# Reflections on Socio-translation Studies

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## ABSTRACT

Three questions are currently confronting the fast-developing sociological approach to translation studies, namely, "How must it be named?", "How could it be defined?" and "How should its model of research be evaluated?", which is involving the subject title, research type and research mode. Drawing on theoretical insights from sociolinguistics, literary studies and sociology, this paper argues that "socio-translation studies" should be adopted as the name for this emerging paradigm of research, that the paradigm should be understood as an inter-discipline with a comprehensive coverage in the study of translation, and that the model of research in translation studies typically associated with the sociological approach has both its advantages and its disadvantages. Further reflections on these issues are needed before there could be a more adequate conception of socio-translational studies.

## INTRODUCTION

### The Origin, Development and Problems of Socio-translation Studies

The principles of "socio-translation studies" originated from James Holmes, founder of contemporary Western school of translation studies, who presented his paper *The Name and Nature of Translation Studies* at the third International Congress of Applied Linguistics in Copenhagen in 1972. In this paper, Holmes first proposed the terms "socio-translation studies" and "translation sociology" and briefly explained them (Holmes, 1988, p. 72). He advocates that the functionally orientated descriptive translation is not interested in the description of translation itself, but in the role of translation in the social culture of the target language, emphasizing the context rather than the text. When more focus is placed on function and context, "Translation Sociology" will take shape. While Holmes also pointed out that name as "Socio-Translation Studies" is more accurate because this new discipline is both the research field of translation and sociology. It is the first Western discussion on the nomenclature of translation studies based on sociology. Wolf (2007, p. 13) believes that the "sociology of translation" is an "umbrella note", including the sociological study of translators, the translation process, and translated cultural products. Meanwhile, she made a distinction between "sociology of translation" and "sociology of translation studies", clarifying that "sociology of translation" mainly refers to the specific study of translation phenomena and activities based on sociology, while the "sociology of translation studies" signifies the discipline construction of translation studies based on sociology. As for the "socio-traductologie" applied by Gambier (2007) in French, Wolf (2007) mentioned that it represented a sociological-driven and a sort of reflection on the history of translation studies and the field of translation studies.

### Current State of Research Development

In the West, since the late 1990s, scholars such as Jean Marc Gouanvic, Gerald Parks, Daniel Simeoni, Moira Ingilleri, Rakefet Sela Sheffy, Theo Hermans and Hélène Buzelin, have developed various sociological theories and methods, such as the theory of reflective sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, Niklas Luhmann's social system theory and Bruno Latour's actor-network theory, and have carried out translation research to promote a "sociological turn" in translation research (Merkle, 2008, p. 175). In 2005, the translation journal *The Translator* published a special issue on the sociological study of translation under Bourdieu's theoretical framework; this brought the sociological approach to translation studies to the attention of the international translation community. In 2006, Anthony Pym and other scholars compiled the *Sociocultural Aspects of Translating and Interpreting*. The sociological approach to translation studies has been further expanded. Constructing a Sociology of Translation by Michaela Wolf and Alexandra Fukari in 2007, advo-

cates the theoretical construction of "translation sociology". In 2014, Sergey Tyulenev, a Russian-British translation scholar, published *Translation and Society: An Introduction*: a comprehensive study of the interaction between translation and social culture and an exploration of various sociological models of translation studies which represents the latest progress of Western sociological approaches to translation studies.

