

Study of “The Romance of the Western Bower” Translation from the Perspective of Translation Stylistics: A Case Study of Xu Yuanchong’s Translation

Xueting Liu*

Faculty of languages and translation, Macao Polytechnic University, Macao, China

*Corresponding author: p2210531@mpu.edu.mo

Abstract:

The Romance of the Western Bower” is a renowned theatrical masterpiece written by the Chinese Yuan Dynasty playwright Wang Shifu. It is celebrated for its poignant love narrative, exquisite poetry, and melodious lyrics. Regarded as a gem in Chinese classical literature, its translations are invaluable assets of Chinese culture. Recent studies have underscored that translation stylistics plays an essential role in the translation process, encompassing elements such as form, style, and linguistic nuances in the translation text. This article embarks on a comparative research endeavor employing translation stylistics to dissect Xu Yuanchong’s translation strategies and stylistic nuances. By delving into the translation characteristics of Xu Yuanchong’s rendition of “The Romance of the Western Bower,” this study aims to elucidate its profound significance in conveying the essence of the original text and propagating Chinese culture. Through meticulous analysis, it emerges that Xu Yuanchong’s focus lies in preserving the source material’s literary flair and narrative techniques while fine-tuning the emotional expressions to resonate more effectively with the target readers. This research sheds light on the intricate art of translation and its role in bridging cultures and preserving literary legacies.

Keywords: Xu Yuanchong; translation stylistics; The Romance of Western Bower

1. Introduction

In order to promote traditional Chinese culture and showcase the profound essence of Chinese culture, numerous creators have made great contributions by writing literary works throughout history. The diligent efforts and dedication of translators connect overseas readers with Chinese works – the translated works. Translation of traditional Chinese dramas requires deep collaboration with translators to ensure the accuracy of the cultural allusions in the lyrics, thereby enhancing their effectiveness in overseas dissemination [1]. Xu Yuanchong(1921-2021), a Chinese translator, dedicated over sixty years to literary translation, covering languages such as Chinese, English, and French. His translations mainly focus on English translations of classical Chinese poetry, developing methods and theories for translating rhymed poetry. He advocates for the “three beauties” as well– the beauty of sound, the beauty of meaning, and the beauty of form. He was known as the “sole translator of Chinese poetry into English and French” and represented by translated works such as “The Book of Songs” and “The Songs of

Chu”[2]. Xu Yuanchong once said, “Without distorting what the author wants to convey, translations must reflect a national culture’s taste, essence, and soul. Only by adhering to the aesthetic beauty of Chinese culture can Chinese culture step onto the world stage.” “The Romance of the Western Bower” tells the story of Cui Yingying, the daughter of a prime minister, and Zhang Sheng, a young scholar who met by chance at the Pujiu Temple, fell in love at first sight and, after enduring numerous trials. Finally, they tied the knot. Author Wang Shifu portrays the youth’s yearning for love, the unstoppable and justifiable nature of passion and desire, and the conflicts between a youth’s wishes and parental expectations, reflecting strong anti-feudal sentiments and expressing a belief in “may all lovers in the world eventually be united in wedlock.” Previous studies on translations of “The Romance of the Western Bower” mainly focused on the translated text and studies from a translation aesthetics perspective. In contrast, research from the translation stylistics perspective is scarce [3]. This study aims to explore Xu Yuanchong’s translation of “The Romance of the Western Bower” from a translation stylistic perspective and analyze the trans-

lator's techniques, understanding of the original content, and emotional analysis. By comparing the differences between the original and translated works, the study helps English readers appreciate the beauty of Chinese classical drama, enabling more readers to "understand, appreciate, and enjoy" and promoting cultural exchange between East and West.

