

Understanding the Image of Jews in a Chinese Translation of *The Merchant of Venice* Accompanied with A Paratext*

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William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1600) is controversial as a result of its negative depiction of the Jewish figure Shylock. In translating this literary work into Chinese, the translator is quite possibly involved in reconstructing the image of Jews, as Shylock being the representative in *The Merchant of Venice*, consciously, or unconsciously. In this paper, the translation of *The Merchant of Venice* by Shiqiu Liang (2001) is selected to find out how the image of Jews is conveyed to the Chinese readers. Due to the translator's translation principle of being loyal to the original text, the content in the original text is transferred to the target readers without manipulation. However, the translation work was conducted with a particular social background which is believed to have influenced the translator's interpretation of the original text. Accompanied the selected translation is a paratext, in which the translator expresses his own opinion on both the playwright and the Jewish and non-Jewish figures in the play; with this paratext, the target readers understand the figures in the play in a different way. Therefore, a different image of Jews is reconstructed in the translation, which is mainly analyzed at the level of larger textual units reflecting hierarchical relations from the perspective of imagology.

Keywords: Chinese translation, image of Jews, paratext, *The Merchant of Venice*

Introduction

Throughout the history of literary, Jews is never excluded from the construction of figures in literary works. In translating this kind of literary works into Chinese, the translator is quite possibly involved in reconstructing the image of Jews as the "other", consciously, or unconsciously. In this paper, *The Merchant of Venice* (1600) by William Shakespeare, in which the negative depiction of the Jewish figure Shylock makes this work controversial, and one of its Chinese translations are selected to analyze how the image of Jews, as Shylock being the representative, is conveyed to Chinese readers. Coming from a different culture, the translator differs himself from both the author and the Jews and the societies they represent; therefore, relating paratexts will be taken into consideration to find out how the construction of the image of Jews as the "other" in the translation is impacted by the extrinsic contextual factors.

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To deal with the image of Jews in the works selected, the author of this paper employs imagology—a research branch originating in comparative literature, which was introduced to translation studies by scholars like Johan Soenen (1995) and Nedret Kuran-Burçoğlu (1995; 1997; 1998). Developed by Jean-Marie Carré (1947), Marius-Francois Guyard (1951), Daniel-Henri Pageaux (1989; 1994), and Jean-Marc Moura (1992/1998), imagology elucidates textual codification of images of other nations and people that are presented in literary works such as novels, plays, poems, travel books, and essays.

The Selected Work, the Translator, and the Translation

The Merchant of Venice, written between 1596 and 1600, is one of Shakespeare's four best-known comedies. The main antagonist in this play, Shylock, is a Jewish figure who not only follows the stereotype of the Jew in English tradition, symbolizing evil and hatred, but also, motivated by his vengefulness, exemplifies one of the aspects of multi-faceted human nature. This is associated with the dispute regarding the image of Shylock, either as a comic villain or a tragic victim suffering from the harsh treatment of Christian society. In general, Shakespeare portrays Shylock as a complex figure with demon-like traits; "he is a hellish creature, a discontented soul whose vilifying of others marks him as the embodiment of malevolence and misanthropy" (Cohen, 1980, p. 60). However, more recent commentary springing from the focus on the marginalized "others" emphasizes Shylock's role as "scapegoat and victim" (Mahon & Ellen, 2002, p. 12).

Chinese translations of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* were first created by Shu Lin and Yi Wei (1904), followed by the translations of Shiqiu Liang (1936) and others. Born in a literary family, Shiqiu Liang who was steeped in the classics since childhood entered Tsinghua University in 1915. At the age of 20, he studied at Colorado College in the USA and one year later at Harvard University, where he received his doctoral degree. All this paved his way to become a bilingual master, which prepared him to translate Shakespeare.

