



BOOK REVIEW

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During the past two decades, Translation Studies has developed rapidly in China as an emergent discipline. One scholar who has contributed extraordinarily to the development of the discipline is Professor Wang Dongfeng. He is one of the most prominent figures in the cultural and poetic study of translation in China. His recent book *An Interdisciplinary Approach to Translation Studies* is a collection of papers that were published in a period of 14 years, from 2000 to 2014. It is a condensed view of the author's major researches over the years, and a snapshot of the panorama of contemporary Chinese Translations Studies.

The book consists of four sections, each of which is a focused study of a particular issue in literary translation, such as coherence, poetic value, and manipulation. In order to deal with these issues, theories and methods from linguistics, poetics, cultural studies, and other neighbouring disciplines have been borrowed.

Section one is a linguistic study of translation. The central issue to be discussed is coherence in literary translation. Here, Coherence is defined as a multi-layered and multi-dimensional network of relations with which a text is interwoven and through which it is understood (p.6). It is created by the working of language at different levels and on different dimensions. Translation is defined, accordingly, as "a process of reconstructing that network of relations to the greatest extent" (p.6). The four chapters of this section deal respectively with coherence on

the dimension of grammar, semantics, pragmatics and stylistics.

Grammatical coherence is thought to consist of intra-sentence relations and inter-sentence relations. The former means the relations between grammatical components in an individual sentence, and the latter refers to grammatical ties between individual sentences. Of particular importance to literary text is the effect of coherence created by the working of marked grammatical structures. At intra-sentence level, it may take the form of ungrammatical sentences. At inter-sentence level, it happens when the grammatical ties between sentences are intentionally removed or when a certain grammatical structure is extensively used. Therefore, in literary translations, "grammatical structures should not be disposed of at will" (p.19).

Semantic coherence of literary texts is taken to be a matter of lexical relations. And two patterns of lexical cohesion, reiteration and collocation, outlined by Halliday & Hason (1976, p.288) are referred to for the analysis. It is shown that while reiteration could help the literary translator to recognize the echoing and cumulative effect that the repetition of a lexical item across a span of text creates, collocation could help him to disambiguate some lexical items.

Pragmatic coherence in translation can be achieved when translation is regarded as "a cooperative act between the translator and the source text writer" (p.39) and when the "maxims for the translator" (p.40), inferred from Gricean maxims, is followed. And the translator is suggested to pay special attention to the representation of implicatures of the source text for at least three reasons. Firstly, the process of inference that the reader has to go through in his search for implicature is a major source of poetic effect. Secondly, the working of implicature is often culture bound, posing challenges for its recognition. Thirdly, the translators are easily subjected to the tendency of "rationalization" and "clarification" which often causes "textual deformation" (Berman, 2000).

Stylistic coherence of a literary text consists of the tension between “a background network”, which is a configuration of normal and standard language use, and “a foreground network”, which refers to the systematic use of deviations (p.58). In order to achieve stylistic coherence in translation, the literary translator is suggested to follow the principle of “deviation for deviation and norm for norm” (p.64), so that the two networks of language use and the tension between them can be reproduced.

Section two is about the poetics of translation. The focus is placed on issue of recreating poetic value in literary translation. The four papers in this section have stirred up heated academic discussions and debates in the circle of Chinese Translation Studies. They include not only a rethinking of traditional standards of translation but also a re-orientation for literary translation.

In the first two chapters, the author draws on post-structuralism and Formalism to deconstruct the standard of “fidelity” and “fluency”. Relying on post-structuralism, especially its denial of pure presence, intrinsic meaning, and unmediated access to reality, the author demonstrates that the very thing to which translation was traditionally required to be faithful does not exist and that the ethics for faithful translation does not hold. And Formalism, with its insistence on “literariness”, is quoted to show that fluency in translation is usually bought at the price of poetic value.

