



## Faithfulness: Translator’s Responsibility in Cross-Cultural Communication

WU Feng<sup>[a],\*</sup>; XU Xihua<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup>Professor. Foreign Languages Department, Zhejiang Sci-Tech University, Hangzhou, China.

\*Corresponding author.

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### Abstract

New trends in translation have led to a mistaken notion that faithfulness is obsolete. This article argues that faithfulness should be highlighted in cross-cultural communication to promote better understanding. As a result, a translator should cultivate a strong sense of responsibility, keeping in mind that faithfulness is the guarantee of successful cross-cultural communication. Erroneous translation, either because of incautious, incompetent translation ending in misinformation, or because of deliberate reading into the source language text the translator’s own ideas, ending in disinformation, is detrimental to effective cross-cultural communication. Faithful translation can never be overemphasized.

**Key words:** Cross-cultural communication; Faithful translation; Misinformation; Disinformation

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### 1. TRANSLATOR’S SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY

In *Language in Thought and Action*, Mr. Hayakawa points out: “Today the public is aware, perhaps to an unprecedented degree, of the role of communication in human affairs. This awareness arises in large part out of the urgency of the tensions existing everywhere

between nation and nation, class and class, individual and individual, in a world that is undergoing rapid change and reorganization.” Perhaps only through effective communication, can man engage in meaningful cooperation and avoid conflict, so that we can hang together instead of hanging separately. To achieve effective communication across cultures, the most important role is assumed by translators who are considered as the experts to bridge over the cultural barriers between peoples. The Chinese scholar HU Gengshen, advocator of Eco-translation theory, in his article “An Eco-translatological Perspective on the Supersession of ‘Translator-centeredness’ by ‘Translator’s Responsibility’” considers it as a significant idea to assign the translator a central position. He observes that “Advocating the notion that ‘the translator is the center,’ and ‘the translator plays the leading role,’ will facilitate the extension of the ‘research radius’ of translator research in translation studies, promoting the theoretical level of such studies. Meanwhile, it will also give impetus to the enhancement of the **self-duty consciousness**, **self-discipline** and **professional quality** of the translator (translated and stressed by WU Feng).”

When assigned the central position of translation, the translator also assumes a very serious responsibility. He should make careful use of his role as a mediator to guarantee the smooth communication between a source culture and a target culture. He should be aware of the fact of parallax in language use, if carelessly performing his duties, he might block the communication instead of facilitate the communication, creating more problems. HU Gengshen cautions us against such dangers by raising a series of questions: “If the translator is the ‘Center’, what is the status of the text? If the translator is the ‘Center’, what can be done in case the translator’s ‘autonomous rights’ are excessive, leading to ‘loss of control’? If the translator is the ‘Center’, should translation criticism focus on the translator or the translated text? If the translator

is the 'Center', does it mean 'the translator overrides everything?' (translated by WU Feng)" Too many cases show that heavy is the head that wears the crown. Even when the translator is given the central position, he is free from fetters, but he still has to obey some fundamental rules to perform his duties well. He should not distort the message of the source language text. He should not read **into** the source language text what the original author did not say or imply. He should not provide misinformation or disinformation and abuse the trust of the target language readers. Nida emphasizes that translator (1) need to understand thoroughly the source text, (2) the close relation between language and culture, (3) the necessity to focus attention on style and discourse, and (4) the relevance of insights coming from several different disciplines (Nida, 2001). HU Gengshen, in answering the questions he raises in his article, also stresses the responsibility of translators in the following comments that "'responsibility of the translator' chiefly refers to that of the translator to shoulder his 'accountabilities,' namely, the translator has responsibility to perform, is bound by his responsibility and conscientiously execute his responsibility to his capacity. ... This demand is especially put forward from the aspect of translation ethics (translated by WU Feng)." The above discussion leads to the conclusion that a translator, as a mediator in cross-cultural communication, not only plays a decisive role, but also assumes an accountable obligation. It is a grave mistake to regard translation principles and rules as fetters, for even dancers have to follow choreographic rules to attain beautiful performance. Drivers have to obey traffic rules to guarantee their own and others' safety. Only by following fundamental rules and guiding principles of translation such as to be faithful to the source text message, will a translator fulfill his obligation to the source text author as well as the target text readers.

