

The Study of Translator' Subjectivity in Translating Chinese Classics

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Abstract: English translation of Chinese classics plays a crucial role which has a bearing on the development of Chinese culture. And Chinese translators should have a greater sense of responsibility and mission. Even though translators are the main body in translation and the significant part in the dissemination of Chinese culture, who have been neglected or not valued for a long time. Some scholars hold that translators have not been given the cultural status which they deserve in China's cultural pluralism, and there has been a marginalization of the cultural status of translators. While it may be true that "outsiders" may be biased in evaluation of translators for the reason that they do not have a good understanding of the tasks and the nature of translators' work, it is even more puzzling that the study of translation itself does not pay enough attention to the subject of translation, as evidenced by the weakness of the study of the subjectivity of translation. Since the 1970s, with the "cultural turn" came up in western translation studies, the study of the translator's subjectivity has been given more attention. This essay will analyse the development and significance of Chinese classics translation, combining with the connotation of translator's subjectivity and the expression methods as well as features of the translator's subjectivity from four aspects: the translation process, the translator's cultural awareness of the target language, the inter-textual relationship between translated and the original text as well as the target literature, and the inter-subjectivity of translation. This is trying to reveal new dimensions in the study of translator's subjectivity, with a view to expanding and enriching the study of translator's subjectivity on the part of Chinese classics translation.

Keywords: Translation of Chinese classics, Subjectivity of the translator, Cultural turn

1. Introduction

Since the 16th century, Western missionaries, sinologists and Chinese translators have attempted to translate Chinese classics into English, which in a certain sense has facilitated the spread of Chinese culture overseas. As Chinese classics contain the core values of Chinese culture, translation of Chinese classics witnesses a great importance during the process of Chinese culture dissemination. The reasons why English translation of Chinese classics is a significant step for Chinese culture to go to the world embody: first, a country's strength and attractiveness are not entirely determined by its economy, while culture is an indispensable and even fundamental factor; second, western readers who want to read Chinese literature also need to explore the origin of Chinese culture, and the English translation of classics can provide great convenience to them; third, what can make a nation flourish globally is the great ideas produced by that nation, and the translation of Chinese classics is the concentration of the great ideas, which can show the spirit of the Chinese nation to the West.

In the process of the translation of Chinese classics, translators are the main body of translation and an important participant in the dissemination of Chinese culture. But for a long time, the status of translators has been neglected. Nevertheless, with the "cultural turn" appeared in Western translation studies since the 1970s, the study of the subjectivity of translation has been concerned. In the past, if someone mentioned creativity in translation and the subjectivity of the translator, he or she would be accused of encouraging mistranslation and abusive translation. This is actually interpreting subjectivity as arbitrariness and mistaking creativity for irresponsible fabrication. Furthermore, in an era dominated by the traditional view of translation, the study of translator's subjectivity will undoubtedly be subjected to all kinds of criticism from the power discourse of the translation research system. Therefore, the "cultural turn" in translation studies not only expands the novel field of translation studies, but also provides theoretical support for translation subjectivity studies and make the academic research legalized. Bassnett (2004)^[1] mentioned that translation does not take place in a vacuum, and

there are many extra-textual factors affecting the translator, such as the translator's life experience, educational and cultural background, the social, historical and cultural context in which the translated text is produced, as well as the subjective factors of translators in choosing translation strategies, which should also be included in the research. And translation is never transparent, it tells us more about the translator than about the translated work (Xie, 2000)^[2]. Translators are beginning to move from behind the scenes to the front of the stage, from the margins of invisibility to the spotlight of attention, to make their voices heard. Thus, translation is regarded as a purposeful cross-cultural communication activity, and the identity of the translator turns more and more obvious in the process of translation, which leads to the study of the translator also becomes more and more important (Xu, 2002)^[3]. In order to study the translation behaviour of translators, the first step should be to study the translator's choice of text type and translation standard.

In this article, the research is based on Chinese classics, to discuss the relationship between translator's subjectivity and the translation process and how it affects the English translation of Chinese classics in the overseas development of Chinese culture, with the aim of deepening the research on subjectivity of translation.

