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Research on the Re-translation Effect of Lin Yutang's *A Nun of Taishan* from a Perspective of Translation Ethics

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Abstract: Re-translation is a common phenomenon in translation activities, referring to the act of re-translating works that have already been translated. It is a necessary means for literary works to prolong their lifespan, reflecting different translators' or the same translator's translation purposes and understandings at different periods. *The Travels of Lao Can*, a famous condemnation novel written by the late Qing Dynasty author Liu E, has been translated into a highly accepted version by Lin Yutang for Western readers. This paper analyzes Lin Yutang's abridged translations of *The Travels of Lao Can* titled *A Nun of Taishan* in both 1936 and 1951, employing exemplification and textual comparison analysis. The main focus of this paper is to explore Lin Yutang's alterations in the re-translation process, as well as the effects and changes in translation purposes manifested in the re-translation.

Keywords: re-translation, *A Nun of Taishan,* translation ethics, Lin Yutang

Introduction

The Travels of Lao Can is one of the four major condemnation novels of the late Qing Dynasty, alongside works like "A Realistic View of Officialdom," and is also one of the most renowned modern Chinese novels in the Western world. It was authored by Liu E, who hailed from Jiangsu Province. Throughout his life, Liu E traveled extensively and devoted himself to various industrial ventures, gaining a deep understanding of the corruption prevalent in late Qing society and officialdom.

In *The Travels of Lao Can*, Liu E intertwines his observations with the narrative thread of the travels of a wandering physician named Lao Can, delving into the sharp social contradictions of the time. Through the protagonist Lao Can's travels, readers gain a clear glimpse into the social life of Shandong Province during the late Qing Dynasty.[1]

In translation studies, re-translation is commonly understood as the act of translating a previously translated work into the same target language again. The occurrence of re-translation can be linear, or it can involve simultaneous re-translations by different translators. There are various motivations for re-translation, such as updating outdated language and terminology, further enhancing the quality of the translation, or the original author making revisions or publishing a new edition of the work. What's more, re-translation is generally regarded as a process of refining old translations and supplementing them with new information or interpretations through new translations. This practice is particularly common in the translation of literary works, where different translators or the same translator may re-translate to improve the quality of the translation.[2]

1. Introduction to the translator and English translation

The book *The Travels of Lao Can* consists of twenty chapters in its main volume, followed by an additional six chapters in its sequel, and one volume of supplementary drafts. The earliest English translation of the novel appeared in 1929 when the British sinologist Arthur Waley translated the third chapter. The first complete English translation was published in 1952 by the British translator Harold Shadick at Cornell University and later included in the "Great Chinese Library," becoming the most widely known English translation domestically. Additionally, there are collaborative translations by Howard Goldblatt with Sylvia Li-chun Lin, and Yang Xianyi with Gladys Yang among others.

Among the numerous translators, Lin Yutang was one of the earliest translators to pay attention to the translation of "The Travels of Lao Can" and held it in high regard. In 1935, Lin Yutang published a translation of the renowned passage "Listening to Storytelling at Daming Lake" from the novel in the "Chinese Review Weekly," and the following year, Shanghai Commercial Press published "The Second Season of English Translations of *The Travels of Lao Can* and Other Selections" which translated the additional six chapters of the sequel under the English title *A Nun of Taishan*. Subsequently, Lin Yutang re-translated this abridged version, which was published in 1951 by Longmans Green Publisher under the collection "Widow, Nun, and Courtesan: Three Novelettes from the Chinese."

The following research on the re-translation of *The Travels of Lao Can* primarily focuses on comparing the abridged versions published by Lin Yutang in 1936 and 1951.

