

An Analysis of the Characteristics of Pseudo Detective Translation in Late Qing Dynasty —With Zhang Kunde’s Translation as Example

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Abstract

In the Late Qing Dynasty, while a large number of foreign literary translations entered China with national revolution gathered paces, there were also some works created by Chinese people under the guise of translation. Such works are known as “pseudo-translation” works. This paper attempts to argue for the existence of pseudo-translations in the translations of the first series of detective novels, Chinese, in terms of the conversion of signature, the application of flashback, and the remains of female aesthetics.

Keywords: pseudo detective translation, Zhang Kunde, Late Qing Dynasty

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Toury’s descriptive translation theory has aroused a new trend in the field of translation and aroused people’s attention to pseudo-translation. In the 1980s, the theory was introduced into China. However, Chinese scholars prefer to study the theory itself, but do not pay attention to the pseudo-translation works in China. The creation of pseudo translated works is mixed with complex personal, social and cultural factors. Pseudo translated novels in the Late Qing Dynasty are typical Chinese pseudo translated literature. They were created by Chinese literati and spread as foreign literature in the era of prosperous translation of Chinese novels and foreign literature, which had a lot of repercussions in the society at that time. Pseudo translated novels in the Late Qing Dynasty can basically reflect all levels of pseudo translated literature, so it is particularly worthy of researchers’ attention.

With the aim of reexamining the introduction of detective pseudo translations in Late Qing Dynasty, this paper is intended to concentrate on the characteristics of Zhang Kunde’s translated version of the Adventures of Sherlock Holmes on 《时务报》.

1.2 Theory of Pseudo Translation

In 1970s, Gideon Toury (*Enhancing Cultural Changes 3*), an Israeli scholar, in his work “Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond”, proposed the target-oriented approach to translation studies, reversing the previous and traditional source-oriented one. This is what he calls descriptive translation. Moreover, he even went further. The definition of translation as the proper object of study is central for descriptive translation study and Toury relativizes or “undefines” (Hermans, 1999, p. 46) this concept by making its definition a result of the sociocultural target context. Toury upholds an “overall culture-internal notion of assumed translation”, as “all utterances which are presented or regarded as such within the target culture, on no matter what grounds”, thus making pseudo-translations appropriate objects of study too (Toury, 1995, pp. 32-33).

2. The Origin of Detective Translation in China

2.1 Translation Trend in Late Qing Dynasty

It’s estimated that the first Chinese translation of western novels was originated in the Qian Long Period, however, with a limited and marginal impact on society at that time. Not until the end of the 19th century of Late Qing Dynasty, during which novels were deemed as a significant tool to wake up Chinese to join the wave of national survival and salvation, did its status got elevated. The proponent of the “New Novel Campaign” Liang

Qichao once noted that translating novels aimed at the transformation of national characters by first changing contemporary social norms. With this primary objective, a vast majority of translations were characterized by a mixed contradiction---both conservative and progressive forces could play a role in the translated products, contributing to its unique cultural connotation.

2.2 Zhang Kunde's Detective Novel Translation

Researchers Cai Zhuqing and Guo Yanli (2005) believe that the introduction of Chinese detective novels in the Late Qing Dynasty started with Zhang Kunde (1896a)'s translation of 《英国包探访喀迭医生奇案》, which was published in the first issue of 《时务报》 on August 9th, 1896. To Zhang's surprise, the launch of 《奇案》 had harvested national acclaim and favorable comments. In the following days, 《时务报》 published another 4 detective stories translated by Zhang Kunde, initiating the translation of the Sherlock Holmes series in Chinese history. According to the analysis of Qi Jinxin and Li Dechao (2019), 《奇案》 is a pseudo work. If it is indeed Zhang's work, then there may also be pseudo translation in Zhang's other translations.

3. Three Pseudo Characteristics of Zhang Kunde's Detective Novel Translation

3.1 The Conversion of Signature

The Late Qing Dynasty didn't pay much attention to the so-called translation rules, as a consequence, it's common for translator to alter the name of the original work or the original author. However, Zhang Kunde's signatures of these four novels are rather intriguing, specifically listed as follows (张坤德, 1896b, 1896c, 1897a, 1897b):

Title	Origin of Translation	Original Author
《英包探勘盗密约案》	译歇洛克阿尔唔斯笔记	
《记伧者复仇记》	译歇洛克阿尔唔斯笔记	滑震
《继父诬女破案》	滑震笔记	
《阿尔唔斯缉案被戕》	译滑震笔记	

First, the translator Zhang Kunde intended to identify all these four novels as note-taking works in classical Chinese for basically 2 reasons--first, the familiar form of classical notes could narrow the otherwise distance between Chinese masses and foreign literature, thus bringing the two parts closer; for another, the name of record to some extent enhanced the credibility and authenticity of the plot. Second, the author called the original title of the novel as works written by the protagonist (i.e. 歇洛克阿尔唔斯笔记) while naming the storyteller as the author (i.e. 滑震笔记). It's because of the adjustment and adaptation of the original narration. At the same time, the original author Conan Doyle was concealed and rewritten as a translation from《歇洛克阿尔唔斯笔记》, turning the main character Sherlock Holmes into a true recorder of notebook novels. Nevertheless, the translator specifically fabricated author Hua Zhen for the book 《记伧者复仇事》 and added a commonly used narrative phrase at the beginning “滑震又记, 歇洛克之事云” (张坤德 1896c). Such transformation conformed with the tradition of historical biography inherited in classical Chinese novels and carried out third-person narration as witnesses or real participants of the event.

