



An Exploration on Psychologist Xie Xunchu's Strategies for Terminology Translation

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Abstract: Xie Xunchu is a representative of the first generation of Chinese psychologists, and his contribution in translation is mainly reflected in his outstanding work in translating early psychological textbooks in China. Based on an in-depth analysis of his translation works, this paper summarizes his flexible strategies for translating psychological terminology, from the inception period of the psychological discipline to its subsequent development. The study finds that Xie primarily adopted a reader-oriented translation strategy during the Republican period of China, shifting focus towards greater informational equivalence with the source text after 1949, thereby ensuring the scholarship and accuracy of the translated textbooks.

Keywords: Xie Xunchu; Psychology Textbooks; Terminology Translation; Translation Strategies; History of Psychology.

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Introduction

Xie Xunchu (1895-1984) was a renowned modern Chinese psychologist. After enrolling at Nanjing Jinling University in 1915, he went to the University of Chicago in 1919 to study psychology, eventually returning to China in 1921. As a representative figure of China's first generation of psychologists, Xie was dedicated to the translation and dissemination of Western psychological knowledge. He participated in preparatory activities for the establishment of China's psychological discipline and significantly promoted its initial construction and development (Ma Wenju, 2024).

While Xie Xunchu achieved considerable success in psychological translation, existing research has predominantly focused on his personal life and overarching contributions, lacking specific and in-depth investigation into his terminology translation philosophy. His most renowned translations include the works of Robert S. Woodworth, a pioneer of American psychology, namely *Psychology* (1933) and *Contemporary Schools of Psychology* (1934). Alongside Gao Juefu's translations, such as *A History of Experimental Psychology* (1935), Xie's works are considered prestigious classics in the history of Chinese psychology (Guo Benyu, 2009).

1 Xie Xunchu's Contributions to the Translation of Psychology Textbooks

During the Republican period, Xie Xunchu was an early advocate for the works of American functionalist psychologist

Robert S. Woodworth. *Psychology: A Study of Mental Life* (1921) written by Woodworth was a classic textbook that systematically introduced psychology's basic concepts and methods, delving into advanced topics like mental processes and personality development. Xie Xunchu published his translation of Woodworth's work as *Psychology: A Study of Mental Life* in two volumes, in 1925 and 1928 respectively. His 1933 translation of *Psychology* further solidified this legacy. This textbook systematically covered basic theories, research methods, and applications of psychology, notably expanding introductions to cognitive psychology, Gestalt psychology, and Freudian psychoanalysis compared to earlier versions. The introduction of this new knowledge disseminated contemporary international trends in psychological theory and provided a crucial knowledge base for Chinese researchers in the discipline to engage in international exchange.

The most influential textbook translated by Xie Xunchu was *Contemporary Schools of Psychology* (1934), published by the National Compilation and Translation Center. This work systematically introduced major modern Western psychological schools, including behaviorism, psychoanalysis, and Gestalt psychology, serving as an essential reference for early teaching and research on the history of psychology in China.

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Xie Xunchu retranslated *Contemporary Schools of Psychology* (1934) in response to the contemporary development of the discipline within China. He not only updated the content based on a new



edition by Woodworth but also adopted a more source-text-centered translation strategy. The 1962 edition improved upon its 1934 predecessor by offering more precise terminology and a sharper, more critical analysis of psychological schools. These enhancements allowed it to better capture the original work's professional depth and scientific spirit. Significantly, Xie changed the title from "现代心理学派别" (Xiàndài Xīnlǐxué Pàibié) to "西方现代心理学派别" (Xīfāng Xiàndài Xīnlǐxué Pàibié). In the new edition, he explicitly explained this change, emphasizing that the book's primary content introduced psychological schools from Western countries. This renaming, from the perspective of Chinese researchers, better reflected the actual developmental circumstances of psychological disciplines in China and the West at the time, providing a clearer framework for domestic learners.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Xie Xunchu pioneered the translation of internationally influential psychological works, such as *Psychology: A Study of Mental Life* (1925, 1928), *The Ways of Behaviorism* (1928), and *Contemporary Schools of Psychology* (1934). The Chinese translation of psychological terms was foundational for Chinese researchers to understand and differentiate between Western psychological schools and constituted a vital part of his translational work. As Hu Bo (2025) notes, for terms lacking direct equivalents, the translator must consider the communicative context in both source and target languages and actively create terms to facilitate knowledge exchange. Acknowledging that some psychological terms lacked established Chinese names, Xie Xunchu leveraged his profound expertise and influence within the field to create new psychological terms. Several of these were later incorporated into the general psychological nomenclature published by the Ministry of Education in 1937. Through his precise translations in works like *Psychology: A Study of Mental Life* (1925, 1928) and *Contemporary Schools of Psychology* (1934), these coined terms became standardized and widely adopted within Chinese psychology.