The significance that the project of dethroning the two standards bears in China is well worth mentioning. “Fidelity” and “fluency”, together with “elegance”, were canonized by Yan Fu (1898) and have always been taken as the defaulted ideals for translators. When different systematic studies of translation were attempted in the west and the polyvalences of translation were unveiled, many Chinese translation scholars were still indulged in the anecdotal talks and impressionistic remarks centering around Yan Fu’s three-word standard. The bud of the new discipline in Chinese context would not really come out and flourish if the traditional standards still held its control. And it is largely due to this project that the broad scope of translation was opened up.

In so far as translation is concerned, deconstructing the traditional standards is just the means. The end is to re-orient the literary translators. That is what the succeeding two chapters of this section are intended. The principle of *de yi wang xing* (得意忘形), i.e., getting the meaning and forgetting the form, that used to hold sway, is shown to be incompatible with the spirit of Formalism. The translators are suggested to “revive the form” (p.133), that is, they should give greater importance to the representation of the way meaning is unfolded rather than the easy flow of meaning. What the author advocated is the foregrounding of the “ab-uses” of language in the process of translation.

Section three is a cultural study of translation, and the central issue to be discussed is about the manipulative powers on and of translations. Some of the theories from the west are introduced, such as “the political agenda” and

“resistant translation” (Venuti 1995) in the third chapter. However, what makes this section more interesting is that some western theories are fleshed out and tested by cases of translation in China, and that a fuller understanding of the causes and effects of some translations is offered.

First, the influence of the translator’s cultural attitude is discussed as a critical response to polysystem theory. According to Even-Zohar (1990), the strategy that the translator adopts is determined by the position of translated literature within the literary polysystem and that position is determined by the social circumstances in which the literature is embedded. For example, when the literature is weak or peripheral, translated literature would maintain a primary position and foreignization would be the prevailing strategy. However, the author’s study of the heterogeneity of translations in China during 1920s and 1930s defies that generalization. The reason is that the position of a literature and the position of translated literature within the literary polysystem are not solely an objectively determined social fact. They are also a matter of the translator’s cultural attitude (p.159). In the case of China, translators who would cherish the glorious past were reluctant to acknowledge that Chinese culture was weak or periphery, and they tended to prefer domestication. On the contrary, those who were eager to break away with traditions would place translated literature on a primary position, and in their translations foreignization was favored.

Second, Sutra translation and Yan Fu’s translations are studies to illustrate how ideology manipulates translation as “an invisible hand” (p.169). When Sutra was first introduced to China, Confucianism and Taoism were the dominant ideologies. Sanskrit scriptures that catered well to the interest of the ruling class were most favored. And in the process of translation, the scriptures were filtered through Confucian ideas and Taoist concepts. The result was a set of hybridized and localized Buddhist thoughts that conformed to the ruling ideology. The sway of ideology is also evidenced in Yan Fu’s translation. Eager to cure the Chinese society and enlighten the arrogant feudal officials and scholars, Yan Fu had scrupulously selected for translation works in which advanced ideas from the west were contained. And in order to make those ideological constructs easily accessible to the ruling class within whom the feudal ideology was deeply rooted, he had to “wrap the pills of western thoughts with the candy coat of classical language” (p.183).

Then, the shaping force of translation is discussed and illustrated with two cases of mistranslation: Ezra Pound’s translation of ancient Chinese poetry, and the translation of western poetry during the period of New Cultural Movement. They are mistranslations in the sense that they conform neither to the sound patterns of the original poems nor to the metrical forms prevailing in the target culture. Each of the two mistranslations was initiated by a clear agenda. Pound was motivated by poetic innovation,

and the cultural elites in China were driven by the urge to break away with the old and bringing forth the new. And both cases of mistranslation have triggered a grand modernist poetry movement whose influence can still be felt today. Pound succeeded in subverting the Victorian poetic tradition and setting the Anglo-American Imagist Movement on stage. The forerunners of New Cultural Movement managed to advance the vernacular language movement and usher in the golden years of Chinese modern poetry.

