

A Comprehensive Analysis of the Chinese Translation of Plotinus's "The Enneads"

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Abstract: Plotinus's profound influence on western philosophical thought, particularly in metaphysics, ethics, and cosmology, serves as the backdrop for a comprehensive analysis of the Chinese translations of his seminal work, "The Enneads." The Chinese translations are depicted as significant events in fostering cross-cultural philosophical exchange. The study underscores the urgency of these translations while revealing the nuanced challenges, diverse methods, and inspirational insights encountered in interpreting Plotinus's philosophy within distinct linguistic and cultural contexts.

Keywords: Plotinus; the Enneads; Neoplatonism; Chinese Philosophy; Translation Studies; Cross-Cultural Philosophy

1. Introduction

Plotinus's "The Enneads" stands as the keystone in the evolution of Neoplatonism across the Western world, offering profound insights into the nature of the universe, reality, soul, and divinity^[1]. As Chinese scholars engage with Western philosophical texts, the translation of pivotal works like Plotinus's assumes a crucial role in fostering a nuanced comprehension of both ancient and contemporary philosophical discourse^[2].

1.1 Background

Presently, there exist two comprehensive Chinese renditions of The Enneads. One is a collaborative translation undertaken by YING Ming and CUI Feng in 2017, released by Shanghai Sanlian Shudian Publishing House. Both translators bring non-philosophical expertise to the task, with YING Ming, a freelance scholar and translator residing abroad, serving as the primary contributor. The

alternative publication is an independent translation from 2018 by SHI Minmin, distributed by China Social Science Press and executed by a university philosophy professor.

1.2 Significance

The translation of Western philosophical works into Chinese is a pivotal component of the broader currents of knowledge exchange and globalization. As China's engagement with the global academic community deepens, there is a growing interest in comprehending and assimilating diverse philosophical traditions^[3]. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, an influx of Western philosophical ideas reached China, prompting visionary scholars and intellectuals to explore and adapt these concepts in response to the challenges and transformations within Chinese society. Against this historical backdrop, the translation of "The Enneads" mirrors a broader movement of philosophical diversification within the Chinese intellectual community.

The task of translating "The Enneads" into Chinese is a nuanced endeavor, demanding translators with a deep understanding of both historical and intellectual contexts, coupled with substantial literary acumen. Given that Plotinus's Neoplatonism presents a distinctive and subtle approach to metaphysics, ethics, and spirituality, the translation must unveil universal philosophical themes that transcend cultural and linguistic boundaries.

Plotinus's exploration of the universe, reality, soul, and divinity appeals to those seeking common ground in philosophical discourse^[4]. The translation of "The Enneads" is propelled by a shared aspiration for cultural and spiritual enrichment that transcends human borders. Evidently, the scholars overseeing the translation were drawn to Plotinus's profound insights and spiritual contemplation, which augmented and enriched their own

philosophical knowledge systems. Thus, the motivation behind both Chinese translations encompasses the purpose and hope of integrating different philosophical traditions. Neoplatonism, rooted in ancient Greek thought, is viewed as a vibrant supplement to Chinese philosophy, fostering dialogue between Eastern and Western modes of thought. Protino's emphasis on mystical experiences and ethical considerations resonates with certain facets of traditional Chinese thought^[5]. The translation of "The Enneads" serves as an opportunity to explore the integration of these dimensions within the broader context of Chinese philosophical discourse. In essence, the translation of "The Enneads" into Chinese is a multidimensional undertaking driven by diverse factors, including global intellectual exchange, the introduction of Western ideas into China, the pursuit of universal philosophical themes, and a quest for cultural and spiritual enrichment. This translation work symbolizes the dynamic interplay between different philosophical traditions and contributes to the ongoing dialogue between Eastern and Western philosophies.

1.3 Impact

Protino's metaphysical concepts, such as the hierarchical structure of existence and the notion of unity, have introduced innovative ideas to Chinese philosophy. Through translation, Chinese scholars can engage with these metaphysical concepts, incorporating them into their own philosophical frameworks and thereby contributing to the evolution of Chinese metaphysical discourse. The ethical and spiritual dimensions of Protagonist philosophy, with their emphasis on the pursuit of elevated consciousness and ethical living, align with certain aspects of traditional Chinese thought. This translation offers Chinese readers a fresh perspective on morality and spirit, potentially influencing contemporary discussions on ethics and personal development. Consequently, translated works may shape the thinking and exploration of contemporary Chinese philosophers and intellectuals.

