

A Comparative Analysis of Two English Versions of Some Poems in *A Dream of Red Mansions*

Xuxiang Suo

Southwest University, Chongqing, China;
Capital University of Economics and Business, Beijing, China

Abstract—This thesis makes a comparative study of the two versions of translation of poems in *A Dream of Red Mansions* to find out the differences. Yang's version is literal translation. It retains the content and form of the original work. The language of the translation faithfully conveys the original's rich and profound connotation. English readers may not adapt to such form, technique and mood of ancient Chinese poems, but they may have some idea of the source text. Hawkes' version employs free translation. It retains the original's content as much as possible. Some poems, in the form of English ballads, with beautiful sound, form and mood, are fluent and easy to understand. Some contents are rewritten, which are expressive.

Index Terms—poetry translation, aesthetic approach, *A Dream of Red Mansions*, literary interest

I. INTRODUCTION

The following is the comparative analysis of two English versions of the translations of some poems in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, analyses briefly the different translation methods used by Hawkes and Yang Xianyi and the different effects they make in the TL culture and to the TL readers. Finally, it concludes that the purpose of translation decides the choice of different translation strategies. *A Dream of Red Mansions* is among the greatest classical works of China and of the world. As an encyclopedia work, it takes pride in rich life, great theme and unique artistic values. Not only in China, this masterpiece also aroused great interests of many foreign readers. The most popular English versions are *The Story of the Stone* translated by the Britain scholar David Hawkes and *A Dream of Red Mansions* translated by Chinese famous translator Yang Xianyi and his wife Gladys Yang (Suo, 2015). It is well known that to fully understand and interpret each detail of Hong Loumeng is a very hard work even for many Chinese readers because of its rich culture-loaded contents and the extraordinary depth of thoughts. So, this essay is going to cite some poems in chapter V for the following comparative study of domestication and foreignization, the two translation strategies adopted by David Hawkes and Yang Xianyi respectively in their translations. In *A Dream of Red Mansions* Chapter V holds a very important position of the whole novel. It is in this chapter that Cao Xueqin firstly pointed “红楼梦”, the name of this novel. So firstly, a brief comparison of the title should be necessary.

II. COMPARISON OF THE TITLE

A. *The Comparative Study of the First Poem of “Third Register of Twelve Beauties of Chinling”*

In this chapter, Bao-yu visits a fairyland with the guide of Qin-shi and saw many pictures and the relevant poems. The first one of “Third Register of Twelve Beauties of Chinling” is about the maid of Bao-yu, Qingwen. The original text goes like this:

“霁月难逢,彩云易散。

心比天高,身为下贱。

风流灵巧招人怨。

寿夭多因诽谤生,多情公子空牵念。”

David Hawkes's translation:

“Seldom the moon shines in a cloudless sky,

And days of brightness all too soon pass by.

A noble and aspiring mind,

In a base-born frame confined,

Your charm and wit did only hatred gained,

And in the end you were by slanders slain

Your gentle lord's solicitude in vain.”

Yang Xianyi's translation:

“A clear moon is rarely met with,
Bright clouds are easily scattered;
Her heart is loftier than the sky
But her person is of low degree.
Her charm and wit give rise to jealousy,
Her early death is caused by calumny.
In vain her loving master’s grief must be.”

Mr. Yang basically adopted literal translation, trying to achieve the fully literal equivalence of each sentence to the original text. The first couplet of the Chinese original “霁月难逢, 彩云易散” not only hides the Chinese name of Qingwen, but also indicates the miserable fate of her, for “霁”, “彩云” means “晴”, “雯” respectively and “难逢”, “易散” also implies the imperfect endings in Chinese. Yang well expressed the literal meanings of the Chinese characters and met perfectly the requirement of form of Chinese poem; however, the information of Qingwen’s name was lost. In Hawkes’s version, the name of Qingwen was translated as Skybright. Hawkes didn’t explain the meanings of Chinese characters “霁” and “彩云”, and the name “Skybright” also was hidden in the first couplet, so in this aspect, Hawkes’s translation is fairly a successful one.

In the six sentence “寿夭多因诽谤生”, the word “寿夭” not only means “death” in Chinese, but also indicates that to live a very short life. Qingwen’s early death is a very important foreshadow of the whole story. Mr. Yang translated this as “early death”, which meets perfectly the Chinese meaning, what’s more, the two words “caused” and “calumny” formed alliteration, which successfully gains the same reading effects as “诽谤” in Chinese. Hawkes also used the two alliteration words: “slanders” and “slain”, but it is pity that he didn’t express the meaning of “early death” to his readers.

