

# **Study on Translator's Subjectivity in the Light of Steiner's Fourfold Translation Motion: A Case Study of the Aggression on Cheng Naishan's Chinese Version of the Joy Luck Club**

Wei Zhang<sup>a</sup>, Wenhui Dou

Department of Basic Courses, Rocket Force University of Engineering, Xi'an, 710000, China

<sup>a</sup>524467898@qq.com

**Abstract.** The paper introduces George Steiner and His Fourfold Translation Motion Theory, and the study of the Aggression on Cheng Naishan's Chinese Version of The Joy Luck Club is elaborated accordingly.

**Keywords:** *translator's subjectivity, aggression, Cheng Naishan's Chinese Version of The Joy Luck Club, The Joy Luck Club*

## **1. George Steiner and his Fourfold Translation Motion Theory**

George Steiner announced that it is impossible to duplicate the original meaning of the source text, because the translation activity involves the translator's interpretation and the reader's comprehension of the target text. He explained, "to understand is to decipher, to hear significance is to translate." (Steiner 3) Therefore, Steiner introduced the influential fourfold translation motion theory to emphasize the importance of the translator. He combined the philosophical Hermeneutics with translation studies with the formation of a systematic Hermeneutics translation theory.

### **1.1 A Brief Introduction of George Steiner**

Francis George Steiner (1929- ), born in Paris, is a famous professor in Geneva University. He is an American literary critic, philosopher, essayist, novelist, educator, translator and prolific writer. He has advanced translation studies on the basis of Hermeneutics. He shows great talents in language with his proficient mastery of French, English and German. Consequently, his language command lays a solid foundation for his researches on translation studies.

George Steiner's fourfold translation theory essentially emphasizes and embodies the features of the translator's subjectivity. The first stage is trust, which means the translator values the source text. After the translator's choice of the source text, he will comprehend and evaluate it. According to Steiner, this move is called aggression. In the incorporation process, the target language culture digests and accepts source language culture, during which the translator's creative ability may be exhausted.

Incorporation is the core step in translation practice, the translator not only spares no efforts to demonstrate the source text, but endeavors to represent the original style and typical characteristics. Both the meaning and the form of the original text are not imported into a vacuum but into the target language, where the "native semantic field is already extent and crowded." (Steiner 315) Steiner divided the incorporation of the original text into two categories, namely, meaning and form of the original text. The translator's native semantic field exerts much influence on the import of the meaning and the form of the source text. Steiner argued that "the third move in the hermeneutic appropriation, the portage home of the foreign sense and its domestication in the new linguistic-cultural matrix, is most never a linear, point to point carry." (Steiner 351) When it comes to the last step, restitution, compensation should be made for the damage caused in the stages of aggression and incorporation. As mentioned above, Steiner's fourfold translation theory is a practical and effective approach for translation studies.

## 2. Incorporation

The third step “incorporation” is based on the translator’s appreciation and aggression of the source text. The translator’s subjectivity can be more easily observed in this stage. The translator not only shoulders the responsibility to transfer the meaning of the source text to the target reader, but also should use his own writing strategy, knowledge and semantic pattern to interpret the source text. “Incorporation” move brings the translator’s subjectivity to the peak in translating process, which can make the source language and the target language well balanced.

Steiner divides the translator’s appropriation into two categories, meaning and form. According to him, the native semantic field of the translator poses considerable impact on his import of meaning and form of the source text. Typical examples are employed to exemplify the translator’s incorporation on the original text in terms of meaning and form.

### 2.1 Incorporation of Meaning

In *The Joy Luck Club*, the author Amy Tan uses commonly used English to express a profound meaning and theme. Comparatively speaking, the translator Cheng Naishan is more excellent in Chinese and she tends to reveal the connotative meaning which is implied in the source text. The incorporation in meaning can be easily noticed in the target text, so typical examples are employed as follows:

Example (1):

English Version:

She began to lament, pulling her long fingers through her hair, “to live here on the moon, while my husband lives on the sun. So that each day and each night, we pass each other, never seeing one another, except this one evening, the night of the mid-autumn moon. (Amy Tan 80)

Chinese Version:

她拨响琵琶唱起来：“妾居月中君住日，日月相对遥相思，日日思君不见君，唯有中秋得相聚”。  
(Cheng Naishan 70)

This lyric was translated into a splendid poem. Cheng’s translated version is quite suitable to describe the Moon Lady’s sadness and loneliness because of long time departing from her husband. Cheng used refined a deliberate words to create a poetic illusion, so the incorporation in meaning is reflected in lyric translation.

Example (2):

English Version:

Lau Po gave me the names. The Double Attack from the East and West Shores. Throwing Stones on the Drowning Man. The Sudden Meeting of the Clan. The Surprise from the Sleeping Guard. The Humble Servant Who Kills the King. Sand in the Eyes of Advancing Forces. A Double Killing Without Blood. (Amy Tan 95)

Chinese Version:

老伯教给我不少花招：什么“暗度陈仓”，“投石落井”，“突然袭击”，“背部捅刀”，“声东击西”，“杀人不见血”。  
(Cheng Naishan 82-83)

The translator’s language competence is clearly showcased in this example. Cheng Naishan used four-word idioms to concisely deliver the meaning. In the above example, each chess strategy is summarized by ancient Chinese military tactic. For example, “The Humble Servant Who Kills the King” was translated as “背部捅刀”，which means that a sudden and unexpected attack from the inconspicuous person.