The translation of "The Enneads" brings new Platonic ideas to Chinese philosophers and scholars, diversifying the philosophical landscape and offering an alternative

viewpoint to traditional Chinese philosophy. This integration of Neoplatonic ideas into Chinese discourse can contribute to the ongoing development of philosophical theory and methodology. Chinese scholars have the opportunity to juxtapose Neoplatonism with elements of traditional Chinese thought, fostering cross-cultural dialogue and enriching both philosophical traditions.

Chinese scholars, through critical research on translated texts, provide varied interpretations and perspectives on Protino's ideas. This dynamic interaction deepens the understanding of Neoplatonism within the Chinese philosophical environment, leading to the development of new syntheses and philosophical innovations. Simultaneously, the Chinese translation serves as a valuable educational resource for students and scholars interested in Neo-Platonism, contributing to the academic research field and facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of Protino's works and their influence on Chinese philosophical thought.

The influence extends beyond academic circles to the adaptation and appropriation of Neoplatonic ideas in broader cultural contexts. Chinese thinkers may incorporate these ideas into artistic, literary, or religious expressions, thereby influencing cultural landscapes beyond the realm of academic philosophy^[6]. It can be asserted that the Chinese translation of Protino's "The Enneads" has profoundly impacted the acceptance and interpretation of his philosophical ideas within the Chinese philosophical milieu. This impact goes beyond inspiring scholars to adopt a broader philosophical perspective, contributing significantly to the ongoing evolution of Chinese thought.

2. Challenges in the Translation Process

The biggest challenge in translating philosophical classics may be that translators must strive to find conceptual equivalence between Greek and Chinese philosophical terms. Due to the fact that most concepts of Neoplatonism do not have direct linguistic equivalents in Chinese, translators need to creatively interpret and adapt them.

In the Western academic community, Protino's works are renowned for their highly abstract and metaphysical language^[7]. As a form of pictographic writing, Chinese may encounter

challenges in accurately conveying these abstract ideas. Therefore, translators must master the subtleties of Chinese to maintain the depth and complexity of the original text. On the one hand, the translator must decide whether to use the transliteration of Greek terms or create new Chinese terms to express their intentions; On the other hand, it is also necessary to consider the readability of the translation for Chinese professional scholars or ordinary readers. In this way, it is crucial for translators to strike a balance between being faithful to the original work and being easy to understand.

China has a rich cultural and philosophical tradition, with its own concepts and subtle differences. Translators need to ensure that the translation can resonate with Chinese readers while maintaining the philosophical integrity of Protagonist thought.

2.1 Translation Selection

2.1.1 Literal Translation and Free Translation:

In evaluating the two complete Chinese translations, it is evident that Shi Minmin's solo rendition tends towards a literal translation style, whereas Ying Ming and Cui Feng's collaborative effort emphasizes a free translation approach. Both sets of translators grapple with the decision of either transliterating certain Greek terms or translating them into Chinese. While transliteration preserves phonetic qualities, translation allows for a more meaningful integration of concepts into the target language.

2.1.2 Creation of New Terms:

In the absence of direct equivalents in Chinese, translators face the challenge of creating new terms. This demands a profound understanding of both the source and target languages and the ability to articulate complex philosophical concepts in a manner accessible to Chinese audiences. The co-translated version boldly endeavors to elucidate issues related to soul, ideas, and more, drawing vocabulary from Taoism, Buddhism, and even Chinese martial arts novels.

2.1.3 Cultural Adaptation:

In navigating the collision of diverse ideas, translators often resort to cultural adaptations to align the translated text with the cultural and philosophical sensibilities of the Chinese audience^[8]. This involves integrating elements

of Chinese philosophy or adjusting the tone and style of translation. The independent translation leans towards a more resolute stance in maintaining the original culture, prioritizing fidelity to the original text's sentence structure and literal meaning while minimizing cultural adaptation modifications.

2.1.4 Footnotes and Annotations:

In the translation of classics, translators may employ footnotes or annotations to address the complexity of certain terms or concepts, offering additional context or explanation without disrupting the fluency of the main text^[9]. The collaborative translation has invested significantly in annotations, particularly in the initial volume of the main translation. Almost every page features footnotes, with numerous small word annotations occupying substantial portions of the page. This meticulous annotation approach ensures that readers can delve into detailed explanations without interrupting the flow of the main text.