By using the way of domestication, Hawkes successfully conveyed the original textual information to foreign readers with smooth and beautiful English, but the loss of Chinese culture-loaded information is inevitable. Mr. Yang mostly adopted the way of literal translation, trying his best to keep the true and idiomatic Chinese style and national tint.

B. The Comparative Study of the Sixth Poem of “First Register of Twelve Beauties of Chinling”

This poem is about Jia Ying-chun, the elder granddaughter of Jia Mansion. She suffered an extreme miserable marriage and finally was maltreated to death by her husband, Sun Shaozu. The original poem is:

“子系中山狼,得志便猖狂;
金闺花柳质,一载赴黄粱。”

For many foreign readers, to understand this poem may not be an easy thing, because the short four lines are full of Chinese traditional allusions and culture-loaded words. For example, the phrase “中山狼” comes from an old Chinese folk tale: “The Tales of Mountain Wolf” which was written by Ma Zhongxi of Ming dynasty. In Chinese, this phrase is used to indicate those ungrateful people. The first two lines are the description of Jia Yingchun’s husband, Sun Shaozu, who is ungrateful and brutal. The other allusion “黄粱” is from 《枕中记》 of Tang dynasty, which means the dream-like rich and prosper that is unreal and easily goes in vain. Another example is the three Chinese characters in the third line: “金”, “花” and “柳”. In Chinese classics, “金” is often used to emphasize the dignity and nobility; “花” is the word that to describe the beauty of female. In this sentence, it was used to modify the svelte and elegant figure of female. So, the information is abundant: the gentle and weak lady, the wolf-like husband and the terrible ending of Jia Ying-chun and so on. David Hawkes’s translation:

“Paired with a brute like the wolf in the old fable,
Who on his saviour turned when he was able,
To cruelty not used, your gentle heart
Shall, in a twelvemonth only, break apart.”

Yang Xianyi’s translation:

For husband she will have a mountain wolf,
His object gained he ruthlessly berates her;
Fair bloom, sweet willow in a golden bower,
Too soon a rude awakening awaits her.

Both Hawkes and Yang Xianyi maintained the image of wolf. This is because that in both the English and Chinese, the word “wolf” has the same conceptual meanings and the culture connotations: a representative of brutal, ruthless and ungrateful person. In Hawkes’s translation, the textual information was kept, while the information of allusion was missing, which is a loss to those foreign readers and they may be wondering about the “fable” in the expression: “wolf in the fable”. For the third line: “金闺花柳质”, Hawkes just used one word “gentle” to describe the lady, which made the readers can not gain the enough information of Ying-chun. Yang successfully kept all the three images of the culture-loaded words by using “bloom”, “willow” and “golden”, and the use of adjectives “fair” and “sweet” also serves well to the expressiveness. Yang’s translation of the final line, in my opinion, is a classic of foreignization. The skillful use of the word “awakening” is really excellent. This word not only reminds the readers the allusion of the story of “黄粱”, but also implies the break of the dream of the red mansion which is accidentally the novel’s name. So, Hawkes adopted liberal translation and cleared away the obstacles of understanding for foreign readers. Mr. Yang is more like a

responsible translator. His strategy is to adopt semantic translation with annotation. By doing this, the loss of meanings of culture allusions can be effectively compensated and the exotic favor can also be retained to the great extent.

C. *The Comparative Study of the Poem “虚花误”*

This poem is one of the fourteen “Hong Loumeng” songs. The poem is:

“将那三春勘破,桃红柳绿待如何?把这韶华打灭,觅那清淡天合。

.....

似这般,生关死劫谁能躲?闻说道西方宝树唤婆娑,上结着长生果。”