3.2 The Application of Flashback Technique

As narrative theorist Genette once said, western novels were used to starting the story from the middle. To be more specific, western novels don't adopt a linear development model like traditional Chinese novels do, by contrast, they mixed various narratives together, such as flashbacks plus interludes. Flashback, as a traditional method of Western narrative literature, yet rarely appeared in Chinese classical novels. For this reason, Zhang Kunde personally changed the flashback in the original work to chronological order while translating.

In the current translation of the novel 《英包探勘盗密约案》, the original text began this way: One day, a letter came to Watson from his former classmate who served in the Admiralty at the moment. The classmate mentioned that some calamity happened to him and hoped to resort to Watson who had a close relationship with detective Holmes. It's not until Watson met this classmate that he was informed of the details about the accident. Apart from the adjustment of narrative perspective, the same change also went to the narrative order. Zhang arranged the case exactly in chronological order: In the first place, personal experience of Watson's classmate was presented and then the climax of how he lost the secret contract was introduced. Afterwards, it was a series of responses towards the troublesome accident, first the calling of the police, then the futile researching process by officers, eventually classmate's resorting to Watson “攀息病卧九礼拜,不能省人事。幸其妻与某医生调治

如式，得稍愈。后发一电与复勃斯（小说中一警察，引者注），亦无可寻究，又疑其同在公事房之写字人，亦不然。久之，忽忆有歌洛克·呵尔唔斯者，以善缉捕名，乃致书其幼时同学友滑震”（张坤德 1896b）。

This change is in line with the traditional reading habits that Chinese possessed. Traditional Chinese Court-Case novels usually start with the murderer committing the crime, and then introduce plots such as upright official investigation and continuous trials. The narrative time order is completely consistent with the original story time, which is a mixed blessing---clear of clues but lack of suspense. The use of flashbacks in detective novels aimed at revealing the results in advance, thus delaying the normal reasoning process of detectives, engendering certain cognitive barriers to readers, as well as elevating readers' expectation and appealing their reading interest.

3.3 *The Remains of Female Aesthetics*

Origin by Conan Doyle	Translation by Zhang Kunde
I may add that she was a woman of great beauty, and that even now, when she has been married for upwards of thirty years, she is still of a striking and queenly appearance. — <i>The Adventure of the Crooked Man</i>	伊妻甚美，迄今相距三十年，貌尚少艾。 —《记伧者复仇记》
She was a striking looking woman, a little short and thick for symmetry, but with a beautiful olive complexion, large dark Italian eyes, and a wealth of deep dark hair. — <i>The Adventure of the Naval Treaty</i>	见其身矮而壮，面如橄榄，睛黑如意大利人，发黑如漆，面色如霞 —《英包探勘盗密约案》

Obviously, Zhang's translation weakens women's aesthetic feeling on the basis of basically conforming to the original text in the 《记伧者复仇记》，the description of Mrs. Barclay only retains "great beauty", "a striking and queenly appearance" is replaced by "貌尚少艾 (looks as young)", which makes the character image thinner. This may be influenced by the brevity of classical Chinese. In 《英包探勘盗密约案》，the translator deliberately retains the appearance feature of the "southern European beauty" of the original actress, but this image is not beautiful in the target culture. (At that time, Chinese people regarded white and thin women as beautiful.) The translator also deleted the two tone adjectives "striking" and "beautiful", which greatly reduced the beauty of this woman in the translation. This may be an attempt of the translator to break through the aesthetics of contemporary people, but it also shows that the female aesthetic feeling is weakened in the exchange of aesthetic cultures of different female images.

4. Impacts of Zhang Kunde's Pseudo Translation

4.1 *Popularization of Detective Novels*

It was Zhang Kunde's step-by-step translation strategy that allowed the Chinese people began to understand, accept, and even embrace this new genre of detective novels. After Zhang's first translations on 《时务报》，a majority of newspapers and media followed suit and published translated detective novels to appeal to readers. For example, more than 30 versions of *the Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* emerged one after another, all gaining great popularity. The introduction of Detective Novels not only brought wonderful detective stories and exotic social customs to Chinese readers, but also showed the pros and cons of Western politics and judicial systems, which in turn might inspire Chinese public's way of solving puzzles.

4.2 *Progress in Narrative Mode*

The essence of translation is more about the simple language switch—The mere focus on "what to translate" is far from enough, instead, the translator should pay attention to the problem of "how to switch". Traditional Chinese novels are developed mostly based on a linear narration for the storyteller often emerged as an omniscient narrator, who is responsible for telling the cause and effect of the entire event, the ins and outs of the clues, and the fate of all the characters. But anyway, Zhang Kunde's acceptance of Western narrative techniques still evoked a strong repercussion among translators and writers by enriching Chinese otherwise limited narrative modes.

4.3 *Exacerbation of Old Thoughts*

Despite translators' original intention to innovate, there is no denying that some inherent stereotypes in Chinese culture are still mirrored in their translation works. As is shown in the foregoing discussion, Zhang Kunde retained traditional Chinese aesthetics about female images in his works. Gideon Toury believes that from a cultural perspective, some texts appear in the form of translation, which is convenient for the input of new media

into the culture. In the name of translation, objections to the new media can be reduced, especially in closed, conservative and conformist cultures, because people tend to be more tolerant of the translated works.

5. Conclusion

Toury's notion of assumed translation expanded the scope of translation studies and demonstrate the value of pseudo-translation. Yet Zhang Kunde's translation retained some traditional elements and personal ideologies, his contributions to the innovation in signature conversion and narrative order could overwhelm the slight flaws in the translation works. Since the way as pioneer was never a smooth sailing, we could draw the conclusion that Zhang Kunde and his detective novel translations not only facilitate the prevalence of the new genre of detective novels in China, more importantly, he opened the door for the continuous influx of translation, allowing Chinese to absorb more fresh narrative modes, novel layout of cases and progressive ideas behind.

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