## 2. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FAITHFUL TRANSLATION IN CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Now in the field of translation in China, faithfulness has become an ugly word, condemned as conventionality, slavishness and lack of creativity. Unfortunately, this trend has led to a lot of translation problems, which in turn have somehow hindered the Chinese government's effort to introduce Chinese culture and civilization to the world. As is known to all, the relatively isolated geographic location of China in history from the rest of the world has made the Chinese culture diametrically different from other civilizations. It now is a strategic policy for the government to introduce our cultural heritage to the world. But as Chinese as a language is used only in very limited areas as China proper, Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, the only way to introduce our culture to the

outside world is by translating, by far the most important translation is in English, a lingua franca in modern world. People engaged in this translation are sinologists from other countries as well as Chinese translators. Because the emphasis on creativity and the advocated notion of translator as the center, some translators in China consider faithful translation is something to be avoided at all costs. Critics in translation also evade this issue as if poor translation does not exist. Every translation error can be justified as long as it is "creative." A professor in Zhejiang University sarcastically states: "The problem with the circle of criticism is everybody is trying to be nice in praising, concealing the errors and highlighting only the merits. As a result criticism has become reciprocal flattery, as in the *Taiji* exercise, vaguely doodling with certain terms and theories without sincerely and seriously dealing with scholastic issues which are problematic (JIANG Ruishui, 2014, translated by WU Feng). Here probably many translators confuse literal translation with faithful translation. Actually Nida has already pointed out that "most persons assume that literalness in translating means faithfulness to the text, even though close, literal renderings are often seriously misleading (Nida, 2001)." To be a responsible translator, one has to be faithful. A translator is to represent a source text in a target language, not to produce a different text of his own in another person's name. As such, his translation should bear great relevance to the source language text. He cannot afford to betray the source text author and the target text reader, because both of them rely on his assistance to engage in a meaningful communication. If he distorts the message, misunderstanding surely will occur and the communication will be a failure.

Some Chinese scholars, when learning that MO Yan's winning the Nobel Prize in literature owes a lot to the translation of Goldblatt, would argue that Goldblatt has not translated MO Yan "faithfully." The fact is that Goldblatt is a very serious sinologist, who takes Chinese works seriously and is very carefully in conveying the spirit and style of the Chinese writers no matter he is MO Yan or others. His translation of Xiao Hong's *Market Street: A Chinese Woman in Harbin* is a case in point.

SL: 他要为我倒水时,他非常着慌,两条眉毛好像要连接起来,鼻子在上端扭动了好几下。——欧罗巴旅馆

TL: He became so flustered in his desire to get me some water that his eyebrows creased into an almost unbroken straight line. His nose twitched several times.

SL: 屏着呼吸,我把鱼从地板上拾起来,再慢慢把它送到水里,好像亲手让我完成一件丧仪。深重的悲凉压住了我的头,寒颤了我的手。——同命运的小鱼

TL: Since the fish was still breathing, I picked it up off the floor and put it gently back into the water, almost

as though I were performing a funeral rite. A heavy sadness descended upon me; my hand began to tremble.<sup>1</sup>

Comparing the two versions, we can observe that Goldblatt has only adjusted the order of ideas expressed in the source language text, but the wording, the sentence pattern and the style all are faithfully rendered in the target language text to represent the emotion of a sensitive woman author Xiao Hong. If there is one problem in the translation, in the second example, it is the person who held her own breath for a while to show her anxiety, not the fish that was still breathing, because according to the context, she was performing a funeral rite, implying that the fish was perhaps dead.