This poem is the description of Xi-chun, the youngest granddaughter of the Jia Mansion. Having been disillusioned by the cruel reality, she decided to get away from the earthly affairs and chose to sacrifice herself to the Buddhism. The first line directly described the short time span of the beautiful early springs. Here the word “三春” not only means spring, but also hides the other three granddaughters of the Jia Mansion, namely, Yuan-chun, Ying-chun and Tan-chun. So, Mr. Yang translated the line as: “She will see through the three Springs.” And he also added the missing information by the annotation that: “A pun meaning the three months of Spring and the three elder Chia girls. All the Chia girls had the character chun or spring in their names.” This way of translation effectively informed the inner connection between Xi-chun and other girls and the exquisite design of their names. By the way, if we connect the first character of the four names of these girls, then a phrase can be gained, which reads as: “原应叹息”. This phrase can be taken as the basic tone of Hong Loumeng. Hawkes simply put: “三春” as the “triple springs”, which lost the rich implied meanings of the original text. As for the last couplet, Mr. Yang added the annotation in translating: “西方宝树”, a special term of the Buddhism. He explained in the foot note that: “it was said that Sakyamuni attained Buddhahood in a grove of sal trees.” Hawkes’s translation is: “In Paradise there grows a precious tree, which bears the fruit of immortality.” Actually, Hawkes replaced the specialty of Chinese culture, “Buddhism” by “paradise” the typical symbol in the culture of English which is a comparatively strong language with more power and influence. The Chinese famous translator Wang Zuoliang once commented translation as a process of the communication between two cultures. So, a translator should be a faithful introducer of the semantic meaning as well as the culture of the source language and has the responsibility of maintaining the national tint in order to satisfy the different requirements of the various readers. In order to promote the communications between different cultures, the translator should respect the conventions and characteristics of the less powerful languages. In the year of 1973, with the invitation of the Penguin Books Publishing House, Hawkes began to translate Hong Loumeng. His direct purpose clearly is to let more readers to understand and enjoy the novel. Mr. Yang successfully meets the three standards of the foreignization proposed by Sun Zhili. Actually, it is very difficult to judge which method is better, the purpose of translation decides the choice of different translation strategies.

III. ANCIENT CHINESE POETRY TRANSLATION THEORY

How to translate Chinese poems into English? The theory of equivalent transferring of meaning (对等翻译理论) prevails in the west while Chinese translators stick to the criterion of “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance” (信, 达, 雅) over a long period of time. Many scholars think loyalty and equivalence should be embodied in many aspects, such as the meaning of words, semantic meaning, understanding of the text, style, harmonious sounds and cultural transference. As is known to all, the sentiment and implication of some words in the ancient poems are gained because these words are often used in the poems. The readers who are familiar with ancient poems may think of a chain of related lines at the sight of these words. The verses together with their respective feelings and lingering charm appear before your eyes. They enrich the significance of the words, which cannot be conveyed by words of equivalent or approximate meaning. Prof. Xu Yuanchong (许渊冲) said, “If equivalent version is the best expression, we will employ the equivalent version. If not, we will employ the best, not the equivalent.” He summarized literary translation as “beautified art”, that is “二美 (意美, 音美, 形美), 二化 (深化法, 浅化法, 等化法), 二之 (知之, 好之, 乐之)”. If his theory lays stress on perceptual factors, then some young scholars’ theories are more rational. Their common ground can be generalized as “fusion”: translation is fusion of differences, not vivid representation of differences. Still there is objector, who holds that the key part of translation is to deal with the differential factors in the source text.

IV. THE STYLES OF TWO ENGLISH VERSIONS OF A DREAM OF RED MANSIONS

At the end of 1970s, Yang Xianyi and his wife Gladys Yang had their translations *A Dream of Red Mansions* published. Owing to the particular political period, they tried their best to be faithful to the original works without expressing their own understanding of the author’s intentions, which led to a rather literal translation and an ignorance of the acceptability for the target language readers. They adopted foreignization, that is, the target language culture submitted to the culture of the original work. David Hawkes, a British sinologist, published his translations *The Story of the Stone* in 1977. He made a profound research into the original book and collected a lot of information about the background of the book. He stressed the target language readers at the expense of the original meaning. He employed free translation, and adopted domestication to deal with cultural connotation, namely, using extremely natural, fluent

target language to convey the content of the original works. Translation is the paramount means of intercultural communication. Chinese poetry, the most concise and implicit literary form with rhymes to express the thoughts and feelings, as a unique symbol of Chinese culture, has been translated into various foreign languages. This book tries making a comparative study of poetry translations in the two complete versions of HLM from the angles of translation linguistics, translation aesthetics and translation rhetorics, which is supposed to help researchers better understand translation theories and translation strategies and generate new ways to comment on poetry translations.

