

On the Translator's Subjectivity in Zhang Peiji's Translation of *The Sight of Father's Back*

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Zhang Peiji's *Selected Modern Chinese Essays* is one of the translation masterpieces, of which the translation of Zhu Ziqing's *The Sight of Father's Back* fully reflects the subjectivity of the translator, including the selection of the original text, the purpose of translation, translation strategies, the choice of vocabulary, and the processing of sentences. Starting from the subjectivity of translators, this article explores Zhang Peiji's translation in order to contribute to later prose translation.

Keywords: Zhang Peiji, *The Sight of Father's Back*, translator's subjectivity

In the past hundred years, there has been no shortage of people who have translated the ideas or theories of Western intellectuals to the Chinese people, but there are very few scholars who have taken the initiative to translate to foreigners the vivid ideas that have existed in prose since the May Fourth Movement in 1919. Professor Zhang Peiji's *Selected Modern Chinese Essays* makes up for this pity (Zhu, 2000, p. 61). Zhang Peiji is a famous Chinese translator, who has been working hard in the translation field for 50 years, translating books and writing academic monographs. He thinks that the achievement of Chinese prose is no less than that of Chinese novel, poem, and drama, but its translation is not so extensive, so he determines to introduce excellent Chinese prose to Western readers to contribute Chinese culture to going abroad. His *Selected Modern Chinese Essays* is so deeply loved by readers that is called "not a textbook but better than a textbook". The book selects more than 100 masterpieces of modern Chinese masters for translation, the translation of which is exquisitely selected, the language is fresh and fluent, and the original text information and style are perfectly reproduced. Thus it has a high reference significance for the translation activities of later generations. This paper selects the English translation of Zhu Ziqing's *The Sight of Father's Back* in *Selected Modern Chinese Essays* (I), studies the subjectivity of the translator, and explores the flexible processing method of Zhang Peiji's translation, in order to have a certain inspiration for the translation of prose.

***The Sight of Father's Back* and Its Translation**

The Sight of Father's Back is Zhu Ziqing's masterpiece, a memorable lyrical prose. In October 1925, the author recalled that on the winter of 1917 when his grandmother passed away, he traveled from Beijing to Xuzhou and returned to Yangzhou with his father to mourn. After the funeral, the father went to Nanjing to find

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an errand; the author returned to Beijing to go to school. At first, the father wanted the train attendant to take care of the author on the train, but finally relieved; he could personally come to Pukou Station to send off the author. He wore a green cloth cotton robe and black cloth coat. Because of his obesity, he struggled to cross the platform fence to buy oranges for the author, which made the author secretly cry. The author recalled the past and blamed himself for being too smarty at that time, and always felt that his father was not good at speaking with others. In recent years, his experience has allowed him to slowly understand his father's depressed mood caused by the falling of the family and the dismissal of errands, and understand the change in his father's attitude towards him. The text of *The Sight of Father's Back* is simple, but is filling with sincere feelings. Through the father's seeing off the author's departure, the father's wordless love for the author was expressed; and after the author's understanding of the father, he also expressed his deep love for the father and his sadness that he did not know when he could see his old father again.

The Translator's Subjectivity

The translator, who plays a pivotal role in translation, is the main body of translation activities, but his/her significance has long been neglected. With the rise of descriptive translation studies in the 1970s and 1980s, and then the prevalence of culture-oriented research, the subjectivity of translators in the translation process has gradually become prominent. The turn of translation research has "discovered" translators, and the subjectivity of translators has become a new theme in translation research (Mu & Shi, 2003, p. 12). But to some degree, studies on this topic especially in China are unsystematic, partial, and scattered (Ma, 2013, p. 10). So further researches are still needed. In terms of definition, translator's subjectivity refers to the subjective initiative of the translator as the translation subject in the translation activities to achieve the purpose of translation under the premise of respecting the translation object, and its basic characteristics are the conscious cultural consciousness, humanistic character, and cultural and aesthetic creativity of the translation subject (Zha & Tian, 2003, p. 22).

Translator's Subjectivity in Zhang Peiji's Translation of *The Sight of Father's Back*

Zhang Peiji puts forward the translation principle of "faithfulness" and "smoothness", requiring that the translation faithfully convey the meaning of the original text, and the language should be smooth and fluent, and can be understood by the reader. This requires translators to give full play to their subjective initiative and flexibly translate. The subjectivity of the translator is reflected in all processes of translation activities—the selection of the original text, the purpose of translation, the choice of vocabulary, and the processing of sentences.