2.2 Philosophical Recognition

2.2.1 Impact on Interpretation

The decisions made during the translation process exert a profound influence on the interpretation of Protagonist philosophy within the Chinese context. The translator of the independent version, perhaps inadvertently, introduces certain cultural or philosophical nuances, thereby shaping the reader's perception and engagement with the text.

2.2.2 Reception and Accessibility

The chosen translation style significantly impacts the reception of "The Enneads" within the Chinese philosophical community. A translation that strikes a balance between faithfulness to the original work and accessibility to a broader audience appears to enhance the influence of Protino's ideas^[10]. Therefore, the translation process for "The Enneads" in Chinese involves grappling with linguistic challenges and making critical choices that can directly affect the reception and interpretation of philosophical content in the target language and culture.

The translators of the two versions play distinct roles in bridging the gap between two philosophical traditions, showcasing their deep understanding of both the source language and target language. Simultaneously, it reflects the nuanced differences and subtle cognitive

approaches in their understanding of cultural phenomena and philosophical ideas. The impact of these choices extends beyond linguistic accuracy, shaping the philosophical landscape for Chinese readers and influencing their engagement with Protino's profound ideas.

3. The Critical Response and Alternative Interpretation of Protino's Thought by the Chinese Philosophical Community Reflected in the Three Chinese Translations

Critical responses within the realm of comparative philosophy often unfold as scholars juxtapose Neoplatonic ideas with those from traditional Chinese philosophy. Through an examination of both similarities and differences, scholars critically evaluate the compatibility and coherence of Protino's ideas within the broader context of Chinese thought. Chinese translators engaged in the study of Protino's ideas contribute alternative explanations by adapting his concepts to the context of Chinese philosophy. This adaptation may involve merging Neoplatonic ideas with the framework of traditional Chinese philosophy, facilitating a smoother integration of foreign philosophical concepts with local traditions. Notably, Chinese translators challenge certain assumptions of Neoplatonism, with criticism directed towards the hierarchical structure of existence or the concept of "one." Translators question whether these ideas align with or deviate from the fundamental principles of Chinese metaphysical thought.

Given Protino's emphasis on mysticism, both Chinese translations explore the integration of Neoplatonic mysticism with existing Chinese mystical traditions. Critical responses involve evaluating the compatibility of Protino's mystical ideas with Taoist or Buddhist mystical experiences, leading to alternative explanations that highlight fusion or divergence.

In Protagonist philosophy, criticism and alternative explanations extend to ethical dimensions^[11]. Translators assess the practical significance of Neoplatonic ethics within the context of Chinese moral philosophy, questioning whether Protino's emphasis on soul purification aligns with or challenges traditional Chinese ethical views.

Critical responses also encompass the

translation choices made when translating Protagnus' works into Chinese. Translators meticulously study the terminology they select, providing alternative translations or explanations believed to better capture the essence of Protagonist Chinese thought. Chinese scholars, particularly those influenced by postmodern or contemporary philosophical trends, tend to critique Neoplatonic thought from an interdisciplinary perspective, drawing insights from psychology, cultural studies, or comparative religion to offer alternative perspectives on the concept of Protagnus^[12].

Moreover, given the intersection of philosophical thought with broader social and political discourse, critical responses extend to examining the meaning of Neoplatonic thought in contemporary Chinese society. Scholars intentionally or unintentionally explore the relationship between Protagonist thought and issues of governance, individual rights, or social harmony, particularly in the preface, introduction, translator's preface, and other sections of the translation. This suggests that the field of Chinese philosophy is dynamic, with scholars actively participating and critically evaluating different philosophical traditions, leading to the continuous emergence of new research perspectives.

4. Key Findings and Contributions

The Chinese translation of Protino's "The Enneads" makes significant contributions to the metaphysical discourse within Chinese philosophy^[13], introducing the concepts of Neoplatonism and offering a unique perspective on reality, levels of existence, and the metaphysical foundation of Neoplatonic thought. The translation enriches Chinese philosophical thought by integrating Protagonist ethics and mystical dimensions, deepening the understanding of Neoplatonic ethics and resonating with elements of Chinese mystical tradition.