2. Overview of Chinese classics

Regarding the definition of "classics", many dictionaries and monographs have given a definition, Yang Zijian(2005)^[4] regarded "classics" as important documents and books written in China before the end of the Qing Dynasty (the mid-19th century, when the modern Chinese language was divided). The production of classic books is the result of academic development, and a historical process of continuous intellectual and cultural evolution. In this long process of development, it comprises at least two interdependent aspects: firstly, spiritual thoughts; secondly, language, the symbol for the preservation of spiritual thoughts; and thirdly, the material which records language, for instance, paper. What translation does is to convert spiritual thoughts from one language to another, the external form of which is language, and the internal texture of which is spirit, thought and culture. Therefore, translation not only involves the study of language conversion, but also the study of the form of cultural manifestation after language conversion. This statement has already been mentioned by Wang Rongpei, "Chinese ancient classics are texts, which belong to the 'cultural capital' of Chinese culture"(2009)^[5]. Hence, it could be concluded that Chinese classics are important books and documents written in words and handed down through history. And the translation of classics is to translate these books and documents, but what is being replaced is not the form, but the knowledge, experience, thoughts, ideas and other forms of consciousness behind the form.

2.1 Stages of developing translation of Chinese classics

As far as scope of the English translation of Chinese classics is concerned, it could be distinguished on the basis of the translators' country. The English translation of Chinese classics can be divided into two parts, overseas and Chinese. While Foreign translators are mainly Anglo-American translators, but also ethnic Chinese translators and other translators. With the reference to the historical development of Sinology in Britain, English translation of Chinese classics overseas can be separated into three parts, namely, the early period of English translation of Chinese books (before 19th century), missionary English translation (19th century), and contemporary English translation (20th century to the present). As the English translation of domestic classics started late, only the English translation of contemporary Chinese classics is available. In 1792, on the appointment of the British Government, George Macartney led a mission to China. In the late Ming and early Qing dynasty, missionaries in China translated Chinese classics into Latin, Italian and French, which were soon translated into English by the British. Afterward, the "Chinese fever" of the 18th century in Europe also spread to Britain, which largely contributed to the English translation of Chinese classics. At the beginning of the 19th century, the main translators were Anglo-American Protestant missionaries and diplomats who were to preach and seek national interests in China. For more than a century, basically all the major works of Chinese classics were translated into English, laying the foundation and opening the way for subsequent English translation of Chinese classics. The translators of the third period were writers and scholars, who were deeply educated and they abandoned the old style of exegetic interpretation and tried out different ideas and strategies of translation, placing more emphasis on conveying the meaning of original texts and on the study of Chinese classics. Through translation, Chinese classics could be introduced to the world, which is necessary for the promotion of national culture and the preservation of China's cultural identity.

2.2 The significance of translating Chinese classics

Chinese culture, as an integral part of the multifaceted system of human culture, actively participates in global cultural exchanges. When it is translated into English, Chinese distinctive cultural essence can be understood by the world so as to for cultural exchanges and cultural dissemination. However, an overview of the history of cultural exchanges between the Eastern and the Western culture shows that the exchange is almost unilateral and unbalanced. In the long process of "Western learning to the east", Chinese culture has always been in a receptive and passive position. A large number of books and documents on Western politics, economics, science and culture were introduced to China and absorbed. It can be seen that China's success in translating these books and documents into Chinese, which reflects the Chinese people's inclusivity and studiousness.

On the other hand, cultural exchanges among people are not enough to learn about themselves only by importing, but also to understand. Meanwhile, the relationship between China and the Western countries has seen the emergence of cultural self-consciousness and cultural export in the demand for "Chinese culture to the world", which means the path of translation activities has also changed (Xu Jun, 2015)^[6]. In the past, Chinese translation focus was mainly on the translation of foreign works, especially works of western countries. Moreover, translation research is centrally concerned with the exploration of translation-into activities. As for the translation-out of activities that existed more or less in history, they have not attracted enough attention. Currently, in the face of the new pattern of international situation, the direction of translation activities in China has undergone an important change, which presents a bidirectional characteristic. Therefore, translation in and out activities should receive the same amount of attention.

3. Study on subjectivity of translators

In the case of "what is subjectivity" and "what is the subjectivity of the translator", there are many opposite opinions and controversies in academics. Philosophically, "subject" is derived from the Latin word "subjectum", which is the existence corresponding to the "object", and refers to the person who has the ability to know and practice the object, and to decide the meaning of the existence of the object. When it comes to "subject of translation", the translation process consists of three main subjects: the author, the translator and the reader. However, for the maker of the translation activity itself, the translator is the master of the whole translation process.