2. The process of the research

2.2 Introduction of the work and method

2.2.1 Features of the work

"The Romance of the Western Bower" is a representative work by Wang Shifu and one of the finest creations in Yuan Dynasty zaju drama. Wang Shifu is famed alongside other playwrights such as Guan Hanqing, Bai Pu, and Ma Zhiyuan. His works inherit the exquisite language artistry of Tang and Song poetry while incorporating the lively vernacular language of the Yuan Dynasty folk. Wang Shifu was familiar with the places like the "Fengyue Camp" and "Yinghua Village," where artists and courtesans resided, and excelled in writing plays depicting romantic relationships. This work combines literary, poetic, and artistic values with splendid and elegant language, melodic and captivating rhythms, and a poetic drama style. Noted Chinese translator and playwright Xiong Shiyi pointed out that the lyrics in "The Romance of the Western Bower" possess extremely high literary aesthetic value. This play was also hailed by the famous Chinese writer Guo Moruo as "a great artistic work with eternal and universal vitality"[4]. Wang Shifu employed plenty of rhetorical devices, flexibly used symmetrical rhythms, and frequently employed parallelism and antithetical sentence structures to create well-structured prose with a strong sense of rhythm, showcasing the profound cultural heritage of China and vividly portraying characters like Cui Yingying, Hongniang, and Zhang Sheng. "The Romance of the Western Bower" has had a certain influence abroad, especially in East Asia and Western countries. While not as universally recognized as "Dream of the Red Chamber" or "Romance of the Three Kingdoms," it still holds a certain level of fame and research value among Western academia and literary enthusiasts. Some Western scholars believe that the love themes and literary values in "The Romance of the Western Bower" have a universal appeal and have been praised by the British publishing industry as comparable to Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet."

2.2.2 Basic conceptions of translation stylistics

Translation stylistics is a branch of translation studies that explores and analyzes translated texts' stylistic features and characteristics. It focuses on the stylistic differences

and transformations between the source language (original text) and the target language (translated text) during translation. Research in translation stylistics includes translation strategies and techniques related to aspects such as vocabulary selection, syntactic structures, tone, intonation, rhetorical devices, and so on. While describing linguistic forms, it also uncovers the aesthetic significance of literary discourse. Malmkjaer was the first person to explicitly introduce the concept of translation stylistics and apply it to the textual analysis of Hans Christian Andersen's English translations in the book "Translation Stylistics." In the book "Translation Stylistics," it is mentioned: "In the process of translating literary works, translators need to handle the relationship between their personal stylistic preferences and the original stylistic features of the literary works correctly. They should fully understand the stylistic features of the original works, try to downplay their own personal stylistic preferences, and effectively integrate the translator's stylistic preferences into the original work's style, thereby achieving unity and harmony between the two"[5].

3. Analysis of the texts

A comparison of the original and translated text of "The Romance of the Western Bower" can be conducted based on translation stylistics. From a translation stylistics perspective, one can study the differences and transformations in the style and stylistic features of the original text and the translated text, including vocabulary, syntactic structures, tone, intonation, rhetorical devices, and other translation techniques.

Is this a paradise or a sorrowless sphere?

Who would have thought I'd meet an angel here!

Pleased or displeased, she's always a vernal vision fair.

Her profile mostly becomes the ornaments on her hair [6].

这的是兜率宫，休猜做了离恨天。

呀，谁想着寺里遇神仙！

我见他宜嗔宜喜春风面，

偏、宜贴翠花钿。[7]

The original text emphasizes the rhythm and style of classical poetry, employing rhyme, metaphor, and exaggeration as rhetorical devices to vividly depict the perfect image of Cui Yingying in Zhang Sheng's eyes, showcasing Zhang Sheng's love at first sight and admiration for Cui Yingying. The references to "兜率宫" and "离恨天" respectively draw from classical Chinese literature such as the "Lalitavistara Sutra" and "Qin Xiaoran Listening to the Qin in the Bamboo Grove," adding elegance, cultural connotations, and depth. Words like "神仙," "春风面," and "翠花钿" not only portray Cui Yingying's beauty but also reflect Zhang Sheng's intense infatuation upon their

first meeting. Xu Yuanchong employs alienation techniques in translation skillfully, transforming these literary allusions into terms like “paradise,” “sorrowless sphere,” “angel,” and “ornament,” which are closer to commonly used English expressions, aligning with Western culture and aesthetics, easy to understand, while still capturing the original mood and essence, achieving a high level of reproduction and preservation.

