



On the Translation of Manchu’s Entertainment Way: A Case Study of Hawkes’ Translation of *Honglouloumeng*

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Abstract

Translation is not only an action of transference between two languages but also a communication between two cultures. In literary translation, a translator is expected to take the language features, the artistic style and cultural information of the source text into consideration. In this sense, translation serves as a bridge to introduce Chinese literature to Western readers. However, the translation of Chinese classical literature is still at an outset stage. As one of the four great masterpieces of Classical Chinese literature, *Honglouloumeng* has been translated into several foreign languages by translators both at home and abroad. The most widely recognized English translation works of *Honglouloumeng* are Yang Xianyi & Gladys Yang’s version and David Hawkes’ version. As for the influence and acceptance of the two versions, Hawkes’ version is more popular among the Western readers for its natural, smooth and idiomatic language. However, after a careful comparison with the source text, we find that Hawkes’ version failed to convey part of the China-specific cultural information to the target reader. In this paper, the author will take Hawkes’ translation of Manchu’s entertainment way depicted in *Honglouloumeng* as an example to demonstrate the loss of cultural information in Hawkes’ version. In terms of being responsible for the target reader and faithful to the source text writer, we strongly hold that cultural information should be reproduced in the most faithful way as much as possible.

Key words: *Honglouloumeng*; Hawkes; Translation; Cultural information; Manchu; Entertainment way

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INTRODUCTION

In 2012, Mo Yan, a Chinese writer, had won the first Nobel Prize in literature for China. Mo Yan’s Nobel winner is regarded as an indication of Chinese literature being recognized by the west and a great help to attach importance to Chinese literature in the context or world literature as well. Swedish Academy member Goran Malmqvist said that the existence of few translations is the main reason that Chinese literature is marginalized in the world (Kekenet, 2012). Mo Yan’s works have been translated into the greatest number of foreign languages among the current Chinese writers. It is no doubt that the sound translation of the Swedish translator, Anna Gustafsson Chen, had played an important role in the Nobel victory for Mo Yan. In this sense, translation serves as a bridge to introduce Chinese literature to the world. And the reality calls for more of China’s literature being translated. As Malmqvist quoting the former permanent secretary of Swedish Academy, “What is world literature? World literature is translation.” (Kekenet, 2012)

Owing to the literariness of literature works, translators have to take the language features, the artistic style and cultural information of the source text into consideration. It’s no easy job for the translators to do the Chinese-English literary translation well. On one hand, Chinese translators’ translation is not readily recognized by the western readers for its Chinese-orientation. On

the other hand, the foreign translators who are experts of Chinese language are not so much interested in translating Chinese literatures. For the translation of classic Chinese literature work, *Honglouloumeng* is a vivid example of the situation.

As we know, the most widely recognized English translation works of *Honglouloumeng* are Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang's version and David Hawkes' version. The two versions differ greatly in the translation strategies. In accordance with the dichotomy of translation methods put forward by German scholar Friedrich Schleiermacher (1813), Yang's version leaves the writer in peace as much as possible and brings the reader to him whereas Hawkes' version leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and brings the writer to him.

As for the influence and acceptance of the two versions, Hawkes' version is more popular among the western readers for its natural, smooth and idiomatic language. However, after a careful comparison with the source text, we find that Hawkes' version failed to convey part of the China-specific cultural information to the target reader. In this paper, the author will take Hawkes' translation of Manchu's entertainment way depicted in *Honglouloumeng* as an example to demonstrate the loss of cultural information in Hawkes' version.

1. KITE FLYING—THE CULTURAL INFORMATION OF SOCIAL CUSTOMS

In the period of Qing Dynasty, kite flying is regarded as a way to send off bad luck and illness by the Chinese people. For the young men and girls living in the “大观园” (Grand-view garden), kite flying is one of their ways to kill time and have some fun, too. In the Seventieth Chapter of *Honglouloumeng*, there are some paragraphs describing the scene of Bao-yu flying kite with the other young girls. 晴雯 (Skybright)'s kite is in the shape of a big fish, 贾环 (Master Huan)'s is a big crab, Baoqin's is a red bat, Baochai's is a line of seven large geese flying one behind the other, Daiyu and Baoyu's kites are in the shape of a pretty lady, and Tanchun's is shaped like a Phoenix with wings that move. When the wind is getting stronger, all the kites are supposed to fly away in order to take away the bad luck and illness. However, when Tan-chun was just about to cut the string of her Phoenix kite, something happened. It goes like the following.

Chinese version: 探春正要剪自己的凤凰, 见天上也有一个凤凰, 因道: “这也不知是谁家的。” 众人皆笑说: “且别剪你的, 看他倒像要来绞的样儿。” 说着, 只见那凤凰渐逼近来, 遂与这凤凰绞在一处。众人方要往下收线, 那一家也要收线, 正不开交, 又见一个门扇大的玲珑喜字带响鞭, 在半天如钟鸣一般, 也逼近来。众人笑道: “这一个也来绞。且别收, 让他三个绞在一处倒有趣呢。” 说着, 那喜字果然与这两个凤凰绞在一处。三下齐收乱顿, 谁知线都断了, 那三个风筝飘飘摇摇都去了。

众人拍手哄然一笑, 说: “倒有趣, 可不知那喜字是谁家的, 忒促狭了些。” (Yang, 2003, p.2120)

Hawkes' version: Tan-chun was just about to cut the string of her phoenix when another phoenix appeared in the sky, not far from hers.

