

Beyond Gender Perspectives: A More Comprehensive Examination of Yang Yi's Translation of *Wuthering Heights*

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The renowned translator Yang Yi passed away in 2023. Many scholars argue that, influenced by their biological gender, female translators often employ translation methods in adherence to feminist translation or reflect characteristics typical of female translators. This study examines the translation of *Wuthering Heights* by Yang Yi, focusing on whether there is a definite influence of gender on translator behavior. While existing literature primarily analyzes Yang Yi's work through a feminist lens, this research takes a broader approach. By considering the translator's social background and translation practice, this paper challenges the assumption that her work strictly aligns with feminist translation theories. Instead, this study emphasizes the importance of considering diverse factors when interpreting translated works, moving beyond a singular gender-based standpoint.

Keywords: gender, translation, Yang Yi, *Wuthering Heights*, feminism

Introduction

Wuthering Heights is the only novel written by the British female author Emily Brontë. Since 1978, there have been 169 translations published in the Chinese mainland, among which Yang Yi's translation stands out. All 350,000 copies printed by Jiangsu People's Publishing House in July 1980 were sold out, making it the recognized classic translation of *Wuthering Heights* in China. Current studies of Yang's translation often interpret it from the perspective of feminist translation or stylistic features of female translators, given that both the author Emily Brontë and the translator Yang Yi are female. For instance, Liu (2010, p. 32) argued, "Considering that Emily Brontë and Yang Yi are both women, selecting this translation to discuss feminist translation theory carries considerable persuasion". Moreover, some scholars believe that Yang Yi deliberately highlighted the characteristics of a female translator in her translation (Tan, 2014). Nevertheless, the author proposes to unveil the superficial veil, transcending biological gender, and objectively examine the translation. This paper will discuss Yang Yi's translation from two aspects: the translator's social background and translation practice.

Social Background

American feminist scholars Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman (1998) distinguished between the notions of sex and gender: Sex is related to biological concepts, such as anatomy, hormones, and physiology, whereas gender is a social construct acquired after birth through psychological, cultural, and societal means. Social gender is not solely determined by biological sex but is influenced by the social environment in which one lives. Previous analyses of Yang's translation often categorize the translator's ideological inclination based solely

on biological gender, suggesting that her work embodies feminist translation views or exhibits more feminine traits compared to male translators. However, the author holds that the appreciation of Yang Yi's translation concepts should start from her social background.

Chinese females endured over two millennia of feudal oppression under the concepts of male superiority and female subservience. Despite movements for women's liberation from the late Qing Dynasty to the May Fourth Movement and subsequent New Democratic Revolution, these efforts were led by men, leaving women still lacking independence and gender consciousness (Yang, 2014). Yang Yi was born in 1919 into a typical feudal family, where male lineage was highly valued, and being a girl meant she received little regard at home. In contrast, her elder brother Yang Xianyi (also a renowned translator) was highly favored as the eldest grandson, treated almost like royalty. In a society where male superiority prevailed, having multiple wives and concubines was commonplace among esteemed men. Her father had three wives, despite her grandfather's disapproval and her father's lack of interest. Living for many years in such a family environment inevitably influenced Yang Yi with traditional family values. In her autobiography *A Hundred Years, Many People, and Many Things* (Yang & Yu, 2023), Yang Yi recalls her upbringing in a family where her mother's status changed significantly after giving birth to her brother: "This was a significant achievement for the family". Her expression reveals a belief that a woman's role in bearing a son was a means to gain status. Furthermore, she noted that her father treated her mother better than his second wife because "Father still had feelings for her, and Mother was more obedient and likable to Father". This viewpoint contradicts feminist ideals, suggesting in her deeper beliefs that wives are not equal in status to their husbands and should be obedient and pleasing. It can be concluded that she lacks awareness of women's rights.

Finally, Yang Yi's view of personal achievement also contradicts the usual feminist ideology: In an interview with *Xiaokang* (Su, 2023), Yang Yi often praises the literati scholars as learned and talented, and the magazine interprets Yang Yi's words as implying her exclusion from this category. Rather than pursuing personal achievements, she prioritizes her life.

Translation Practice

In the field of literary translation, different translators hold their own cultural positions regarding the central ideas of the original work and the source culture. This affects the translator's strategies, ultimately permeating various levels of the translated work (Zhong, 2009). Through comparison between Fang Ping's translation (hereafter referred to as Fang's translation) and Yang Yi's translation (hereafter referred to as Yang's translation), the author concludes that despite Fang Ping being a male translator, Yang Yi's translation methods deviate more from feminist translation. The changes to characters' dialogue in Yang Yi's version diminish the portrayal of female figures while improving negative male figures. In terms of wording and sentence structure, Yang Yi also does not necessarily embody the stylistic traits typically associated with female translators.

