

# Similarities in Literature Works Coming into Foreign World

## Cases Study of Lin Shu and Howard Goldblatt

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**Abstract**—Literature works coming into foreign world experienced a series of challenges. But in the long process of popularizing literature works into foreign world, both parties made numerous attempts, got a few insights and finally achieved some success. Though Chinese literature world bringing in foreign works and its literature works coming into foreign world were in different historical phases, as the former was in late Qing period and the latter began decades later, some similarities can still be found after having a detailed analysis of such a process. These similarities can be fully presented in the course of Lin Shu and Howard Goldblatt's translation who are two key figures in turning the tables from translated works being rejected by target readers to their being widely accepted. Their success lies in the fact that both Lin Shu and Howard Goldblatt are masters of languages, being familiar with the target readers and adopting the right strategy to translate foreign works in their own country and won great success.

**Keywords**—literature works; foreign world; Lin Shu; Howard Goldblatt

### I. INTRODUCTION

As is known to all, foreign classics have attracted a large number of readers from China since decades ago. It was not a simple story for Chinese people had great faith in their own culture and it must experience something challengeable to open such a big market. Nearly one hundred years ago, as China was in economic backwardness and political unrest, many foreign countries come into China in the hope of getting some benefits in such a legendary rich country and sharing its big market by spreading their advanced economic, military, and politic views, selling their practical-while-well-decorated products and even trying to interfere in Chinese domestic affairs with their powerful weapons. At that time China was in a state of domestic strife and foreign aggression. Therefore, in order to change such a situation, Chinese government tried to send a group of scholars coming to foreign countries, especially western ones, to learn their advanced ideas and technology so as to save China from such a dilemma. With such a group of scholars coming back to China, they had a good knowledge of both Chinese and English, some of whom tried to translate English classics into Chinese so as to greatly change some basic concepts in

Chinese people's mind. In such a way, English literature books came into Chinese people's eyes. But they did not won the popularity from Chinese readers at first. What really made them popular were literature works translated by a Chinese scholar Lin Shu, who could neither read nor write in English but was a master in Chinese, translating English books with the help of those who was proficient in English. Lin Shu's first attempt *The Lady of the Camellias* was a big hit. It is said that once the reader read this book, his heart would be broken for the sad story. Chinese famous scholar Zhen Zhengduo once remarked: "It was not until for Lin Shu's great success in translation in novels that famous writers at that time called themselves novelists. The rise in the number of translated novels in the past 20 years can be great contribution from Lin Shu." (Zheng Zhengduo, 1981) As is mentioned above, we can come into conclusion that it is because of the translation of Lin Shu that many Chinese readers who were quite confident in their domestic culture which stand the test of time in long history tried to get rid of prejudice against foreign literature works and began to appreciate them.

Surprisingly, decades later, with the development of Chinese economy, China hopes to disseminate its culture to foreign countries so as to improve its international influence, among which the best way is to translate outstanding Chinese literature works into English which is the most widely used language in the world. However, such an attempt did not go smoothly. Just as Howard Goldblatt said, Chinese literature works cannot be widely accepted by Americans, which was partly resulted from the idea that in their mind, the characters in Chinese literature works, most of which were narrated through plots and actions, were not described in depth so as to analyze their inner world. Obviously, at the first stage, Chinese literature works did not enjoy wide recognition. However, China will not stop its course of translating its works to English world for these obstacles. Instead many measures have been taken to improve such a situation. In 1981, Chinese Literature Magazine, one subordinate body in Foreign Languages Publishing and Distribution Administration published Panda Books. (Geng Qiang, 2010) From that day on, translation activities organized by Chinese government has been the main way to promote the Chinese literature works coming

into foreign world. However, by the end of 2000, Panda Books had been cancelled and the impacts those translation books exerted in foreign countries were limited. In the long course of groping for a right way to help Chinese literature works being accepted by foreign readers, a group of sinologists have made great contribution with their proficiency in both Chinese and English, their positively introducing, translating and recommending Chinese literature works, and their best knowledge of foreign readers which cannot be fully realized by Chinese translators. With the help of those people, Chinese writers, such as Mo Yan, Jia Pingwa, Su Tong, have been awarded several international prizes for their excellent works in recent years. Among them, Mo Yan, even won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2012, for elevating the individual from an anonymous human mass and using ridicule and sarcasm to attack history and its falsifications as well as deprivation and political hypocrisy. The moment we congratulate Mo Yan achieving such a great accomplishment, we should also be grateful to his translators, especially Howard Goldblatt, whose English version is the most widely read in the world.

Though Lin Shu and Howard Goldblatt are different generations, they are the actual doers who help foreign literature works coming into their own countries. How could they achieve that goal? Though both of them came across many problems in that process, here are some key points that help them accomplish that great task. Their success is not a coincidence but a must for their proficiency in using their mother language, being familiar with the aesthetic taste of target readers and using the appropriate strategy to convey the original works.

## II. BEING MASTERS OF LANGUAGES — A PREMISE

As there are large numbers of books in each country, therefore it's not easy for the readers to accept works coming from outside world as the narration mode and ways of wording and phrasing may not to the target readers' favor. Therefore, translators must be the masters of languages, which is a premise to attract foreign readers.

Both Lin Shu and Howard Goldblatt making a great contribution in attracting more target readers to appreciate foreign literature works first resulted from their mastery of languages. They are writers themselves, therefore, they could know how to convey the author's meaning in right words and expressions. Lin Shu was a great scholar at his time and noted for his appropriate way to construct sentences using right words. And Howard Goldblatt used to contribute to newspaper and he kept learning and practicing his English each day. Their proficiency in writing lays a solid foundation for their success in translation.