“I wonder who's that is?” Said Tanchun.

“Don't cut yours yet,” the others cried. “It looks as if that one is going to get caught up in it.”

And that is just what happened. The other phoenix drew nearer and nearer until the two strings crossed and tangled. The maids were all for winding Tan-chun's kite in and capturing the other kite with it, but the owner of the other kite was not prepared to yield, and after a good deal of tugging and heaving on both sides, the strings finally snapped and the two phoenixes flew off companionably together. The cousins clapped their hands delightedly. (Hawkes, 1973-1986, p.747)

According to the source text, there appeared another Phoenix kite and a third kite in the form of a Chinese character “喜” (happiness). After comparison, we come to find that the “喜” (happiness) kite is omitted in Hawkes' version. For western readers, the omission of “喜” (happiness) kite causes no misunderstanding of the plot for it is just another kite in different shape. However, a great loss is to be found in the aspect of cultural information of social custom. In Chinese culture, “phoenix” is a kind of bird that symbolizes richness and power. “Phoenix” can be used to refer to both the male one and the female one. The depiction of two phoenixes get entangled with each other signifies that Tan-chun is going to meet a rich and powerful man. Then, the entangle of the “喜” (happiness) kite gives a hint of marriage for the social custom of Chinese people cutting out “喜” (happiness) in paper and using it to decorate the marriage room. Therefore, the entangle of two phoenixes together with a “喜” (happiness) is a symbol of getting married to the royal family for Tan-chun. That's the ulterior purpose of the source text writer's writing. In this sense, Hawkes' omission of the “喜” (happiness) kite fails to reproduce the metaphoric meaning of the different shape of the kite on one hand and fails to reveal the social custom to the target reader on the other hand.

2. FISHING—THE CULTURAL INFORMATION OF LIVING ENVIRONMENT AND HISTORICAL FIGURE

Fishing has always been a favorite entertainment for both old and young people. The most important thing in fishing is having patience. In order to catch some big fishes, you may have to sit there a whole afternoon. Though fishing is time-consuming, it repays you and gives you real fun when you eat the fish angled by yourself. In

Honglouloumeng, there is a description about fishing in Chapter eighty-one. When Baoyu was turning past 藕香榭 (Scented Lotus Pavilion, he came to see Tanchun, Li Wen and other girls are fishing on 蓼溆一带 (Smartweed Banks). Then, Bao-yu suggested that all should fish to try their luck. Those who catch a fish will have good luck that year and vice versa. Tan-chun was the first to cast the line. The whole scene goes like the following,

Chinese version: 探春把丝绳抛下, 没十来句话的工夫, 就有一个杨叶窠儿吞着钩子把漂儿坠下去, 探春把竿一挑, 往地下一擦, 却活活的. 侍书在满地上乱抓, 两手捧着搁在小磁坛内, 清水养着. (Yang, 2003, p.2476)

Hawkes' version: Tanchun cast her line, and in just a few seconds a little 'leaf-wiggler' swallowed the hook and down went the float. She pulled in and landed her catch, alive and jump in. Scribe, after a lot of scrambling about, managed to get a grip on the thing, and carrying it over in both hands, placed it carefully in a little earthenware jar of fresh water. (Hawkes, 1973-1986, p.863)

“杨叶窠儿” is a kind of freshwater fish in the shape of willow leaf that swims swiftly. Hawkes faithfully translated this word into “leaf wiggler”, which is a leaf-like larvae of mosquito. Although Hawkes reproduced the shape of the fish, he misclassified it into an insect. Actually, “杨叶窠儿” belongs to the Hemiculter leuciclus (Basileaky) family. It is the same as the minnow fish in western countries. Owing to the different living environment of China and Britain, it is understandable that Hawkes doesn't get to know the true meaning of this word. When it came to Bao-yu's turn, he said the following words,

Chinese version: 宝玉道: “我是要做姜太公的。”便走上石矶, 坐在池边钓起来. (Yang, 2003, p.2476)

Hawkes' version: 'I shall follow in the footsteps of old Sire Jiang,' he declared.

“Straight was his hook,
His bait a single grain:
Yet of their own accord
The fish unto him came...”

Walking solemnly down the jetty, he sat at the water's edge in the pose of the Fisherman Sage. (Hawkes, 1973-1986, p.863)

Compared to the source text, we find that Hawkes added the second paragraph in his translation to inform the target reader the unique way of Jiangtaigong (Sir Jiang)'s fishing. Jiangtaigong is a historical figure who lived in the Shang Dynasty of China, the eleventh century B.C. He was said to fish by the Weishui River (presently Shaanxi) holding a line, with no hook or bait, three feet above the eater, and saying at the same time, “whoever is ordained, come and take the bait”. (Yang, 2003, p.2954) On hearing his unique way of fishing, Ji Chang, the future king of West Zhou, came to visit him and invited him to be highest leader of generals. Thanks

to Hawkes' supplement, the western readers get to know the historical figure better. However, it would be much better if Hawkes add the time Jiangtaigong lived and reveal a part of the story with Jichang to the target reader.

