

Influence of Translator's Identity on Translation in China's Global Communication—Taking XU Yuanchong's Version of Classical Chinese Poetry as an Example

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Abstract: This thesis concentrates on influence of translator's identity on translation in China's global communication. With a case study on *Version of Classical Chinese Poetry*, the thesis finds out three main influences, which are influence on the style, figures of speech and diction of the target language, influence on translator's motivation, influence on national image, and influence on national cultural soft power; moreover, this thesis presents influence of Xu Yuanchong's identity on *Version of Classical Chinese Poetry*. Through the analysis, this thesis aims to emphasize the importance of translator's identity so as to rouse translators' awareness of equipping themselves with profound knowledge and to provide references for the following related researches.

1. Introduction

Translation in China's global communication helps spread Chinese culture as well as have the achievement of politics, economy etc. understood by the outside world. Translation quality is tightly related to the national image. Thus, translator carries the responsibilities of presenting the developing situation and establishing a good national image of our country^[1].

Translator plays a key role during translation process as he acts as both readers and translators. When the Chinese classics are translated, dictions, figures of speech, style, and the equivalence between the source and the targeted texts all influence the quality of the targeted text.

Translator's identity mainly refers to his knowledge background. For instance, someone who knows the world history, literature, economy or even linguistics etc. can be called a multi-identity person. Translators' identity have important influence on translation in China's global communication. Li Jing and Zhu Xian^[2] both pointed out that translators with multi-identity benefit in reproducing and spreading the ST. Xu Duo^[3] said that translators' identity and thought, undoubtedly, have been influencing the whole translation process. To translate classical Chinese poems etc., translators should have a profound understanding of Chinese culture, philosophy, and literature, which means translators should perfect their identity.

XuYuanchong, a professor in Peking University and a well-known translator at home and abroad, has translated hundreds of books in Chinese, English, and French. He is the only scholar on translating classical Chinese poetry into English and French rhymes. In 1999, he was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature. His *Version of Classical Chinese Poetry* is popular among scholars, which presents his special translation theory and tactics.

This thesis, taking Xu Yuanchong's *Version of Classical Chinese Poetry* as a case study, mainly focuses on influence of translator's identity on translation in China's global communication

2. Influences of Translator's Identity on Translation in China's Global Communication

There is the common sense that the poets should translate poetries, which means translating poetries is a harsh and complicated work and translators should know more than just the source language and

target language. Instead, it would be better if the translator is a poet who knows how to create poems. As Li Jing wrote in his paper “no matter it (refers to ‘the poets should translate poetries’) is scientific or not, it is no doubt that translator’s multi-identity has a positive effect on translation^[2]”. Obviously, translator’s identity influences translation quality.

2.1. Influence on the Diction, Figures of Speech, and Style of the Target Text

Different authors have different writing style. For example, Ernest Hemingway is known for his short and brief language. Thus, translators who will translate should try to get close to the author. However, with different experience and personal knowledge background, translators will choose different words to describe the same meaning, which as a result will influence the diction. Moreover, some figures of speech will also be affected. As a whole, the target text’s style is influenced. For instance, the poem *Starting for the Front* in the *Tang Poetry*^[4] which is translated by Xu Yuanchong is as follows:

*With wine of grapes the cups of jade would glow at night;
Drinking to pipa songs, we are summoned to fight.
Don’t laugh if we lay drunken on the battleground,
How many warriors ever came back safe and sound?*

The source text^[4] is as follows:

葡萄美酒夜光杯，欲饮琵琶马上催。
醉卧沙场君莫笑，古来征战几人回。

In the first sentence of the original poem, it consists of two nouns, one is wine and the other is the cup of jade. However, in the target text, “glow” is a verb to describe the cup of jade, which made the image more vivid and concise. In the second sentence, actually, there are different understandings. Some experts think that it refers to playing pipa (a typical Chinese musical instrument) while riding on a horse, while some says it refers to summoning the soldiers to fight immediately. As for Xu Yuanchong, an expert with a deep understanding of Chinese culture and history, he choose the later understanding. In the last sentence of the target text, “safe and sound” is added by the translator so as to help the readers have a better understanding, which also make the target text be more closed to the source text. In the source text, the last sentence’s form is a statement (according to the meaning, it is a rhetorical question), while in the TT, it is a question, which is easier for readers to understand. Thus, owing to Xu Yuanchong’s profound knowledge, the diction, figures of speech and the style are to a large extent equivalent to the source text’s.

Similarly, diction, figures of speech, style, tones, the inner meaning, political issues and questions of translation in China’s global communication would be influenced or misunderstood.

2.2. Influence on Translator’s Motivation

Translator’s identity also have an impact on translator’s motivation. In Chinese modern history, the writers and translators such as Yan Fu, Lin Shu, Guo Moruo, Xiao Qian (who translate *Ulysses* with his wife), Zhu Shenghao, Fu Lei, Lu Xun, Qian Zhongshu etc. translated plenty of English works into Chinese in order to spread western culture and advanced technologies in our country. But as economy develops and with the opening-up policy, our country has changed a lot——developed technologies, high-speed developing economy, stable and harmonious society, excellent education condition etc.. Therefore, we need not only to learn from the outside world, but also to let ourselves be understood by the western countries.

In the current situation, writers and translators would like to translate literature works such as *The Four Books and Five Classics*, *A Dream of Red Mansions*, *Journey to the West*, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and so on. There are also other translated works like *Xi Jingping—The Governance of China*, and some English version newspaper such as *China Daily*.

