

A Comparative Study of the Preface of Two Chinese Versions of Jane Eyre

---From the Perspective of the Influence of Translator's Gender Identity on Translator's Subjectivity

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Abstract: The world-wide popularity of Jane Eyre has generated great interest and enthusiasm in many translators, resulting in as many as 20 Chinese versions. Jane Eyre's different Chinese versions and strong feminism provide rich materials for studies on translator's subjectivity. Translator's preface reveals how well translator understand writer's writing purpose. This essay mainly compares translator's prefaces of Zhu's and Wu's translation of Jane Eyre, aimed at revealing how the translator's gender identity affects the translation effect in the hope of highlighting the influence of translator's gender on the translator's subjectivity and enriching translation studies.

Key Words: Translator's Gender; Translator's Subjectivity; Preface; Jane Eyre

Introduction

Along with the economic globalization, cross-cultural communication featuring the appreciation of foreign literature works plays a major role in modern life, which highlights the function of translators and promotes translation studies. It is safe to say that one of the most popular subjects in translation studies during the past few decades has been translator's subjectivity, a term referring to translator's subjective initiative involved in rewriting the original text. A persuasive case is that an original novel may have several translated versions, such as Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte.

The feminism in Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte is quite strong and obvious, for which the novel has earned worldwide popularity since its debut. Many Chinese translators are interested in introducing Jane Eyre to domestic readers but some fail to fully convey the original meaning. By comparing the preface of two Chinese versions translated by Zhu Qingying (1980), a female translator and Wu Junxie (1990), a male translator, respectively, this essay aims at catching a glimpse of the differences and revealing how translator's gender identity affects the translation effect. It is hoped to highlight the influence of gender on the translator's subjectivity.

1. Studies on Translator's Subjectivity

At the beginning of the 21st century, many scholars have published essays discussing what translator's subjectivity is and what affects translator's subjectivity. According to Xu Jun, translator's subjectivity refers to "the realization of the translator's individuality and creativity, which directly affect the translating process and the significance of the translation." (Xu, 2013: 7). He proposed the concept of "creative treason", which by his definition means a balance between blind fidelity and undue treason and can achieve faithfulness to some extent.

Translator's subjectivity is under the influence of various factors, in which a great number of scholars have carried out thorough researches. According to Hu (2009), the source text, the mainstream social ideology and cultural background of the target readers and the translator's competence on both languages and cultures were the three major factors. Covering the three factors above, Song and Wang (2011) classified them into two major groups: the inner factors and the external factors, the former including the motive of translating and the bilingual proficiency and personality of the translator, while the latter referring to the cultural background and the time background. Meanwhile, aesthetic concept was added to what have been mentioned above by Sun (2022) and Wang (2022). However, few scholars have touched upon the gender of translator and analyzed its impacts.

2. General Introduction of the Translator of the Two Chinese Versions of Jane Eyre

It is estimated that there are all together 20 Chinese versions of Jane Eyre. To exclude other factors' influence on translator's subjectivity as much as possible, the author chooses to compare the translations of the female translator Zhu Qingying (1980) and the male translator Wu Junxie (1990) in that they share many similarities.

Zhu was born in 1930 in Jiangsu province. After graduating from the Department of Foreign Language of St John's University in Shanghai, Zhu began to work as an editor successively at several publishing houses. Proficient in English and Spanish, she devoted her life to translating foreign literature. In spite of her deteriorating eyesight, she revised others translations in the day and was absorbed in translating foreign literary classics. Apart from Jane Eyre, she has translated several other famous works, such as *The Mill on the Floss* by George Eliot, *Dombey and Son* by Charles Dickens and *Life of Charlotte Bronte* by Mrs. Gaskell. In 1980 and 1982, she was awarded Shanghai Model Worker. She was a member of the council of Shanghai Writer's Association and Shanghai Translator's Association.

Wu was born in 1928 in Zhejiang Province. He majored in English language in Zhejiang University and was an editor as well. In 1982, he joined Chinese Writer's Association and won the title "Senior Translator" in 2004. He has translated Hemingway's famous novel *The Old Man and the Sea* and *The Winter of Our Discontent* by John Steinbeck.

It can be seen that Zhu Qingying and Wu Junxie have much in common. Firstly, they are of similar age and their hometowns are along the eastern coast of China, indicating that they grew up with the same mainstream social ideology under the same cultural background. Secondly, they both are English majors and have translated a number of literary works, indicating that both of them boast bilingual proficiency. Thirdly, they share the same work experience as an editor. Therefore, it is enlightening and worthwhile to compare Zhu's and Wu's translation of *Jane Eyre* to figure out the influence of translator's gender identity on translator's subjectivity.

3. Translator's Subjectivity Manifested in Translator's Preface

"Preface and footnote" is one of the most important translation strategies that Feminist translators employ to highlight their gender identity (Chen, 2008:85), thus it is safe to say that translator's preface is the best place to explore translator's subjectivity. Both Zhu's and Wu's preface cover father's influence on Charlotte, Charlotte's writing purpose, as well as the main plot of *Jane Eyre* and comments on the novel. By comparing translator's preface, a full picture of how well the translator comprehends the author's writing purpose will be formed.

