

A Feminist Study of the English Translation of Can Xue's *The Gloomy Mood of Ah Mei on a Sunny Day*

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Abstract: From the perspective of feminist translation, this study makes an analysis of the English version of Can Xue's *The Gloomy Mood of Ah Mei on a Sunny Day* translated by Ronald R. Janssen and Zhang Jian. The conclusion shows that the translators adopt the two feminist translation strategies—supplementing and hijacking—in the process of translation. By these means, Ah Mei's feelings, thoughts, and attitude to marriage are revealed. The translated works not only reproduces feminism presented in the source text, but also makes the implied feminist consciousness of the author obviously conveyed. It shows the creative rewriting of the translators, which enhances the value of the English translation and benefits its dissemination and acceptance in the English world.

1. Introduction

Can Xue, a Chinese female writer, has good reputation in the English-speaking world. This is not only reflected in the fact that her works have been continuously translated into English for nearly three decades, but also in the fact that Can Xue was nominated or even won several important literary awards in English-speaking countries. Since 2015, the number of the researches on the English translation of Can Xue's works in China has gradually increased, and they are mostly conducted in the following three dimensions. Firstly, many studies focus on the overall introduction to the overseas dissemination and acceptance of Can Xue's works as well as the reasons for her success, such as Wang Wenqiang and Guo Enhua^[1], Liu Chengcai^[2], Liu Kun^[3], Yang Liu^[4], Xin Xiaoxiao^[5]. Secondly, some studies analyze the success of the English translations of her masterpieces. For example, Sun Huijun and Zheng Qingzhu^[6] analyzed that *The Yellow Mud Street* has won the favor of western readers due to its remarkable modernist features; Cen Qunxia^[7] discussed the reasons for the successful translation of *The Last Lover* from the perspectives of sociology. Thirdly, quite a few studies probe into the features of the English translation of her works from the linguistic perspective. Especially, in the past two years, with the application of corpus in translation studies, some scholars, like Zhang Lizhu^{[8][9]} discussed the unique spatio-temporal narration of Can Xue's works from the perspective of corpus translation stylistics.

However, few scholars interpret her English translations from the perspective of feminist translation although many of Can Xue's works have very distinct feminist characteristics. In Can Xue's works, the most outstanding and successful characters are a group of

different women, with male characters playing a foil role or even downplayed. Besides, Can Xue's greatest contribution to contemporary female literature lies in the fact that she destroys and subverts the perception system and discourse system of the complete set of procedures formed under the patriarchal system, and she also deconstructs the traditional ethical and moral relations of modern families and subverts the self-image of women^[10]. These features coincide with “the purpose of subverting the culture of patriarchal hegemony of translation”^[11] in feminist translation studies. Therefore, this paper makes a case study of the English translation of Can Xue's short story *The Gloomy Mood of Ah Mei on a Sunny Day* [阿梅在一个太阳天里的愁思] (hereinafter referred to as *The Gloomy*) from the perspective of feminist translation, and thus reveal its manifestations of feminism.

2. Theoretical Framework: Feminist Translation Studies

Western feminism rose along with the second wave of western women's movement in the 1960s. Snell Hornby^[12] put forward the “cultural shift” in the study of translation, with the historical, cultural and political factors of translation activities being included in the research scope, and translation was no longer regarded as a simple and mechanical language transformation. In this context, Feminist Translation Studies (FTS) was brought about by Canadian feminist translators in the late 1970s, providing a new perspective for translation studies. The main contributors to FTS are Barbara Godard (1984), Sherry Simon (1996), Luise von Flotow (1991) and Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood, etc. The chief features and focuses of FTS are pursuing the gender equality in literature and translation, eliminating discrimination against women in

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translation studies, and displaying the subjectivity of translators.

FTS advocates an interference approach in translation, and intends to “womanhandle” the text^[13]. It is “a method of translating the focus on and critique of ‘patriarchal language’ by feminist writers”^[14]. To this end, the feminist translator adopts several feminist translation strategies, such as supplementing, prefacing and footnoting, as well as hijacking, as discussed by Flotow (ibid). In terms of supplementing, “the ST(source text) is supplemented by its translation, matured, developed, and given an afterlife”(ibid). In prefaces and footnotes, the feminist translators indicate their presence and promote their feminist consciousness. With respect to hijacking, the translator makes extreme interference in the translation process by hijacking the source text. The research objects of FTS ranges from translating women writers’ work, feminist works, to challenging patriarchal translation of the women's texts^[15].