In the translation, Xu Yuanchong uses rhetorical devices such as interrogatives, metaphors, exaggeration, and initial and final rhyme, corresponding to the rhyme scheme in the original text, as well as the use of subjunctive mood and participle structures, embodying poetic and graceful imagery, enhancing the literary charm and expressive power of the translation. Through these meticulous translation techniques, Xu Yuanchong successfully conveys the emotions and meanings of the original text to the target readers, presenting a vivid and flavorful literary picture.

Shut is the gate within which bloom pear trees.

The white-washed wall seems as high.

As azure sky.

Why will not Heaven help men to do what they please!

How can I while the time away?

How can I linger here and stay?

I am at a loss what to do this life long day [6].

呀，门掩著梨花深院，

粉墙儿高似青天。

恨天、天不与人行方便，

好著我难消遣，端的是怎留连。

小姐呵，则被你兀的不引了人意马心猿。 [7]

This passage describes Zhang Sheng’s psychological activities, employing metaphors, exaggeration, and rhyme as rhetorical devices, adding interjections like “ah” and “well” to vividly depict Zhang Sheng’s reluctance to part with Cui Yingying and his eagerness to see her again. The phrase “the closed door with pear blossoms in the deep courtyard” echoes the line “pear blossoms and spring rain cover the heavy door” from Dai Shulun’s “Grudge of Spring,” adding a strong poetic flavor. Phrases like “suddenly” and “mind like a galloping horse, heart like a mischievous monkey” portray Cui Yingying’s beauty that captivates Zhang Sheng, causing him to be distracted and enamored, depicting Zhang Sheng’s urgent yet helpless psychological state. The translation similarly employs metaphors, exaggeration, and rhyme, along with interrogatives, emphasizing Zhang Sheng’s intense pain of wanting to see Cui Yingying but being unable to do so. The term “pink wall” refers to a white wall, and it is noteworthy that Xu Yuanchong did not translate it as “pink-washed wall” but retained the original color of the wall, reflecting the cultural differences between East and West making it easier for readers to understand and aligning more with

reality. Xu Yuanchong presents the phrase “As azure sky” as a separate line, emphasizing the height of the wall, symbolizing the difficulty of Zhang Sheng and Cui Yingying meeting, highlighting the initial rhyme technique, adding poetic beauty and making it flow smoothly when read. Xu Yuanchong also uses “at a loss” to replace the last sentence, succinctly and accurately capturing Zhang Sheng’s state of inner turmoil and showcasing a brilliant translation.

Faded her rouge of previous night,

Down falls the black cloud of her hair.

She puts upon her face a powder light

And arranges her locks without much care.

She takes the letter then

And reads it over and over again

Without indeed a sign of weariness and pain [6].

晚妆残，

乌云辮，

轻匀了粉脸，

乱挽起云鬟。

将筒帖儿拈，把妆盒儿按，开拆封皮孜孜看，

颠来倒去不害心烦。 [7]

This passage depicts Cui Yingying’s actions when she just wakes up and starts grooming. The term “evening make-up” originally “morning makeup” refers to the makeup from the previous night that has not been washed off, showcasing Cui Yingying’s carefree lifestyle as a young lady, vividly portraying her carefree and free-spirited character, as well as the image of a young girl in love, also showing her care and affection for Zhang Sheng’s letter. Wang Shifu uses rhyme and parallelism in rhetoric to bring Cui Yingying’s image to life on paper, creating a strong visual impact. Xu Yuanchong employs participle structures, accompanying adverbials, metaphors, and rhyme as rhetorical devices, effectively capturing the image depicted in the original work. The translation retains the original sense of rhythm and rhyme, using a free translation style to embody freedom and poetic beauty, showcasing the elegance and fluidity of poetry. In terms of overall rhythm, Xu Yuanchong’s translation follows the concise and brisk characteristics of the original text, employing rhyme and rhythm techniques and neat parallelism, highlighting the literary and poetic effects of the original lyrics.