There is no essential difference in understanding the meaning of the translator's subjectivity in translation studies. It is considered that the translator, under the influence and constraints of the marginal subject or external environment and his or her own viewpoint, manifests a kind of subjectivity in the translation activity to meet the cultural needs of the target language (Tu, Zhu, 2003)^[7]. In the traditional mode of translation, the translator is undoubtedly at the centre of translation activities, and his or her subjectivity permeates the whole process of translation activities, which not only reflects in the translator's interpretation and linguistic re-creation of the work, but also in translator's choice, translation strategies and skills as well as the manipulation of the expected reception effect of the translated work (Lan Hongjun, 2010:93)^[8]. Based on the research on translators' subjectivity, it can be defined that the translator, as the subject of the translation to achieve the purpose of translation under the premise of respecting the translation object, displays the subjectivity in the translation activity. And its basic characteristics are cultural awareness, humanistic character, culture and aesthetic creativity of the translation subject. In the following, the translation process, the translator's cultural awareness of the target language, the inter-textual relationship between translated and the original text as well as the target literature, and the inter-subjectivity of translation will be discussed.

3.1 From translation process

The specific process of translation is an important part of the translation activity, and it is also the level in which the translator's subjectivity is most clearly expressed. Taking literary translation as an example, translators need to show at least three kinds of literary identities in the process of translation, namely, the reader, the translator and the author (the literary re-creator). First of all, as the reader, the translator also needs to activate his or her own imagination and esthetic, concretize the "undefined points" of the original text, and adjust the "pre-structure" to achieve an integration and a construction of original meaning in terms of the text. Secondly, as the translator, he or she needs to give full play to the ability of literary appreciation and criticism to discover the ideological and aesthetic connotations of

the work so as to analyse the literary value and social significance of the work. When it comes to the stage of language conversion, the translator mainly focuses on how to reproduce the original work's ideological and aesthetic points and linguistic features, and at the same time, he or she needs to adjust the understanding and aesthetic perception of the work for the reader and the interpreter, so as to integrate them into the language conversion. If the reading and interpretation of works is a general literary activity, the translator's literary creativity is the most prominent in language transformation, which means the translator has to convey not only the basic information of the original text, but also the aesthetic meaning. The more outstanding a literary work is, the richer its aesthetic and cultural connotation are, and the more difficult it is to translate, as a result, it is more necessary for the translator to display creativity. In the process of translation, the translator's subjectivity is the most distinct, and it is also the most discussed topic in the field of translation research.

3.2 From translator's cultural awareness and reader awareness

The "self-centre" of the translator's subjectivity is expressed in the theory of translation as the "Skopos theory" of translation, which stands for translation is a kind of behaviour having its purpose since every behaviour has a purpose, and translators' primary concern is whether the purpose is achieved (Vermeer, 2000)^[9]. It inspires the translator to know more about translation from a culture: any translation is made for a certain cultural purpose. Translators could choose appropriate texts and strategies according to the cultural needs of the translated language. Therefore, translation is a meeting of two kinds of different culture, and the process of translation is a type of negotiation between two cultures, while the translator is the media included. Their cultural identity and orientation will inevitably reflect translated text selection and translation style. Moreover, cultural value orientation of translators here means either an identification with the dominant culture of the translator's language which strengthens the existing ideology and view of literature through translation, or a denial of the existing culture which subverts the existing culture and literary model through translation to reach the purpose of change. Readers' awareness is another manifestation of the translator's cultural awareness in the translated language. The "reader" is of great significance in the theory of receptive aesthetics. Erwin Wolfe proposed the concept of "intended reader", which refers to author's potential audience for his or her work (Yao, 1987)^[10]. Terry Eagleton (1986)^[11] also put forward a similar "implied reader" with the explanation about that reception is a constituent part of the work itself, and every literary work is composed out of an awareness of its potential readers, and contains an image to whom it is written. Every kind of description in the work implies the type of recipient it expects. Since translation is a kind of creation, the translator has own "intended readers" and "potential readers". In order to fully realize the value of translation and make it play a specific role in the local cultural context, the translator has to pay attention to the "horizon of expectation" of potential readers in the process of selecting the original text and translating to decide appropriate translation strategy. Furthermore, the readers' "horizon of expectation" includes three aspects. At first, the translator chooses the translated texts according to the ideology of the mainstream readers, and adopts a proper translation method based on their ideology and reading interests. Secondly, the translator tries to subvert the mainstream ideology through translation, and in this case, the translated works may be far away from most readers' "expected horizons", therefore, the translated works may be out of the majority of the readers' "expected horizons". Thus, the translator needs to adopt certain translating strategies in order to attract readers to accept. At last, a certain consciousness of cultural and literary change had already sprung up in the translated language, but it was still rather weak, so the translator sensitively captured this new cultural information and chose the relevant works for translation in order to provide support for the readers with the consciousness of change and to cultivate more readers. To summarize, if the translated text could be analyzed from the perspective of the translator's cultural awareness of the translated language and the reader's awareness, the intentional mistranslation and deletions in translation will no longer be simply dismissed as "Inferior translation". On the contrary, those translation errors which are in line with the logic of the translated text actually reflect the translator's spirit of responsibility and rigorous attitude towards translation.

