

Approach To Buck's Translation Of *Shuihuzhuan* From Its Impact In Creating Image Of China

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Abstract

This paper is devoted to a comparative analysis in rhetoric, characterization, theme representation and some other significant aspects between *Shuihuzhuan* and Pearl S. Buck's translation from a perspective of the function of the translation of Chinese classic masterpieces in creating the image of China, and then to an exposition of the defect of Buck's version, on the basis of which a reflection is to be made on the guiding principle of the translation of classic Chinese literary masterpieces.

Keywords: Rhetoric, characterization, theme representation, image creation

Introduction: popular comments on Buck's Translation

Published in 1933 in America, Pearl S. Buck's *All Men are Brothers*, an English translation of *Shuihuzhuan*, has been influential in both America and China. In America, the book "jumped into the ranking list of the authorized Monthly Reading Club in America"(Gongfang, 1999:289), and has constantly aroused Chinese scholars' attention and comments, the most well-known of which was done by Lu Xun in thirties of 19th century. The major comments are generally categorized into the following three types. Some argue that Buck's version, honored as a great achievement (Gongfang, 1999) has made great contribution in Chinese culture transmission due to its popularity in Western society; while some others, represented by Qian Gechuan (1981), have pointed out that the version is an dwarfization of Chinese language and a misreading of Chinese culture as well as a disrespect to Chinese literature heritage and furthermore announced that the translator, Buck, totally "misunderstood China". Recently other scholars' research indicates that the translation strategy taken by Buck is literal translation and the version is not a "misreading" but a "foreignization" to "maintain the cultural differences", that is, to "maintain the peculiar expression way and passage-construction style of ancient Chinese" to "literally introduce classic Chinese literary masterpieces to the West" (Mahongjun, 2003:125).

The above three views are to some extent reasonable but not comprehensive enough to explore the translation strategy, the style and further the concrete and potential effect of the version. The first view has noticed the popularity of Buck's version in the West but ignored that the popularity may be appealing cultural psychology and goal of target culture while degrading source culture. The second view is unconvincing for it has taken the style of target language into research but neglected the translator's knowledge and cultural background. Combined with "foreignization", the third view has studied the translator's knowledge and cultural background from the perspective of cultural constructive function of translation and corrected the radical opinions of "misreading" or "mistranslation", but it has completely argued in favor of literal strategy in Buck's version while in lack of some questions like the translation goal of literature texts, the limitation of "foreignization", the role of the translation of classic pieces in creating an image of China.

In this paper, the principal idea is that translation of classic pieces plays a significant role not only in cultural transmission but also in creating image of source culture. The study of the translator and his or her translation of classic pieces like *Shuihuzhuan*, a very presentation of Chinese culture, cannot be done without the research on the function of translation in constructing image of Chinese culture. Integrated with the concept of "image of China", this paper will explore the effects that Buck's translation strategy has exerted on the cultural inclination of her version from the perspective of the function that translation of classic pieces has performed in creating image of Chinese culture. Furthermore, the translation strategy and standards of Chinese classic pieces will be discussed.

Function of the translation of classic pieces in creating image of China

"Image of China" is sourced from Imagology, focused on "the internal logic of production and transmission" (Zhou Ning, Song Binghui, 2005:149) of cultural image, that is, the construction and development of cultural image of a nation in the cultural and literature system of other cultures. Generally, imagology bases on the analysis of literary works or non-literary works; the former is termed as "literature imagology", exploring how literature works function in creating and developing cultural image of a nation and related topics.

In the last decade, the introduction of imagological studies from France and Germany has given rise to a hot research on "image of China". It has been the major research of Chinese imagologists and other scholars living in Europe or America. The research mainly includes how and why the image has been historically created and constructed in European culture and

American culture as well as European and American cultural psychology in this process.

Wang Yongping (2004:115) has a detailed description about the creation of Chinese image in Western culture. Generally, the image of China has gone through a great change from a nation of being adored and worshiped to a culture of being depreciated and even belittled. The image has been built on travelogues recorded by travelers, literary works, historic records made by the missionaries or philosophical works in western history. Although the ways of cultural transmission have been extended with the technological advancement, the major way of creating Chinese image is still based on the works carried by texts. Certainly, literary works is the major way of constructing a nation's image due to its comprehensive readers and now literary imagology has aroused a growing attention from both literature researchers and translation scholars. The rise and development of post-colonialism and deconstructionism has made it clear that literary translation has performed a significant function in creating the image of source culture in the target culture. Venutti has stated that translation as an integral part of target literature and culture is an important way of shaping target culture and emphasized that translation plays a key role in creating the image of source culture. That confirms that "translation is unavoidably adopted to support the cultural construction, especially the development of source language and culture, which is to create the image of source culture" (Xu Baoqiang, Yuanwei, 2001:372).