V. LINGUISTICS AND TRANSLATION OF THE POEMS IN A DREAM OF RED MANSIONS

The basic property of language is the humanities, which are expressed in the form of human thoughts and feelings. How to convey connotations and feelings and realize equivalent transferring of meaning (意义对应转换) is the focus and goal of meaning transferring translation theory (意义转换理论). Successful translators are adept at conveying the ideas. Literary translation is full of indeterminacy (不确定性), because what it would convey is beyond the basic meaning of the original works. There are differences in culture, mode of thinking and expression between source language (SL) and target language (TL). The translation should consider not only the target language reader's acceptability, but also the aesthetic perspective and imaginary space so as to achieve conformity in culture and find the corresponding expression. This chapter will make a case study on the poetry translations of the two English versions in A Dream of Red Mansions to explore the art of translation. Beauty is the characteristics and true nature of art; beauty is the characteristics and nature of literature; and beauty is the characteristics and nature of poetry. The aesthetic feeling embodied in the mood of the poem, the activity, mobility, interest, image, space for imagination, sound and so on, is the main content of aesthetic study of ancient Chinese poetry translation.

VI. AESTHETIC APPROACH TO THE TRANSLATION OF THE POEMS IN A DREAM OF RED MANSIONS

《红豆曲》is Baoyu's classical work on lovesickness.

Original:

女儿悲，青春已大守空闺。女儿愁，悔教夫婿觅封侯。女儿喜，对镜晨妆颜色美。女儿乐，秋丁架上春衫薄。

滴不尽相思血泪抛红豆，开不完春柳春花满画楼。睡不稳纱窗风雨黄昏后，忘不了新愁与旧愁。咽不下玉粒金药噎满喉，照不尽菱花镜里形容瘦。

展不开的眉头，握不明的更漏。呀，恰便是遮不住的青山隐隐，流不尽的绿水悠悠。

Yang's version:

The girl's sorrow: Youth is passing but she remains single.

"The girl's worry: Her husband leaves home to make his fortune.

"The girl's joy: Her good looks in the mirror in the morning.

"The girl's delight: Swinging in a light spring gown."

Like drops of blood fall endless tears of longing,

By painted pavilion grow willows and flowers untold:

Sleepless at night when wind and rain lash gauze windows,

She cannot forget her sorrows new and old:

rice like jade and wine like gold,

She turns from her wan reflection in the glass:

Nothing can smooth away her frown,

It seems that the long night will never pass:

Like the shadow of peaks, her grief is never gone:

Like the green stream it flows for ever on.

Rain buffets the pear blossom and the door is closed".

Hawkes' version:

The girl's upset:

The years pass by, but no one's claimed her yet.

The girl looks glum:

Her true-love's gone to follow ambition's drum.

The girl feels blest:

The mirror shows her looks are at their best.

The girl's content:

Long summer days in pleasant pastimes spent.'

'Still weeping tears of blood about our separation:

Little red love-beans of my desolation.

Still blooming flowers I see outside my window growing.

Still awake in the dark I hear the wind a-blowing.

Still oh still I can't forget those old hopes and fears.
 Still can't swallow food and drink, 'cos fm choked with tears.
 Mirror, mirror on the wall, tell me it's not true:
 Do I look so thin and pale, do I look so blue?
 Mirror, mirror, this long night bow shall I get through?
 Oh-oh-oh!
 Blue as the mist upon the distant mountains,
 Blue as the water in the ever-flowing fountains.'
 Rain whips the pear-tree, shut fast the door".

The verse was composed by Baoyu at Feng Ziyang's feast, with superb talent, and elegant artistic style. Permeated with long-drawn-out sad thoughts, the mood of the verse is "lovesickness", which is constructed through "Bi" and "Ring" of the imagery“豆”, taking the readers into the realm of the verse naturally and experience the endless affection. “春” is also imagery to show lovesickness and interdependence.

Yang's version left out the imagery, so "drops of blood, tears of longing" lost the lingering charm for analogy and mental connection. While Hawkes' rendering "tears of blood" and "little red-love beans" enriched the emotional appeal of the verse.

The parallel structure“滴不尽”, “开不完”, “睡不稳”, “忘不了”etc. contains a“不”in each sentence. The negative wording makes the whole verse appear passive and distressful. Yang's version uses seven negative expressions: "endless", "untold", "sleepless", "cannot", "nothing", and two "never"s, which may better convey the maiden's longing and sadness. While Hawkes' version begins with 5 "stills", and ends with rhyming "separation& desolation", "growing& blowing", "fears& tears", "true, blue& through", "mountains& fountains", which sounds mellow, sweet and smooth, resulting in lack of intense feelings. “青山隐隐” and“绿水悠悠”gave expression to Baoyu's hidden pain and endless sad thoughts. Yang rendered the analogy explicitly while Hawkes' rendering was a failure.

