

Studies on Yan Fu's Translation Thoughts "Faithfulness, Expressiveness, and Elegance"

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Abstract—Since Yan Fu's putting forward his translation thoughts in his translated book *Evolution and Ethics and Other Essays* one year ago, it have been a hot topic for ages. Each time when Chinese scholars try to evaluate one translated book, Yan Fu's translation thoughts "Faithfulness, Expressiveness, and Elegance" would be their first choice to act as a standard to judge whether it can be an ideal one. Even Howard Goldblatt, the most popular literary translator of numerous works of contemporary Chinese fiction, even explained his translation thoughts with the help of "Faithfulness, Expressiveness, and Elegance". Can "Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance" be as translation criterion? How about Yan Fu's own understanding about his translation thoughts and whether he followed his translation thoughts to conduct his translation tasks or not? Besides, how do people today understand Yan Fu's translation thoughts? In this thesis, the author first pointed out the source of Yan Fu's translation thoughts "Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance" and their related discussion. Later, modern interpretation of Yan Fu's translation thoughts "Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance" and their development as time went by were described. And at last, whether "Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance" can be as Translation Criterion was discussed in great detail and the author also gave her own opinion about it.

Keywords—translation thoughts; Faithfulness; Expressiveness; Elegance

I. INTRODUCTION

Yan Fu was a Chinese scholar and translator, most famous for introducing western ideas, including Darwin's natural selection to China in the late 19th century. But Yan Fu's translation thoughts "Faithfulness, Expressiveness, and Elegance", put forward in the preface of the translation of T. H. Huxley's book *Evolution and Ethics and Other Essays* one hundred years ago, impressed large number of Chinese scholars profoundly, which contributed to his having an everlasting name in history.

Scholars hold totally different views on his translation thoughts, leading to even heated debates for ages, which in turn proved his status in Chinese translation studies.

Actually, Yan Fu did not set them as general standards for translation and did not say that they were independent of each other. However, since the publication of that book, the phrase has been attributed to Yan Fu as a standard for any

good translation and has become a cliché in Chinese academic circles, giving rise to numerous debates and theses.

II. THE SOURCE OF "FAITHFULNESS, EXPRESSIVENESS, AND ELEGANCE" AND THEIR RELATED DISCUSSIONS

"Faithfulness, Expressiveness, and Elegance" was proposed by Yan Fu in his preface of his translated book *Evolution and Ethics and Other Essays*. "Translation involves three requirements difficult to fulfill: faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance. Being faithful to the original is of great difficulty already. However, even though you succeed in achieving that goal, if the translated one cannot be called coherent writing, it is of no significance. Therefore, expressiveness should be given priority too." "It is said in the Book of Changes that faithfulness is basis of translation. But Confucius says that expressiveness is all that matters in language. He adds that where language has no refinement, its effects will not extend far. These three dicta set the right course for literature and are the guidelines for translation. Hence besides faithfulness and expressiveness, I also aim at elegance. I strive for elegance not just to make my translation travel far, but to express the original writer's ideas better, for I find that subtle thoughts are better expressed in the vocabulary and syntax of pre-Han prose than those of the vulgar writings of today. Using the latter often leads to distortion of meaning, which, however slight, results in vast misunderstanding. Weighing the pros and cons, I opted for the former, as a matter of necessity, not trying to be different." (Yan Fu, 1986: 1321-1322)

As was mentioned above, from the perspective of Yan Fu, "Faithfulness" referred to the meaning of the original text should be close to that of the target one, that was, being faithful to the original meaning. "Expressiveness" meant the target text should be coherent and clear, there being no need to follow the exact order of words and sentences structure of the original language but reorganize and elaborate to respect the rules of target language. And "Elegance" indicated that the target text should be of refinement in language. Though Yan Fu put forward these translation thoughts and attached great importance to them, he seldom adopted "Faithfulness" in his former translation life. Instead, such translation strategies as reduction, addition and others were used so frequently in his translated works that many scholars in Chinese academic circle made negative comments on these translation thoughts he had stated in his preface. Actually in the middle of his translation life, he changed his mind and

translated western works strictly following his translation thoughts “Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance”. However, in his later life, things changed again. He preferred to free translation. To some degrees, he was not the one who strictly followed his translation thought “faithfulness” in his translated works. As for “Expressiveness”, we must admit it brought into full play in his translated works. As more scholars such as Wang Kefei, Huang Lianzhong studied further, they believed firmly “Expressiveness” was the core of Yan Fu’s translation thoughts. To be faithful was to be expressive as translated works should be faithful to both original works and target readers. And to be elegant was to be expressive for what you translated was to cater to the taste of target readers. To achieve the goal of being read widely, the translated works must be coherent and clear, which required translators to take some measures to change its word order and sentence structure of the original texts so as to be reasonable in target language. That was why Yan Fu adopted some translation strategies in his translation. As for the translation thought “Elegance”, the discussion it aroused resulted from today’s scholars’ interpretation. What Yan Fu referred to about his translation thought “Elegance” was that the translation should be refined in language, namely, the use of ancient Chinese so as to meet the expectation of target readers who were well-educated in China. He claimed that “where language has no refinement, its effects will not extend far”. In his translation, he regarded ancient Chinese—an old language as a way of elegant expression. Besides, some researchers believed that if the language in the original text was not elegant, how can the target text be elegant, which may result in the betrayal of the principle “Faithfulness”.