Classic pieces as the representative image of literature, cultural psychology and characteristics always enjoy a high social status in a culture, so their translation, which will be read and comprehended by the target readers, is undoubtedly a way and carrier of creating the image of source culture. Therefore the assessment on translation of classic pieces cannot be done without a combination with how literary translation functions in creating image of China in western world.

Achievements and historical status of *Shuihuzhuan* in its source culture

A systematic research and assessment of translation of classic pieces will necessarily make comparative studies between the status and image of source text in source culture and the image already created by translated versions in target language so as to decide whether the version has created a true "image". That is, a study on image of China created by translation should first explore the artistic characteristics and achievements as well as social status of the source text in source culture and second probe into translation strategy and style of its version and third research the possible influences exerted by the version in target culture. Generally, the historical status of a piece of work is decided by three questions: whether the theme

can reflect the cultural psychology, whether the narration strategy is refined and reasonable and whether the expression is artistic and skillful.

Shuihuzhuan as one of four great classic novels in Chinese history enjoys a rather high social status in Chinese literary and cultural history. Zheng Gongdun stated in *Symposium of Shuihuzhuan* that the novel is “a marvelous artistic achievement, profound and vivid”, while Zhao Weizhong also addressed that the novel is “the first peak of Chinese ancient novels by its profound thought and mature art”. Generally, *Shuihuzhuan* has embodied three great artistic achievements: first, the thematic thought in the novel is “a miniature of the historical moment which is a reflection of grand classic struggles of how Chinese peasants fought for their survival” and “a generalization of peasants revolt and rebellion in Chinese history” (Zheng Gongdun, 1983:6). “The thoughts and arts of the novel is an integral part of national culture, national characteristics and social psychology. Many readers have realized the nature of the society and acquired the spiritual power from the characters created in the novel. In China, many writers and artists inspired by the novel have created numerous works”(Zhao Weizhong, 2000:10). Second, *Shuihuzhuan* has achieved a great success in rhetoric and characterization. The oral, vivid and natural language adopted by the writer has created 108 heroes, many evil characters and small figures, most of who are rather personalized. “As a remarkable memorial in Chinese literature history, the novel has built the foundation of how to create and shape characters in Chinese modern literature” (Zheng Gongdun, 2000:228). In the third place, the excellent narration strategy reflected by its compact structure and delicate plot typically generalizes narration skills of Chinese ancient novels. Totally, a successful integration of the theme, personalized characters and vivid language as well as the excellent narration strategy has successfully produced a great masterpiece and created a wise and courageous image of Chinese nation against injustice and tyranny.

Buck’s translation strategy and its representations

A literary translator naturally has certain cultural view on the theme of source text and cultural system of source culture, which necessarily exerts influences on his or her translation strategy, and the strategy will be running through his version. That is, translation strategy is a carrier of a translator’s comprehension of source text and cultural views with a strong subjectivity. Therefore, the correspondence between translator’s subjective strategy, the style of his version and the image of source culture in the version is an unavoidable question in literary translation assessment.

Buck’s subjective translation strategy and her cultural view on China, in her preface of *All Men are Brothers*, are possibly categorized into the following points. 1. The strategy of literal translation is comprehensively

adopted to maintain the expression of source language and the complete contents of the story. 2. If one character has several names, only one name is referred and all the historical allusions involved in characters' names are abandoned in translation. Buck stated that her literal translation is "to reproduce the source text and expect that English readers would read the novel as naturally as English works" and "to maintain the meaning and style of the source text, even the parts not appreciated by Chinese readers". She also explained her translation strategy of the characters' name and that is "Chinese names are too difficult to be understood by western readers". This paper has selected a paragraph about Li Kui in the 46th chapter of *Shuihuzhuan* (a commented version by Jin Shengtan) to make a further contrastive analysis between the source text and the target text.

The source text:

李逵道：“哥哥，兄癩了多时。不曾杀得一人，我便先去走一遭。”宋江道：“兄弟，你去不得。若是阵冲敌，用著你先去；这是做细作的勾当，用你不著。”李逵笑道：“曷个鸟庄，何须哥哥费力！只兄弟自带三二百个孩儿们杀将去，把这个鸟庄上人都砍了！何须要人先去打听！”

Buck's version:

Then Li K'uei said, "Elder Brother, I have been idle for how long and I have not killed a single man all that time. I will go first for once."

But Sung Chiang replied, "Brother, you may not go. When we break the ranks of the enemy and charge in, then we will use you at the front. But this is an affair of spying and we cannot use you."