Example (3):

English Version:

“It is too hot in the summer. You will only grow more spots and then your whole face will become red!” she tells Rich. And Rich grins, gestures his thumb toward my mother, and says to me, “Can you believe what comes out of her mouth? Now I know where you get your sweet, tactful nature.” (Amy Tan 183)

Chinese Version:

“那边的夏天太炎热，你只会长出更多的斑点，然后，你的脸会晒得通红通红！”她对里奇说。里奇则高兴的哈哈大笑，一边朝我妈伸出大拇指，一边回头对我说：“你看你妈多会讲话，多体贴人。现在我可明白了，你那套甜甜的善解人意的小伎俩，是从哪来的了。” (Cheng Naishan 183)

Cheng used “通红通红”, the reduplicative words to express “become red” in order to emphasize that July is not a good time to visit China for their honeymoon. Since the repeated words are commonly used in China. Therefore, the translator used this Chinese expression to let the readers fully understand the source text. Meanwhile, “Can you believe what comes out of her mouth? Now I know where you get your sweet, tactful nature.” Cheng translated this sentence with her own understanding. She added “你看你妈多会说话” to illustrate that Rice tries to flatter his mother-in-law and his wife-to-be. “小伎俩” is employed to reflect the intimate relationship between Waverly and her husband-to-be.

## 2.2 Incorporation of Style

The translator Cheng Naishan was born and brought up in Shanghai, so her dialectical language will consciously or unconsciously exert impact on the target language. *The Joy Luck Club* sparkles with witty and humorous writing. It is difficult for the translator to maintain the original style in translating process. However, Cheng Naishan is adept at it. She used some idiomatic Chinese saying and Shanghai dialects to reproduce the vividness and retain the style. Notable examples are cited to illustrate the “incorporation” in style.

Example (4):

English Version:

She came from a low-class family, but she was pretty and pleasant and had married well, to an old man who died and left her with a better life. (Amy Tan 23)

Chinese Version:

她虽然是个小家碧玉，却是妩媚动人。她嫁了一个有钱老头，老公死了，给她留下一笔足够她这辈子吃香的喝辣的钱财。 (Cheng Naishan 10)

Cheng translated “She came from a low-class family” as “小家碧玉”. In Chinese, this idiom means a good-mannered lady from a civilian family. The translator used the polished and refined words to depict the lady. Cheng Naishan also employed creative translation technique in translating “a better life”. She translated it as “吃香的喝辣的”, which indicates the lady’s well-off life.

Example (5):

English Version:

But after sixteen rounds, we would again feast, this time to celebrate our good fortune. And then we would talk into the night until the morning, saying stories about good times in the past and good times yet to come. (Amy Tan 24)

Chinese Version:

八圈后，开始吃点心了。话盒子也打开了，海阔天空的直聊到天亮。我们聊着聊着，怀恋着过去的好时光，企盼着何时天会亮(胜利)。 (Cheng Naishan 6)

Cheng used Shanghai dialects in many times while translating. In this selected section, “话盒子” refers to chatterbox or motor mouth. The conversation participants have the common topics to share and can communicate with each other freely. In addition, Cheng used the Shanghai dialects such as: “哪儿不舒畅”, “不得闲”, “大汗涔涔”, “立时三刻”, “贼忒兮兮”, “凉沁沁”, “笃悠悠”. The translator’s incorporation can be further verified through the application of Shanghai dialects.

## 3. Summary

In summary, Cheng Naishan’s incorporation in meaning and style can be obviously noticed in the target text. The translator’s feminist writing and colloquial language is the mark she left in translating process. Translation strategy affects the incorporation in meaning and style of the source text. Since no translator can avoid a certain degree of personal involvement in his work, translation

is never done in vacuum. Cheng Naishan's language competence, feminist writing style, using of Shanghai dialects objectively exert unavoidable impact on the target text.

## References

- [1]. Stein, G. *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2004.
- [2]. Tan, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. New York: Ivy Books, 1989.
- [3]. Venuti, L. *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2004.
- [4]. Zha Jianming, Tian Yu. "On the Translator's Subjectivity—From the Marginalization of Translator's Cultural Status." (*China Translator*), 2003 (1): 19-24.
- [5]. Chen Daliang. "Who is the subject of translation." (*Chinese Translators*) 2004 (1): 3-7.
- [6]. Cheng Naishan, He Peihua, Yan Yingwei. (*The Joy Luck Club*) Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 2006.
- [7]. Chen Yanmin. "Analysis of Back Translation in Chinese American Literature and the Reproduction of the Author's Style from the "The Joy Luck Club" Novel." Shanghai Foreign Studies University master degree thesis, 2009.
- [8]. Guo Jing, Zhu Fengling. "From the Comparison of the Two Chinese Versions of (*The Joy Luck Club*) to See the Limitation of Translator's Subjectivity." (*Online Fortune*) 2010 (2): 21.