2. Translation ethics theory and re-translation

Ethics pertains to the methods of dealing with various relationships between individuals and society. In the context of translation activities, there exist complex social relationships among the original author, translator, readers, and publishers, and the translation process itself is undoubtedly subject to specific ethical constraints. Since the 1990s, translation ethics theory has been a focal point in translation studies. It was initially proposed by the French translator Antoine Berman, who advocated for the preservation of the source language's characteristics, respect for the source culture, facilitating reader understanding of the original text, and engaging in an equitable dialogue with the source text. Venuti later supplemented this theory by emphasizing that translation ethics are constantly evolving, and translators should not only focus on fluency and readability but also employ foreignization strategies to maintain fidelity to the source text.

Chesterman, in his "Proposal for a Hieronymic Oath," summarized five major translation ethics models: Representation, Service, Communication, Norm-based, and Commitment. Chesterman's model is widely accepted in the field of translation studies as it draws from past and present translation theories, providing a comprehensive framework.[5]

3. Text analysis

In the following analysis, the translation ethics model is employed to analyze Lin Yutang's translations from three angles: the translation of culturally loaded words, the addition and omission of content in re-translations, and the updating and correction of texts in re-translations. Specifically, the translations from 1936 and 1951 are compared to explore the changes in Lin Yutang's translation strategies during re-translation, the purposes of re-translation selection, and the effects of re-translation.

3.1 Translation of culturally loaded words

Vocabulary is the most dynamic and frequently changing part of language, reflecting changes in social life and thought. The meanings of vocabulary are both extensional and connotative, encompassing culturally loaded words with rich cultural connotations.

Example 1:

Source text: Because Dehuisheng's wife wants to go to Mount Tai to Shaoxiang, explain stop car one day, so evening all things self-aware quiet. (Back Translation)[1].

1936 version: As Mrs. Teh wanted to go up the Taishan to "burn the incense," they told the driver that they would stop over there the following day.[3]

1951version: As Mrs. Teh wanted to go up the Taishan to pray the temple , they told the driver that they would stop

over for the following day.[4]

In this example, the culturally loaded word is “Shaoxiang”, which refers to a common Buddhist ritual in East Asian cultures where ordinary worshippers burn incense to show respect to deities. The term “Shaoxiang” carries unique cultural and religious connotations from ancient China. While rituals involving the burning of incense also occur in Western religions like Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, they are typically led by clergy, and ordinary believers do not engage in the act of burning incense themselves.

In the 1936 translation, the translator employed a foreignization strategy, translating “Shaoxiang” directly as “burn the incense” without any modifications, thus retaining the Chinese culturally loaded term in the translated text. However, in the 1951 re-translation, the translator adopted a domestication strategy, rendering it as “pray the temple” through functional equivalence. This shift from foreignization to domestication in the re-translation process makes the meaning of the original text more accessible to the target readers. However, it also leads to a partial loss of the cultural connotations behind the term.

From an ethical standpoint, in the process of re-translation, Lin Yutang was influenced by both service ethics and communication ethics. By employing a domestication strategy, he made the text easier for target readers to understand, thus potentially increasing the dissemination of the translated work and promoting cultural exchange.

Example 2:

Source text: De lady said: "Since it is a Guzimiao, we just here rest rest (Back Translation)[1]

1936 version: “Let’s stop here since it is a nunnery,” said Mrs.Teh.[3]

1951version: “Let us stop here since it is a convent,” said Mrs.Teh.[4]

In this example, “Guzimiao” is a culturally loaded term unique to China. Also known as a “Niguan” , it refers to a place where female believers practice Buddhism. According to Buddhist doctrine, believers must leave secular life and take up monasticism for spiritual cultivation, and the “Guzimiao” serves as the venue for female practitioners.

In the 1936 translation, Lin Yutang rendered it as “nunnery,” while in the 1951 re-translation, he opted for “convent.” Both terms can be used in English to refer to a place where women practice religious life, but they differ in connotation and usage. In English, “nunnery” typically describes an abandoned or desolate place rather than a temple or monastery for nuns. Additionally, in some modern English literary works, such as Shakespeare's “Hamlet,” “nunnery” is used as a euphemism for a brothel. In terms of frequency of use and usage habits, “convent” is a more natural and commonly used term to represent a convent for women religious.