FTS was introduced into China in the late 1990s. Up to now, Chinese scholars has conducted considerable theoretical explorations, such as Xu Lai(2004)^[16], Zhang Jinghua(2004)^[17], and Jiang Xiaohua(2004)^[18]. Many case analyses have been made as well, for example, Wu Jing(2012)^[19], Lv Xiaofei & Dai Guiyu(2017)^[20], and Xiang Ping(2018)^[21]. Summarizing from these studies, we found that novels are one of the most important research objects in the application of FTS, especially those written or translated by women and those full of female characters. For example, Wu Jing(2012)^[21] conducted a study of Pearl S. Buck’s translation of the female figures in *Shui Hu Zhuan* from the feminist perspective; He Hongli(2015)^[22] analyzes the mild translation strategies of harmonization adopted by Eileen Chang; Cen Qunxia(2019)^[23] made a feminist study of the English translation of *Hong Lou Meng* translated by Florence and Isabel McHUGH. These studies are good examples to show that feminist translation strategies are adopted in the English translation, and may even enhance the feminism implied in the original text. However, the researches on the English translation of Can Xue’s works have been just conducted in the past ten years and there are few studies based on feminist translation. Therefore, this paper attempts to enrich the studies of Can Xue’s works and the application of FTS.

3. A Brief Introduction to *The Gloomy* and its Translation

As a female writer, Can Xue shows her great concerns about and reflections on women in her works. Her creation highlights the extremely distinct and unique feminist characteristics for her works focus on women's survival and emotions, inquiring after their happiness or unhappiness, while challenging the traditional concepts applied to them. Her short story *The Gloomy Mood of Ah Mei on a Sunny Day* (hereinafter referred to as *The Gloomy*), along with the other two short novels published in 1986, embodied the typical factors of Can Xue’s works^[24]. It was originally written in Mandarin Chinese and published in *Tianjin Literature Journal* in June, 1986.

As soon as it came out, it attracted wide attention in Chinese literary critics.

This short story is about Ah Mei’s reminiscence of her marriage with Old Li. Ah Mei, the main character, lived together with her mother but they were on bad terms. Old Li often came to visit them and chatted happily with Ah Mei’s mother. Then, Ah Mei was arranged by her mother to marry with Old Li. Their life was not happy because their marriage was not based on love but on a ridiculous reason that Ah Mei’s mother owning a house. The next day of their wedding, Old Li moved to the attic, and left her three months later. After the birth of their son Da-gou, Old Li returned home but stayed all day with their son and Ah Mei’s mother. When Da-gou was five years old, Old Li never came back. Due to his leaving, her mother disliked her more than before. In this story, the relation between mother and daughter and that between wife and husband are very indifferent and weird. Ah Mei and her mother are described to be ugly and unpleasant. This is the typical writing style of Can Xue. She usually uses the deformed figures to challenge the traditional concepts of family and women, and arouse the readers’ attention to their inner world.

Shortly after its appearance, *The Gloomy* was translated by the sinologist Ronald R. Janssen and the Chinese scholar Zhang Jian into English. It is also included into Can Xue’s short story collection *Dialogues in Paradise* published by Northwest University Press in 1989, which is the first separate edition of Can Xue’s novels translated in English. It is compiled as the first short story among the 13 ones in this volume. Due to its significance in Can Xue’s works, this paper attempts to analyze the English translation of *The Gloomy*.

4. Analysis of Feminist Translation Strategies in *The Gloomy*

In this section, this study focuses on the English version of *The Gloomy* from the perspective of FTS. The examples will be given to show that the translators often deploy the feminist translation strategies of supplementing and hijacking to (re-)construct the female characters and reproduce the feminist consciousness in their translation.

4.1. Examples of Supplementing

Supplementing, which has the “compensation” function, is the most common feminist translation strategy^[25]. In FTS, supplementing means that on the basis of respecting the source text the translator reasonably adds the feminist consciousness in the target text. In *The Gloomy*, Ronald R. Janssen and Zhang Jian adopt this strategy to show Ah Mei’s personal traits and the family relationship. Here are some examples.

Example 1:

Chinese ST:三年来,老李渺无音信,我再也没有在大街上看见过他。在我的想象中,他现在已经变成了一个精干的、漂亮的小个子男子汉,走起路来又轻松又精神。^[26]

English TT: For the past three years nothing has been heard of Old Li, and I have not seen him in the street. I imagine he has become a capable, handsome, short but “manly” man, relaxed and high-spirited in his walk. ^[27]

Example 1 is about Ah Mei’s imagination of Old Li after his leaving home for 3 years. In the English TT, the translators translated “男子汉” into “manly man”, by supplementing the word “manly” with quotation marks to describe Old Li. This is an emphasis and also an irony of Old Li’s image. It shows that Ah Mei was contemptuous of the arranged marriage and it is also an irony to the traditional concept of marriage. Thus, the implied feminist thoughts in ST are obvious in TT.

