

A study of drama translation from the perspective of feminist translation -- A case study of *The Romance of the Western Bower*

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Abstract:

The theory of female translation originated from the western feminist movement. This theory regards translation as a political activity, pays more attention to the translator's subjectivity and creativity in the process of translation, and tries to promote the spread of feminism through translation. This paper explores the specific application and limitations of feminist translation theory in practice through the study of the English translation of *The Romance of the Western Bower* (a classical Chinese literature written by Wang Shifu). According to comparative studies, female translators are generally more likely than male translators to pay attention to how female roles are portrayed in the target text and to use certain translation techniques to lessen the prejudice against female roles in the source text and attempt to balance out the gender differences. From the perspective of feminist translation theory, this paper also reveals the influence of the social background centered on male discourse power on women's lives in ancient China.

Keywords: Translation; Feminist; *The Romance of the Western Bower*; Drama translation.

1. Introduction

1.1 Feminist translation theories and strategies

One of the cultural problems in translation studies is to represent the gender issues, because the relationship between translation and gender is so strong that even the external factors such as the gender of the author of the original text and the gender of the translator can have a great influence on the translation [1].

In the 1960s and 1970s, with the advent of women's liberation in Europe and the United States, feminist literary criticism and cultural feminism theories were developed [2]. It is the product of combining the latest progress in translation studies and the feminist movement. This theory has opened up a new gender theme for the translation field and supported the „cultural turn“ in translation studies, particularly in the study of the subjectivity of translators, with its fresh viewpoint and clear political stance.

Works by feminists were produced to express their

political views, make themselves visible, and challenge what they saw as the traditional language [3]. Feminist translation theorists believe that the weak translation position results from the long-term influence of male discourse power. Translation studies have lost the gender ethics of male superiority and female inferiority in social culture, so translation, a cross-cultural language activity, is also regarded as a derivative part and thus marginalized. Because of the similar position between female and translation, feminists try to pursue an equal status as men in and out of words [4]. Therefore, the main points of feminist translation theory include the subversion of the traditional standard of “fidelity” and the emphasis on rebellion. Redefining the relationship between the translation and the original work, underscoring the translator’s subjectivity, which refers to the personal and cultural influences that shape a translator’s interpretation.

Feminist translation theorists firmly oppose the idea of “fidelity” in traditional translation theories. They believe that language is full of sexism, and “fidelity” usually means depriving women of their right to speak. Therefore, in translation, they will manipulate the text from a female perspective and in a female way and boldly practice their theoretical purposes. The translator’s subjective ideological positions, related to political, cultural, gender, and religious issues, affect the translation process [5].

In addition, feminist translation theory also supports the use of a variety of translation techniques to emphasize the position of women in the text and make their voices „visible“ in the target language. In the practice of translation, many feminist translators boldly adopt new words, new spelling, new grammatical structures, and some word games, aiming to transcend the conventions of male-dominated language and open new space for female discourse.

1.2 Introduction to The Romance of the Western Bower

The Romance of the Western Bower is a classic drama in the history of Chinese literature and is regarded as the peak of Chinese classical drama. Yuan Dynasty playwright Wang Shifu adapted it and tells a love story that takes place in the Pujiu Temple. This story takes place during the Tang Dynasty. The scholar Zhang Sheng met Cui Yingying, the daughter of Xiangguo, in the Pujiu Temple, and they fell in love at first sight. However, due to the bondage of feudal ethics, the road of their love is full of twists and turns. This work conveys the criticism of feudal ethics and the yearning for free love, with a distinct anti-feudal theme. It encourages people to pursue sincere love, challenges traditional constraints, and shows the brilliance of human nature.

This paper analyzes the English translation of *The Romance of the Western Bower* by Mr. Xu Yuanchong, a famous Chinese translator. In his translation practice, he pays special attention to the rhyme and rhythm of the poems, striving to reproduce the beauty of Chinese phonology in English, and pays attention to the visual form of the poems, maintaining the lines and verses of the original poems, so that the translated works can match the original poems in form.

2. The translation of The Romance of the Western Bower under the feminist translation theory

The Romance of the Western Bower is one of the famous dramas in ancient China, but it has distinct themes of anti-feudal ethics and the feudal marriage system. Feminist translation theory holds that the subjectivity of the translator is very important, which encourages translators to transform the original text and inject new perspectives and vitality into the translation by adding footnotes, modifying attributives and pronouns, etc., to strive for more voice for women. In the translation of the Story of the Western Chamber, female translators corrected the gender discrimination in the original text. Using the translation techniques of augmenting, prefacing and footnoting, and hijacking or appropriation, they emphasized the dominant role of women.