3. DICE ROLLING: THE CULTURAL INFORMATION OF GAME PLAYING

In ancient China, Dice Rolling is one of the indispensable games for people and is favored in the same way as that of Mahjong nowadays. It's said that dice was originally invented by a literary man in the time of three Kingdoms for the purpose of doing divination. Later, it became a game of gambling for wine or silk goods in the harem of Tang Dynasty. When it came to Qing Dynasty, the way of playing Dice Rolling was finally fixed. Generally, there will be two dices carved with numbers from one to six separately on the six faces of the dice. Different combination of those numbers lead to different way of playing. One of the most popular ways of playing is called “双陆” (trick-track). In the rule of “双陆” (trick-track), there are two dices with the chess called “马” (horse). If the sum of the two dices totaled eight, then the horse can walk eight steps and if the sum is under six then the horse must remain still. In Chapter Twenty of *Honglouloumeng*, Jia Huan joined Bao-chai, Xiang-ling and Yinger in a game of Dice Rolling. The description goes like the following:

Chinese version: 赶着这盘正该自己掷骰子, 若掷个七点便赢, 若掷个六点, 下该莺儿掷三点就赢了. 因拿起骰子来, 狠命一掷, 一个作定了五, 那一个乱转. 莺儿拍着手只叫“么”, 贾环便瞪着眼, “六—七—八”混叫. 那骰子偏生转出么来. 贾环急了, 伸手便抓起骰子来, 然后就拿钱, 说是个六点. (Yang, 2003, pp.548-549)

Hawkes' version: It was now his turn to throw the dice. He needed seven to win, and if he threw anything less than seven, the dice would go next to Oriole, who needed only three. He hurled them from the pot with all his might. One of them rested for two. The other continued rather erratically to roll about. “Ace! Ace! Ace!” cried Oriole, clapping her hands. “Six I Seven! Fight I” shouted Jia Huan glaring at Oriole and commanding the die to perform the impossible. But the perverse wanderer finally came to rest with the ace uppermost, making a grand total of three. With the speed of desperation Jia Huan reached out and snatched it up, claiming, as he did so, that it was a six. (Hawkes, 1973-1986, p.202)

Apparently, the girls and Jia Huan were playing Dice Rolling in “双陆” (trick-track)'s way. If Jia Huan threw more than six, he will win. According to the source text, one of the dice turned up five and then the other came to rest at one. In this case, the sum of the two dices is six, which means Jia Huan shall lose the game. That's why

Jia Huan snatched up the dice and refused to admit it was one while insisting it was six he had thrown. However, in Hawkes' version, he revealed to the Western readers that Jia Huan needed only seven to win and one of the dice rested at two while the other rested at one. In reference to the customary playing rule of “双陆” (trick-track), Hawkes had misunderstood their Dice Rolling in two aspects: first, Jia Huan can win the game as long as he threw more than six rather than just seven; second, the first dice rested at five rather than two, which showed that he was quite close to win but desperately failed. The description of two dices totaled six which is only one step away from “more than six” actually is purposefully written by the source text writer to show that Dice Rolling as a gambling is unpredictable and Jia Huan is a man who cannot take his failure in a decent way.

Owing to Hawkes' minor change of the number, the target reader missed the opportunity to enjoy the real fun of gambling and do not understand the true color of Jia Huan.

CONCLUSION

The entertainment way of Manchu people in *Honglouloumeng* is a valuable part of traditional Chinese culture. The translation of *Honglouloumeng* is a window for Westerners to catch a glimpse of Chinese culture. The faithful reproduction of the cultural information implied in the entertainment way is the essence of the translation. As a translator, whether it is a Chinese or foreigner, one should always keep the source text in sight and be faithful to the source text writer. Regardless of the fact that some

rewriting and addition are unavoidable for the purpose of a better acceptance of the target reader, it doesn't mean we can discard the source text away. After all, translation is a work of dancing with chains.

In the above-mentioned translation of *Honglouloumeng* in Hawkes version, Hawkes' omission of the “喜” kite, rewriting of the number of Dice Rolling failed to reproduce the cultural information implied in the source text while his addition of the poem about Jiangtaigong's fishing filled the target reader's cultural default caused by lacking of historical information. Therefore, in terms of being responsible for the target reader and faithful to the source text writer, we strongly holds that cultural information should be reproduced in the most faithful way as much as possible.

Facing the challenge of introducing Chinese culture and literature to the world, translators are not just doing the work of language transference but also playing the role of communication. As for the domestication and foreignization of the cultural information, we hold that the two translation strategies are complementary rather than opposite as long as they serve the same purpose of adequately reproducing the source text.

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