

A Comparative Study on the Two Chinese Versions of *The Color Purple* From Perspective of Feminist Translation

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Abstract

In the 1970s, the famous “cultural turn” in translation field combined feminism with translation studies. Feminist translation theory then came into being and became popular across the world. The feminist translation theory aims to manifest the female identity and strive for women’s status through translation, and analyzes translation works from a gender perspective. It emphasizes on differences between male and female translators and explores gender’s influence on translation. Strategies such as supplements, preface, footnote, hijacking (to rewrite according to feminist translation theory) can be used to show translators’ subjectivity and gender consciousness, which are two main aspects of the theory.

Keywords: *feminism; subjectivity; gender consciousness; translation*

1. Introduction

In the mid-1960s, feminism movement rose in America and the West Europe under the impact of the WWII. And gradually linguistics and translation got the attention of feminists. In 1980s, feminist translation theory, which was a new translation approach appeared with the famous culture turn. Feminist translation development went through two stages. In the first stage, feminists acted radically to win the discourse power, such as recreating new words and syntax in an attempt to end ignorance and depreciation of women in literacy. In the second stage, feminists had turned to “the androgynous theory”, which emphasized on gender balance.

2. Feminist Translation

In feminist translation theory, translation is viewed as a political behaviour and a means to regain women’s status. It is a study of translation based on sex. Feminist translation aims to eliminate gender discrimination by advocating translators’ subjectivity in translation, encouraging them to rewrite and recreate so as to change the invisible women image in literature works and win more public focus. Countless outstanding scholars at home and abroad have dived into studies of feminist translation. The scholar Luise Von Flotow proposed three translation strategies of feminist translation, supplement, prefacing, footnoting, and hijacking. Some feminists proposed “androgyny strategy” (blurring the boundaries of sex) as they viewed word invention and syntax creation methods as new obstacles in understanding (Flotow, 26).

Feminist translation is hotly discussed in China’s academic world. Up to now, about 661 articles of feminist translation have been published, among which, the two Chinese

versions of *The Color Purple* are heated discussed. They are female translator Tao Jie’s and male translator Yang Renjing’s work. Based on relevant studies in this field, the study attempts to make a comparison between Yang and Tao’s version from the perspective of feminist translation. It employs qualitative methods such as explication, analysis, literature review and descriptive approach to analyze related theories and make comparisons between the two Chinese versions systematically. Through comparison, we can see different degree of subjectivity and gender consciousness in them. As to feminist consciousness, Tao Jie is stronger than Yang Rening. And Yang’s version shows a sense of gender discrimination, while the female translator Tao did a good job in expressing feminist thought.

As feminism movements rose in the West, linguistics and translation gradually got the attention of feminists. In 1980s, feminist translation theory, which was a new translation approach appeared with the famous culture turn. Broadly speaking, feminism is a social movement that aims to eliminate discrimination and oppression on women, and finally leads to revolution in ideology and culture. Feminist means anyone who has get involved in such movements despite their sex. In a narrow sense, feminism advocates a principle used to see things from the perspective of gender. Feminism focuses on discrimination, stereotype about women, objectification of women, body, household distribution, oppression and paternity. And women’s issues such as abortion rights, reproductive rights, educational rights, maternity leave, voting rights, sexual harassment and pay equality are big global challenges. Feminist translation theory is devoted to eliminating gender discrimination in translation, advocating political behaviour in translation, and contributing to enrich translation theory and explore new translation models. Translators’ subjectivity and gender consciousness are focuses of the theory, for the feminist translation theory

also has a distinct political nature.

In feminists' understanding, translation is not just interchanging between two languages, not just exchanges between two cultures, it's a political act. The aim is to resist male-centrism and all kinds of explicit and implicit discrimination against women in the original work, so as to give prominence to women's voices and even promote their status. In order to achieve this goal, feminism has revised the criterion of "faithfulness" in a big way. In their view, it is as unfair to require translation be faithful to the original work as to make a woman absolutely loyal to her husband or paternity. Breaking authority and advocating equality is the cornerstone of feminist translation theory. It is clear that feminist translation theory has completely abandoned the old criteria of "loyalty and infidelity". Feminist translation theory holds that translation is a political act, which aims to expand women's right to speak and try to eliminate sexism in translation studies. According to feminist translators, language not only reflects the reality of sexism. In order to oppose the patriarchal language and various forms of male expression, feminist translators put forward the concept of "gender neutrality", which blurs several female features. Translation is a powerful tool for them to intervene in culture, oppose and change the dominant structure of patriarchal language.