2 Xie Xunchu's Strategies for Terminology Translation

Over half a century of psychological research and translation, Xie Xunchu's terminology translation strategies exhibited notable differences before and after the liberation of China in 1949, primarily influenced by the social environment and his evolving translation stance across different periods. As the French translation theorist Berman proposed, the concept of "translation stance" refers to the fact that "every translator holds a certain 'concept' or 'feeling' about their translation activity, its meaning, objectives, form, and methods. This 'concept' or 'feeling' varies from person to person but is not entirely personal, as translators are also influenced by historical, social, and cultural factors" (Berman, 1995). Xie Xunchu's "translation stance" was adjusted according to the developmental status of Chinese psychology before and after liberation. Following the May Fourth Movement, during the initial stage of the Chinese psychology discipline, Xie Xunchu employed a reader-centered terminology translation strategy, focusing on how to make new psychological schools better understood by Chinese readers. After liberation, considering domestic readers' growing understanding and acceptance of psychological knowledge, he adopted a concept-centered translation strategy, pursuing the academic accuracy of terminology transmission to better realize the academic value of psychology textbooks.

2.1 Initial Stage of the Discipline: Reader-Centered Translation Strategy

"Translation, through the introduction of advanced foreign technology and culture, can spread knowledge, enlighten the people, shape the national spirit and way of thinking, and even directly influence significant political movements and transformative practices in society during special periods" (Xu Jun, 2017). This was Xie Xunchu's translation purpose during the initial stage of the psychology discipline. In the translator's preface to his translation of Watson's *The Ways of Behaviorism* (1928), he stated his aim was to "introduce these works to students within the country who are attentive to modern psychology and to people who usually enjoy viewing life and society through a psychological lens." He also mentioned the difficulties encountered: "one must consider both preserving the original meaning and making the translation clear." Thus, Xie Xunchu hoped to achieve the goals of enlightening the people and improving national quality through the popularization of psychological knowledge and terminology. During this period, while ensuring conceptual accuracy, Xie Xunchu utilized a large number of indigenous Chinese vocabulary to translate terminology from the field of psychology via meaning-based translation, aiming to accurately present the relationship between psychological activity mechanisms and resulted behaviors. This strategy of localized meaning-based translation made some psychological terms more suitable for the Chinese context, gradually reconstructing a Chinese psychological discourse system integrated with Western psychological knowledge. For example, the textbook terms "sensation" and "perception" were translated by Xie Xunchu as "感觉 (gǎnjué)" and "知觉 (zhījué)" respectively. In psychology, "sensation" refers to the biochemical reactions within an individual after sensory organs detect changes in external energy; whereas "perception" is the brain's overall view and understanding of the external world when stimulated by the senses, involving the organization and interpretation of sensory information. The terms "感觉" and "知觉" adopted by Xie Xunchu integrated Western psychological terminology with the concept of "觉 (jué)" from indigenous Chinese psychological thought. In fact, "觉" is a very significant academic contribution of traditional Chinese indigenous psychology – it is a fundamental quality of the human mind, a basic activity, and an embodiment of human initiative and creativity. Therefore, studying "觉" and revealing its significance holds extraordinary meaning for the innovation and development of psychology (Ge Lujia, 2004). By using the meaning-based translation of "觉" to further elucidate the specific meanings of "感觉" and "知觉" within the context of Chinese indigenous psychological culture, this strategy of localized meaning-based translation not only accurately conveyed their psychological significance but also revitalized the traditional Chinese psychological term "觉".