Nida itinerates in his works the importance of careful study of the source language text. In his opinion the first step for a cross-cultural communication is the thorough understanding of the source language text. Once the essence of the source language text is grasped, the representation of its message in the target language text is autonomous. But Nida also regrets that “many translators have only very hazy ideas about how languages are structured and how to explore the meanings of words and combinations of words.” In other words, some translators take their duties lightly, abusing the trust of the target reader by providing substandard translation that is not only erroneous, but very misleading and harmful. In Nida’s opinion, as a form of cross-cultural communication, the first and foremost step in translation is to explore the meanings and styles of the source language text, because “the most difficult task for the translator is to understand thoroughly the designative and associative meanings of the text to be translated. This involves not only knowing the meanings of words and the syntactic relations, but also being sensitive to all the nuances of the stylistic devices (Nida, 2001).” Nord advocates functionalism over equivalence in translation. Even so, he raises the issues of **professional loyalty** in his monograph *Translating as a Purposeful Activity—Functional Approaches Explained*. “Loyal”, according to *Webster’s New World Dictionary*, means “faithful to those persons, ideals, etc. that one stands under an obligation to defend or support.” By choosing this expression, Nord actually implies that faithful translation is absolutely necessary as the divine duty of a translator, who has to fulfill his obligation to both the source language text producer and the target language reader, so that the cross-cultural communication can be conducted without failure. In this sense, faithful translation should not only be encouraged, but also be lauded as a virtue.

### 3. DETRIMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF ERRONEOUS TRANSLATION IN CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Problems occur not only in cross-cultural communication, but also in intracultural communication. For instance,

<sup>1</sup> The two examples are provided by my student Miss YU Wanwan in her graduate paper on the translation skills of Goldblatt.

owing to corruption or mistakes in copying, the same work can often have varied versions, an unsolvable puzzle to scholars who want to trace the “original” of some literary canons. Take *Hamlet* as an example. When he expresses his dismay at his own mother’s hasty marriage to his uncle, the suspected usurper and murderer, Hamlet sighed: “O, that this too, too **solid** flesh would melt.” Another version, however, is “O, that this too, too **sullied** flesh would melt.” In the context, both versions can vividly reflect Hamlet’s anger of and disgust at the base, corruptive human flesh. So which is the very expression used by Shakespeare? This is probably a question that would never have a definite answer. Similarly in *Richard the Third*, Clarence dwelt on the horror after death, saying:

“O, then began the tempest to my soul,  
Who pass’d, methought, the melancholy flood,  
With that **grim ferryman** which poets write of  
Onto to the kingdom of perpetual night.” (p. 978)

But other varied versions also use “that **grim ferriman**, that **sour ferry-man**, and that **sowre Ferry-man**,” all are suitable to depict the horrible features of Charon. Which one should we take as the writing of Shakespeare? Bibliographers will be happy to discover as many varied versions of the same book, but it might a nightmare for a scholar who wants to identify the “orthodox” version which is the author’s own writing. Issues like this can often lead to heated dispute and controversy.

When cross-cultural communication is involved, this situation becomes more complicated and troublesome. Nord points out: “Communication takes place through a medium and in situations that are limited in time and place. Each specific situation determines what and how people communicate, and it is changed by people communicating. Situations are not universal but are embedded in a cultural habitat, which in turn conditions the situation. Language is thus to be regarded as part of culture. And communication is conditioned by the constraints of the situation-in-culture.” In face-to-face communication between two interlocutors, the speaker and the addressee, owing to their different schemata of the world, will interpret the same language items differently, sometimes ending in misunderstanding and conflict. It is no wonder and surprise that when a third party, the translator is employed in the communication, the speech event becomes even more involved and problematic. In this situation, the speaker’s (author’s) message will first be received and interpreted by the translator, who in turn will convey the message to the target language addressee. If in this process, the translator misunderstands the source language text, the mistake will be multiplied or enlarged by the target language addressee because of parallax. A

famous Chinese translation scholar LIN Kenan, in his article "Know the Author, Know the Theory, Know the Use," criticizes the tendency of some scholars who are impatient to conduct research in a systematic way and are not willing to read theoretical works thoroughly before their research. He observes that "Sometimes it (such research) is even like intending to travel to the south, but contrarily driving one's horses to the north. What is discussed is like a horse in must and an ox in heat, the two having nothing to do with each other. If such phenomenon is further explored, the deep-rooted cause is probably that 'the original works are not carefully and thoroughly perused (translated by WU Feng).'"