In terms of translation strategies, feminism strongly advocates "rewriting". Three translation strategies are used in this process, which are supplementing, prefacing and footnoting, hijacking. Supplementing is to supplement the differences between the source language and the target language. Translators can adapt the text creatively based on their own gender position or belief. They use "business executive" instead of "businessman", "firefighter" for "fireman", "incest survivor" for "incest victim" and so on. They even radically change the spelling of some words. For example, they use the Greek suffix "hyst"+"story" to spell "history" instead of "history" because his means "his", story means "story", history is man's story. Translators use preface and footnote to interfere with the text. Female translators use it as a translation convention to explain the background, meaning, and translation strategies. Some translators also record the translation process in the form of a diary. Feminist translators believe that women's status is similar to that of traditional translators, who are at the bottom of society. The essence of feminist translation theory is to identify and criticize the concepts that lower women and translation in society and literature. By identifying and criticizing the concepts that suppress women and translators, feminist translation will inevitably lead to the promotion of the translator's status. However, feminist translation theory differs from general studies of translator's subjectivity. It has a distinct political nature. As a derivative of feminism, feminist translation theory starts with striving for the dignity and equality of women, and tries to eliminate serious gender discrimination stereotypes in translation studies. In the history of translation, faithfulness has always been regarded as the highest criterion of translation. Any violation of the code will be criticized. Feminists strongly oppose this viewpoint,

they believe that the requirement of faithfulness to the original text is only an inheritance of patriarchal society. In their views, the requirement for faithfulness is depriving women of the rights to speak. Therefore, in translation activities, feminists often consciously deviate from the original text, even translating classics. It is clear that the concept of creative treason poses a great challenge to the traditional view of translation, but there are many successful examples of creative treason in literary translation in which translators work creatively to show their wisdom and feelings.

Translators' position is constantly changing in history. Generally speaking, translators in traditional translation are often seen as servants, whose task is to serve the original text or the author. Even in the present time, translator's position has not been fundamentally improved. American translation theorist Lawrence Venuti uses the term "invisible" to describe the status of contemporary British and American translators. However, in feminist translators' view, the meaning of the original text is not hidden or waiting to be discovered, but to be created, which is quite consistent with the view of deconstruction (Hu, 32). So the translation work becomes the afterlife of the original text. The translator and the author are no longer servant and master, but equal friends. Therefore, feminist translation theory has greatly improved the translator's status.

3. The Color Purple

The Color Purple is an epistolary novel with a unique structure and writing techniques. The book consists of 92 letters which are written by a pair of black sisters. The first half is Celie's letters to God, and the second half is letters between Celie and her sister Nettie, but they never receive a letter from each other. *The Color Purple* is set in towns and villages in the southern United States, from the start of 20th century to the end of WWII. The novel depicts the story of a black woman who wins a new life in love and character from her childhood to middle age. *The Color Purple* depicts the story of a black woman who has won a new life in love and character in her 30 years of life from childhood to middle age. Purple symbolizes the beauty and completion of human nature. This novel is regarded as Walker's masterpiece and has established her position as a well-known writer in the United States. The book has been translated into 13 languages, proving its extraordinary charm and marking that Walker has reached a new height in literary creation.

In *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, Walker summed up black women into three categories: women who are bullied and insulted by patriarchal society, women who suffer from contradictory instincts, new women who gain strength from matriarchal ancestors and realize their full selves. These three kinds of women are all embodied in Walker's novels. In the patriarchal society, Celie's mother is treated as a breeding machine, who delivers a baby year by year, with her body getting worse and worse, and eventually dies of illness. Celie, like a mule, is not only physically trampled, but spiritually controlled by

traditional religious thoughts. She cannot resist and only writes to the God for comfort. After the death of her mother, her stepfather marries Celie to Mister like selling a cow. Celie remains a tool for men's desire, and a babysitter, a maid for the children of Mister and his ex-wife. In her relationship with men, Celie has never had any tenderness or sexual pleasure, without knowing even the physical structure of women. However, she never thinks of resisting. She accepts the idea of male supremacy, which reflects her attachment to men (Butler-Evans, 72).