Similarly, for the translation of psychological terms like "complex", "emotion", "affection", and "feeling", Xie Xunchu also selected "情 (qíng)" from traditional Chinese psychological thought, translating them as "情结 (qíngjié)", "情绪 (qíngxù)", "情

感 (qínggǎn)", and "感情 (gǎnqíng)" respectively. In traditional Chinese psychological thought, "情" is a form of "感动 (gǎndòng)" or "being moved". This "感动" is not about being stirred by external objects but refers to a movement emanating from the heart, or a stirring of the heart (Ge Lujia, 2004). In the psychological context, "complex", a term first used by Carl Jung, the pioneering Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, was described by him as "a knot in the unconscious"; while in the Chinese context, it primarily denotes a state of "emotional entanglement in the heart" that emanates from within. "Emotion" is a general term for a series of subjective conscious experiences, a psychological and physiological state resulting from the synthesis of various sensations, thoughts, and behaviors. "Affection" is a concept used in psychology to describe experiences of sensation or emotion, acting as a conductor for the interaction between an organism and stimuli. According to the Oxford Dictionary, the English word "feeling" can have multiple meanings in the Chinese context, such as sensation, emotion, sentiment, etc.; this term also extends into broad discussions concerning the "essence of humanity," becoming one of the core concepts in modern philosophical anthropology. Xie Xunchu matched it to the concept of "感情" in the Chinese context, referring specifically to the description in Woodworth's psychology of "people's reactions to the state of need satisfaction," which aligns well with the idea of "movement emanating from the heart" in the indigenous Chinese psychological context.

From 1924 to 1934, Xie Xunchu successively translated four works by the American functionalist psychologist Woodworth, including *Psychology: A Study of Mental Life* (1925, 1928), *Psychology* (1933), and *Contemporary Schools of Psychology* (1934). In his translation process, he focused on how to make new psychological schools more acceptable to readers. Through terminology translation, he localized the interpretation and reproduction of Western psychological knowledge to better adapt it to the Chinese educational environment. Consider the following examples:

Example 1:

ST: All the social sciences, including economics and politics, have a psychological side, since they evidently are concerned to know the causes that govern human conduct.

TT: 一切社会科学如经济学政治学等, 皆有心理学的一面, 因为他们都要明了驱使人行为的原动力。

(Yīqiè shèhuì kēxué rú jīngjìxué zhèngzhìxué děng, jiē yǒu xīnlíxué de yīmiàn, yīnwèi tāmen dōu yào míngliǎo qūshǐ rénmén xíngwéi de yuándòngli.)

The literal translation of "causes" is "原因 (yuányīn)" (reasons). Here, Xie Xunchu translated it as "原动力 (yuándòngli)" (motive force/driving force), primarily based on the specific context of psychology. In psychology and social sciences, "causes" often refer to the factors leading to certain behaviors or phenomena. The term "原因" denotes the objective "reasons" or "causes" of a matter, whereas "原动力" specifies the fundamental motive power or inherent force that propels it. Xie Xunchu's meaning-based translation of "causes that govern human conduct" as "驱使人行为的原动力" (the motive force that drives human

behavior), within the psychological context, makes the meaning clearer, allowing readers to more intuitively understand the focus of psychological research, namely those internal factors driving human behavior. It is worth mentioning that studying the driving factors of human behavior is a crucial topic in psychology. Therefore, Mr. Xie Xunchu's translation of "causes" as "原动力" not only preserved the professionalism of the original text, making the translation more aligned with psychological expression, but also highlighted the professional importance of "motive force".

Example 2:

ST: You cannot hope to make minute observations on any process that lasts over a very few seconds, for you must let the process run its natural course unimpeded by your efforts at observing it, and then turn your mental eye instantly back to observe it retrospectively before it disappears.