The theories of several translation studies schools, which first appeared in the 1970s and quickly gained popularity in the West, were not systematically incorporated until 1995 in China. For instance, the introduction of translation theories from western cultural schools into China also resulted in the "Culture Turn" of translation studies at that time. Borrowed from the sociological theoretical framework, translation studies developed at the end of the 20th century exhibit cross-disciplinary traits in researching theories studies and interpreting translation activities. Generally, concerning the social translation studies in Chinese are a little later than that of the West, but great progress has been made at present, including the preliminary discussion on the theoretical construction of "socio-translation studies" based on the investigation of the evolution law of the paradigm of translation research, and the theoretical demonstration of the basic problems such as the research object, discipline nature and research methods of "socio-translation studies" (Hu, 2006; Wang, 2008; 2011). It also follows up the latest progress of translation studies in this field, with detailed introductions and in-depth analyses of the survey of Western translation sociology, Bourdieu's reflective sociology theory, Luhmann's social system theory and the "sociological turn" of Western translation studies (Li, 2007; Song, 2014; Wang, 2011; Wang Yunhong, 2014). More studies are based on the sociological theories and methods of Bourdieu, Luhmann and Latour to explain and analyze the translation activities of Chinese translators, such as Yan Fu, Lin Shu, Mao Dun, as well as American and British sinologists Howard Goldblatt, William Lyle and Julia Lovell (Cai, 2015; Shao, 2012). In addition, some valuable research reviews and reflects on the development status, major deficiencies and future trends of social translation studies and translation sociology (Wu, 2008; Zhao, 2013).

**Three Current Problems**

However, with the in-depth progress of sociological approach of translation studies, some indefinite and controversial issues concerning this research field are gradually exposed, among which three of the most controversial ones are related to the disciplinary name, research type and research model.

First, what are the similarities and differences between "socio-translation studies" and "translation sociology" ? Which appellation is more appropriate to refer to the current sociological approach to translation studies?

In the West, translation scholars have different preferences for the usage of these two terms. For example, in the collection of *Constructing a Sociology of Translation* Wolf and Andrew Chesterman used the term "sociology of translation/translation sociology" alternately. Chesterman (2006,

2007) employed "sociology of translation" in the *Questions in the Sociology of Translation*, but "translation sociology" in *Bridge Concepts in Translation Sociology* with saying that "Translation sociology is a relatively new area within translation studies." Nevertheless, Yves Gambier (2007) cited the term "social translation studies" in discussing the necessity of establishing and developing the studies. Indeed, although Wolf employs the term "sociology of translation", her anthology also includes and endorses the papers of Gambier that mentioned "socio-translation studies", noting reluctantly: "It is clear that terminology around the subject's title is currently quite inconsistent; So the field itself is still 'in the making'. " (Wolf, 2007, p. 31). So, what should the researchers think of this subject, which is still 'in the making', and its two appellations - "socio-translation studies" and "translation sociology" ? What is the difference between the two? Which is the more appropriate title for the current sociological path translation research?

A second area of dispute regards the type of research: has the sociological approach of translation study, led by led by socio-translation studies, separated from the translated text and become an external study that struggles to take into account the internal factors of translation studies?

According to the current development of social translation studies in the West, Wolf divides the field into three areas: "sociology of agents", "sociology of the translation process" and "sociology of the cultural product" (Wolf, 2007, pp. 13-18). The types of socio-translation studies in China are basically similar to those in the West. In this regard, there is still a critical voice in the academic circle: "from the perspective of research content, the biggest problem of socio-translation studies is that the sociological orientation forces the object of translation research leave the translated texts. With the continuous expansion of the field of translation research, translation studies seem to be content to seek a foothold as a discipline in a broader social, cultural and historical context." (Zhao, 2013, p. 111). Others claim that while the external causes of translation should be the primary focus of sociological research on the subject, it is still necessary to return to textual content to maintain the research paradigm. On the grounds of the accurate observation of Zhong Weihe and Feng Man (Wu, 2008), they found that scholars tend to classify the socio-translation studies as the external study of translation. Then, how do translation scholars say "internal research" and "external research"? Is it appropriate? Is socio-translation studies really an external study?

The third aspect is about the research modes into translation in light of socio-translation studies. What are the advantages and weaknesses?

Since the emergence of socio-translation studies in the late 1990s, it has become the focus of many translation scholars. Hermans (1999), Chesterman (2007), Wolf (2007; 2010), Wang Yunhong (2014) and other scholars have praised it, while Buzelin's interpretation is more representative: "Within translation studies (i.e., the second position), sociology appears as a recent and dynamic trend. It has not delivered all its promises yet, but its legitimacy and importance no longer need to be demonstrated" (Buzelin &

Baraldi, 2013, p. 195). However, Pym is cautious and skeptical about the model of socio-translation studies. After criticizing the wrong idea that translation studies only provide simple descriptions, he points out that "we should resist the obverse illusion that the real explanations only come from a wider and better-established discipline called Sociology" (Pym, 2006, p. 16). Then, how to view the research model of social translation studies objectively? What are its strengths and weaknesses?