Selection of Original Text

The choice of original text is influenced by both objective factors (political environment, social orientation, poetic tradition, patrons, etc.) and subjective factors (personal preferences, etc.). Zhang Peiji's choice of modern Chinese prose for English translation is mainly affected by subjective factors, that is, the subjectivity of the translator plays a greater role. In the preface to *Selected Modern Chinese Essays (I)*, he said:

I have been inextricably linked to prose since I was a child. ... This year, in my idle life after retirement, I have intermittently translated some short essays, one for entertainment, the other out of a love of English and prose, and the

third to introduce some excellent modern Chinese prose works to foreign countries. Since the founding of PRC, most of the Chinese literature introduced to foreign countries is poetry, novels, and dramas, but the prose has been left out in the cold, which is really a pity. (Zhang, 2007, p. 2)

Subjective factors, such as Zhang Peiji's learning experience, personal preferences, and translation purpose determine his English translation of modern Chinese prose, and the proeses he chooses to translate are not randomly picked, but out of careful consideration after screening. The proeses he chooses are all masterpieces of modern masters, excellent works accumulated over time.

Purpose of Translation

In terms of the influencing factors of translation purpose, the translator's subjectivity is the most deciding one. As mentioned above, the main purpose of Zhang Peiji's translation is to introduce some excellent Chinese modern prose works to foreign countries. Driven by this noble goal, Zhang Peiji works on the English translation of modern Chinese prose, so that Westerners can learn more about China through this book.

Translation Strategies

Zhang Peiji does not stick to one translation strategy when translating, but flexibly selects translation strategies according to the actual situation, such as naturalization and alienation, addition and subtraction, literal translation and paraphrasing, and strives to make the translation faithful and smooth.

Example 1

Original: ……好在天无绝人之路!

Translation: Fortunately, Heaven always leaves one a way out.

Zhang Peiji adopts a naturalized translation strategy, using the English phrase "leave one a way out" to correspond to the Chinese "无绝人之路", and using the affirmative statement familiar to English readers to correspond to the negative sentence in Chinese, reflecting Zhang Peiji's profound English ability, and achieving loyalty in the sense of dynamic equivalence through flexible processing.

Example 2

Original: 回家变卖典质, 父亲还了亏空。

Translation: After arriving home in Yangzhou, father paid off debts by selling or pawning things.

"Going home" means that the author and his father return to Yangzhou from Xuzhou to mourn together. Although the original text does not illustrate it, it is necessary to explain that Yangzhou is their hometown when translating in English, so the strategy of additional translation is adopted, adding "in Yangzhou".

Example 3

Original: ……家庭琐屑便往往触他之怒。

Translation: That is why even mere domestic trivialities would often make him angry...

Zhang Peiji adds the word "mere" when translating, namely even the trivial things in the family will often make the father angry. The addition makes the logic clearer and the sentences more fluent. "My" father is old and depressed, so even if the family trifle will make him angry, so his attitude towards "me" changes, not as good as before.

Example 4

Original: 他踌躇了一会, 终于决定还是自己送我去。我两三回劝他不必去……

Translation: After some wavering, he finally decided that he himself would accompany me to the station. I

repeatedly tried to talk him out of it, but he only said, "Never mind! It won't do to trust guys like those hotel boys!"

In English we will avoid repeat. So when Zhang Peiji uses "the station" once, he translates "persuade him not to go (station)" to "talk him out of it", which is more concise.

Example 5

Original: 我那时真是聪明过分，总觉得他说话不大漂亮……唉，我现在想想，那时真是太聪明了！

Translation: I was then such a smart aleck that I frowned upon the way father was haggling...Oh, when I come to think of it, I can see how smarty I was in those days.

"聪明过分" is antiphrasis, and Zhang Peiji translates it to "smart aleck", meaning "self-righteous person" or "person who thinks he understands everything". "总觉得他说话不大漂亮" means that he has contempt for his father. Zhang Peiji uses "frown upon" to express "my" disapproval of father's words and deeds. "我那时真是太聪明了" is also a counter-statement, translated by Zhang Peiji as "how smarty I was in those days". "Smarty" and "smart aleck" are synonymous, and the addition of "how" in front of it accentuates the irony.

