as Tagore's "original" writing. Consequently, Bing Xin creates a Chinese image of Tagore with her writing and translation style. In this essay, I employ Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital to argue that the critical acclaim enjoyed by Bing Xin owes greatly to the social and cultural capital she holds, in addition to her literary success compared with other less accomplished and less recognized Chinese translators of Tagore. The social and cultural capital is embodied in her identities as both a writer and a translator. This sociological study of Bing Xin's translation of Tagore reveals the myth and illusion of the canonical position she holds as Tagore's Chinese translation, with the hope of dispelling this illusion and allowing other translations to be recognized and appreciated.

Keywords

Bing Xin, Rabindranath Tagore, Pierre Bourdieu, translation, cultural capital