## RESEARCH AND IDENTIFICATION: SUBJECT TITLE, RESEARCH TYPE AND RESEARCH MODEL

### Analysis of Appellation of the two Disciplines

In line with the research on the naming of this field, the author found that the most commonly used term in the West is "sociology of translation" (Chesterman, 2006; Heilbron, 1999; Wolf & Fukari, 2007). It can be searched that the reference of translation studies based on sociology in Western academic circles is quite inconsistent due to the relevant disciplines are still in the process of formation. However, "only further insights into the socially conditioned workings of translation and translation studies will be able to specify both the terminology and the research area of a 'sociology of translation' and a 'sociology of translation studies'." (Wolf, 2007, p. 31). As a matter of fact, due to the infiltration and expansion of sociology in many humanities and social disciplines, similar title disputes exist in a series of marginal disciplines related to sociology, including the dispute between "sociolinguistics" and "sociology of language", which has been basically reached in linguistics.

As an enlightening reference, it first presents the academic distinction between "sociolinguistics" and "sociology of language". At the beginning of the birth of sociolinguistics, there was also a phenomenon that the term was mixed with the sociology of language. Even J. Fishman, the early founder of the discipline, sometimes spoke of sociolinguistics and sometimes of sociology of language in his writing, and the two were often mixed indiscriminately (You, 1979, p. 75). Later, with the development of sociolinguistics and sociology of language, scholars' understanding of the differences between them became clear. Bi Kesheng, a Chinese scholar, has a more distinctive view consented that sociolinguistics and sociology of language are two different disciplines. The former is the study of linguistics, which studies society in order to understand language. The latter is still a sociological study, which studies language to understand society. R. A. Hudson, a British linguist, believes that "sociolinguistics as 'the study of language in relation to society', implying (intentionally) that sociolinguistics is part of the study of language", and pointed out the " 'the study of society in relation to language (the converse of our definition of sociolinguistics) defines what is generally called THE SOCIOLOGY OF LANGUAGE." (Hudson, 1996, p. 4) It should be noted that there are many differences between sociolinguistics and sociology of language which lie in the discrepancy in research interests and analytical skills, and in the analytical methods and theoretical perspectives. A brief discussion about the disparity between "sociolinguistics" and "sociology of language" in terms of theoretical perspective, research object, research purpose, and ownership of discipline, accelerates to explore the relevant discussions of sociotranslatology and translation sociology.

Socio-translation studies is a discipline that studies translation phenomena and translation activities from the perspective of sociology, with starting point mainly in sociology, and its research object is mainly translation phenomena or translation activities. Its research purpose is mainly to understand translation phenomena or translation activities appropriately and adequately. So, its research attribute is translation research. In other words, that is to say it can be regarded as a branch of translation. In contrast, translation sociology is a discipline that studies social phenomena or social activities from the perspective of translation. The research purpose is principally to interpret social phenomena or social activities. With its research attribute basically in sociological research, it conducts as a branch of sociology. As an interdisciplinary discipline of sociology and translation studies, they do have many overlapped research objects. Whereas, even for the same research objects, due to different starting points, analysis methods and landing points, their research nature and subject attribution are naturally different. Although there are many commonalities between the sociology of translation and translation sociology, there are distinct differences between them in theoretical perspectives, research objects, research objectives and disciplines, at least in terms of disciplines.

Based on the above considerations, the author holds that most current research, on the sociological approach to translation that is carried out by Chinese and Western scholars, no matter whether dubbed the "socio-translation studies" or "translation sociology", investigates translation phenomena or translation activities from the perspective of sociology, with purposes to better understand translation phenomenon, and reveal the social nature of translation activity, which basically belongs to the nature of translation studies, thus worthy of the name, "socio-translation studies". In the West, the work of a few scholars, such as Johan Heilbron and Gisele Sapiro, is typically sociological and can be called "translation sociology" (see Buzelin & Baraldi, 2013). The vast majority of other scholars' research (though often titled "sociology of translation") is in fact the study of social translation.