In Chapter 33 of *Wuthering Heights*, amidst the heightened character conflicts, the characters' images vividly come to life, making it a representative example. The author selects some dialogues from the outbreak of conflict to conduct analysis.

Translation Methods

In Chinese translation studies, from Yan Fu's principle of faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance, to Lu Xun's faithfulness and fluency, and Lin Yutang's faithfulness, fluency, and beauty, the mainstream translation

theory has always emphasized faithfulness. Feminist translation theory particularly focuses on subverting the traditional concept of faithfulness under the macro-cultural translation (Chen, 2008). In the afterword to the revised edition of *Wuthering Heights*, Yang Yi mentioned the translation concepts that influenced her: Professor Chen Jia educated her to strive for fidelity and fluency in translation, and another teacher, Professor Fan Cunzhong, also supported Yan Fu's advocacy of faithfulness (Brontë, 2010). This reflects her pursuit of faithfulness, which determined that she was unlikely to engage in the creative rewriting advocated by feminist translation.

In the original text, Heathcliff, a male character, is sharp and malicious, as seen in the following passage where he verbally attacks young Catherine. How the translators handle this segment is a representative example:

Original text: "Damnable witch! Dare you pretend to rouse his against me? Off with her! Do you hear? Fling her into the kitchen!"

Yang's translation: "该死的妖精! 你竟找借口挑动他来反对我? 让她滚! 你听见了吗? 把她扔到厨房里去!"

Fang's translation: "他妈的, 你这妖精! 你竟敢妄想挑拨他来反抗我? ——跟她一刀两断! 你听到了吗? 把她扔到厨房去!"

Yang Yi adopts a literal translation method, translating "damnable bitch" as "该死的妖精". Fang Ping, on the other hand, translates it as "他妈的, 你这妖精", which in terms of semantics leans towards a literal translation where "damnable" corresponds to "他妈的" in Chinese. In form, it precisely reflects the strategy of "hijacking" advocated by feminist translation theory, transforming the modifier of "witch" into an angry expletive "他妈的", not only vividly reflecting Heathcliff's rudeness but also weakening the insult towards women. Yang Yi's literal translation, however, does not reflect this. Additionally, in terms of how female characters are treated, Yang's translation of "让她滚" is not as gentle as Fang's translation of "跟她一刀两断".

Shaping of Character Images

In novels, the portrayal of vivid and distinct character images is crucial for authors to convey their thoughts. The shaping of character images cannot be separated from the reader's reconstruction process. In the translation of novels, translators are also readers who often bring their implicit value judgments into the translation process (Xia & Li, 2009). The language choices made by translators after judgment will have a significant impact on the transmission effect of character images in translations. Yet in Yang's translation, some changes diminish the portrayal of female characters. For example:

Original text: Mr. Heathcliff started; his eye rapidly surveyed our faces, Catherine met it with her accustomed look of nervousness and yet defiance, which he abhorred.

Yang's translation: "希刺克厉夫一惊; 他的眼睛很快地把我们的脸扫视一遍。凯瑟琳以她习惯的神经质的却又是轻蔑的表情回望他, 这是他最憎厌的。"

Fang's translation: "希克厉先生吃了一惊, 他的目光很快地掠过了我们每个人的脸。卡瑟琳的目光碰到了他的目光, 那是一种既紧张又显示出反抗的目光, 而他恨的恰恰是这个。"

Fang Ping translates "nervousness" directly as "紧张", while Yang Yi translates it as "神经质". Catherine in the original work was originally a positive female character, but this description carries strong derogatory connotations, which detracts from her image. "Defiance" is directly translated by Fang Ping as "反抗", while Yang Yi translates it as "轻蔑", showing that Catherine does not regard Heathcliff highly, but such behavior is illogical for a person who has been controlled for a long time. In this case, Yang's translation not only fails to

faithfully represent the original text, but also paints Catherine's image as somewhat irrational and arrogant, causing readers to deviate somewhat in their understanding of this female character. Fang Ping's translation is more realistic.

