

An Analysis of English Translation of The Book of Poetry from the Perspective of Feminist Translation Theory

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Abstract:

The Book of Poetry is the earliest collection of poems in China, reflecting the ancient social life of 2,500 to 3,000 years ago, which is a microcosm of the society at that time, and also an important work for the study of female consciousness in the years during the Book of Poetry. Feminist translation theory is the combination of translation theory and culture, which emphasizes the translator's intervention in the text, which is of great significance to the text translation with bright feminist color. This paper takes the translated texts of Xu Yuanchong and James Legge as the research object, makes a comparison between the two English versions of the Book of Poetry under the guidance of feminist translation theory, analyzes the embodiment of feminist consciousness in the two versions, for the purpose of exploring how feminist translators' self-consciousness plays a specific role in translation practice, and how the two translators use the strategies in the theory to intervene the translations.

Keywords: The Book of Poetry; the feminist translation strategies; Xu Yuanchong; James Legge.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Book of Poetry

The Book of Poetry was compiled in the Zhou Dynasty, which recorded thousands of years of ancient society and historical events. It is the earliest collection of poetries and songs in China, which has a profound influence on the formation and development of Chinese culture. The Book of Poetry depicts a large number of ancient people's lives and their ways of thinking, showing the ancient material and spiritual world to future generations. Among them, Book of Songs mainly involves people's daily life, process of love and different emotions. Poetries about love occupy an important position, especially those chapters describing women's love concept. Through delicate and sincere brushstrokes, they show the brave pursuit, wisdom and firm adherence of ancient women in love, revealing their rich and unique inner world for future generations, and reflecting people's concepts of life and life conditions at that time, which contains a strong feminist color.

1.2 Feminist Translation Theory

As a translation theory derived from the combination of feminism and culture, feminist translation theory defines that the translated text enjoys the same status as the original text from the perspective of translation and aims to eliminate discrimination against women in translation practice on cultural issues so as to "make women appear

in language so that the world can see and hear women."

In this study, the writer selects two translations—— Xu Yuanchong[1] and James Legge[2], to make a comparative analysis from the perspective of feminist translation theory and explore the embodiment of feminism in translation practice.

2. Literature Review

Since the end of the 19th century, feminism has experienced three waves, from the pursuit of equal rights with men, and the appeal of independence and freedom, to now gradually being diversified, which means female consciousness and values are being seen by the world. After the 1970s, western translation studies gradually began to shift to culture, and feminist translation theory emerged in the "cultural turn" of translation studies in the early 1980s.

The views of feminist translation theory are: (1) taking women as the center during the translation process and eliminating discrimination against women in translation theory or during translation practice; (2) Redefining the relationship between the translated work and the original work, highlighting the equal status between them; (3) In the process of translation, translators should not only consider translation skills, but also pay attention to cultural, political and ideological factors[3].

Besides, feminist translation theory includes three translation strategies: prefacing and footnoting, supplementing,

and hijacking.

Supplementing is the translator's compensation to the original text based on translator's own understanding of the deficiencies caused by social, linguistic and cultural differences, so that the target language readers can better understand the content of the original text. In feminist translation theory, the translator integrates feminist thoughts into the translation through the added content so that the translation can be filled with feminist color.

The preface in the article is mostly used to explain the main idea or the purpose of the article. The purpose of adding the preface is to let the readers understand the content of the text and explain the translator's translation strategies and the translation's intention. Footnotes are supplementary explanations for the text, the footnotes printed at the bottom of the page are the translator's supplementary explanations of the translation based on the original text. Feminist translators adopt the strategy of adding a preface and footnote to reflect feminist thoughts in their translations better and achieve the purpose of propagating the spirit of feminism.

Hijacking refers to the translator's creative rewriting or appropriation of views that are inconsistent with feminism in the original text, such as the malicious demeaning or distortion of the image of women in the original text. By using the hijacking strategy, translators add their own views to the translation in order to construct good images of women, praise women, and try to bring the concept of gender equality and the idea of improving women's status into the culture of the target language[4].

3. Translator Analysis

3.1 Xu Yuanchong

As a translator and writer, Xu Yuanchong has been engaged in translation work since the 1940s, and his translations span Chinese, English and French. In his more than 80 years of work on translation, Xu Yuanchong especially loved classical literature and devoted himself to translating a large number of Chinese verses[5].

Almost half of the more than 100 works published are Chinese poems, which have been widely circulated and accepted by readers. He devoted his life to promoting cultural exchanges between China and the West. Through the translation, he realized that the translation techniques he used at that time were all based on Western translation theories, so he not only translated a lot of literary works but also introduced his translation theory, the three-beauty concept.