Li K'uei laughed and said, "But for such an accursed village as this why would you trouble yourself so much, my Elder Brother? Let me just take two or three hundred of your children and we will kill our way in! We will slaughter every person in this accursed village. Why should we want men to go first and spy out?"

This paragraph has depicted Li Kui's personality vividly while partly reflected the difference between Likui and Songjiang in character. Obviously, the difference here is painted by the two figures' verbal expressions. Specifically in this novel, a character's verbal expressions are highly personalized with obvious difference between the writer's narration which is naturally vivid and easily understood. Totally speaking, "the language in the book appropriately represents our folk language"(Zheng Gongdun, 1983:76). However, the language in Buck's version is rather non-personalized. Here both Li Kui's and Songjiang's words as well as the

writer's narration are typically standardized English in her version. The frequent uses of pronouns, adoption of compounding sentences and no dialects in her version make no difference between Li Kui's language and Songjiang's cannot be seen. That is, the standard employment of English in Buck's version cannot help readers discover the differences in characters' words, which are an important approach to show the differences between characters' personalities. In other words, the correspondence between the characters and their personalized language in the source text is lost in Buck's translation. Moreover, Buck's translation strategy also functions in her transfer of those specific cultural elements like religion or the creation of certain images. The version is culturally westernized, e.g. 和尚 "is translated into "priest" and 梁山好汉 into "robbers". The conclusion from the above analysis proves that: 1. From perspective of style, long sentences naturally in English formal writings are very popularly adopted in Buck's version and her strategy of word-for-word translation produced a version which, an almost exact literal translation of words of source text, is dull and lifeless with a loss of vividness, fluency and elegance of the source text. 2. Buck's version is to domesticate source culture into target culture. 3. Her version as a distortion cannot represent the theme and contents of the source text. It can be concluded that there is a great divergence between Buck's version and the subjective translation strategy that she announced in her preface to take to "reproduce the charm of source text", "to maintain the meaning and style of the source culture" and "to respect source culture". In a word, Buck's version is unsuccessful in transferring the language, the characters, the contents and the theme of the source text to the target language and even went to a controversial way.

Effects of Buck's version on creating "the image of China"

The quoted part from *Anecdotes about Nankai University* has proved that Buck's version was a bestseller after it was published in America. Meanwhile, the author Tang Tingting also mentioned this and some other Chinese people staying in America described that Buck's version is popularly collected by libraries of many universities throughout the US. Therefore, some scholars believe that Buck's version is a success to introduce the masterpiece, *Shuihuzhuan*, to the western world. "The Chinese novel impressed the world" (Gong Fang, 1999:228) and made Chinese culture understood by westerners. However, without a research on the function of the version in creating image of China, a good sell and popularity of the version cannot mean the success. First, a reduction of the artistic achievements and even a distortion of source text is actually the disrespect to the source text. Second, the version which cannot faithfully transfer the

theme that carries Chinese culture and its national psychology is a distortion and even a hurt to the image of source culture. Hence, the popularity of the version is just a means for Western centralists to discriminate the source culture and raise the status of the West. Now many scholars agree that translation is not only a process of language transfer but also a significant approach to create image of a culture, especially the translation and transmission of classic pieces is both a part of constructing target culture and an approach to create image of source culture, here image of China.

For Chinese translators, the translation of classic pieces is to spread Chinese culture and make its charm and spirit sensed by other nations. But for scholars with the thought of Western centralism, the translation of Chinese classic pieces is possibly an introduction of Chinese culture into western society or more likely a conscious degradation of the value of source text, that is, a means to dwarfize and despise image of China.

All the above analysis comes to a conclusion that Buck's version is an unsuccessful maintenance of art achievements of the source text and cultural image it created. The version cannot create a faithful image of China, although she announced her translation strategy is subjectively to maintain the meaning and style of the source text as faithfully as possible. It sees that there have been many debates and much criticism on Buck's version while Sha Boli's version has been more accepted.

Conclusion: the reflection on standards of classic pieces translation

This paper has collected and categorized many comments on Buck's version and further explored their defects and biases. On the basis of that, this paper would put forward some thoughts on standards of classic pieces translation assessment.

First, a research on a translator's personal translation strategy and his cultural psychology reflected by his cultural background is an essential way to assess translation of classic pieces. Second, an analysis on how and why a version deviates from its source text is more important than a contrastive study between the source text and its version. Third, a justifiable assessment on classic pieces translation cannot be done without an objective analysis on the theme and characters created by the source text and a comprehensive research on how the version maintains the image and theme of source culture and how the version deviates from the theme in the transfer. Fourth, a convincing assessment on classic pieces translation also should comprise a study on cultural image created by source text and a study how the version distorts the image. Generally speaking, a successful translation of classic pieces must maintain the chief artistic achievements and cultural images created by the source text.

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