

Translator's Subjectivity in Lin Shu's Translation

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Abstract

Lin Shu translated many foreign works for Chinese readers, but he had to cooperate with his oral interpreters in his translation process because he knew nothing about foreign languages. Translators and reviewers often criticized that what Lin Shu did was to utter his own voice and that he was not a translator but a second-hand story teller. A review of existing studies on Lin Shu's translation shows that they are mostly value judgments of correctness or adequacy of the translations using traditional perspective linguistic approach, which emphasizes the 'faithfulness to the original' principle. In the static text-centered studies, translator's subjectivity has been almost completely neglected. This paper tries to analyze translator's subjectivity in Lin's translation from four aspects: selection of the original, translation purpose, and textual form and translation strategies. It comes to the conclusion that it is due to Lin's subjectivity that his translations possessed a wide readership and became a great success in the literary translation history of China.

Key words: Lin Shu's translation; Translator's subjectivity

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INTRODUCTION

Lin Shu was one of the most famous writers and translators in modern China. A man of remarkable talent, who produced in his life a large number of poems, essays, novels, and literary treatises, he made his contribution to modern Chinese literary history mainly by his amazingly extensive translations of foreign novels. *Bali chahuanv yishi* (*La dame aux camélias*), his first translation (1899), caused a great sensation in China. Lin Shu was inspired by its success and kept translating foreign literary works. His translations let modern Chinese get to know many famous writers. As a pioneer of modern Chinese literary translation, it was him who began China's literary translation and made translation a conscious practice. His translation remains an academic interest in China's translation history.

1970s saw the occurrence of the cultural turn of translation study, which has brought out translator's subjectivity to the foregrounding position. Now, translator's subjectivity has become a hot issue. "The translator's subjectivity shows its influence not only in the process of translator's understanding, interpretation and artistic re-production of the originals, but also in the process of translator's selection of the originals, translator's cultural motivations, translation strategies, and the manipulation of translations' expected functions" (ZHA, 2003). Owing to the overlap in Zha's methodology and the particularity in Lin's case, the paper chooses to study from four aspects: selection of the original, translation purpose, textual form and translation strategies, which can best show how Lin Shu took his subjectivity as a translator.

1. TRANSLATOR'S SELECTION OF THE ORIGINAL

What role did Lin Shu play in the selection of the original texts? It is widely accepted that Lin Shu did not know any foreign languages so the choice depends on his collaborators. Zheng Zhenduo said, "The collaborators randomly chose a book and narrated it to Lin Shu. Then Lin Shu wrote it down" (ZHENG, 1924, p.12). Obviously, Zheng thought Lin played an entirely passive role in the selection process.

Zheng's opinion was representative but not reasonable. It is possible that his oral interpreters played a more important role, but Lin Shu was impossible to play an entirely passive role. First of all, Lin Shu could choose to translate or not translate the originals brought to him. Owing to the 'obstinacy' in his personality and his 'prestige' in the society, Lin may put his own consideration and judgment on the first place. His own decision was very likely to be accepted by his oral interpreters because most of them were his students or admirers.

Secondly, according to the prefaces or postscripts written by Lin Shu, it is not difficult to find his initiative in the original text selection. The preface of *Jiayin xiaozhuan* (his translation of *John Haste*) shows that he chose to translate *John Haste* because he was not satisfied with Pan Xizi's incomplete version. As for an original that his readers and he might be both interested in, he would try his best to find it and translate it. In the preface of *Gugui yijinji* (his translation of *Benita*), Lin wrote, "Yan Fu once said that theology was very popular in the west and there existed such books which vividly describes ghosts in detail, so I wanted to find such books and translate them for my readers" (ZHU, 1923, p.34). After he saw his translations of several Dickens' works were welcome among his readers, Lin told his readers that Dickens has many excellent works and it was not impossible to translate them in a short time. He asked his readers to be patient, because he would translate Dickens's works one by one. These prefaces not only show that Lin Shu did not passively accept the originals that his interpreters brought to him, but also reveal that he chose the originals for certain purposes.