China's feminist thought emerged late; even to this day, many people are still restricted by traditional thought. The formation and development of feminist thought in China has been hindered by the education on women's behavior

and the restriction of women's status in Chinese tradition.

At the beginning of the 21st century, feminist translation theory was introduced to China; there were some newly published translation works and monographs, including the translation and introduction of feminist translation theory, the study of theoretical and practical texts, and the limitations of its ideological core. Actually, the research of Western feminist translation theories in our country began in 2000[6].

As a man who had not had much exposure to feminism at that time, it was a challenge for Xu Yuanchong to translate the Book of Poetry, which is a collection of poems with many poems full of women's thoughts properly.

3.2 James Legge

James Legge was a Scottish sinologist, missionary, and scholar. To do missionary work in China, he exerted himself to comprehend Chinese ideas and cultures. In 1841, he began to translate The Chinese Classics and finished it in his final years. It was an influential translation. During his residence in Hong Kong, he translated Chinese classic literature into English with the help of Wang Tao and Hong Rengan[5].

James Legge was the first person to systematically study and translate the ancient Chinese classics. During the 25 years from 1861 to 1886, he translated all the major Chinese classics such as the Four Books and the Five Classics, totaling 28 volumes. Many of his works occupy an important position in western sinology circles.

As a foreign scholar, it is difficult to translate Chinese works with traditional colors. In the process of translation, it is necessary to constantly understand Chinese traditional culture to accurately translate the meaning of the original text. Furthermore, the traditional form of Chinese in the Book of Songs and the poems with traditional colors or emotions bring more difficulties to the translation[6].

What's more, in addition to the barriers of traditional culture in the Book of Songs, the female perspective contained in many poems also brings difficulties to the translator of different genders. For the feminism abroad, 1970s was the second climax of the women's movement. Feminist translators believed that there were serious gender discrimination problems in translation. For this reason, they had begun to question translation theories that imply male centrism. Feminist translators all agreed that "women must improve their status through language." As a western Christian missionary, Legge came to China for the purpose of preaching to China. In his early education system and life background, he was deeply influenced by religious belief, and there was a certain conflict between religious tradition and the newly emerging feminist thought. Therefore, it is worth analyzing how to treat and deal with the female thought contained in the translation of Legge's

translation.

4. Case Study

4.1 Supplementing

Example 1: the translation of the title *Meng*

Xu Yuanchong—— A Faithless Man

James Legge—— Mang

The whole poem is in the first person tone. There is a Chinese saying goes like “氓，民之一名。眈犹懵。懵，无知貌。”To call a man by “氓” is a neutral and slightly derogatory term, probably equivalent to today’s colloquial “that guy”[7].

In the translation of the title, Xu takes the supplementing strategy to translate the title into “a faithless man” according to the meaning of the word, which respects the emotion and theme of the whole poem. Through the additional content, the target language readers can imagine the rough content of the poem when they see the title and naturally understand the main theme of the poem. At the same time, this translation follows the original poem to describe the woman’s experience from a female perspective, respects female emotions, and extends the feelings about her own experiences into the translation.

In contrast, Legge does not supplement the title but directly transliterates the title into Mang. Although the translator tries to use the cultural characteristics of the original language as much as possible, readers cannot understand the content of the poem or have a deep understanding of the title. The author believes that in this case, readers cannot understand the meaning of the poem through the translation of Legge. The translator’s treatment of the title cannot reflect the deep emotional connotation of the poem, so it is a little thoughtless.

Example 2:

宴尔新昏，不我屑以。

Xu—— Feasting your new wife dear, you treat the old as dead.

Legge—— You feast with your new wife, and think me not worth being with.

The sentence is chosen from *Ye Feng·Gu Feng*. This poem is a classic poem about an abandoned woman. The poem is full of accusations against the unfaithful husband. In this poem, the self-image of the woman is also very clear, with her own clear requirements and wishes, efforts to save the family crisis, without begging; she spoke out her sorrow and disappointment, without sinking into the state of infatuation. Words in this poem shows that the woman has made efforts for the harmony of the family, but also has defended her personal dignity [8].

Xu’s translation of “feasting on wedding day” and the second as “feasting your new wife dear” shows the gradual improvement of the feelings. In fact, it is also the emo-

tional progress of women’s disappointment and accusation of their husband’s treachery in the poem, and the addition of “as dead” in the subsequent translation is a catharsis of women’s emotions. Xu’s translation symbolically expresses the emotion in the poem through the text, showing the changes in the mood of the woman who experienced a failed marriage and gradually saw the ugly side of her husband. Although it is not like the resolute determination of the woman in A Faithless Man, it also reflects that the woman has self-awareness in the era of inequality between men and women and is also a vivid individual.