In *Matthew*, Jesus Christ admonishes his disciples "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden underfoot of men (Matthew 5, 13)." If a translator fails in his duties, he is even worse than the salt that has lost its savour in that the tasteless material can still be cast out to be trodden underfoot as paving materials, at least doing no harm to people. But a translator who does not faithfully perform his duties is not only useless, but actually is very harmful in cross-cultural communication. Under most circumstances, the target language reader will turn to a translator simply because he cannot understand the foreign language and related culture. So he needs the assistance of the translator. Usually he will presume that the translator is trustworthy and will willingly accept the message provided by the translator as the intention of the source language author. It is also beyond most target language readers' capacity to identify any deviations or distortions of the source language text. In other words, they are at the mercy of the translator. They have to believe in the translator. If the translator abuses this trust, the target language readers will be victims, for they are misled without realizing this fact. As a responsible translator, it should be remembered that he should cultivate both his language expertise and his cultural awareness, in order to perform his duties faithfully. He should not find shelter behind the excuse of "creativity," whitewashing his incompetence and errors. Because his mistakes in translation will remain a historical existence, a hindrance to the real understanding of the source language text, he is not doing any useful job in promoting cross-cultural communication. He actually has raised a lot of roadblocks for the unsuspecting target language readers to surmount. If there are too much unintentional misinformation and intentional disinformation existing in his translation, he has created confusions for later generations, because in their research, they have to identify what is the real message of the source language author, what is the fake goods concocted by the translator and should be discarded. This is really a daunting task in today's context of mass communication.

Nida points out that the basic requirement of qualified translation is the thorough understanding of the source language text, but unfortunately many translators are content to learn about language instead of learning language. As a result, they are neither prepared in language competence nor in cultural awareness. When engaged in a translation mission, they assume a kind of anything-goes attitude. In their translation, they lay too much emphasis on "creativity," and "the subjectivity of translators." But they forget that translation is, if an art, a representational process, not an expressive process. Otherwise you should work as an author, offering your own ideas to the readers instead of conveying the ideas of your own in the name of a source language author. Because of the erroneous notion, they would take it for granted that any kind of interpretation should be acceptable, any translation should be valid. There seems never any poor or bad translation as long as it is rendered into the target language. Such an attitude will lead to the betrayal of the trust of the target language readers' expectation and serious damage to the integrity of the source language text, leading to failure in cross-cultural communication and confusion.

Professor JIANG Ruoshui points out a problem in criticism in general. Everybody tries to be nice and help to praise the merits. But nobody wants to poke at the mistakes in scholastic exploration. This is not a healthy atmosphere for the pursuit of truth. In translation circle in China, the same phenomenon also prevails. Anyone raising the issue of faithfulness is regarded as a pervert. Serious criticism is considered as personal attack. Sometimes even very obvious translation mistakes are overlooked. It is a great pity. We all make mistakes, and tolerance should be encouraged. After all, to err is human, to forgive divine. But pointing out a problem is never a personal attack as long as the critic's purpose is to improve quality of translation and facilitate future efforts. We all have our own limitations. Only by realizing our own limitations will it be possible for us to make progress. In this sense, sincere criticism is a plus, not a disservice. Newmark emphasizes the importance of translation theory because of the appalling badness of so many published translations (Widmer, 1959). And "literary or non-literary translations without mistakes are rare" (Newmark, 2001). In 1911, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* already stated that "most versions of modern foreign writers are mere hackwork carelessly executed by incompetent hands." So it seems that poor translation has been living with us for a long time and will still live with us in the future. What we can expect is to caution translators of the various sources of errors and mitigate the severity of mistakes. It should be construed that only when symptoms are diagnosed can diseases be treated and cured.

Over the decades after China's reform and opening-up, many Chinese scholars have engaged in the efforts of promoting cultural exchange between China and other countries. In this process Chinese translators

have contributed a lot to the mutual understanding and exchange between Chinese and foreign cultures. Recently the Chinese government has also realized the importance of cultural exchange and is making efforts to promote the permeation and dissemination of Chinese cultural heritage to other countries. Many major projects in translating Chinese canons in English have been launched and a number of influential works are published. On the one hand we should be happy about these efforts, but on the other hand we should also notice that even such major efforts sponsored by government funding still have some problems that need to be tackled to guarantee better quality translation so that less misunderstanding in cross-cultural communication will arise. Now at least two kinds of mistakes can be observed from some of the translated works, some of which have very detrimental consequences because they distort the Chinese cultural spirit and leave permanent stains on Chinese heritage. Here we discuss these problems because we hope future translation efforts will be taken more seriously and such mistakes will be avoided.