The patriarchal society tries to keep all women in slave-like roles and to reject, isolate and condemn women who dare to break through the shackles to seek freedom and independence. Walker constantly studies racial sexism and contradictions within black families and finds ways to resolve them. In *The Color Purple*, through the letters of Celie to God, Nettie's letter to Celie, a great discussion about women's consciousness was opened: how women have self-esteem, self-love, self-reliance, self-improvement and how to realize the value of life.

4. Comparative Study of the Two Chinese Versions from Perspective of Feminist Translation

The two Chinese versions of the female translator Tao Jie and the male translator Yang Renjing are compared from the perspectives of translators' subjectivity and gender consciousness. Tao, a female translator, she points out that Walker focuses on the issue of black women while exposing racial oppression and racial discrimination. Yang is a male translator, who is an expert in Hemingway and has paid no special attention to gender. Yang believes that *The Color Purple* shows the most serious problems in American society, and black women's problem is only one of them, not the core. The comparison study is based on translators' subjectivity and gender consciousness, in an attempt to figure out gender's impact on translation activities.

4.1 Translator's Subjectivity

In the two versions, due to the translators' background, gender and other factors, there are obvious signs of full play of subjectivity in the two versions.

Example 1: It took him the whole spring, from March to June, to make up his mind to take me (Walker, 10).

Tao's version:他拖了整整一个春天的时间,从三月一直拖到六月,最后才下决心要我 (Tao, 9)

Yang's version:从三月到六月,他花了整个春天,才下决心娶我 (Yang, 10)

"Him" is Celie's husband, who at first wants to marry Nettie because she is pure, young and beautiful. Tao Jie used "拖了" twice to show Mister's hesitation, replaying Celie's anxiety before marriage. She hopes Mister marries her as soon as possible for she is eager to protect Nettie.

However, Yang Renjing ignored Celie's mental state and translated the source text directly into "花了", "从3月到6月" structure. Yang who translated word by word, lacked a sense of subjectivity and failed to reveal the complex mood of Celie.

Example 2: She maybe twenty-five. Old-maid. She looks younger than me. Healthy. Eyes bright. Tongue sharp (Walker, 21).

Tao's version:她大约 25 岁,是个老姑娘。她看上去比我年轻,很健康。眼睛很明亮,嘴巴很厉害 (Tao, 18)

Yang's version:她也许 25 岁,老处女。她看起来比我年轻、健康、眼尖手快 (Yang, 21)

This sentence depicts Mister's sister Kate through the eyes of Celie. Tao's language showed female features. She used lots of adverbs of exaggeration like "很" and adjectives like "明亮", "厉害". But Yang just translated literally, neglecting characteristics of female language. And he used "老处女", compared with Tao's "老姑娘" "老处女" has a sense of discrimination. In China, "老处女" is an offensive term, which is defined by patriarchal society. It is clear that Celie will not use this term to describe Kate.

Example 3: Shug say, Well sah, and I thought it was only white folks do freakish things like that (Walker, 117).

Tao's version:莎格说,天啊,我以前一直以为只有白人才干这种伤天害理的事情 (Tao, 87)

Yang's version:好啦,就这个样子,我以前认为只有白人才会做出这种反常的事 (Yang, 111)

Shug is shocked and outraged by Celie's stepfather's rape. Tao Jie's translation of "freakish" into "伤天害理" reinforced her anger. The translation of "wellsah" to "天啊" stressed her incredible shock. In contrast, Yang Renjing translated "wellsah" and "freakish" into "好啦" and "反常", which weakened her strong reaction. In fact, it weakened the strong indignation of women being oppressed by patriarchal society.

Example 4: And God done fixed her, you can do everything just like you want to and she ain't gonna make you feed it or clothe it (Walker, 10).