In contrast to Xu’s translation, Legge focuses on the woman’s value in the eyes of the man through the complaint from the woman, the translation weakens the severity of the man’s behavior toward his wife and weakens the woman’s spirit of resistance in the poem.

4.2 Prefacing and Footnoting

Example3: footnoting of *Meng*

A woman who had been seduced into an improper connection, now cast off, related and bemoaned her sad case.”

When translating the poem “氓”, Xu Yuanchong uses the word “seduce” in the footnote to explain the main idea of the poem further. Xu uses the word “seduce” in the footnote to explain that the woman in this poem is lured into an unhealthy marriage relationship and to express his sympathy for the woman’s suffering and accusations against the male role in the failed relationship, thus speaking for women. In the translation of the Book of Poetry, Xu mostly uses footnotes to explain the title, which is intended to make readers better understand the content of the poem and is the general outline of the whole poem.

In Legge’s translation, footnotes are not indicated, and the annotation and interpretation of the original text are mostly annotated with parentheses in the original text.

4.3 Hijacking

Example 4:

厌浥行露，岂不夙夜，谓行多露。

Xu—— I accuse. The path with dew is wet, before dawn off a set, I fear nor dew nor threat.

Guo Feng·Zhao Nan·Hang Lu is a poem that records the process of a chaste woman resolutely resisting the entanglement of a rogue man who already has a wife. In the original poem, “谓行多露” means “be afraid of dew and difficulty in walking,” but in Xu’s translation, this sentence is translated as “I am not afraid of dew nor threat,” and the part with feminist values is forcibly embedded in the neutral original work [8]. The translator adds his own views to the translation, with a view to constructing a beautiful image of women[9]. The translator adopts the strategy of hijacking here to reflect better the spirit of struggle of women who are not afraid of power and have the courage to resist. If words such as afraid are used

according to the meaning of the original text, this completely opposite expression of emotion may leave readers with the image of women being weak and afraid, which is contrary to the feminist thought that the poem aims to express. From the above point of view, Xu's treatment of the poem translation here not only reflects the feminist thought, but also creates a female image that dares to fight, and also conveys the main idea of the original poem in the first part of the poem.

Example5:

彤管有炜，说怿女美。

Xu—— Playing a rosy air, I'm happier thane'er.

The sentence is chosen from *Jing Nü*. The original meaning of this sentence is "bright red tube has brilliance, love its color is really bright". The poem describes the process of the tryst with a beautiful, quiet, subtle and intelligent woman from the perspective of an honest and generous man. The whole poem shows the deep relationship between the man and the woman, and makes readers feel the beauty of love between young men and women. In this sentence, the man expressed his love for the gift on the surface of the tube, but in fact all revealed the importance and treasure of the woman, Xu wrote the man's mood directly in the translation, and the man's joy in getting along with the loved one showed in front of the reader. Although the implicit beauty of the Chinese language is lost in the translation process, the implication of the poem is written, and the woman's frank enthusiasm, bold and active female image is shaped in the side by the description of the man's emotion.

5. Conclusion

Through the analysis of the two translations, it is found that Xu Yuanchong, on the basis of fidelity to the original text, presents the emotional and social phenomena involved in the original text to the reader in another language. However, due to the social environment at that time, feminist thought was not widely promoted in China, and the application of feminist translation theory in Xu's translation was not comprehensive. However, it is undeniable that the translation of poetry in Xu's translation has already had the embryonic form of feminist translation theory and feminist thought. It can be seen from the translation of some verses that the translator consciously incorporates the portrayal of female images into the translation. In contrast, Legge's translation is more literal. The translation usually includes not only the original poem and its translation but also adds detailed explanations and commentaries. Hence, the translation is long and strives to retain the cultural characteristics of the original poem but lacks the construction of the female image. A large num-

ber of translations of poems, although the translator tried to retain the main theme of the original text, he still had insufficient understanding of the original text. The lack of understanding of the interpretation of ancient Chinese characters leads to the distortion of the subject matter and the distortion of the female image in the translation, which runs counter to the feminist concept[10].

To sum up, the two English versions of the Book of Poetry mentioned in this paper did not make much use of feminist translation theories, and there is also a lack of female translators to translate it in other existing versions. However, the female thoughts involved in the Book of Poetry and the social status at that time are worthy of later generations' interpretation and publicity of feminist ideas. From the perspective of feminist translation theory, it opens up a new perspective on the translation of the Book of Poetry, which profoundly impacts the publicity of traditional Chinese culture.

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