Example 2:

Chinese TT: 隔了一会儿，鞭炮又在屋后什么地方大响，吓得我心脏“怦怦”直跳。后来我进了屋，从抽屉里找出一点棉花，把耳朵紧紧地塞上了。 ^[26]

English TT: Minutes later, I hear firecrackers exploding somewhere at the rear of the house. My heart pounds, and I go into my room and stuff my ears with cotton which I find in a drawer. ^[27]

Example 2 describes Ah Mei’s reaction to her son Dagou setting off firecrackers. In Chinese ST, the clause “鞭炮又在屋后什么地方大响” is just an objective expression of the sound of firecrackers. However, the translators add “I hear” before it. Thus, the whole paragraph is made up of a series of Ah Mei’s reactions to the firecrackers from “hear” to “go” and to “stuff” by keeping the same subject “I” in the two sentences. Moreover, through Ah Mei’s actions, readers may understand that Ah Mei is very timid and her relations with her son is not intimate and friendly.

4.2. Examples of Hijacking

For a long time, women's inner consciousness, psychology, emotion, etc. have lost their discourse power due to women's fate in writing. In order to reveal them, when translating *The Gloomy*, the translators Ronald R. Janssen and Zhang Jian hijack the ST and creatively rewrite it by changing the agents or the recipients of the actions to Ah Mei. By this means, Ah Mei is set in the obvious place in the sentence. In this way, her thoughts and feelings are stressed, and the feminist consciousness in the ST are strengthened. Here are some examples.

Example 3:

Chinese ST: 那一天我到厨房舀水，他冷不防就进来了，我正打算溜走，没想到他开口讲起话来了。

“喂，你，对我有什么意见？”

“.....”

然后他对我说，愿不愿意马上跟他结婚？他说话的当儿脸色发灰，一身抽搐得怪难受的。 ^[26]

English TT: I was in the kitchen fetching water. All of a sudden he entered. Before I could escape, he started talking.

“Hey, you, any comment to make about me?”

“.....”

Then he asked if I was willing to marry him immediately. His face turned gray and his body twitched, making me feel most uncomfortable while he spoke. ^[27]

Example 3 is a dialogue between Old Li and Ah Mei. Although Old Li visited her home now and then before their marriage, he always chatted and chuckled with Ah Mei’s mother. At that day, he suddenly stopped Ah Mei and proposed to her in the kitchen. In Chinese ST, “他说话的当儿脸色发灰，一身抽搐得怪难受的” is a clause describing Old Li’s painful looks on the face and the twitches of his body when he made the proposal. But in English TT, the translators rewrote the sentence into “making me feel most uncomfortable while he spoke”. By hijacking the ST, the translator emphasized the inner world the Ah Mei, providing the reader with the a better understanding of the fact that Ah Mei did not like Old Li and even felt very uncomfortable while Old Li spoke. It created a strong conflict with the following reversal that Ah Mei accepted Old Li’s proposal.

Example 4:

Chinese ST: 我们结婚的那天他脸上紫疱涨成了黑色，红鼻头象蜡烛一样又硬又光，他的又短又小的身体紧紧地裹在新衣服里面，让人看了有一种很伤心的想法。 ^[26]

English TT: On our wedding day, all his pimples swelled into blackheads. His red nose was hard and bright like a candle. Seeing his short, small body wrapped tightly in new clothes, I couldn’t help feeling misery and regret. ^[27]

Example 4 is the description of Old Li in their wedding day. In Chinese ST, the clause “他的又短又小的身体紧紧地裹在新衣服里面，让人看了有一种很伤心的想法” literally means “his short and small body was wrapped tightly in new clothes, making people feel sad”. The subject of this sentence is Old Li. The character “人”, a general word, means “people”, without telling clear who feels sad when seeing Old Li. In English TT, the translators rewrite it in two ways. First, they changed the subject to “I”, and in this novel “I” refers to Ah Mei. Second, the translated sentence “I couldn’t help feeling misery and regret” makes it clear that it was Ah Mei who felt sad. By hijacking the ST, the translators change the angle of the description from Old Li to Ah Mei, stressing the inner world and the emotions of women.

The similar examples are also found in the translation, for example “这种情形一直延续到大狗生下之后” is translated into “He stayed away until I gave birth to Dagou”. Here, “这种情形”, which literally means “this situation” in English, is translated to be “he stayed away” so that it repeatedly tells readers Old Li’s leaving home. The subject of the clause “大狗” is changed to “I”, which refers to Ah Mei. Through the change, the indifferent attitude of Old Li to Ah Mei and the disappointment of Ah Mei are expressed.

5. Conclusion

From the above analysis, it is found that Ronald R. Janssen and Zhang Jian take full advantage of the two feminist translation strategies—supplementing and hijacking—in the process of translating *The Gloomy Mood of Ah Mei in a Sunny Day*, which not only reproduced the feminism presented in the source text, but also made the implied feminist consciousness obviously conveyed. It is the

creative rewriting of the translators, which results in the improvement of the value of the English translation and its dissemination and acceptance in the English world. Compared with the previous traditional translation theories, feminist translation studies have many advantages, such as allowing the translators to add personal interpretations to the source text, giving translators more creative space, and affirming the translator's subjectivity, etc. However, with the collision and integration with different theories, feminist translation studies should be revised, improved and developed in order to be better applied to the translation practice and studies.

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