This first kind of mistakes is the result of careless reading of the source language text. In China there is a myth that it is easier to translate from English into Chinese than vice versa, as can be reflected by the fees paid in the two kinds of translation. Usually the fees paid to a translation from English into Chinese will be only half the amount to a translation from Chinese into English. In reality, it is just as Nida has pointed out, many translators don't have the necessary expertise in language as well as cultural capability, but are bold enough to start the "translation" without even carefully reading the source language text. As a result, mistakes will occur in both translations. Sometimes translators will be lured by "false friends" in English and end in mistranslation. No wonder there would be errors that should be easily avoided if the translators are a little more careful. Now let's take some examples and analyze the cause of the mistakes.

The first example is from an introduction written by Lois Fusek to a collection of Tang poems, which is translated by a Chinese translator ZHOU Jing.

SL: And as A. C. Graham notes in *Poems of the Late Tang*, "From about 800 poetry began to move indoors, and in particular behind the doors of **courtesans**, from which the *tz'u* was emerging. Nature is seen increasingly in terms of the artificial." (*Poems of the Late Tang*, Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965, P. 142, qtd. From Introduction---The Translation, Nanjing, Yilin Press, Ltd., 2012, P73, stressed by WU Feng.)

TL: 葛瑞汉在《晚唐诗集》中提到,“约800首诗关注的是房内的世界,尤其是宫廷内的世界,‘词’也由此诞生,对大自然的描写渐渐有失自然”(赵崇祚编,傅恩英译,《花间集》,“前言”——关于《花间集》的翻译,周静译,南京,译林出版社,2012,P33)

In the source language text, 800 refers to 800 AD, the year which roughly marks the beginning of the late Tang Period (827---907 AD), when the vigor of the dynasty declined and the culture assumed a decadent flavor. Scholars and poets were no longer concerned about social issues. Instead they indulged in sensuous life with courtesans. But in the Chinese translation, the number is considered as the number of poems which deal with love and romantic relationship. If the translator had been a little more careful, he should have noticed that the word after the number is "poetry," a general noun usually regarded as uncountable, so 800 should not be a modifier of poetry, but the year 800 AD.

A more serious mistake is the word courtesan. Seeing the first part, the stem is court, the translator, subconsciously considers this word courtesan must have been related to court. So he translated it as "the world of the court." Actually, this word refers to very polished, graceful and talented prostitutes, as can be verified from many different sources. In *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language*, it is defined that courtesan, courtesan, n. [Fr. courtesane, It. cortigiana, a prostitute, orig., court lady < corte, see COURT], a prostitute. In *A New English-Chinese Dictionary*, it is defined as an expensive, famous prostitute (living on high officials and nobilities), a social flower. In *New Age English-Chinese Dictionary* compiled by ZHANG Boran, it is also defined as an expensive prostitute or social flower (only having commerce with high officials and celebrities), or the mistress of wealthy men. As the capital of Tang Dynasty, which is well-known for its wealth and tolerance, Chang'an (today's Xi'an) had many brothels. Many poets lived among prostitutes and wrote about them. So here the word courtesan has nothing to do with the court. Graham just hopes western readers will understand why there is a collection of poems describing the life of this social stratum, a unique cultural phenomenon in Tang Dynasty, but the Chinese translator unwittingly mistakes the word for court and has made a cultural mistake.

Similar mistake has also occurred in another poem translated from Chinese to English by another Chinese professor, with even more damaging consequences.

SL: 比似丹青旧玉颜 (P232)

TL: Comparing her look to the **courtesan** in the old paint. (p.233)