It is more pragmatic for researchers, on the one hand, to accept the current situation that "socio-translation studies" and "translation sociology" are synonymous with each other in the field of translation studies, and when necessary, and it can be collectively referred to as "translation research under the sociological approaches" in necessity. On the other hand, researchers still need to further clarify the differences between the two, and leave the final choice between the two to the further development of the research field in the future, that is, as advocated by Wolf, to obtain a profound exploration of translation activities and the social restriction mechanism of translation studies.

## On the Research Types of Socio-translation

Currently many scholars position the sociological approach of translation studies represented by "socio-translation studies" and "translation sociology" as an external study of translation, and believe that such studies deviate from the ontology of translation studies, because "ontology studies are internal rather than external studies" (Lv, 2004, p. 56). It is not difficult to see that the distinction between internal and external translation studies may stem from the traditional distinction between internal and external studies in literary studies. In fact, the distinction between internal research and external research, language and social culture, text and context is straightforward in research practice, while it is essentially a false understanding of binary opposition, and social translation research in the real sense is a comprehensive research.

Tracing back to the source, "internal research" and "external research" were first seen in the book *Theory of Literature* co-authored by Wellek and Warren in 1949. Wellek and Warren classified the studies on the relationship between literary works and external factors such as biography, psychology and society as external studies of literature, while those on the form and structure of literary works themselves as internal studies of literature (Wellek & Warren, 1949). Since then, this distinction made by Wellek and Warren has become a kind of justification for the rejection of traditional social and historical criticism by formalist literary theory represented by new criticism and structuralism, and for the ontology of works and the internal research of texts for a long time. However, with the repeated transformation of literary research between internal research and external research, scholars have deeply questioned the idea that internal and external studies are separated from each other. For example, external and internal are relative rather than absolute, external in one scope while being internal in another; vice versa. Wang Benchao believes that "the so-called external and internal research of literature is only two different viewpoints of literary research, and the relationship between the two is not a completely contradictory opposition. The relationship between external and internal research of literature cannot be simply understood, nor can it be mechanized, vulgarized and viewed from a dual perspective, but should be viewed comprehensively and comprehensively" (Wang, 2007, p. 58). Most literary scholars tend to regard external research and internal research as a unified and comprehensive whole, rather than separate opposites. Furthermore, a single internal research, as well as text research and language research as its forms of expression, are difficult to constitute the noumenon of literary research, and of translation research. The classification proposed by Wellek and Warren is an expression strategy to highlight the centrality of literary works and the independence of literary form, and its purpose is to integrate the external relations related to the internal elements of works, such as the author's biography, psychology and society, into a whole, to break through the binary division of classical content and form and the single ontology of modern form. Similarly, it is also difficult to separate text from context. The two groups of concepts, internal and external, context and text, are not so strictly distinguished, and they are dynamic. Therefore, a single internal study or text study cannot constitute the ontology of literary study, nor can it constitute the ontology of translation study. Assuming that literature is predigested in an absolute language, unable to express itself, it can basically not be translated into other languages. The reality is that translation exists. Moreover, translated works often exert a great impact on the development of the literature in the translated language; even awkard or inaccurate translations help a lot. In translation studies, language studies are undoubtedly important, which does not mean that language studies have a "priority" and become better than other types of ontological studies, because "language, then, is the heart within the body of culture, and it is the interaction between the two that results in the continuation of life-energy. so the translator treats the text in isolation from the culture at his peril" (Bassnett, 2004, p. 23). Accordingly, it is legitimately indefensible to justify that the inherent study of translation is an essentialist thesis of language research and text research, and to position the study of social translation as external research.

As a matter of fact, sociology of translation is a comprehensive study in terms of the nature of the discipline, the object of investigation and the main research methods used. It is an interdisciplinary subject of sociology and translation studies, to a large extent inheriting the "comprehensiveness" of sociology. In a more detailed manner, sociological studies focus on the relationship between social phenomena, especially the comprehensive analysis of various factors, so the manifested comprehensiveness has become one of its considerable characteristics. And socio-translation studies under the shadow of sociology have succeeded that nature in its discipline. It is evident to understand that the study of the sociology of translation does not arrive at an isolated local investigation of the social translation phenomenon but an emphasis on the overall analysis of the social translation phenomenon and various factors influencing it.