## III. BEING FAMILIAR WITH TARGET READERS — A FOUNDATION

In addition to Lin Shu and Howard Goldblatt's mastery in their own mother language, both of them know their readers well. Chinese and English readers, coming from different countries, receiving different education, and having different values, are totally different reading groups. It is hard for a

Chinese translator to have a good understanding of English readers for they have different thinking patterns. In a similar way, the works translated by Chinese scholars cannot win the heart of English readers though in general the former can understand the original text better than the latter. Therefore, translators who use their mother language to turn the source text into target text could better satisfy the aesthetic expectation of the target readers because they have a better understanding of their preference in language expressions.

Lin Shu and Howard Goldblatt grew up in the same social environment, receiving the same mode of education, and having same traditional concepts with the target readers. Therefore, they are clear about what the target readers need most and what kind of expressions cannot be accepted widely by those readers. Since they have a good understanding of the target readers, they know how to choose a suitable book for them and translate it in a way that can cater the aesthetic expectation of the target readers. Their success also proves that being familiar with target readers is a foundation for attracting them to appreciate foreign works. Just as an old saying goes like this, knowing yourself and your enemy, you don't need to fear the result of a hundred battles.

## IV. ADOPTING THE RIGHT STRATEGY — A MUST

Apart from their mastery in languages and their being familiar with target readers, both Lin Shu and Howard Goldblatt adopt appropriate strategy-rewriting- to translate works.

Rewriting is a translation strategy put forward by Lefevere, Andre in his book *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*. He proposed that if some rewritings are inspired by ideological motivations, or produced under ideological constraints, depending on whether rewriters find themselves in agreement with the dominant ideology of their time or not, other writings are inspired by poetological motivations, or produced under poetological constraints. (Lefevere Andre, 2004) In his books, he emphasized the importance of adopting flexible strategy to adept the source text to cater to the expectation of the target readers.

At preliminary stage, Chinese translators, holding the attitude of learning advanced culture from western countries, used the strategy of word for word translation. Chinese famous scholar Lu Xun was one of these members, but his popularity did not contribute to his translation works having a place in literature world. Instead, few readers read what Lu Xun translated as it's difficult to understand. However, Lin Shu took the suitable method, namely, rewriting, and won great success. Similarly, at the beginning of Chinese literature works coming into foreign world, many scholars convinced that there must be a twist in works translated by foreign translators for the latter, being not familiar with Chinese and its culture, cannot show what Chinese literature works really were to English readers. But, if a detailed analysis is made of why Chinese literature works cannot be accepted widely by foreign readers, some conclusions can be made that the translated works, adopting the strategy of

rewriting to cater to the taste of foreign readers, are gaining a place in foreign world. Both Lin Shu and Howard Goldblatt adopted the same strategy in their translation. For example, when Howard Goldblatt translated works from Mo Yan, most of the information about Chinese Communist Party and Chairman Mao was omitted in his English version. What's more, *The Wolf Totem* by Jiang Rong, *Mobile Phone* by Liu Zhengyun, or his favorite writer Mo Yan, were cut in large scale and their plots were rearranged. The moment Lin Shu translated *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, China being under a state of domestic strife and foreign aggression at that time, Lin Shu took rewriting strategy to remove all details about the negative and forbearing ideas in Christian, turning that novel into a kind of advocating patriotism, educating the public, and emancipating the minds of Chinese people. Actually, in the course of translation, translators cannot avoid judging the beauty and ugliness in the original works from their own aesthetic perspective. Therefore, when they come into the stage of expression, they would make some adjustments unconsciously, rewriting the original text, so as to reduce the effect of conflicts in values.

Every time scholars have a discussion about Chinese literature works coming into foreign world and vice versa, they firmly believe China was at a disadvantage position; therefore, translation strategies must be different. However, in the course of literature works coming into foreign world, there must be some malposition in different stages in history. Seldom scholars paid great attention to make a contrast in different historical periods. In preliminary stage, literature works coming into foreign countries should set the priority to meeting the aesthetic expectation of target readers; therefore, rewriting is a must for translators if they hope to gain recognition. Distinguished English sinologist Waley once made a comparison between the target text translated by Lin Shu and the original text written by Dickens, believing the translated works are more concise and better than the original ones (Arthur Waley, 1975:5). And Mo Yan's works translated by Howard Goldblatt helped the latter get similar comments. Zhang Xiudong in New York University once said: "When Mo Yan visited New York University and read *Life and Death are Wearing Me Out*, a novel written by Mo Yan, with students, they found some paragraphs and sentences in translated version removed turned out to be more powerful and cleaner." (Zhang Xiudong, 2013) Actually, Haggard turned from a second-rate writer into a first-rate one through Lin Shu's translation and Qian Zhongshu once remarked Lin Shu's translated versions were much better than Haggard's original one (Qian Zhongshu, 1981:34). Besides, Howard Goldblatt is the first foreigner studying Xiao Hong's works, later convincing her works are of great value. It is Lu Xun, contemporary with Xiao Hong, that discovered her talents and value in Chinese literature world, but Howard Goldblatt is the one who helps Xiao Hong gain a place in Chinese literature circle.

## V. CONCLUSION

Contemporary Chinese literature works coming into foreign world and Late Qing's bring in foreign literature works into China showed great similarities, which are, to

some degrees, out of historical, economic and political reasons. But there is still a certain model in their success. Both parties owning translators who have a good command of languages, being familiar with target readers and adopting the same strategy rewriting to win the love of target readers by achieving their aesthetic expectation so as to gradually expand the market to reach the goal of cultural communication.

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