This poem is a lamentation for the misfortune of WANG Zhaojun, one of the four great beauties in ancient China. WANG was a farmer's daughter from Hubei Province, recruited to the Han court as a maid to serve the emperor for her beauty and talent, especially her talent in playing the *pipa*, a four-stringed musical instrument. In Han Dynasty, the Chinese were often inflicted upon by the Hun cavalry, which owing to their mobility and military

might, forced the Han emperors to pay them tributes and women to buy peace. WANG was later given to the king of the Huns as a wife against her will, a fate arousing people's universal sympathy. So for centuries, many poets have written about her tragic lot. In the source language text, the poet sings of her beauty which remained as in the past. In Chinese red and green pigments are used together as a metonymy, meaning picture or portrait. The color of jade is a cliché to describe the beautiful look of a woman. But in the target language text, the word courtesan is used to depict WANG and completely undermines the mood of the source language message. Here the innocent, unfortunate daughter of a farmer becomes a loose woman who sells her flesh for a living. A person who deserves our sympathy is transformed into a despicable prostitute. Such a metamorphosis is never excusable, because it definitely will mislead the target language readers and tarnish the figure of WANG Zhaojun.

In the following two examples, Professor HU also points out how a translator might be easily misled by English expressions which seem so familiar and easy.

SL: William, another teenage neighbor, took a shotgun blast to the shoulder in some urban drama and displayed his bandages proudly. (B. Staples: *A Brother's Murder*)

TL: 另一位年轻邻居---威廉,在一场城市戏剧中把炸药放在肩上,并且得意地展示他身上的绷带。<sup>2</sup>

In the above example, the Chinese translator obviously considered that in the expression "took a shotgun blast to the shoulder," "took" meant "set, put, carry, place," and "shotgun blast" meant "explosive." Thus the Chinese version literally means that William put some explosive on his shoulder and bragged about it. But the context and the theme is about gang fight in black neighborhood. The so-called city drama is violence in which black youngsters attacked and killed each other. So as Professor HU points out, here the proper understanding should be "injured by a shotgun bullet" instead of "carrying explosive on the shoulder," otherwise why he bragged about his bandages?

In the second example, the expression "take over" does sometimes mean "become/get very popular," but here Asimov talks about some people's worry that in the near future computers will become masters to control humans. Under such circumstances it is illogical to talk about the popularity of computers.

SL: In other words, once we pass a certain critical point, the computers take over and there is a "complexity explosion." In a very short time thereafter, computers may exist that not only duplicate the human brain---but far surpass it. (Isaac Asimov, *The Difference between a Brain and a Computer*)

<sup>2</sup> PAN Wenguo quoted from HU Mingliang, 2002, "Analyze E-C Translation Mistakes from Semantics, Syntax and Text," Reflections on Language, emphasized by the original book.

TL: 换句话说,一旦我们突破某一极点,电脑盛行起来并产生"复杂爆炸"。接下去不久,电脑不仅复制了人脑,而且超越了人脑。(《美国散文小书屋》,第92~93页)<sup>3</sup>

Here the translator fails to appreciate the nuance of the mood, leading to the misunderstanding of the SL. The Chinese version literally means that computers become very popular, completely missing the point, which actually states the concern that sometime in the future computers will control the world because they are "smarter" than humans. So we can see that it is no easy task to translate from English into Chinese as most Chinese believe. Actually there are many linguistic traps to catch us unawares.

Similarly, even very common Chinese characters, when translated into English, the semantic meanings, both denotative and connotative ones, should be carefully considered, or the wrong choice may create confusions. One example is the word "revival" in the following examples.

SL: 莎剧以父王显灵开始,引起了王子的疑心,...

TL: *Hamlet* begins with the **revival** of the dead king who tells his son how he was poisoned by his brother who usurped his throne and married his wife. The son is not sure of the truth of what the dead king said,...

SL: 莎剧中哈姆雷特看见父王显灵,并不完全相信,...(p.5)

TL: for it begins with the **revival** of the dead king for revenge. (p.13)

In the above two cases, the Chinese characters 显灵 obviously do not mean "revival." More accurately they mean the appearance of the soul, the spirit, the spectre or ghost. When we say a dead person comes back to life, the Chinese character should be 复活, 复生, meaning "revive" or "revival." In Chinese 灵(soul) is the opposite of flesh. Besides as is known to all, in *Hamlet*, the old king didn't revive. Only his apparition was allowed to trod the world at night, so that he could tell his son how he was murdered by the new king, his own brother. This way his son Hamlet could avenge his murder. No doubt the translator knows all this, but it is a pity he does not reflect on the meaning of "revival," or he wouldn't have made this blunder. Fortunately, the target readers happen to be English readers who are familiar with the play of Shakespeare, and immediately detect the mistake. But to a Chinese learner of English, this can prove a problem.