With the help of his collaborators, Lin Shu rendered more than 180 foreign literary works in his whole life. No one could be compared with him in the total number of translations and the impact on China's modern literary translation.

2. TRANSLATOR'S PURPOSE

'Subject' is often used as a synonym for 'human being' who has power, will and consciousness. As far as translator is concerned, *translator's purpose* cannot be neglected. It is supposed to contribute to the connotation of translator's subjectivity as a whole. Skopostheorie,

put forward by Hans J Vermeer, is one of the important theories of German Functionalism. Vermeer proposed that translation is a purposeful action. "Any form of translational action, including therefore translation itself, may be conceived as an action, as the name implied. Any action has an aim, a purpose. ...Further: an action leads to a result, a new situation or event, and possibly to a 'new' object" (Venuti, 2000, p.221).

Bali chahuanv yishi (*La Dame aux Camélias*) is the first book Lin Shu translated. One of the reasons why Lin Shu accepted the original may be Armand's faithful love for Maguerite. When Lin Shu was 46, his wife died of a fatal disease and he was very grieved. Wang Shouchang, one of his best friends, came back from Paris with *La Dame aux Camélias*, and he asked Lin Shu to translate the book with him. Because of the sad scene and tone of the book happened to be the same with his mood at that time, Lin Shu accepted Wang's invitation immediately. In the process of translating, Lin Shu and Wang Shouchang were deeply engaged in the story. When they translated the sorrowful plots, they would burst out crying. In *A Critical View on Translation*, Zhou Yi and Luo Ping said that, "Of all Lin Shu's translated versions, the best ones are those which the translator poured his feelings" (ZHOU & LUO, 1997, p.127).

The prefaces and postscripts written by Lin Shu also clearly indicate his translation motivations. The most important motivation is to save China from subjugation and ensure its survival. To save China, Liang Qichao believed that political fiction has great power. Influenced by Liang Qichao, Lin Shu also thought highly of the social function of fiction and translated some political novels. Joseph Blotner once states: "As an art form and analytical instrument, the political novel, now as ever before, offers the reader a means for understanding important aspects of the complex society in which he lives, as well as a record of how it evolves" (Blotner, 1955, p.1). In the postscript of *kuairou yusheng shu* (his translation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*), Lin Shu explained his translation motivation: to warn Chinese readers of dangers that the country was confronted with, and to save the nation from subjugation.

As for Lin Shu's translation of western realistic novels, the most important ones are those of Charles Dickens. Dickens was good at depicting the lower class of the society. David's joys and sorrows in life (*David Copperfield*), Dombey's various family troubles (*Dombey and Son*), the horrible orphan asylum (*Oliver Twist*), the terrible conditions of village school (*Nicholas Nickleby*), the desolate house where Nell died (*The Old Curiosity Shop*) were known by Chinese readers thanks to Lin Shu's translation versions. Lin Shu thought that Dickens's description of the lower classes could help British government to develop the society." He said sorrowfully that there were no writers like Dickens in China. From the above analysis, it is not difficult to find that one of

the reasons why Lin Shu translated realistic novel was to reveal various defects of the society.

The reason why Lin Shu translated western detective stories might differ a little from the others. He knew such novels played an important role in improving western judicial system. "Western judicial system was far better than China's" (ZHU, 1923, p.47), so he thought that it was necessary to introduce western detectives to Chinese readers. In China there were no lawyers pleading for the accused, which led to a number of wrong cases. Lin hoped that western detective stories could get popular in China and help to improve Chinese judicial system.