Though Liang's translation of *The Merchant of Venice* is part of his translation of the complete works of Shakespeare, the translation of this specific play had a particularly complex social background. The climax of China's National Democracy Movement in 1911, the Xinhai Revolution, inspired the transformation of the political system; there was turmoil in the ideological field for a few years after the Revolution. Then in 1915, the May Fourth New Culture Movement took place and stimulated an intellectual modernization. "At that time, the classical Chinese language had not been suitable for modern social communication, so one of the main goals of the May Fourth New Culture Movement was to replace classical Chinese with modern Chinese (the vernacular)" (Zhang, 1996, p. 104). The employment of vernacular language in literary works from then on was a result of this movement. Liang's translation was produced after the vernacular Chinese had replaced the classical. Accordingly, his translation was written in vernacular and was more in line with the contemporary readers' reading habits, contributing to its readability and dissemination.

Another manifestation of intellectual modernization was that some scholarly politicians, journalists, and diplomats became dedicated to exploring the Jewish people and culture themselves. This exploration helped in forming the Chinese view on Jews (Pan, 2001). Furthermore, at the end of WWI, Japan had a hold over China amounting to virtual military control of the country. With the Japanese military deepening its invasion into China, the war between the two countries was on the verge of breaking out. Though Liang moved to Taiwan in 1949 and his translation of the complete works of Shakespeare was not published in Mainland China until 2001, he

produced the translation of *The Merchant of Venice* in 1936 in Qingdao. Liang witnessed the Chinese people's suffering from and oppression of the Japanese military during the Japanese invasion while he was still living in Mainland China. Triggered by their own experience, the Chinese, especially the intellectuals, began to pay attention to those people who had a similar experience. Or, as Qinyou Wu, a Chinese intellectual, says regarding the Jews in the 1930s: "The significance of the Jewish people lies [...] in their common goal to unite together with all the oppressed people and to liberate the human race" (Wu, 1936, p. 7, Zhou's translation, 2013, pp. 107-108).

Accompanied with the translation, there is a paratext which is actually an adaptation of Liang's articles entitled *The Significance of "The Merchant of Venice"* which was published in the *Supplement of Ta Kung Pao* in 1934, two years before the publication of the translation itself, revealing the translator's opinion on both the playwright and the Jewish and non-Jewish figures in the play. The paratext proves that Shiqiu Liang did not just translate this play as a famous literary work, but had his own thoughts about it. In the paratext, Liang first gives his personal opinion on the figure of Shylock: a tragic figure in a comic play. The figure of Shylock is, to Liang, that of a poor man, representing an oppressed people—the Jews. He proposes that it is the persecution from which Jews suffer that leads to usury: Legislation forbids them to possess real estate; and this leads them to usury as a means to make a living. Liang also presents his personal opinion about the playwright: Shakespeare is a truth teller in that he exposes the oppression of the Jews.

It is also evident in the paratext that Liang's concern is not limited to the playwright and the figure of Shylock in the play, but also extends to the Christian figures. However, his opinion about the Christian figures is not presented directly in his own words, but can be deduced from his citation of Heine's commentary on *The Merchant of Venice*—a commentary which has been translated into Chinese. Heine was a Jewish-born German poet who, like Shylock though under different circumstances, converted to Christianity. In Heine's time, in order to facilitate professional life, one had to convert: "[c]onversion, of course, was not so unusual for German Jews in precisely the early years of the Restoration" (Katz, 1986 in Holub, 2002, p. 230). Conversion was tolerable inside the Jewish community itself (Holub, 2002, p. 233). Heine's original work dealing with the play and the figures in it was in German, but Charles Godfrey Leland translated it into English in 1891.

From the paratext, one can conclude that Liang shows sympathy for Jews, regarding them as oppressed victims, and calls attention to the hypocrisy of the Christian figures in the play. In the light of this paratext, the image of Jews in the translation is not quite the same as in the source.