TT: 你简直不要希望你能精密地观察数秒钟的心理历程, 因为你必定要让心理历程自然流行, 你万不能用观察力来阻挡他的行止, 你只能在这历程未灭迹以前赶快用你的心眼来行回顾的观察。

(Nǐ jiǎnzhi búyào xīwàng nǐ néng jīngmì de guānchá shù miǎozhōng de xīnlǐ lìchéng, yīnwèi nǐ bìdìng yào ràng xīnlǐ lìchéng zìrán liúxíng, nǐ wàn bùnéng yòng guānchá lì lái zǔdǎng tā de xíngzhǐ, nǐ zhǐnéng zài zhè lìchéng wèi mièjì yǐqián gǎnkuài yòng nǐ de xīnyǎn lái xíng huígù de guānchá.)

Xie Xunchu's translation emphasizes cultural adaptability, making the text easily acceptable to Chinese readers. The term "mental eye" in this sentence, literally translatable as "心理的眼睛 (xīnlǐ de yǎnjīng)" or "心灵的眼睛 (xīnlíng de yǎnjīng)" (mind's eye), was translated by Xie as "心眼 (xīnyǎn)". This retains the intuitive meaning of the original while conveying its metaphorical significance in psychology – the ability to retrospectively observe mental processes through internal perception. Simultaneously, the expression "心眼" aligns with Chinese terminological expression; it is concise and easy to understand, reducing the comprehension difficulty for Chinese readers while preserving the core meaning of the original. In psychology, "mental eye" typically refers to an internal observational capacity for reviewing and reflecting on mental processes. The term "心眼" originates from Chinese Buddhist texts, such as the Contemplation Sūtra: "虽在幽闭, 心眼无障, 遥见世尊。" (Although confined in darkness, his mind's eye was unobstructed, and he saw the World-Honored One from afar.). Here, "心眼" precisely refers to what the heart perceives as if seen by the eyes. Through the expression "心眼", Xie Xunchu integrated Western psychological concepts with vocabulary from Chinese Buddhist culture, making the translation both faithful to the original information and easily accepted by Chinese readers.

Thus, as a representative of China's first generation of psychologists, Xie Xunchu, in his practice of translating psychological terminology, emphasized integrating the traditional cultural psychology and思维方式 (way of thinking) of the Chinese nation, fully exploring traditional Chinese academic resources (Pan Wenguo, 2012). They were not only disseminators of advanced

Western culture but also founders of the transformation of modern Chinese academic discourse; they were both expert scholars and accomplished translators, leaving a significant mark on the history of scientific translation in modern China (Hu Yanfeng, 2008), promoting the localized integration and reprocessing of new Western psychological knowledge in China.

2.2 Discipline Development Stage: Translation Strategy Pursuing Terminological Accuracy

After liberation, Xie Xunchu particularly pursued accuracy in terminology translation. For specialized psychological terms and clear expressions in the original text, he tended to use literal translation, ensuring the accuracy and consistency of professional terminology. His translation style can be summarized as accurate and consistent, balancing scientificity and cultural adaptability.

In 1962, following the requirements of the national planning for liberal arts textbook development at the time, Xie Xunchu changed the title of his translated work from *Contemporary Schools of Psychology* (1934) (现代心理学派别, Xiàndài Xīnlìxué Pàibié) to *Contemporary Schools of Psychology* (1962) (西方现代心理学派别, Xīfāng Xiàndài Xīnlìxué Pàibié). In the translation process, he consciously guided the research and teaching of psychology history using the principles of dialectical materialism and historical materialism. The renamed translation better reflected his critical analysis of Western psychological schools, freeing it from the negative influence of Woodworth's eclecticism in the original work. Through this critical analysis, Xie Xunchu not only enhanced the academic quality of the textbook but also provided strong support for training psychology talents suited to the needs of New China's construction. Furthermore, as Woodworth had updated the content of the original work, Xie Xunchu retranslated *Contemporary Schools of Psychology* (1934) to keep pace with developments in psychology. At that time, new research results and theories continuously emerged in international psychology. Mr. Xie Xunchu hoped that through retranslation, he could introduce the latest psychological theories and research findings aligned with contemporary trends, thereby making the textbook's specialized content more relevant to the times.