Moreover, as far as the object of study is concerned, socio-translation study aims to investigate all translation phenomena and translation activities within social nature. It itself does not distinguish the internal and external objects of study. Consequently, any stage of translation activities, including preparation, translating process and distribution, or any aspect in translation phenomena, including language, text, actors and socio-cultural factors, are within the scope of socio-translation studies, with the foothold in the sociality of all these activities and phenomena.

Sociology of translation is not only interested in the macro socio-cultural factors that "condition and influence the selection, production and reception of the translation" (Wolf, 2007, p. 28), but also concerned with the micro issues such as interlingual conversion, text production and translation strategies in translation activities. It advocates that the micro issues of internal translation research should be investigated under the macroscopic background of field, system and network, because if the connection

between translation and its own starting point (translation is a social practice of human beings to serve the society) and its environment is surrendered, and only taking the translated text as an entity from the perspective of structuralism, the result will have no differences from those produced by laboratory conditions or vacuum. It may be limited or even false.

What's more, socio-translation studies mainly draw on the methods of sociology to carry out research, such as "micro-analysis, meso-analysis and macro-analysis" (Buzelin & Baraldi, 2013, p. 190) supporting to conduct a multi-dimensional and comprehensive study of social translation phenomena. Sociology pays attention to macro-social phenomena, and inquires about micro-social problems. This is because although the main body of sociological research is macro, it still has a micro side. The most representatively famous micro one is symbolic interactionism, and for example, the emergence of linguistic sociology itself is one of the results of sociological careful investigation of micro-social phenomena. Here take Luhmann's sociological theories and methods widely used in social translation studies as an example: according to Buzelin's observation, Luhmann's theory is suitable for both a macro "bird's eyeview" of social translation phenomena and a micro-analysis of social translation phenomena (Buzelin & Baraldi, 2013, p. 197). In addition, the system in Luhmann's theory has the feature of "self-reference", which "emphasizes that the translation system is open to the external environment, but the influence of the environment on the translation system can only play a role under the acceptance of the internal system mechanism of translation, and this influence must be subject to the internal norms of the translation system.This reasonable thinking and deduction is the best proof that sociological translation research is not divorced from translation ontology research, and also refutes the considerations that socio-cultural research will dispel translation ontology studies" (Song, 2014, p. 134).

## On the Strengths and Weaknesses of the Research Model

Like any other model of translation studies, the sociological approach of translation studies led by socio-translation studies also has its own advantages and weaknesses.

### On the strengths

Apparently, as a comprehensive study, the research model of socio-translation studies formed on the basis of absorbing various sociological theories goes beyond a series of binary opposites in translation research, such as subject and object, text and context, internal and external, micro and macro, and integrates and connects the previous research models of philology, linguistics and culture in translation research. This superiority of the research model comes from various sociological theories on which have a profound impact. For example, the methodological principle of "relationalism" advocated by Bourdieu's reflective sociological theory aims to surpass the binary opposition between

individualism and holism, subjectivism and objectivism in traditional sociological studies, and is of special value in breaking down the divisions between internal and external, language and culture involved in socio-translation studies. As for Luhmann's social system theory itself conveys the idea of "holism" in which elements are integrated into the whole and being interrelated, and Buzelin also believes that its "system" can be of any size and scale (Buzelin & Baraldi, 2013, p. 197). Luhmann's theory supports both macro research and meso and micro socio-translation analysis. Speaking of Latour's actor-network theory, the social world is compared to "seamless fabric". Accordingly, "there is no rupture between nature/culture, text/context, agent/structure, or human/non-human: through constant processes of translation, there is continuity" (Buzelin & Baraldi, 2013, p. 189). In addition, the research model of socio-translation studies formed on the basis of the above sociological theories and thoughts has not only effectively overcome the shortcomings of some previous models of translation studies, but also lightly combined different models with its comprehensive research perspective. Chesterman, for example, argues that the sociological perspective of translation studies has led scholars to focus on "bridge concepts", including "the notion of causality; translation practice, discourse and habitus; and translation norm, brief, and strategy", which connect the perspectives of text, cognition and culture; while the sociological approach "may even take a few steps towards the goal of consilience: the idea of uniting different branches of knowledge" (Chesterman, 2007, p. 171).