Example 6

Original: 他走了几步，回过头看见我，说，“进去吧，里边没人”。

Translation: After a few steps, he looked back at me and said, "Go back to your seat. Don't leave your things alone".

"里边没人" should not be literally translated. In the context of the time, this sentence was the father's instruction to "I" when separated—"There is no one in the carriage, your luggage is not taken care of, so go back to your seat". So Zhang Peiji paraphrases it as "Don't leave your luggage alone".

Example 7

Original: 唉！我不知何时再能与他相见！

Translation: Oh! How I long to see him again!

Zhang Peiji does not simply translate the author's lament as "Oh! I don't know when I can see him again!", because it is difficult for English readers to feel the sad emotions in it. It is easily for them to focus on "don't know", thinking that the author is really just saying that he does not know when he will see his father again. After truly understanding the connotation of Chinese, Zhang Peiji directly translates the emotion in English, which translated as "Oh! How I long to see him again!" The translation will not be ambiguous and foreign readers can more clearly feel the author's missing, worries, and guilt for his father.

Selection of Language

Example 8

Original: 父亲……叫旅馆里一个熟识的茶房陪我同去。他再三嘱咐茶房，甚是仔细。但他终于不放心，怕茶房不妥帖……又嘱托茶房好好照应我。……他们只认得钱，托他们直是白托！

Translation: Father...would ask a hotel waiter to take good care of me, but still did not quite trust him. ... He also asked the train attendants to take good care of me. ...for it was utterly useless to entrust me to those attendants, who cared for nothing but money.

"茶房" is not a room where people can drink tea in the literal sense, but a waiter in the old hotels, restaurants, ships, etc. The word "茶房" appears five times, which is translated as "hotel waiter", "waiter",

“him”, “train attendants”, and “attendants” respectively, reflecting the accuracy and diversity of Zhang Peiji's choice of words.

Example 9

Original: 行李太多了, 得向脚夫行些小费, 才可过去。

Translation: There was quite a bit of luggage and he had to bargain with the porter over the fee.

“小费” in here is not the “bounty” in the English context, but refers to the cost of the porter to pick up luggage, so after truly understanding the meaning of “小费”, it cannot be translated as “tip”, but as “fee”.

Splitting Long Sentences

Example 10

Original: 那年冬天, 祖母死了, 父亲的差事也交卸了, 正是祸不单行的日子, 我从北京到徐州, 打算跟着父亲奔丧回家。

Translation: Misfortunes never come singly. In the winter of more than two years ago, grandma died and father lost his job. I left Beijing for Xuzhou to join father in hastening home to attend grandma's funeral.

Chinese sentences are short, with the subject changing several times. There are less connecting words, and short sentences are naturally connected into smooth long sentences. A sentence in English has only one set of subject-verb structures, so when translating from Chinese to English, it is necessary to logically split Chinese flowing sentences.

Merging Short Sentences

Example 11

Original: 我心里暗笑他的迂; 他们只认得钱, 托他们直是白托!

Translation: I sniggered at father for being so impractical, for it was utterly useless to entrust me to those attendants, who cared for nothing but money.

Although few or no conjunctions are used in Chinese sentences, the reader can still understand the meaning, but cohesive devices are needed in English to express the relationship between the front and back components. When translating this sentence, Zhang Peiji adds the conjunction “for”, indicating the causal relationship between the two sentences before and after, and connecting the two short sentences into a long sentence.

Adjust the Order of Short Sentences

Example 12

Original: 到南京时①, 有朋友约去游逛②, 勾留了一日③。

Translation: I spent the first day (3) in Nanjing (1) strolling about with some friends at their invitation (2).

In the translation, Zhang Peiji changes the order of three short Chinese sentences and combines them into a long, logical English sentences which is more readable for Western readers.

Summary

Zhang Peiji follows the translation principle of “faithfulness” and “smoothness” and selects the translation of excellent prose in contemporary China. On the basis of fully understanding of the original text, he exerts subjective initiative, selects words accurately, and handles sentences flexibly, so that his translation becomes a mirror for Westerners to understand China, realizing his translation purpose.

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