Reconstructed Image of Jews by Larger Textual Units in the Translation in the Light of Paratext

According to the contemporary imagologist Pageaux (1989), the construction of the image of "other" can be analyzed at levels of lexical items, larger textual units, and plot from the perspective of intrinsic text. At the second level, larger textual units reflecting hierarchical relations, the image of "other" is mainly constructed through pairs of oppositions. As the concern of contemporary imagology has shifted to the image-creator and the formation of the image, the relation between the image-creator/author of a textual work and the "other" is the prime focus. Moreover, based on the key role of the social collective imagination of the image-creator's society in constructing the image of the "other", the relation between this society as "self" and the "other" is of utmost

importance. In the present case study Jews are regarded as the “other” and Christians as the “self”. Thus, textual units structuring the hierarchical relations between the Jewish and the Christian figures in the play will be the main topic of the following parts.

Among the hierarchical relations between Jews and Christians presented in this play, the hierarchical relations between Shylock and Antonio are of utmost importance, since the whole story revolves around the flesh bond between these two figures. In the source text, the hierarchical relations between Shylock and Antonio vary and are not the same before and after the signing of the bond.

Before the signing of the bond, and from the perspective of social position, Antonio enjoys superiority over Shylock. Antonio looks down upon and criticizes Shylock as well as his usury business in the Rialto; he calls Shylock a misbeliever and a cut-throat dog, and spits upon his Jewish gabardine, but Shylock’s response is bearing it with a patient shrug. Facing Shylock’s protests, Antonio does not feel sorry for his insulting behavior; rather, he insists that “I am as like to call thee so again, to spet on thee again, to spurn thee too” (Shakespeare, 2001, p. 41). Their attitudes to each other compose a hierarchical relation which constructs the image of Shylock as that of a person who patiently suffers his humiliation. But his suffering in this hierarchical relation leads to his later vengefulness.

With the signing of the bond, and from the perspective of economic power, Shylock becomes the creditor, therefore, holding superiority over Antonio. Moreover, with the deadline of the bond coming closer, Shylock’s identity as the superior becomes clearer. When Shylock insists on the execution of the bond, he becomes the master of Antonio’s fate. At the same time Antonio, as a bankrupt, a beggar, who scarcely dares to show his face on the Rialto, becomes the inferior in this hierarchical relation. Antonio, who used to come so smug upon the mart, gives up now his contemptuous attitude towards Shylock and begins to plead that Shylock hears him: “Hear me yet, good Shylock” (Shakespeare, 2001, p. 122). However, Shylock chooses to turn a deaf ear to Antonio’s pleading. The image of Shylock constructed by this hierarchical relation is not only that of a creditor, but also that of a revenge-taker, refusing to show mercy to his foe, Antonio.

However, their roles in the hierarchical relations change again from the perspectives of both social position and economic power as a result of Portia’s claim (when she is in disguise) that unlike Antonio, Shylock is “an alien” rather than “a citizen” of Venice. At the court, Portia in disguise agrees that according to the flesh bond Shylock has the right to get one pound of Antonio’s flesh, but without shedding any of Antonio’s blood, which puts Shylock in a dilemma. Eventually, Shylock has to give up his bond; neither can he get his own money back. Moreover, Shylock is proclaimed “an alien” rather than “a citizen” of Venice, no matter how much wealth he has and what kind of social position he occupies. Subject to a specific legislation regarding aliens, Shylock is accused of an attempt to kill a citizen (Antonio).

As the defendant, Shylock is placed in an unfavorable position and as the inferior one again. According to the above-mentioned legislation, both his life and wealth are at the control of the duke and Antonio. As Antonio’s foe, his fate is especially at the mercy of Antonio. According to the verdict, half of Shylock’s wealth is awarded to Antonio. However, that is not the only loss that Shylock has to suffer. Due to this legislation, Antonio has the power to impose his own will on Shylock and requires Shylock to convert into Christianity. In converting to Christianity, Shylock is deprived of his only way to make a living—usury. Shylock not only fails in taking his revenge but also loses his wealth and the right of keeping his own religion. As the inferior one in terms of both

social position and economic power, Shylock has to accept the punishment decreed by the Duke and the demands made by Antonio and he returns home, dejected. Shylock's image becomes that of a defeated loser both materially and spiritually.