VII. CONCLUSION

This thesis makes a comparative study of the two versions of translation of poems in *A Dream of Red Mansions* to find out the differences. Yang's version is literal translation. It retains the content and form of the original work. The language of the translation faithfully conveys the original's rich and profound connotation. English readers may not adapt to such form, technique and mood of ancient Chinese poems, but they may have some idea of the source text. Hawkes' version employs free translation. It retains the original's content as much as possible. Some poems, in the form of English ballads, with beautiful sound, form and mood, are fluent and easy to understand. Some contents are rewritten, which are expressive.

Depiction of natural scenery and human spirit may emerge from the mood of Cao Xueqin's poems, full of poetic charm. The poems to depict characters in the novel make very images of various persons. They go with the individual's personality, characteristics, self possession. Lin Daiyu is romantic and delicate; Xue Baochai is graceful and reserved. Their individual manner is different from each other. Some poems are mediocre, some are childish, some are stupid, and some are vulgar. But the depicted objects are absolutely lifelike. The translations seize the mood and interest of the source text, convey the thoughts and feelings and reflect the literary grace.

As to rhetoric, the translators should by all means choose the most proper and approximate expression to convey the beauty of rhetoric in the translation. Most rhetoric forms in the poems of HLM have corresponding expressions in English versions, but euphony, pun, allusion, etc. are impossible to pronunciation, convey in the translation. And rhetoric related with the word forms word structure, word omission and abbreviation, word order cannot be rendered. For the rhetoric that has powerful effect on the thought and plot of the original work, we should remedy it as much as possible, for example, by changing the rhetoric forms, by emphasizing or by adding some footnotes; for those which have little to do with the plot or thought of the source text, the translator may give up. For the rhetoric impossible to translate, we may give a brief explanation, so that the English readers may understand the appeal of rhetoric.

Based on the study, the author of the thesis comes to the following conclusions: Translator is the subject of translation; source text is the object of translation; recreation is the mode of translation. The author's subjective understanding may have great effect on the translation and recreation. The translator should have profound understanding of the original, be loyal to the style of the original. But different translators may have different manners in translation. Translation requires truth and poems pursue beauty. So the translation of verses should put truth before beauty. The version should convey the beauty of significance, form and sound of the original so as to attain the goal of cultural communication. Translation should perfectly render the words, significance and taste. The essence of ancient poems should be conveyed in the translation. The translation of rhetoric sometimes requires the change of object of analogy, or the rhetoric forms so as to reproduce the significance for the English readers. If corresponding forms cannot be found in the target language, we should make full use of the superiority of the target language and choose the best rather than the corresponding forms to convey. The studies of the translations of the poems in involve many profound theories, which have influenced a lot of principles. This book is only a tentative Investigation versions into this complex field. The comparative study of poetry translations in the poems of HLM from the angles of translation linguistics,

translation aesthetics translation rhetorics might give researchers some enlightenment and reference on poetry translations.

REFERENCES

- [1] Cao, Xueqin. (1973). *The Story of the Stone*: Penguin Books Indiana University Press Volume I: *The Golden Days*, Translated by David Hawkes, First Published in 1973 by Penguin Books, Reprinted by Caves Books, Ltd., 1978.
- [2] Gu Jingyu. (1995). *Romeo and Juliet*, Beijing: The Commercial Press.
- [3] Hawkes. (1973). *The Story of the Stone*: Penguin Books Indiana University Press Volume I: *The Golden Days*, Translated by David Hawkes, First Published in 1973 by Penguin Books, Reprinted by Caves Books, Ltd., 1978.
- [4] Luo Xinzhang. (1984). *The Self-made System of Theories of Translation in Our Country*, a preface to the book *An Anthology of Essays on Translation*. Beijing: The Commercial Press.
- [5] Munday, J. (2001). *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Application*, New York: Routledge.
- [6] Nida, Eugene A. (1964). *Toward a Science of Translating*, Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- [7] Nida, Eugene A. (1993). *Language, Culture and Translating*, Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- [8] Nord, Christiane. (2001). *Translating As A Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained*, Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- [9] Newmark, Peter. (2001). *Approaches to Translation*, Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- [10] Newmark, Peter. (2001). *A Textbook of Translation*, Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- [11] Suo. (2015). A New Perspective on Literary Translation Strategies Based on Skopos Theory, *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 2015.

Xuxiang Suo was born in Hubei, China in 1973. She is studying cognitive linguistics for PHD in Southwest University, Chongqing, China. She is also an English teacher in Capital University of Economics and Business, Beijing, China. Her research interests include translation theory and practice and cognitive linguistics.