The above examples will demonstrate the potential

<sup>3</sup> PAN Wenguo quoted from HU Mingliang, 2004, Exploration and Analysis of Misunderstanding of Word Meanings in C-E Translation, Journal of Yun-nan Normal University, an edition on the teaching and research of Chinese for foreign learners.

harm done to a target language reader because of the carelessness of a translator. If such erroneous translation is referred to as misinformation, the second kind of translation, in which the translator usually is quite competent in both language and culture expertise, and is highly regarded as a prestigious expert in this field, is more controversial. The translator sometimes is so confident that he would compete with the author. As a result, he would often use his own expressions or diction to replace the author's, believing in this way, he could produce a translation better than the original. But as Nida points out that parallax, as a feature of language, can both represent and distort reality. When a work has established its position as a classic, it is regarded as an ideal model of its kind, with proper words in proper places. If inadequately translated, the undertranslation is no doubt a demerit. But overtranslation is equally undesirable. Any attempt to compete against the author is not only futile, but faulty and damaging. A responsible translator should always realize his duty is representational, not expressive. He should read **out of** the source language text what the author has written and suggested. It is against work ethics to read **into** the source language text the translator's own ideas. If this occurs, the translator is deceiving the target language readers by offering them disinformation, a deliberate betrayal of their trust. Besides, if his interpretation is off the point, he has also stained the reputation of the source language text author. In this it is better to remain humble and faithful. Instead of showing off the skill and expressive power of the translator, he should make use of his language power and cultural knowledge to help target language readers appreciate the nuances of the original work in terms of thematic meaning and style. Now let's study one example of this kind of overtranslation. But as Nida observes, "there may, however, be a danger some highly creative persons who are not satisfied to identify with the thoughts of other authors, but insist on imposing their own ideas on those of the original source." Now let's study one example of this case.

SL: 河东旧族、柳氏名门最。论星宿，连张带鬼。几叶到寒儒，受雨打风吹。漫说书中能富贵，颜如玉，和黄金那里？贫薄把人灰，且养就这浩然之气。(p.6)

TL: Born in a family nobler by far than **those under a lucky star**, poor now I still remain, after cold wind and rain. 'Tis said books will bring wealth, beauty and gold, I'm disappointed to have in vain to grow old. What can I be but a man right and free? (p.7)

This is an excerpt from *Dream in Peony Pavilion* by the famous Chinese playwright Tang Xianzu in Ming Dynasty. The English version is by a most outstanding Chinese translator Xu Yuanchong, whose English is fluent, with attention paid to rhyming and pleasant sounds. Because Mr. Xu believes in competition against the author, he advocates beauties in sound, in form and

in sense. Here, however, for this belief, he resorts to overtranslation by reading his own understanding into the original and changed the message of Tang Xianzu. 论星宿,连张带鬼 is part of ancient Chinese astronomy, a kind of cultural default even unfamiliar to many Chinese today. 张 and 鬼 refers to two mansions of the 28 mansions (constellations) in ancient Chinese astronomy. 张 is the Extended Net, or Hydra, while 鬼 is the Ghost, or Cancer. In China, the constellations are used to designate the corresponding land areas on earth. As a result, here it simply means that the ancestors of the hero Liu Mengmei were from a celebrated family from Hedong Prefecture in today's Shanxi Province. This phrase only refers to the geographic location, having nothing to do with luck. In the translation, some extra message is inserted, leading to a complete different interpretation that the Liu family was not lucky. As the Chinese saying goes, excessiveness is as bad as shortage. This overtranslation will only create misunderstanding and confusion, especially because of the prestigious status of the translator, most target language readers will take his translation very seriously, as if directly from the horse's mouth.

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## CONCLUSION

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Our discussion and case studies have led to the conclusion that as a very important channel of cross-cultural communication, translation plays a vital role in facilitating the cultural exchange and in promoting mutual understanding between peoples. But the essential demand for successful communication is that the message conveyed should be accurately transferred. In this case, faithfulness is a merit whose importance can never be overemphasized, while "a failure to reflect the spirit and dynamic of a source document is a 'mortal sin' (Nida, 2001)."

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