3. The application of feminist translation strategies in the translation of The Romance of the Western Bower

3.1 Supplementing

Supplementing refers to replenishing the differences between the source language and the target language. In the process, the translator creatively adapts of the text based on his or her gender position or beliefs [6].

Example 1:

Original text: 夫人引莺莺, 红娘, 欢郎上云。

Translation: Madame Cui enters with Yingying (Oriole), her daughter; Rose, the maid; and Merry Boy, her adopted son; and says.

In this sentence, the translator obviously uses the supplementary method to supplement the original text. For readers who have not read the introduction of the characters, simple supplementary instructions can help them identify the characters and thus understand the story logic more easily.

3.2 Prefacing and footnoting

The prefacing and footnoting is called the routine of translation by female translators, which explains the background and meaning of the original text and the translator's translation strategy and process. Through the translation, readers can additionally experience the translator's ideals and the feminist principles that guide them, demonstrating the female translator's willpower[7].

Example 1:

"The Romance of the Western Bower written by Wang Shifu is the most important lyrical drama in the history of Chinese literature. It is as well-known in China as Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet in the West, yet it was written about three hundred years earlier than Shakespeare's tragedy. Like the English play, it consists of a narrative part written in prose and a lyrical part written in verse."

This passage is from the translator's preface. By comparing it with the Western classic Romeo and Juliet, it makes the reader more clearly understand the position of the story of the Western Chamber in Chinese literature, and also makes it easier for the reader to understand the story content. Through a brief overview of the technique of the play, the reader's sense of inclusion is stronger. All these reflect the characteristics of feminist translators who introduce the background of the story, express the intention of the original text and modify it through the translation strategy of the preface.

Example 2:

"It is divided into five acts and twenty scenes....Act Three describes the lovers' longing for each other. Act Four depicts their meeting in Scene I."

This paragraph is also from the translator's preface, which briefly introduces the main content of each chapter of the play, to facilitate readers to understand the content of the play. In the third act, Miss Cui and Mr. Zhang challenge China's feudal ethics and ignore family rules to meet secretly. This act was criticized by everyone at that time, and even Miss Cui should be executed. However, when the translator uses "longing for each other", it does not show that this behavior is against the moral code of women. As a result, this also illustrates the translator's efforts to advance gender equality and lessen the negative aspects of gender discrimination in feminist translation theory. Preface shows the translator's mission is not only to translate, but also to create with translator's subjectivity [8]. Translation enables readers to see beyond their own cultural backgrounds and to have new vistas of the world and history, which makes it a perfect platform for feminists to assert their ideas about the socio-economic situations of women and the complex relationship between the two genders [9].

3.3 Hijacking or appropriation

Hijacking or appropriation refers to the feminist translator's rewriting of the non-feminist points of view in the text according to his preferences or subjective intentions. Feminists' over-emphasis on the translator's subjectivity, to some extent, has imposed negative challenges upon translation theories and practices [10].

4. Conclusion

When Xu Yuanhong translated *The Romance of the Western Bower*, the strategies of applying feminist translation theory were mainly embodied in the aspects of paying attention to the accurate representation of female roles, avoiding gender bias, adapting to cultural background, respecting the original author's female description, and balancing artistic and conveying effects. These strategies make the translation not only faithful to the original but also show respect for the role of women and gender equality. Some studies have conducted a comparative study of the three English versions of *The Romance of the Western Bower* from the perspective of in-depth translation and explored the translation motives, concepts, and methods behind the translations. These studies reveal how translators apply female translation theory to practice through their own choices and strategies to enhance the artistic and cultural transmission of the translation.

In the translation practice of the Story of the Western Chamber, the female translation theory emphasizes the translator's subjectivity. Based on respecting the original text, translators adjust and reconstruct the original text according to their own gender consciousness, cultural background and the acceptability of the target language readers. This translation strategy not only reflects the translator's style, but also reflects his sensitivity to cultural differences and deep understanding of the target language culture. In this way, the translator can build a communication bridge between different cultures so that the original work can be effectively disseminated and accepted in various cultural contexts.

However, it should still be noted that there are many schools of feminism, and there are many viewpoints that are too radical, aiming to subvert traditional translation theory based on structuralism as the ultimate goal. To achieve their political objectives, they put too much emphasis on language manipulation and translators' involvement in translation, thus deviating or even distorting the essence of translation activities to some extent. If such a translation standard guides translation practice, it may encourage excessive translation.

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