Besides the above translation types, Lin Shu translated western adventure fiction, among which *Lubinxun piaoliu ji* (*Robinson Crusoe*) was the most popular. It told a story of a man who shipwrecked alone on an island and finally got back to his country. *Robinson Crusoe* is a fascinating story in the west. After Lin Shu introduced it to Chinese readers, it also fascinated many Chinese readers. Why did Lin Shu want to translate *Robinson Crusoe*? In the preface of *Lubinxun piaoliu ji*, Lin Shu explained: traditional Chinese culture emphasizes Confucianism, which might have made the Chinese people not as brave and adventurous as the westerners. In view of this, Lin Shu tried to change this by introducing Robinson Crusoe, a hero of adventure.

3. TRANSLATOR'S CONSIDERATION OF TEXTUAL FORM

Most of the originals Lin Shu translated are written in their vernacular language. However, Lin Shu chose classical Chinese to translate instead of vernacular form. He was the first and also the last person who succeeded in rendering western literature into classical Chinese. Classical Chinese was chosen by him deliberately.

Lin Shu knew quite well the readers of his translation version. Chinese literati were his readers. Knowing nothing about western literature, they hold that Chinese literature was the best in the world. In order to attract those old literati, he chose classical Chinese. Lin Shu was good at using classical Chinese. It is safe to say that his adoption of classical Chinese in translation help to the success of his translations.

The analysis of Lin's attitudes towards classical Chinese can help us better understand his choice of textual form. As a matter of fact, Lin Shu thought he was a guardian of classical language instead of simply a contributor of it. Since he was a little child, he began to learn it. He has a good mastery of it. The essays he wrote became the texts for students of classical Chinese at the end of the Qing Dynasty. Before he died, the last words he said to his son were "You must work hard to practice classical Chinese in order to have a good mastery of it. Classical Chinese should survive"(XUE & ZHANG, 1982,

p.60). Apparently, Lin Shu saw himself as the guardian of classical Chinese. In the preface to one of his anthologies, "the fate of writing" was compared to "the fate of the nation" by Lin Shu. So his advocacy of classical Chinese is actually the protection of Chinese traditions

Lin Shu's versions read like traditional Chinese novels because the originals are written in their vernacular language. His versions are expressed in classical Chinese which is quite different from Baihua (modern Chinese). Lin's use of classical Chinese is obvious in the translation of sentences. An example can be found in *David Copperfield*. Before moving to Canterbury, Micawbert wrote a letter to David. It was both of a private letter and an invitation. On the whole, Lin Shu kept the flavor of classical Chinese prose, representing characteristics of conciseness, plainness and fluency. In the end of the letter, four Chinese characters "大卫顿首" (David touches the ground with his head) can be found, which were added by Lin Shu deliberately. These four Chinese letters are often used in traditional Chinese letters in order to express politeness.

It is interesting that the classical language Lin Shu used to translate foreign literary works is somewhat different from the classical 'Tong Cheng', which is a genre of prose in the middle of the Qing Dynasty. Characterized by many taboos, the classical Tong Cheng excludes not only Baihua but also some features of classical Chinese. Later, scholars of Tong Cheng extended the range of taboos, which included '注疏' (notes and commentaries), '尺牍' (correspondence) and '诗话' (notes and commentaries in poetry). However, the classical language of Lin Shu's translation is relatively concise and clear. "It has some elements of classical Tong Cheng, but it is much freer in grammar and vocabulary" (QIAN, 1981, p.39). Therefore, borrowed and newly created words and phrases can be found, many of which are translated literally in Lin Shu's translation, especially through transliteration, for example, "密斯" (Miss), "辨士" (penny), "安琪儿" (angel), "布丁" (pudding). Readers nowadays are familiar with these words, but in Lin Shu's time they were newly created in Chinese. Some of them, such as '安琪儿', '布丁' and so on, are still kept in modern Chinese, but some of them are gradually replaced by other new terms.