Meanwhile, socio-translation studies model has borrowed a large number of empirical methods and other scientific methods from sociology, which has enriched the methodological system, and is also conducive to the formation of a research paradigm with the characteristics of the discipline as soon as possible. Since sociology "seeks to answer questions that are discussed by the discipline of social philosophy or philosophy of history.and empirical and scientific methodology has special significance in sociology" (Yuan, 1997, p. 24). Sociological research has gradually formed a set of procedures from determining topics to designing programs, to collecting and analyzing data, and finally to deliberating results and reporting findings (Giddens, 2003, pp. 607-609), and conceiving analytical methods at micro, meso and macro levels, as well as specific methods such as social investigation, statistical analysis, case study and historical research (Wang, 2011, p. 17). In the course of exploring translation phenomena from the perspective of sociology, Chinese and Western scholars actively absorbed these empirical research procedures and scientific research methods of sociology. For example, Belgian scholars Katrien Lannoy and Jan Van Gucht (2006) employed a series of classic sociological methods, such as interview, questionnaire and statistical analysis, to investigate the interpretation and translation services received by social welfare institutions in Flanders. Austrian scholar Nadja Grbić (2006) also adopted the sociological empirical research method based on questionnaire and data analysis to evaluate translating sign language in Stilia.

Chinese scholars Shao (2012) and Cai (2015) also applied data analysis, statistical analysis and other sociological empirical research methods for reference in their sociological approach translation studies. Furthermore, within the assimilation of various sociological research models, socio-translation studies have reinforced the methodological system of translation studies, because it "provides provide literary studies, comparative studies and literary translation researchers with a broad range of methodologies and research techniques from which to choose, thereby greatly enriching the discipline or 'interdiscipline'" (Merkle, 2008, p. 175).

Furthermore, the research model of socio-translation studies profoundly reveals the social natures of translation activities and the social operation mechanism hidden behind those, highlights the important role of translators and translating in the progress of society, and strengthens the status of the translation discipline in the academic circle. As early as the late 1990s, when the emerging conception of sociology-minded research on translation in the West, Hermans pointed out that sociological approach to translation studies "is a way of conceptualizing translation as simultaneously autonomous and heteronomous, a means of studying disputes over what is or what is not translation, a tool to think about the internal organization and evolution of the social and intellectual space we call translation" (Hermans, 1999, p. 138). As the spokesman of the sociological approach of translation studies in the West, Wolf has discussed in detail the various inspirations brought by the construction of translation sociology, and what Wolf called these enlightenments are actually the advantages of the socio-translation studies, which in that they reveal the power relationship hidden behind all stages of the translation process and underscore the prominence of translation products and translators in society. And these inspired ideas have had significant influences on the meaning of research methods, mainly from the analytical tools borrowed from social sciences, which deepened scholars' understanding of the miscellaneous operating mechanisms behind the translator's invisibility, which are contained the interaction between the external conditions of translation creation and the translation strategies adopted by the translator. If Wolf's discussion on the advantages of the research model of social translation is mainly an elucidation of academic theory, Inghilleri takes a more long-term view: "not only has this view encouraged a greater interest in the role of agents and of institutions involved in translation or interpreting activity, it has also stimulated a focus on the location of and recognition given to translation and interpreting studies within academic disciplines and departments" (Inghilleri, 2005, p. 126). As is known to all, translation has a long-standing marginal position in the academic circle. One of the main reasons is that people are used to seeing translation as a language conversion technique, and translators often ensconce behind the translated text and translation activities. Naturally, the elevation of translation and even translation discipline is not recognized, while the research model of socio-translation studies not only highlights the revelation of the translator's subjective initiative, but also endows prominence to the role

of translation activities in the whole process of social development, which greatly boosts the social value and academic status of translation studies.