Xu Yuanchong is a Professor in Peking University as well as an expert in literature, history, translation and writing. He has a great responsibility for spreading classical Chinese culture and literature to the western countries. Thus, he has translated many works, such as *Classical Chinese Poetry*, *Song Lyrics in Paintings*, *Tang Poetry in Paintings*, *Elegies of the South*, *Poems of Mao*

Zedong, Selected Poems of Li Bai and so on.

In the 1980s when he was still studying abroad, one day, Xu Yuanchong was reading in a book store, he found out almost nobody paid much attention to the C-E works. Subsequent to this event, he decided to translate so as to let the outside world have a comprehensive understanding of China.

As a professor and expert in Peking University which is the best university in China, Xu Yuanchong also translated *Version of Classical Chinese Poetry* which can be regarded as the quintessence of Chinese poetries. For example, in *Book of Poetry*, besides *Cooing and Wooing*, *Peach Blossoms Beam*, *A Wife Waiting etc.* are also typical. *A Wife Waiting*^[5] is as follows:

Along the raised bank green, I cut down twigs and wait.

My lord cannot be seen, I feel a hunger great.

Along the raised bank green, I cut fresh sprig and spray.

My lord can now be seen, I feel not cast away.

The bream has fire-red tail, My lord has fire-red eye.

He fires to no avail, Our parents are near-by.

The source text^[5] is as follows:

遵彼汝坟，伐其条枚。未见君子，惄如调饥。

遵彼汝坟，伐其条肄。既见君子，不我遐弃。

鲂鱼赪尾，王室如毁。虽则如毁，父母孔迩。

In Chinese history (from about 11 to 16 century), the male have to serve for the countries in the militaries. As a result, their wives have to support the whole family, including the old parents and the little babies. This poem describes such situation which lasts for several centuries. The western readers would have a better understanding of people's living condition in Chinese history after reading such poems.

As for Xu Yuanchong, as an expert in literature and translation, he wanted to spread classical Chinese literature to the outside world. Similarly, a person who is an expert in economy, internet technology, history, philosophy would chose to translate Chinese economical theories and thought, IT books, historical events, and Chinese philosophy such as the thoughts of Lao Zi, Confucious, Han Feizi etc. to the western countries.

2.3. Influence on National Image and National Cultural Soft Power

Translator's identity affects translator's choice of the ST and the quality of the TT, which in consequence impacts national image and national cultural soft power. In Qing Dynasty and the Modern Times of China, most translators translated the western works into Chinese, but as economy and society develop, China image is no longer the same as before.

Xu Yuanchong's Version of Classical Chinese Poetry shows the profound cultural background and wisdom of Chinese people in different times and dynasties. For example, *Tang Poetry* shows the colorful life and prosperous society. In Han, Wei and Six Dynasties, poetries presents readers some heroes' courage and determination, such as Xiang Xu. He wrote *Xiang Xu's Last Song*^[6] ("Song" doesn't refer to a singing song. It is a style of poems in Han Dynasty.)

I could pull mountains down, oh! With main and might,

But my good fortune wanes, oh! My steed won't fight.

Whether my steed will fight, oh! I do not care.

What can I do with you, oh! My lady fair!

The source text^[6] is as follows:

力拔山兮气盖世。时不利兮骓不逝。

骓不逝兮可奈何！虞兮虞兮奈若何！

This poem could describe, to a large extent, the image of Han Dynasty. Similarly, in the twenty-first century, the C-E works will presents China image to the outside world. A high-quality translated works with different aspects also proves a better education condition, which, more or less, proves the national cultural soft power.

3. Influence of Xu Yuanchong's Identity on *Version of Classical Chinese Poetry*

Xu Yuanchong's *Version of Classical Chinese Poetry*^[7] includes *Book of Poetry*, *Golden Treasury of Chinese Poetry in Han, Wei and Six Dynasties*, *Tang Poetry*, *Poems of Su Shi*, *Song Lyrics*, *Yuan Songs*, and *Golden Treasury of Yuan, Ming and Qing Poetry*, which translates some classical Chinese poems and song lyrics into English.

Xu, as an expert in translation in literature, tries his best to make the translated works dynamically equivalent to the source texts in the following aspects: tones, diction, figures of speech, emotion of the author, and most importantly, the general style.

Xu also advocate his own principle of translation, which is “the theory of three beauties—the sound, the form, and the meaning”. During translation, he uses many strategies and skills to translate, such as transliteration (e.g. pipa), free translation (e.g. frail woman), literal translation (e.g. oh!), repetition (e.g. miles and miles) etc..

Version of Classical Chinese Poetry is no doubt a success which deserves translators' attention. Translators should equip themselves with more knowledge, including history, religion, literature, politics, economy, biology, and even philosophy which will surely help the translators translate more accurately and fluently.

4. Summary

Translation in China's global communication is a language-transferring activity. However, a high language level is not enough to translate because translation needs translators to be multi-identity. Through the analysis, it is apparent that translator's identity has influence on translation in China's global communication. Diction, figures of speech, and style of the target text are affected. A good TT should be largely equivalent to the ST. Meanwhile, the identity also influences translators' motivation. The choice of the ST is decided by the translators' identity as well as his interest. And the quality of the TT also affects national image and national cultural soft power. Xu's *Version of Classical Chinese Poetry* also shows that the identity of translator affects TT's accuracy, fluency, and style, and Chinese image in the western countries.

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