Recently, Howard Goldblatt, one of the most distinguished literary translators of numerous works of contemporary Chinese fiction, when referring to the translation thoughts, showed his own understanding about Yan Fu’s “Faithfulness, Expressiveness, and Elegance”. After Mo Yan won the Nobel Prize in literature with the help of Howard Goldblatt’s translation, most Chinese scholars believed that he would be the right one to translate excellent Chinese literary works into English for he owned the natural advantage of being familiar with the taste of target readers and his mastery of both Chinese and English. Therefore, they conducted careful study on his translation works, only to find that Howard Goldblatt took such translation strategies as reduction, addition and structural rearrangement, which was out of the expectation of Chinese scholars and gave rise to heated discussions. As Chinese scholars used Yan Fu’s translation thoughts “Faithfulness, Expressiveness, and Elegance” to question his translation works, Howard Goldblatt explained his translation thoughts in his articles. In his opinion, “Faithfulness” should have an exact definition. In the course of translation, should the translator be faithful to the original meaning, original form or original style? To some degree, being faithful to all related aspects would be impossible for Chinese and English are two different languages with totally different word order, sentence structure and so on. Therefore, each translator should have his own choice in the process of his translation. He praised “Expressiveness” highly for he believed that translation

works should be coherent and clear, which was the precondition for target readers to have an interest in them. In his mind, target readers are of top priority on the basis of respecting the meaning and style of the original text. One hundred years passed by, when Chinese scholars tried to evaluate whether a translated book was an ideal one or not, Yan Fu’s translation thoughts “Faithfulness, Expressiveness, and Elegance” could still be their best choice to act as theoretical basis, which turned out that even now Yan Fu’s translation thoughts can be of great significance.

III. MODERN INTERPRETATION OF YAN FU’S TRANSLATION THOUGHTS “FAITHFULNESS, EXPRESSIVENESS AND ELEGANCE” AND THEIR DEVELOPMENT

Yan Fu’s translation thoughts “Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance” have inspired continuous debates for nearly one hundred years and the interpretation of the later scholars cannot be ignored. Lin Yutang believed that these translation thoughts indicated that the target text should be responsible for original text, target readers, and art itself. Such an interpretation showed that Yan Fu’s translation thoughts took all related elements into consideration in the course of translation, respectively from the perspectives of original text, target readers and art itself. And Liu Zhongde even developed Yan Fu’s translation thoughts and put forward his own ones, namely, “Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Closeness”. Since later scholars voiced their opposition to the principle “Elegance”, Mr. Liu changed it into “Closeness”, showing that the style of the original text should be close to that of the original one. There is no doubt that not all literary works are elegant, therefore, being close to its original style is more suitable. In addition, there is still someone holding the opinion that these translation thoughts “Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance” took their ideas from the three principles of famous British translator Tytler. “Firstly, the translation should give a complete transcript of the ideals of the original work. Secondly, the style and manner of writing should be with the same character of the original work. Thirdly, the translation should have all the ease of original composition. Actually, there were something in common between Yan Fu’s translation thoughts “Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance” and Tytler’s “Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Closeness”. (Chen Fukang, 129) No matter what the truth was, Yan Fu’s translation thoughts had the advantage of being concise and conclusive, holding a special position in Chinese translation history.

IV. “FAITHFULNESS, EXPRESSIVENESS AND ELEGANCE” AS TRANSLATION CRITERION

Since Yan Fu’s putting forward his translation thoughts “Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance”, most scholars hold the view that Yan Fu’s translation thoughts can be seen as translation criterion. But what is the definition of criterion? Actually criterion is a standard or principle by which something is judged or with the help of which a decision is made. There must be one translation criterion to tell good translation works from bad ones. However, can “Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance” be acted as translation

criterion? What kind of translated works can be good ones? As for their answers, we should get them from all the elements they related. First, since it is a translated work, it must be faithful to the meaning of its original text and be responsible for the author of that original text. After all, translation is different from writing. Second, as translated works are to help target readers have the opportunity to read and understand original texts; therefore, being coherent and clear is a necessity. If the target text is hard to read for its strange word order and sentence structure, then who will have the interest to read it? If nobody reads a translated text, what is the significance of translation? Therefore, if the target readers hope to get something the same as what the original readers acquired, the translated text must be coherent and clear for the original readers can read the original text in a smooth way. To some degrees, that can be called a kind of being faithful. Besides, the style of original work must be close to that of the target text. For literary works, especially poems, style sometimes is even more important than its contents, therefore, the closeness to its style is also of prime priority. Therefore, from what have been analyzed, the conclusion can be made that only Yan Fu's "Faithfulness and Expressiveness" can be one part of translation criterion. "Elegance" requires that the target text should be of refined language, namely, the ancient Chinese, which cannot be acted as one part of translation criterion for the style of target text should be decided by the original text. Therefore, Liu Zhongde's translation thoughts "Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Closeness" are more suitable for being translation criterion for they take all related aspects into consideration. Though Yan Fu's translation thoughts "Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance" cannot be acted as translation criterion, they are of profound significance. At first, they are concise, which cater to the taste of Chinese readers. Then, the translation thoughts that can be put forward at that time under the social conditions are pioneering. That is the reason why it can be studied by so many scholars for ages. At that time, with the restriction of historical conditions, Yan Fu shouldered the responsibility to save the country from its humiliated situation by translating western works so as to introduce some progressive ideas. His target readers were those well-educated scholars in China who showed only interest in elegant language. Therefore, Yan Fu chose the principle "Elegance". At last, Liu Zhongde's "Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Closeness" are on the basis of Yan Fu's "Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance". If there is no solid foundation laid by former scholars, how can these progressive ideas be created? In all, Yan Fu's translation thoughts "Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance" are profoundly significant.

V. CONCLUSION

Taking all related aspects into serious consideration, we could come to the conclusion that Yan Fu's translation thoughts "Faithfulness, Expressiveness, and Elegance" is still of great significance for it can be the source of Chinese translation theory. As there are still a lot of uncertainties about exact definition of Yan Fu's translation thoughts and translation is really a complicated activity, there should be more encouragement for more progressive translation ideas.

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