Tao's version:还有,上帝早就把她治好了。你对她可以很随便,她绝不会向你吃的要穿的 (Tao, 7)

Yang's version:上帝惩罚过她。你对她爱怎么搞,就怎么搞。他不会白白叫你给她吃穿的 (Yang 8)

The source text is from Celie's stepfather, who rapes and tortures Celie and is trying to persuade Mister to marry her. Yang used "惩罚" of God to show Ceile's misfortune. But Tao concerned about women's status, though Celie has been tortured from childhood, she remains kind and honest, and will never be punished by God. Then Yang used "搞" twice, which showed great disrespect for women. There was some discrimination against women in Yang's, he failed to translate *The Color Purple*, a book of feminism from a feminist perspective.

4.2 Gender Consciousness

In general, female translators grasp and reproduce details related to gender more accurately. In the process of translation, the female translator reproduced the feminist thought of the original text more prominently and showed stronger female consciousness.

Example 5: She have the nerve to put one hand on her naked hip and bat her eyes at me (Walker , 40).

Tao's version: 她居然敢把一只手放在光屁股上对我飞个媚眼 (Tao, 47)

Yang's version: 她厚着脸皮把一只手放在光屁股上,还对我挤眉弄眼 (Yang, 50)

“She” refers to Shug, who is taking a bath with the help of Celie. Celie is afraid of men and submits to the reality. When she sees her husband's mistress, Shug, who is unfettered by the world, dares to love and hate, Celie envies and even adores her. When she sees her beautiful body, she couldn't help but look at it. Shug perceives, and responds to Celie. Tao Jie spotted Celie's surprise and envy at Shug's boldness, choosing the neutral words “居然敢” and “对我飞个媚眼” to express Celie's surprise and a slight appreciation for Shug. And when Yang Renjing treated the “debauchery” Shug in his eyes, not only did he failed to realize that Shug has transcended ordinary women in self-consciousness, but also hid the true feelings of Celie's heart. He used two derogatory and hostile phrases, “厚着脸皮” and “对我挤眉弄眼”, showing his disgust towards Shug and misinterpret the feelings that the author wants to express.

Example 6: Nettie still don't understand. I don't neither. All us notice is I'm all the time sick and fat (Walker, 5).

Tao's version: 耐蒂还是不懂,我也不懂。我们两个只知道我一天到晚想吐,而且人越来越胖 (Tao, 9)

Yang's version: 聂蒂还是不明白,我也不明白。大家觉察到我一直不舒服,又发胖 (Yang,11)

After being raped by her stepfather, Celie becomes pregnant and is forced to drop out of school. Facing her physical response to pregnancy, Celie and her sister Nettie don't know it is because of pregnancy. In the face of Walker's portrayal of Celie's pregnancy, Tao Jie, as a woman, had a deep physiological experience of women, so her translation was more appropriate and more practical. She translated sick directly into “想吐”. Yang Renjing, a male translator, only translated the literal meaning of sick into “uncomfortable”, and gave the reader a vague and inappropriate feeling.

5. CONCLUSION

Translation has long been regarded as derivative, subordinate, untrue imitation, and then feminized. Female and translation came together naturally for they have been both belittled and repressed for a long time. The primary goal of feminist translation is to advocate translators' subjectivity. In feminist translation philosophy, translation criteria should be in line with feminist requirements;

translation purpose should extend women's discourse right; translation strategy should try to show female features; translation method should rewrite in feminist way; translator's status should be equal with the author; translation and original work should be equal and complementary, etc. The feminist translation view provides a new perspective for translation studies. It is devoted to eliminating gender discrimination in translation, advocating political behavior in translation, and contributing to enrich translation theory and explore new translation models. Feminist translation theory also has a distinct political nature. As a derivative of feminism, feminist translation theory starts with striving for the dignity and equality of women, and tries to eliminate serious gender discrimination stereotypes in translation studies. In this sense, feminists' publicity of translators' subjectivity is also part of their political agenda.

Through the comparison, it is found that there are significant differences in the translator's subjectivity and gender consciousness between two Chinese translated versions. Tao Jie had stronger feminist consciousness than Yang Renjing, who showed deep-rooted patriarchal consciousness and a sense of gender discrimination in his translation. While the female translator Tao did a good job in expressing feminist thought. She was more sensitive to women's feelings and had better understanding on women's inner world, for she did translate from perspective of feminism. However, the male translator did not fully reflect female consciousness, failing to be completely free from the influence of traditional patriarchal culture.

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