From an ethical perspective, norm-based ethics and service ethics constrain and influence the translator's behavior in the re-translation process. Changing “nunnery” to “convent” aligns more closely with the language norms of the target readers and makes the translated text easier for them to understand, thereby reducing their cognitive burden.

3.2 Amplification and omission in translation

Amplification and omission are commonly employed translation techniques in the translation process. Each language possesses unique perspectives on the world, each imbued with its distinctive linguistic nuances. Despite the similarities between languages, there are always aspects that resist direct translation, making expansion and omission indispensable components of the translation process.

Example 3:

Source text: At that time two women, one old maid, sat three mountain sedan chairs ahead go. (Back Translation)[1]

1936 version: The two ladies and an old amah occupied three chairs in front.[3]

1951 version: Mrs. Teh and Huants’ui, a girl who had recently been rescued from a brothel by Laots’an, and an old amah occupied three chairs in front.[4]

In the 1936 translation, the translator faithfully reproduced the information from the original text without any additions or omissions. However, in the 1951 translation, the translator employed the technique of amplification to provide detailed clarification on the identities of the two female relatives mentioned in the original text, and elaborated extensively

on one of the female relatives, Huan Cui. The 1936 translation by Lin Yutang was published by the Shanghai Commercial Press and primarily targeted domestic readers or foreigners visiting China. Since *The travels of Lao Can* was already highly renowned in China at that time, the translator did not need to introduce characters from previous chapters. On the other hand, the 1951 translation, published by the American Random House, was aimed exclusively at Western readers, necessitating clear references to characters from the previous volume and detailed introductions of important characters.

From an ethical perspective, the translator's use of amplification in the re-translation was influenced by service ethics. Due to changes in the publishing house, sponsors, and target audience, the translator's translation decisions were affected during the re-translation process. To provide better translation services to Western readers, Lin Yutang made reasonable adjustments and interpretations to the original text through amplification.

Example 4:

Source text: The old nun turned around and said to the Lady De: Please South Yard sit. Then called a forty-plus-year-old nun to lead the way in front, everyone let Lady De and Huan Cui go first, De Hui followed, Lao Can at the end. (Back Translation)[1]

1936 version: The old un then turned to Mrs. Teh and said, "Please come to the southern room," She then bade the other nun to lead the way, and they all asked Mrs. Teh and Huants'ui to go in front, while Mr. Teh followed the next, with Laots'an bringing up the rear.[3]

1951version: "Please come over to the southern room," said one of them.[4]

The original passage describes the scene where Lao Can and his companions are received upon their arrival at the nunnery. The order of speech and the sequence of departure subtly imply the relationships and statuses of the characters, reflecting a unique tradition and etiquette in Chinese culture. In the 1936 translation published by the Shanghai Commercial Press, the translator faithfully reproduced the elaborate etiquette depicted in the original text. However, in the 1951 translation published in the United States, the translator made extensive deletions, retaining only the core information and omitting all parts related to ceremonial culture. This was likely due to the different cultural background of American readers, who may not understand such etiquette. The translator, therefore, opted to omit these parts entirely to enhance the readability of the translation.

From an ethical standpoint, the translator's extensive omission violates the principle of representation ethics, as the omitted parts undoubtedly result in the loss of cultural connotations present in the original text. The translator in the re-translation process was more influenced by service ethics, prioritizing the readability and fluency of the translation for the target readers and aiming to reduce their cognitive burden.

3.3 Updating and revision

During the process of re-translation, translators may make updates and revisions to the old translation for various reasons. This could be due to significant gaps in time leading to changes in the language norms of the target language. Alternatively, it may be necessary for the new translation to cater to readers from different cultural backgrounds, thus requiring adjustments. Additionally, differences in the translator's knowledge and translation style may also contribute to the need for updates and revisions.