In contrast, when shaping male characters, Yang Yi did not fully depict the despicable nature of negative male characters. When translating the vulgar language of some negative male characters in the original work, Yang Yi chose more civilized language. Part of the reason is that according to the documentary post-1990s, Yang Yi came from a wealthy family and received education at Southwest Associated University, where society demanded that educated women use more civilized language. However, Yang Yi's adjustments, whether due to subjective choices or societal expectations of female linguistic civility, somewhat elevate the male image. For example:

Original text: "Thank God! Shoo cannot stale t' sowl o' nob'dy! Shoo wer niver soa handsome, but what a body mud look at her, 'bout a winking. It's yon flaysome, graceless quean, that's witched our lad, wi' her bold een and her forrard ways..."

Yang's translation: "她现在也挺糟糕。谢谢老天爷!她可不能偷走任何人的魂!她从来也没有怎么漂亮过,谁要瞧她都只能眨眼睛。那是你那调皮的、无礼的皇后,用她那胆大的眼睛和她那一贯任性的办法迷住了我们的孩子……"

Fang's translation: "尽管她是个一文不值的女人,又臭又坏。谢天谢地!她还不能够把别人的灵魂勾了去!她从来也没怎么漂亮过,男人看到她用不着眨巴眼睛。是那边这个可怕的、难看死了的臭丫头,是她把咱们的小伙子迷住啦,凭她那一双放肆的眼睛和做出种种不害臊的样儿来……"

The original text is riddled with errors, with many colloquial and spelling mistakes demonstrating Joseph's low cultural level. The translator should reflect this in the Chinese translation. In Fang Ping's version, Joseph describes Nelly as "又臭又坏", "可怕的、难看死了的丫头", whereas Yang Yi translates it as "挺糟糕", "调皮的、无礼的皇后". Yang Yi's elegant language results in a loss of tone, superficially maintaining the dignity of women but not aiding readers' understanding of women's suffering or generating sympathy for women at the time, thereby prompting reflection in the society. Only by objectively describing Joseph's words can his vexed, foul-mouthed demeanor be fully conveyed, illustrating his low quality and the oppression suffered by women. Rather than viewing Yang's actions as an attempt to uphold the female image, it would be more accurate to say that this improves the portrayal of male characters in the text. Moreover, Yang's handling may have been influenced by her level of education and societal expectations regarding women.

Differences in Translation Styles of Male and Female Translators

It is generally believed that gender differences lead to different translator habits, with female translators tending to be more delicate, while male translators tend to be more rugged. Female translators often use modal particles, adjectives, and other elements. However, Yang Yi does not embody the typical style of a female translator. For example:

Original text: "... It's yon flaysome, graceless quean, that witched our lad, wi' her bold een and her forrard ways-till-Nay! It fair brusts my heart! He's forgotten all I've done for him, and made on him, and goan and riven up a whole row o' t' grandest currant trees, i' t' garden!"

Yang's translation: "……那是你那调皮的、无礼的皇后,用她那胆大的眼睛和她那一贯任性的办法迷住了我们的孩子——直到——不!简直伤透了我的心啦!他全忘了我为他作过的事,和我对他的照顾,竟在花园里拔去了一整排最好的黑醋栗树!"

Fang's translation: “……是那边这个可怕的、难看死了的臭丫头，是她把咱们的小伙子迷住啦，凭她那双放肆的眼睛和做出种种不害臊的样儿来——到后来——说它干吗！我心痛哪，都快碎啦！我帮过他多少回忙，是我一手培养他的，他全都忘干净啦！如今他却动手把花园里一整排最出色的红醋栗树都掘掉啦！”

In the above passage, Fang's translation includes four onomatopoeia “啦” (la), while Yang Yi uses only one “啦”. This does not align with the typical characteristic of female translators who often use onomatopoeic words. In their translations, Fang Ping often uses multiple onomatopoeia, whereas Yang Yi does the opposite. Due to space constraints, not all instances are enumerated.

Conclusion

In conclusion, based on Yang Yi's social background and her translation practice, it is not appropriate to categorically consider her as a typical research subject of female translators based solely on her biological sex. Many studies selectively interpret individual phrases that reflect feminist thoughts without conducting a more comprehensive analysis based on the translator's experiences and translation practices. In fact, due to the long-term existence of patriarchal society, the ideologies of many women have been subtly influenced, perhaps unknowingly, permeating their behavior. In the specific field of translation, this influence is reflected in translator behavior. While gender differences undoubtedly influence translation, it is equally unwise to start appreciating translation and analyzing translator thoughts based solely on gender. Currently, influenced by the feminist movement, there is abundant literature observing male translators' female sentiments. However, in analyzing translations, it is honest to point out that if a female translator's work does not reflect female characteristics, it may lead to more reflection among translators, thereby promoting progress in feminist translation.

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