## On the weaknesses

Based on the above research, it is proved that there is no necessary unification of the research model in socio-translation studies. At present, the operating research model is mainly based on Bourdieu's reflective sociology theory, Luhmann's social systems theory, and Latour's actor-network theory, while these three theoretical models lack necessary correlation and conflict with each other. For instance, some scholars have questioned that what is the relationship between Bourdieu's "field", Luhmann's "system" and Latour's "network" (Wu, 2008, pp. 80-81). Moreover, there are conflicts between Bourdieu's and Latour's theoretical models: "Bourdieu assumes that society can only be explained by analyzing practices and relating them to their authors' position in society as well as to their own trajectory in their field, Latour claims that to understand a society one must, above all, analyze the way humans and non-humans interact…" (Buzelin, 2005, p. 193). And the deficiency of compatibility between different theoretical models has an impact on the overall validity of social translation research model.

Subsequently, there are some difficulties in the practical application of social translation research. As mentioned earlier, the model of sociology of translation is on the strength of various Western sociological theories, which are often derived from the theoretical ideas of multifarious disciplines. For example, Luhmann's social system theory integrates the ideas of biology, organizational science, linguistics, deconstructive philosophy, cybernetics, and other disciplines (Buzelin & Baraldi, 2013, p. 188), which is often complex and abstract in applying to translation studies. Zhao Wei (2013) summarizes complaints from scholars about the studies that sociological theories are too abstruse. Since the translator's "habitus" concept stems from cognitive sociology, interaction relationships between subject and object, and field and capital are quite elusive. In the specific research practice, except for the renovation of theoretical concepts, its theoretical dominant position is not obvious, even the operability is not strong, and the combination of sociological theory and research object is farfetched or even superficial.

Finally, the explanatory power of socio-translation research model itself is also limited. No matter how prominent the advantages of the discipline are, it merely represents a research approach, which must have its restrictions. Although socio-translation studies discharging interpretations of literary translation activities, it is unmanageable to vest appropriate accounts of some subtle factors, such as imagination, inspiration and artistic conceptions that lay emphasis on the representation of aesthetics and art. Matthew Reynolds, professor of comparative literature and translation studies at Oxford University, pointed out that the space of imagination and the work of translation is fanciful, unpredictable, not entirely under the control of imaginative translator, and

hence not entirely subject to social or political frameworks. He asserts that all kinds of things can happen in the process of translating. Thus, while historical, social, and political interpretations are important, they do not represent the whole interpretation of imaginative translation.

## CONCLUSION

Since 1972, when Holmes formally proposed the terms "socio-translation studies" and "translation sociology", the sociological approach to translation studies has experienced a period of about twenty years of unknown accumulation, and finally achieved rapid development in the process of the "cultural turn" of translation studies and the deepening of descriptive translation studies. In the field of translation, it has moved from the former periphery to the present center. Nevertheless, socio-translation studies and the whole sociological approach to translation studies have gradually exposed some problems that need to be solved, mainly involving the subject name, research type and research model of sociological approach to translation studies.

Although the terms "socio-translation studies" and "translation sociology" are commonly used interchangeably in Chinese and Western translation studies, they are quite different from each other in terms of theoretical perspective, research object, research purpose and academic affiliation. With respect to research types, socio-translation studies is a comprehensive study, which is reflected in the nature of the subject and the object of investigation, also in the research methods used. Being a research model, the advantages of sociology of translation are mainly reflected in its integration and connection with the previous research models of philology, linguistics and culture of translation research, enriching the methodological system of translation research, revealing the social operation mechanism of translation activities and highlighting the social importance of translators and translation activities. The weaknesses of the discipline are mainly in the absence of internal unity, difficulties in the practical application and the limitations of its own explanatory power. As for the future development of the model of socio-translation studies, with a more objective vision, Inghilleri believes that "the emerging sociology of translation and interpreting will develop a certain eclecticism with respect to social theory or, indeed, establish divergent and competing approaches" (Inghilleri, 2005, p. 142).

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