4.1 Enrichment of Chinese Philosophical Environment

The integration of Neoplatonic ideas diversifies China's philosophical landscape, fostering global dialogue between Eastern and Western traditions^[14]. The translation serves as a dynamic dialogue initiated by Chinese scholars, linking Neoplatonism with local

Chinese philosophy and enhancing academic resources. This synthesis contributes to a more detailed understanding of universal philosophical themes, expanding philosophical education and encouraging exploration of diverse knowledge traditions.

4.2 Influence on Contemporary Chinese Philosophical Thought

The translation has a profound impact on contemporary Chinese philosophical discussions, particularly in metaphysics, ethics, and mysticism. It prompts scholars to reflect on the relevance of Neoplatonic thought to contemporary challenges, emphasizing the interconnectedness of philosophical traditions. This trend aligns with the ongoing global exchange of philosophical ideas, promoting dialogue beyond cultural and linguistic boundaries and encouraging scholars to explore the integration of diverse traditional ideas.

4.3 Encouragement of New Philosophical Frameworks

Different philosophical traditions have distinct approaches to knowledge construction^[15]. Despite differences, both complete translations maintain the structure and appearance of the original work, employing translation and annotation methods. The detailed explanations provided by both translations, particularly in terminology systems, facilitate comparisons with traditional Taoist thought or psychological systems. The extensive footnotes in the joint translation offer additional insights, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of Protino's philosophical views.

In summary, the Chinese translation of Protino's "The Enneads" not only enriches the philosophical discourse in China but also fosters global dialogue, influences contemporary Chinese philosophical thought, and encourages the exploration and integration of different philosophical traditions. The meticulous approach to translation and annotation further contributes to the construction of new philosophical frameworks that draw on the strengths of both Neoplatonism and Chinese thought^[16].

5. Avenues for Future Research

No. 1. Cross-Cultural Comparison of

Metaphysics. Deepen the exploration of the intersection and divergence between Neoplatonic metaphysical concepts and traditional Chinese metaphysical frameworks. Investigate how these concepts influence perceptions of reality, levels of existence, and the metaphysical foundations in both philosophical traditions.

No. 2. Ethical Integration. Examine the alignment or challenges presented by Neoplatonic ethics in comparison to existing Chinese ethical views. Investigate the potential for integrating virtue ethics and moral development, shedding light on universal ethical principles applicable to all humanity.

No.3. Integration of Neoplatonic Mysticism. Explore the integration of Neoplatonic mysticism with Taoist and Buddhist mystical traditions. Research in this area can uncover commonalities and differences in cross-cultural understandings of mystical experiences, enriching the discourse on spirituality and inner exploration.

No. 4. Impact on Contemporary Chinese Society. Investigate the impact of Neoplatonic thought on contemporary Chinese society, particularly in areas such as personal well-being, social values, and cultural perspectives. This research can contribute insights to social and political philosophy, revealing the practical implications of philosophical ideas in daily life.

No. 5. Translation Theory and Choices. Conduct in-depth research on translation theory, specifically analyzing the translator's choices when rendering Neoplatonic ideas into Chinese. This investigation aims to enhance understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with translating abstract and metaphysical philosophical texts.

No. 6. Public Reception of Translated Works. Explore how translated works are received by the general public in China. This research not only provides insights into the influence of Neoplatonic ideas beyond academic circles but also offers a deeper understanding of the broader cultural impact of cross-cultural philosophical exchanges on the society at large. Investigate how these translated philosophical concepts resonate with the cultural and intellectual landscape of the general population.

These avenues for future research promise to deepen our understanding of the interplay

between Neoplatonic thought and Chinese philosophy, addressing both theoretical and practical aspects of cross-cultural philosophical exchanges.

6. Conclusion

By translating and introducing the Western philosophical classic, "The Enneads," into Chinese discourse, we observe the distinctive cultural traditions that delineate the East and the West, shaping perspectives on existential matters, human nature, and morality. Ancient Greek philosophy leaned towards rational explanations of nature and the cosmos, while Chinese philosophy underscored the interplay between morality, societal dynamics, individual roles, family ethics, and social order.

These philosophical disparities manifest significant differences in how Eastern and Western thought grapple with issues related to human existence and development. However, as *The Enneads* gains traction through its Chinese translation, cultural exchange is poised to deepen. The ongoing march of globalization compels individuals to explore the intersections of diverse philosophical traditions, fostering a continued and evolving cross-cultural dialogue in the realm of philosophy.

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