Furthermore, in addressing Shylock, Portia uses the lexical item "Jew" rather than his name, which implies that in Venice Jews are not recognized as citizens, but as aliens, the inferior party from the perspective of social position. The hierarchical relations between citizens and aliens are manifested in the city's alien-specific legislation. According to this legislation, the aliens have to pay a high price for their misdoings towards the citizens while the citizens pay nothing for their humiliating behavior towards the aliens. Clearly, Jews as the aliens are the inferior ones when compared with the Christian citizens since they cannot enjoy the protection of the law as the citizens do. The image of Jews in general becomes that of the discriminated.

Due to his translation principle of being loyal to the original text, Liang transfers all the above-mentioned hierarchical relations in his translation. In accord, the images constructed in the translation by these hierarchical relations are the same as in the source text. However, as the authority behind the translated work, the translator can possibly show his or her personal opinion on the author, the work, and the figures portrayed. Since the "Cultural Turn" in translation studies around the 1980s, it is acknowledged that translators are not just the "porters" of the original text; "translators are 'privileged readers' of the SL [source language] text. Unlike the ordinary ST [source text] or TT [target text] reader, the translator reads in order to produce, decodes in order to re-encode" (Shreve, Schäffner, Danks, & Griffin, 1993, p. 35; square brackets in the original). Therefore, the translator's subjectivity can shed light on the reconstruction of the hierarchical relations in the translation.

By disclosing his opinion on the figures in the play, the translator reconstructs the hierarchical relations between them. Moreover, of all the articles criticizing *The Merchant of Venice*, the translator selects just the one by Heine (1838) and translates it into Chinese as worth introducing. His deliberate choice of Heine's article leads us to speculate that he shares with him the same opinion. Thus, new hierarchical relations are reconstructed through both Heine's and the translator's opinion on the figures involved.

"The bankrupt Antonio is a weak creature without energy, without strength of hatred, and as little of love, a melancholy worm-heart whose flesh is really worth nothing save 'to bait fish withal'" (Heine, 1838 in Liang, 2001, pp. 6-8; English trans. by Leland, 1891, pp. 377-383). Taking into consideration Heine's comment on Antonio, Shylock's main foe, and the Christian figure who enjoys the best reputation and highest praise, in the eyes of the translator Antonio does not really deserve his position. Shylock is cruel to his foe, evidenced by his bond with Antonio which is not rooted in good intentions and when Antonio is on the edge of bankruptcy, Shylock takes advantage of the opportunity to seek revenge and insists on executing the bond which may end Antonio's life. As to Antonio, when he comes to the dominant position with the help of Portia at the court and is expected to render mercy on Shylock, his decision cannot be regarded as real mercy. Thanks to the Duke's mercy, if Shylock shows humility he just needs to pay a fine instead of offering half of his wealth to the state. The fine will not necessarily influence Shylock's life much, but the other half of his wealth designated to Antonio may. When Portia asks, "What mercy can you render him, Antonio?" (Shakespeare, 2001, p. 162), what she really points at may be the half of Shylock's wealth awarded to Antonio. However, what Antonio does is asking for more mercy from the Duke. Thanks to Antonio's pleading, Shylock is exonerated from the fine, but Antonio actually does not give up anything; the half of Shylock's wealth is still at his hand.

“He does not repay the swindled Jew the three thousand ducats” (Heine, 1838; trans. by Leland, 1891, p. 380). It is Antonio who agrees to the flesh-bond but with the help of Portia, he exempts himself from it and gets half of Shylock’s wealth. He takes Shylock’s punishment for granted and takes half of his wealth, never mentioning again the three thousand ducats. Shylock is the one who is deceived for three thousand ducats, and even more. Shylock is first a victim of the law of Venice which deprives him from any professions except usury, and then the victim of Antonio’s and other Christians’ discrimination, and finally the “victim of Antonio’s refusal to abide by the (contractual) law he wants to see enforced” (Porteous, Cavazza, & Charles, 2010, p. 1299).