3.3 From inter-textual relationship between translated and the original text as well as target literature

As for the relationship between the original work and the translated work, when the original texts convert into translated language, in addition to being alienated into the translated language from external linguistic form, it is also branded with the culture of the translated language due to the translator's cultural awareness and value orientation, carrying the cultural connotation of translated

language of the time, so that the translated work is no longer a foreign literary work originally. It has a kind of connection with the original text, which is the continuation and derivation of the original work in the "totally unanticipated frame of reference" (Escarpit, 1987)^[12], and it is also a "after life" (Benjamin, 2000)^[13] with its own independent life and value, becoming a new work in the culture of translated to have a new literary exchange with new readers (Escarpit, 1987).

Translated works are given life by the translator, who not only gives life to the original works, but also decides what kind of life to give and how to incorporate them into the translated literature (Lefevere, 1995)^[14]. The subjectivity of the translator determines the aesthetic independence of the translated work and the cultural characteristics of the translated language. From the point of view of the independence of the translated work, the relationship between translation and the original work is not subordinate, but intertextual. Cha(2000)^[15] mentioned that for the influence of the translation work on the translated language, it also constitutes an intertextual relationship with the creative literature influenced by it. These two kinds of intertextual relationships fully demonstrate the creativity of the translator and the translator's cultural awareness in translated language.

3.4 From inter-subjectivity of translation

The relationship between translator and the original author is another important aspect of the translator's subjectivity. In the course of translation, it is claimed that both translator and original author are the subject of translation. Thus, under the inter-subjectivity theory, the connections of translator and the original author will be analyzed. "Inter-subjectivity" refers to the characteristic of mutual interaction between subjects, which is an important part of human subjectivity. Yang Chunshi(2002)^[16]stated that the subject exists in an inter-subjective way, and it is individual, which means inter-subjectivity is the coexistence of individuality. In the translation process, translation is not only a place of coexistence between the subject of the original author and the translator, but also a way of their inter-subjective interaction. That means the original work is the opportunity for their dialogue and the platform for exchange. As for dialogue, the original work is the subject of dialogue between the author and the translator, and the translation is the process of their dialogue and the translated work is the result of their conversations. It is in this sense that both the translator and the original author are the subject of translation, and they complete the translation task together. Therefore, the relationship between the original author and the translator should not be one of priority or subordination, but one of dialogues between equal subjects. Thereafter, translation is not a monologue in which one party has a monopoly of the right to speak, nor is it a mechanical response of the translator to the original author, but both parties are giving their own voices. In this way, there are parts of the translation that the translator agrees with the original author, and there are also parts of translator's disagrees. The "creative treason" in translation is the translator's "refutation" of the original author according to the cultural context of the time. It is precisely because of this, translation inherently presents a double meaning: firstly, the significance of cultural and literary exchanges, through which readers can learn about foreign culture, literature, customs and relations; secondly, the cultural meaning of the times is different in the translated language, which is to say if the translator focuses on introducing the works of foreign writers and culture, his or her dialogue with the original author will be agreeable and the translation will be dominated by this kind of resonance. If the translator takes use of a specific cultural purpose in the target language to translate, the translator's voice will be stronger. Therefore, these voices of translator and the original author often coexist.

4. Conclusion

At a time when the trend of global cultural pluralism is inevitable, the translation of Chinese classics has far-reaching historical and practical significance. It aims at introducing the real Chinese traditional culture to Western readers and to disseminate Chinese classics. In this article, development of Chinese classics translation is deliberated, which includes the early period of English translation of Chinese books (before 19th century), missionary English translation (19th century), and contemporary English translation (20th century to the present). In regard to the translation process of Chinese classics, the translator is the creator of the translated text and the disseminator of ideas and culture of the source language, who plays a great role in the process of spreading the target language culture. The above analysis is based on the subjectivity of the translator, to differentiate the concepts about "subject of translation" and "subjectivity of the translator" in order to reveal new dimensions in the study of translators' subjectivity enrich the research of translators' subjectivity in Chinese classics translation.

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