In retranslating, Xie Xunchu retained more of the original terminology to better convey the professional connotations of the source text. In *Contemporary Schools of Psychology* (1962) (西方现代心理学派别, Xīfāng Xiàndài Xīnlìxué Pàibié), for the specialized psychological term "conditioned reflex", Xie Xunchu no longer used the expression "交替反射 (jiāotì fǎnshè)" (alternating reflex) from the old edition but opted for "条件反射 (tiáojiàn fǎnshè)" (conditioned reflex), a translation closer to the original and keeping up with the times, to describe Pavlov's concept. This translation choice aligned with the materialist doctrine advocated by scientific psychology. In the retranslated edition, he also literally translated "the school of psychoanalysis" as "精神分析学派 (jīngshén fēnxī xué pài)" (spirit/psycho-analysis school) instead of "心理分析派 (xīnlǐ fēnxī pài)" (psychological analysis school) used in the old edition. This change was made by Xie Xunchu referencing the standardized expression of Freud's "psychoanalytic theory" as "精神分析学说 (jīngshén

fēnxī xuéshuō)" in Chinese. His adoption of two different terminology translation strategies in the initial and retranslated versions served different purposes: the initial translation of *Contemporary Schools of Psychology* focused more on introducing and disseminating Western psychological concepts, bringing various Western psychological schools to China and stimulating interest among domestic psychology scholars and readers; whereas during retranslation, responding to the requirements of the 1961 national planning for liberal arts textbook development, Xie Xunchu emphasized the scientificity and standardization of terminology translation in textbooks.

Viewed from this perspective, the choices in Xie Xunchu's terminology translation strategies were closely centered around the needs of different stages of Chinese psychological discipline development, reflecting the diligent enterprising spirit and high sense of responsibility towards training psychology talents that he upheld as a psychology educator in his translation work. He advocated that terminology translation should be based on scientificity and accuracy while also considering cultural adaptability. This translation approach not only facilitated the timely translation and introduction of new Western psychological knowledge but, more importantly, provided first-hand teaching reference materials for psychology talent cultivation in China.

Conclusion

"Every turning point in Chinese history has been closely related to translation activities. Research on influential translators can provide essential background information and clues that illuminate various aspects of modern China's evolution, from the transformation of ideas and the emergence of literary schools to technological revolutions and the establishment of new academic disciplines." (Fang Mengzhi & Zhuang Zhixiang, 2016). As a disciplinary expert, Xie Xunchu, throughout the process of translating and disseminating psychological terminology, consistently adhered to "reader needs" as his guiding principle and shouldered the responsibility for the development of the Chinese psychology discipline. His translation philosophy also bears the imprint of his time as a translator during the Republican period, playing a significant role in the localization and reproduction of Western psychological knowledge.

Notes:

① Robert S. Woodworth (1869–1962), also translated as Wu Weishi, was one of the most important pioneers in the history of American psychology, forming the Columbia School of Functionalism alongside Cattell and Thorndike. He was a landmark figure in experimental psychology and made significant contributions to the development of psychology as a science.

② National Institute of Compilation and Translation (国立编译馆, Guólì Biānyì Guǎn): This was an academic institution under the Ministry of Education of the Chinese Nationalist Government responsible for the compilation and review of cultural books and textbooks. It was established in June 1932, located on Shanxi Road in Nanjing. The first director was Xin Shuzhi (辛树帜).

③ *Contemporary Schools of Psychology* by Robert S. Woodworth (USA). Published by The Ronald Press Company, New York, in 1931, with a second edition in 1948. The book introduces the history of the emergence and development of various modern Western psychological schools, reflecting the research orientation

of functionalist psychology, and contains较多批判 (considerable criticism) of Gestalt psychology. It was selected as a standard textbook for the history of psychology in universities worldwide. The Chinese version was translated by Xie Xunchu. The first edition was published by The Commercial Press in 1934. The second edition, titled Western Modern Psychological Schools (西方现代心理学派别, Xīfāng Xiàndài Xīnlìxué Pàibié), was published by People's Education Press in 1962.

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