Moreover, his request that Shylock convert to Christianity is also cruel, not only because it means Shylock’s betrayal of his religion, but also because this actually takes the means of usury whereby Shylock makes his living. Converting to Christianity may mean opportunities of many other professions; however, Shylock is still a Jew. Jews are not so easily accepted in the Christians world even after they convert. According to the conversation between Launcelot and the converted Jessica in Act III, Scene V (Shakespeare, 2001, p. 132), conversion may be a disadvantage rather than a benefit.

Jews are excluded not only because of their religion but also due to their race. As a Jew and a so-called “pagan”, Shylock may support his family by usury; but as a converted Christian, there is no guarantee that he can hold the same rights as native Christians to take other professions. Therefore, Antonio’s request that Shylock convert to Christianity should not be regarded as merciful but as cruel. Moreover, if he really enjoys a good reputation and the friends are sincere ones, Antonio may not need to come to Shylock for usury in the first place. At the beginning, when Antonio plans to borrow money for Bassanio, he intends to “try what my credit can in Venice do” (Shakespeare, 2001, p. 24). It soon becomes clear that his credit does nothing in Venice but only brings him to Shylock, a usurer and the one he hates the most, and drives him to sign the flesh-bond.

When Antonio’s life is in danger as a result of the flesh-bond, we learn that “twenty merchants, the duke himself, and the magnificoes of greatest port, have all persuaded with [Shylock]” (Shakespeare, 2001, p. 120). They are speculators hunting for profit rather than sincere friends of Antonio: They know well when to grasp the opportunity to show their “kindness” without investing one pence, which manifests their hypocrisy. The figure of Shylock is flawed, but he is no longer the contrast to Antonio who is not a real pursuer and executor of the Christian doctrine. Shylock and Antonio are each other’s foes; they both are cruel to their foes. Shylock’s demonized sides become less unacceptable and eventually “Shylock is regarded as the most respectable person in the whole piece” (Heine, 1838; trans. by Leland, 1891, p. 382). At least, his attitude towards money is honest and he confesses it frankly. Money is important, but taking revenge for his dignity is Shylock’s unbreakable faith; nothing would change his mind. On the one hand, the above idea crushes the impression that Shylock is a person who only cares for money; on the other hand, Shylock is a targeted person, though his desire to take revenge in this play is disruptive and makes his image negative to an extent. Consequently, a vivid figure of Shylock with both ugly and bright sides in his human nature or personality is presented

Conclusion

In the light of the denial of Antonio, he does not have the quality of being superior in the relations with Shylock in the translation. Considering the paratext, Shylock can be regarded as a decent person. Relatively speaking, Shylock wins the superiority in the above-analyzed hierarchical relations from the perspective of

personality, despite his cruel vengeful behavior. Being observed from this perspective, Shylock's image becomes less detestable. In contrast with the hierarchical relations between Jews and Christians in the source text, those in the translation are even inclined to construct a positive image of Jews or at least a complex one combining both frankness and cruelty.

Remaining loyal to the original text, Shiqiu Liang leads the target readers to understand the figures in a different way by expressing his own opinion or citing Heine in the translation. And, therefore, a different image of Jews is constructed, which can be regarded as the result of the impact of the social background. Shiqiu Liang's translation was affected by the fact that the Japanese military forcibly occupied a portion of Chinese territory and bullied the Chinese, and a war between China and Japan was on the verge of erupting in 1937. As a bullied character, Shylock, and Jews in general, deserved sympathy. They could serve as a symbol of the Chinese who would fight back after being repeatedly insulted.

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