3.1. Different Comprehension on Charlotte's Writing Motivation

In Zhu's introduction, there are mainly two reasons for Charlotte to write. Firstly, in December, 1836, she sent some of her poems to a famous poet with great passion and hope but was only told that she had no talent and that female writers had no status in Britain. It is obvious that she does not agree that literature is the male's business. Secondly, life was tough for the Bronte sisters. Charlotte had been a governess twice but both ended up in discrimination and humiliation. She set up a school with her sisters but no one signed up. What's worse, her younger brother lost his job and became addicted to alcohol, which added a lot to her burden. Driven by all these, she thought writing might be a way out.

Wu writes that there are various reasons leading Charlotte to the literary cause, but the most motivated is her studying experience in Brussels. Together with her sister, Charlotte entered a Catholic school which was designed for local nobility. Ironically, the Bronte sisters were Protestants. Poor and upright, they felt out of place. The sharp contrast between those rich young ladies and them evoked her desire to speak for herself and she chose writing.

From the above analysis, it is safe to say that Zhu can better understand Charlotte, because for a woman at that time, no disparity with other ladies can be more shocking and encouraging than the denial of equality by the opposite gender. Charlotte writes to speak not only for herself but also for women. That's exactly the reason why Charlotte wrote *Jane Eyre* in the first place and why *Jane Eyre* attracted so much attention.

3.2. Different Introduction on Jane Eyre

Zhu gives a detailed introduction on *Jane Eyre*'s main plot, which centers on Jane's spirit of resistance. It is chronically and spatially divided into four stages---at Jane's aunt's home, at Lowood, at Thornfield and at St John's. Jane's spirit of resistance made a debut when she was abused by her cousin and discriminated by her aunt. Lowood was anything but a good place for living. Suffering from hunger, abuse and oppression, Jane fought bravely against her fate to get herself out of the hell through hard learning. When she met her true love, Mr Rochester, a rich man with high social status, she demanded a relationship grounded on mutual respect and equality. Jane's spirit of resistance culminated in her decisive leave after knowing Mr Rochester was married and finding herself cheated. Although she admired St John's devotion to religion, she refused his proposal since he didn't make it out of love.

Wu sheds little light on the plot, and compares Jane to a "Cinderella". As Wu writes, *Jane Eyre* is about an orphan, who was discriminated and mistreated by her aunt and cousins when she was a little kid, growing up into a brave and strong young lady at a cruel charity school and about how she fell in love with her master, left him when cheated and finally came back to him and lived happily together ever since.

Charlotte aims at creating a heroine who is rebellious enough to challenge the male-dominated society and brave enough to pursue freedom and equality. It can be seen from the emphasis on Jane's spirit of resistance that Zhu catches the theme of *Jane Eyre*.

3.3. Different Comments on Jane Eyre

Zhu's comment centers on the theme of *Jane Eyre*. Although Jane just fights only for herself to earn an equal social status; it is unwise to blame Jane or Charlotte for failing to think about the liberation of women. Living in the remote countryside does not mean that Charlotte knows nothing about the British society. However, she has no ability to realize gender equality and female liberation. All that she can do is to set a happy ending for Jane. Zhu can understand the arrangement of Jane's fate, but thinks the happy ending is gilding the lily in that Jane enters into the noble bourgeoisie and makes compromise with the oppressive society. As a result, the novel's realistic significance is terribly weakened.

Wu makes comments on the artistic expression, writing features and realistic significance. He fully appreciates its charm in artistic expression and writing features, but points out that Charlotte lacks profound and reasonable understanding of the society in spite of her passion for exploring life.

Although both Zhu and Wu agree that *Jane Eyre* needs to be improved in terms of realistic significance, Zhu can understand the reason behind. She explains it to the readers and holds that no harsh and unreasonable demand should be placed on Charlotte. It is believed that,

with the tolerance towards Charlotte and Jane Eyre, Zhu is able to transmit the Charlotte's writing purpose in a more accurate way.

3.4. Different Comprehension of Father's Influence on Charlotte

According to Zhu, Charlotte's father is a poor Anglican priest in Haworth in Yorkshire in the Northern Britain. Graduated from St John's College, Cambridge, he boasts profound and immense learning. He enjoys teaching his children, and often tells stories and helps them read books, magazines and newspapers, which has definitely exerted great influence on them. Zhu sets up a positive image for Charlotte's father who fails to provide his children with a cozy life but pays great attention to enrich their inner world.

Wu also mentions that Patrick Bronte, Charlotte's father, is a priest and graduated from Cambridge. In Wu's eyes, Patrick is a gloomy and self-centered father. He sometimes helps his children with their studies and at the same time pours out his Tory's creeds into their minds.

Compared with men, women tend to be more attached to and dependent on their fathers both materially and mentally, especially when father is the only parent. Thus Zhu, as a female translator, is easier to echo with Charlotte's feelings towards her father.

Conclusion

By comparing the translator's prefaces, a conclusion can be safely drawn that Zhu comprehends the author's writing purposes in a more accurate way. As a female, Zhu can understand Charlotte's life experience and feelings much better than Wu. From the point view of female, they are destined to share similar understandings and cognitions toward issues concerning kinship and women's status, which enables Zhu to get closer to the original purpose. A good translation first and foremost depends on how well the translator comprehends the author's writing purpose and the theme of the original. Without accurate understanding, translation will lose its soul. From the above analysis and comparison, we can see that translator's gender identity can affect a translator's comprehension of the author's writing purpose and the theme of the original.

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