4. TRANSLATOR'S TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES

Lin Shu did not mechanically write down what his collaborators interpreted. He actually rewrote the originals, making changes. Lin Shu's translation techniques are totally unacceptable to traditional paradigm, but they are quite reasonable from target culture oriented translation paradigm. Toury thinks that "the introduction of a source text into a target culture always entails some changes" (Toury, 1995, p.67), so he will accept the changes. The

paper will analyze three translation techniques Lin used, which are deletion, addition and alteration.

Deletion is a strategy often used by Lin Shu. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* written by Harriet Stowe is a long novel of 446 pages. When translated into modern Chinese, it should at least have around 600 pages; or around 300 pages in classical Chinese. However, Lin Shu's version titled *Heinu yutianlu* has only 206 pages. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has many other versions later, which are longer than Lin's version of 124,000 words. Huang Jizhong's version (1982) has 432,000 words; Zhang Peijun's version (1982) 438,000 words; Wang Jiaxiang's version (1998) 324,000 words.

Why Lin's version is shorter than other versions? One fact is that there is the absence of relevant cultural background knowledge. In literary translation, when such cultural background knowledge is an obstacle to the target readers, it is termed as cultural default. If not handled properly, it has the possibility of perplexing target readers. Therefore, in order not to damage the translation effect, Lin Shu chose deletion. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, there are several passages discussing ghosts. Ghost stories exist in both traditional Chinese and traditional western literature, yet differences can be found between them. What traditional Chinese literature is interested is the ghost story. Traditional western literature not only takes interest in the story, but also the question of ghosts ('pneumatology'). Therefore, Lin Shu retained the story of ghosts while omitting the abstract discussion of ghosts.

Addition can also be found in Lin's translations. Lin Shu's addition simply involved words and sentences. In "*Lin Shu's Translations*", Qian Zhongshu said, "when Lin Shu found imperfection in the originals, he would make additions in order to make the text more concrete, the scene more vivid, the whole description more perfect" (QIAN, 1981, p.40). There are many examples of addition in his translations. Take the twenty-fourth chapter of *David Copperfield* for instance. The drunken David happened to meet Agnes in the theatre, and they talked. What David spoke let Agnes felt ashamed of David's behavior. The original is: "... (I) saw her shrink into her corner, and put her gloved hand to her forehead" (Dickens, 1994, p.363). Lin Shu rendered it into "安尼司则瑟缩座隅, 以手扶头, 状似避余" (Agnes shrank into her corner, and put her hand to her forehead as if she was dodging me), adding "状似避余" (as if she was dodging me). Obviously, it is additional.

Alteration In the process of translation, Lin Shu often made alterations of the source text. In Lin Shu's translation, alteration can be found at lexical level. Lin Shu often used some Chinese words that were functionally equivalent to the words in the original. In his translation of *Ivanhoe*, we can find a lot of examples: 'squire' was rendered into '奴子'(lackey), 'the robbers' into '林之盗'(the robbers in the greenwood), 'trumpet' into '胡

茄'(an ancient Chinese instrument), 'Friar and Father' into '道人'(Taoist priest), 'Father' into '老僧人'(the old Buddhist monk).

The above discussion of Lin Shu's translation technique is divided into three categories: deletion, addition and alteration. They are interrelated and complementary. Lin's practice should not be taken as a model for today's translators. His practice was not faithful but acceptable to his audience. At that time, Chinese readers were concerned with new contents, subject matters and the readability of a translation.

CONCLUSION

The above analysis fully shows translator's subjectivity in Lin Shu's translation. He took initiatives to select the original, instead of translating whatever his collaborators brought to him. His translations to some extent were production of his own translation purpose: to save the nation from subjugation and to ensure its survival. Most of the novels he translated were in their original vernacular language, but Lin Shu translated them in classical Chinese, which reflected his aesthetic pursuit and his consideration of target readers. He preferred free translation to literal translation, so translation techniques such as addition, deletion and alteration were not unusual in his translations. It is due to his initiatives that his translations possessed a wide readership and became a great success in the literary translation history of China. His translations had tremendous impact on the contemporary people and society.

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