Example 5:

Source text: Walk into the "Ketang", place yet extremely clean. (Back Translation)[1]

1936 version: So they entered the parlour which was very neat and tidy.[3]

1951version: They entered a very well-furnished parlor.[4]

In the original text, "Ketang" was translated into "parlour" in the 1936 translation and "parlor" in the 1951 translation, with both spellings referring to the same word. However, "parlour" represents the traditional British spelling, which was gradually decreasing in usage in Britain at the time. Conversely, "parlor" was more commonly used, particularly in the United States, by the time of the publication of the 1951 translation, making it a more acceptable choice. This update reflects the translator's consideration of evolving language norms.

Ethically, in this instance of re-translation, the translator is primarily bound by service ethics and norm-based ethics. Updating the language to conform to the linguistic norms of the target audience enhances readability and aligns with norm-based ethics, ensuring that the translation is more accessible and fluid for the readers.

Example 6:

Source text: Absolutely cannot like Tianjin people's words, three words two phrases become couple, after all must avoid taboo a bit. (Back Translation)[1]

1936 version: Certainly we cannot allow ourselves to “live intimately with a man after three words of conversation”, as the saying goes in Tientsin.[3]

1951 version: Certainly we cannot allow ourselves to hop into bed with a man after three words of greetings as the saying goes in Tientsin.[4]

In the original text, the phrase “three words two phrases become couple” is uttered by a nun in the temple when discussing how to refuse the requests of overnight guests for intimate relations. The two translations differ in their rendition of the term “become couple”. In the 1936 translation, it is rendered as “live intimately,” a term that, while carrying connotations of intimacy, is primarily used in a formal sense, with less explicit sexual implications. Conversely, in the 1951 translation, the term is translated as “hop into bed,” a more colloquial and direct expression with overt sexual implications, particularly suitable for describing the promiscuous behavior of the temple’s guests in the text. Moreover, this expression is a common idiom in American English, making it more readily acceptable to American readers.

From an ethical standpoint, the translators in this re-translation adhered to both the ethics of representation and service. By updating and revising the expression, they ensured a more accurate conveyance of the original meaning to the readers while also enhancing the readers’ reading experience by employing a more fluid and natural expression.

4. Conclusion

Through a comparative analysis of the 1936 and 1951 translations, notable discrepancies between the two versions emerge, with the latter exhibiting more substantial alterations. These modifications during re-translation can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, changes in external translation-related elements, such as shifts in publishing houses and sponsors, transitioning from the Shanghai Commercial Press to the American Longmans Green & Co., as well as alterations in the target audience from domestic Chinese readers to American readers. Secondly, the passage of time between the publication of the two translations allowed translators to develop new understandings and interpretations of the text, along with fresh ideas regarding language use in translation.

In terms of translation strategies, the 1936 version predominantly employed foreignization strategies, preserving more of the original text’s cultural nuances and maintaining closer fidelity to the source material. This approach is deemed commendable and suitable for translations intended for domestic publication and readership, facilitating the learning of foreign languages and the dissemination of Chinese culture. Conversely, the 1951 translation predominantly employed domestication strategies, sacrificing some of the original text’s cultural depth but enhancing readability for the target audience, thereby reducing comprehension difficulties and facilitating broader dissemination of the translation in Western countries.

From an ethical perspective, the initial translation process prioritized the ethics of representation, hence the prevalent use of foreignization strategies aimed at faithfully conveying the original content and cultural context to readers, fostering dialogue with the source text. Conversely, during the re-translation process, greater consideration was given to the principles of service and communication, catering more to the understanding of readers with diverse cultural backgrounds. Consequently, translators predominantly employed domestication strategies, making appropriate adjustments and deletions to the original text to enhance the reading experience and stimulate greater interest in the source material.

The hypothesis of re-translation posits that with each subsequent translation, the translated text progressively aligns more closely with the source text, with domestication decreasing and foreignization increasing over time.[5] However, contrary to this hypothesis, the analysis of the two translations in this study reveals the opposite trend. This suggests that

critiques of this theory by scholars may have some validity, underscoring the diverse and complex factors influencing translators' choice of translation strategies during the re-translation process.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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