4. Summary

Xu Yuanchong translates the original lyrics with a unique rhyme scheme, preserving the poetic beauty of the translation while infusing it with the translator’s strong personal thoughts. His translation effectively conveys the information and emotions expressed in the original text to readers

and flexibly transforms the original text's logical structure and juxtaposition. The translation technique of combining literal translation with free translation is employed in multiple instances [8]. Furthermore, Xu Yuanchong converts some obscure and difficult-to-understand words from the original text into easily comprehensible vocabulary for English readers, adapting them into cultural forms representative of the translated language, making the expressions more appropriate [9].

Xu Yuanchong believes that translation is a form of recreation, allowing for a certain degree of sacrifice in fidelity to preserve the beauty of Chinese culture, effectively disseminating the poetic beauty of Chinese literature [10]. He has made significant contributions to promoting Chinese culture, enabling overseas readers to better understand its cultural implications and connotations.

5. Conclusion

This study utilized a comparative research approach based on translation stylistics to deeply analyze the stylistic features and translation techniques in Xu Yuanchong's translations, which helps overseas readers better understand "The Romance of the Western Bower" and further improves Chinese culture to the world stage. However, this study still has some shortcomings, especially in the partial analysis of the selected texts, which may not be comprehensive and accurate enough. It is hoped that in the future, more scholars can supplement and improve such research, allowing more foreign readers to appreciate the profoundness of Chinese culture.

References

[1]Liu Lisheng & Sun Haoran.(2022). Research on the translation of the Book of the Western Chamber and the investigation of Chinese and foreign English translations. *Foreign Studies* (01), 62-72+108. doi:CNKI:SUN:WWYJ.0.2022-01-010.

[2]Zou Su & Liu Lisheng. (2022). A Comparison of English Translations of the Classic Drama "The Romance of the Western Chamber" — Take the Literary English Translations by Xi Rugu, Edward W. Said, and Xu Yuanchong as Examples. *Journal of Mudanjiang Education Institute*, 03, 31-35. doi:CNKI:SUN:MDJJ.0.2022-03-009.

[3]Zhou Hong. (2016). Aesthetic Representation of English Translations of "The Romance of the Western Chamber" from the Perspective of Translation Aesthetics. *Language Construction*,15, 73-74. doi:10.16412/j.cnki.1001-8476.2016.15.037.

[4]Yu Jingliang. (2024). Research on the literary English translation of the lyrics of "The Book of the West Chamber ." *Journal of Changchun University* (01), 49-55. doi:CNKI:SUN:CDXB.0.2024-01-007.

[5]Tu Yangyang. (2017). The exploration of the translator's style from the perspective of translation and sports - with Mr. Comparative analysis of Wu Mi-A Scholar and a Gentleman translation as an example. *Campus English* (15), 240. doi:CNKI:SUN:XYYY.0.2017-15-224.

[6]Xu Yuanchong. *Romance of the Western Bower* [M]. Changsha: Hunan People's Publishing House, 2000:22.

[7]Wang Shifu, author. *The Story of the Western Wing* [M]. Translated by Xu Yuanchong. Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2011.

[8]Wang Ruo, Zhou Jian & Yang Sen. (2014). Practical translation research based on translation style. *Journal of Tianjin Urban Construction University* (02), 124-128. doi:CNKI:SUN:TJCS.0.2014-02-012.

[9]Gao Haitao. 2017). The style selection and translation strategy of English translation of classics under the perspective of translation and style. *Intelligence*(01),220-221. doi:CNKI:SUN:CAIZ.0.2017-01-185.

[10]Lin Xueming & Mo Yunxia.(2021). Comparative study of the English translation of *The Book of the Western Chamber* - Take the English translation of Xu Yuanchong, Xi Rugu, and Ivid as an example. *Modern and ancient cultural creation* (47), 105-106. doi:10.20024/j.cnki.cn42-1911/i.2021.47.045.