In section four, the author takes an integrated approach to translation. He offers in each chapter of this section a comprehensive study of a case that marked deeply in modern Chinese history. The goal is to reveal the rich meanings that each translation is loaded with, such as the historical appeal that called for the translation, the socio-cultural context in which the translation is embedded, and the linguistic features with which the texture of the original work is reinscribed. These studies bring home the point that translation is inexorably complex and Translation Studies is necessarily interdisciplinary.

The first chapter of this section explores how “the translation of a short poem succeeded in shaking a high building” (p.237). The poem is *The Isles of Greece*, Canto the Third – LXXXVI of George Byron’s *Don Juan*. The high building is the late-Qing and early-Republic society. And the six translations examined differ from each other in so far as poetic convention, metrical form, sound pattern, and language use are concerned. These translations sparked the sense of national crisis and the spirit of freedom within Chinese readers, and quickened the downfall of the feudal system. Moreover, they mirrored the game that different poetic ideals and language conventions were playing. With these translations, the tight grip of traditional poetic convention, characterized by strict metrical patterns and classical language, was loosened, and a new poetic form that endorses free verse and vernacular language began to get the upper hand.

In another paper of this section, the author seeks to dig the historical memories buried in Chen Wangdao’s translation of *The Manifesto of Communist Party*. It was also the national agenda that called for its translation, since it’s appealing to those that had been searching all around for means to save the nation in crisis. As to the translation, several observations have been made. Firstly, it is heavily influenced by the Japanese version in so far as vocabularies, terminologies and stylistic features are concerned, which signals the role of Japanese as a medium language in importing western ideas. Secondly, modern vernacular instead of classical dialect is used in translation, revealing the translator’s support for the language movement of the day. Thirdly, the stylistic features and rhetorical effects of the source text were fully echoed, due in large part to the fact that the translator was a renowned scholar in rhetoric.

The last chapter of this part is a study of Zhu Shenghao’s translation of Shakespeare. As one the most brilliant translators in China, Zhu’s translations have always enjoyed the widest popularity among Chinese readers. According to the author’s observation, that popularity is largely due to the methods of semantic extension and structural reshuffling used skillfully by the translator. By semantic extension, he means that Mr. Zhu would choose to change the word form whenever necessary so that the meaning of the source flows smoothly and naturally (p.298). And structural reshuffling is used to deal with grammatical disparities between Chinese and English, so that the translation would be read with perfect ease and not assault the reader as being clumsy or awkward.

The book covers a wide spectrum of themes, ranging from discussions of specific issues in translation, critical thinking of traditional ideas, introduction and trying out of western ideas, to careful examination of some translational events. Moreover, while this book is theoretically ambitious, it does not float on abstract reasoning. The rich sources of examples included in the book have made it more readable and lent more persuasive force to the author’s arguments. It could serve different purposes for different readers. First, it is a highly recommendable reference book for those who would like to have a general picture of contemporary Chinese Translation Studies and a better understanding of some translations in the history of modern China. Second, the different chapters of the book, each addressing a specific issue of translation with wide theoretical sources and illustrations, would offer to the young scholars and practicing researchers excellent examples on how to carry out effective researches in Translation Studies. Third, it is a wonderful guidance for the literary translators, in that it can remind them of what is to be avoided and what is to be stressed in translation.

There are also some problems. Because the book is a collection of papers that were published in a span of 14 years, some examples and theoretical references used in one chapter can sometimes be found in another. Besides, although the papers collected in each section are wonderfully written, some of the issues raised in these papers seem to require more supporting evidences and research efforts.

However, just as the flaws on the jade cannot obscure its splendor, these limitations would not reduce the value and significance of the book. The author displays in the book not merely a willingness to learn different schools of thought, but also a critical stance towards imported ideas. He is always ready to place different theories and methodologies on trial and explore their relevance to translation-related issues in Chinese context. That is how the book contributes to the booming of Translation Studies in China and enriches the reservoir of international Translation Studies.

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