

Wichmann's Translation of Peking Opera the Phoenix Returns to Its Nest from the Perspective of Chesterman's Translation Ethics

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Abstract: the Performance of English Peking Opera the Phoenix Returns to Its Nest in Hawaii of the United States Caused a Sensation. the Finding is That the Performance Success can't Be Achieved without the translator's Unconscious Conformance to the Ethics for Translating Proposed by Chesterman. It is Hoped to Shed Light on Future Drama Translation.

1. Introduction

1.1 Elizabeth Wichmann-Walczak and Translation of Peking Opera

Elizabeth Wichmann-Walczak, a professor at the University of Hawaii in the United States, was one member of the graduate students studying in China and majored in Chinese Peking Opera at Nanjing University. She was assigned to Jiangsu Provincial Peking Opera Theatre to learn from Shen Xiaomei, a famous female role of Mei Lanfang school. For her successful performance in the Mei school representative drama *The Drunken Concubine*, she won the reputation of "foreign concubine". In 1981, she completed her doctoral dissertation on Peking Opera, and obtained her doctoral degree. After returning home, Wichmann devoted herself to "rehearsing Chinese drama." In 1985, the first English Peking Opera *The Phoenix Returns to its Nest* translated and directed by Wichmann was put on in Hawaii, and caused tremendous response at home and abroad. Peking Opera had been performed abroad before, they were either in the form of drama, or in the form that the lyrics were pronounced rather than sung. Both are far from the connotation of the Chinese Peking Opera's "singing and playing" in which singing is given the priority. It is already a non-traditional Peking Opera. It was not until Wichmann's *The Phoenix Returns to its Nest* was staged that the "original" English Peking Opera performance was opened on the stage of the world.

1.2 Chesterman's Translation Ethics

Interaction between people must follow certain ethics. As an interpersonal activity, translation is also bound by social norms and satisfies the presupposition of the value system in a certain culture, that is, translator must follow the translation ethics.

Finnish scholar Andrew Chesterman sums up four translation ethics in *Translational Memes: The Spread of Translation Theory*^[1]: Ethics of Representation, Ethics of Service, Ethics of Communication and Norm-based Ethics. The four ethical priorities are different, emphasizing the behavioral norms that translator should follow when interaction takes place between the original text, the original author, the target reader, and the client. In the special issue of *The Translator* in 2001, in order to resolve the contradiction in positioning the translation subject, Chesterman added the Ethics of Commitment^[2]. Inspired by the Hippocratic Oath of the Greek medical industry, Chesterman presented the commitment ethics in the form of nine "Hieronymic Oaths". In fact, the ethics involved in each oath are covered in the previous four ethics. So discussion is still within Chesterman's four translation ethics frameworks.

2. Discussion of Wichmann's the Phoenix Returns to Its Nest Peking Opera Translation Activities from Perspective of Chesterman's Translation Ethics

Pavis believes that from the perspective of drama translation, we should integrate translation, director, and actors into the context of broader translation of dramatic texts^[3]. Since *The Phoenix Returns to its Nest* was staged in the United States, Wichmann acts as the roles of promoter, translator, director, actor, teacher and so on. Therefore, her translation is regarded as a generalized translation--not only including translation of the text (words sung or spoken), but also including the entire translation activities related to the English Peking Opera performance.

2.1 Ethics of Representation

Ethics of representation emphasizes the relationship between translator, the original author and the original text. The translator must "accurately reproduce the original text, reproduce the original author's intentions, and do not make any additions, deletions, or changes"^[2]. As far as drama translation is concerned, Corrigan believes that translator should try to keep the same number of words in the target language as in the original sentence^[4]. Bassnett even argues that effective performance texts should seek rhythm similar to the original text^[5]. Wichmann translated and reproduced *The Phoenix Returns to its Nest* from the perspective of stage performances. Peking Opera is a highly stylized stage performance art. Apart from the verbal things being changed into English, other elements such as the make-up costumes, stage props, vocal movements, etc. remain consistent with the original drama, so as to faithfully reproduce the original drama to the greatest extent. Wichmann has also made a lot of efforts in the microscopic script translation. Let's take the lyrics of the heroine Cheng Xue'e in the play as an example:

先前有人到书馆, (Someone went to the library before,)
你就该先对我父言. (You should first say to my father.)
奴家生来非下贱, (I was not born squatted,)
我岂肯私自进花园! (How unwilling I was to enter the garden privately!)
每日闺阁多腼腆, (Every day in my boudoir I am shy,)
如今受逼在人前; (Now forced to be in front of people;)
有心来把青丝剪, (intend to cut my black hair,)
焚香念佛也就安然. (Burning incense and chanting Buddha will be safe.)

Then Wichmann's Translation:

*When she came to call on you,
Father should have been told right away.
I am not an ill-bred girl;
Howe could I have gone to you that day?
I keep to my inner rooms;
But today you put me on display.
Now I want to become a nun,
Burn incense and pray, out of harm's way.*

As one of the main voice patterns of Peking Opera, Xipi Liushui has lively tunes, strong vocals and compact rhythm. In this case, Cheng Xue'e expressed her dissatisfaction with the pattern. Each Chinese sentence contains 7-8 words. The first, fourth, and eighth sentences are "an" rhymes; the second, third, fifth, sixth, and seventh sentences are "ian" rhymes. When Wichmann deals with this lyric, each English sentence contains 7-9 syllables, and the 2nd, 4th, 6th, and 8th sentences also use the "ei" rhyme, which conforms to the rhyming format of English. The translation not only corresponds to the original sentences in the number of words, but also keeps smooth and beautiful rhymes, achieving a similar effect in English as that in Chinese.

2.2 Ethics of Service

The ethics of service emphasizes the relationship between the translator and the client. "Only

when the translator translates according to the requirements of the client and achieves the translation purpose requested by the client... then is his translation considered to be ethical”^[2]. In a cultural-exchange-oriented Peking Opera performance, the client is the audience. As early as in 1930, Mr. Mei Lanfang brought his *Farewell My Concubine* to the US. But the performance was in English, the audience had difficulties appreciating, as a result the artistic effect was discounted. How can Peking Opera, which has profound Chinese traditional cultural connotations, be understood and accepted by foreign audiences? In China Wichmann performed Peking Opera in Chinese language. However, in Hawaii only a small number of audiences can understand Chinese language, and performing in Chinese language undoubtedly brings great obstacles to the audiences. Therefore, Wichmann decided to rehearse *The Phoenix Returns to its Nest* in English, which was the first step to follow the audience-centered philosophy in the macroscopic level.

This is especially true for microscopic text translations. For example, Daobai -- the spoken parts in Peking Opera, if translated literally, would produce a big problem of unrhymedness. Wichmann did the translation similar to the original text both in rhyme and in artistic conception, thus attracted the American audience’s resonance. Let’s look at the conversation between Mrs. Cheng and her son-in-law:

程夫人:贤婿!(Mrs. Cheng: Virtuous son-in-law!)

朱焕然:再”咸”我就吃不得啦。(Zhu Huanran: I will be inedible if I got more salty.)

程夫人:事到如今,有什么长策无有?(Mrs. Cheng: What is the long-term strategy?)

朱焕然:这会儿,甭说长策,我连个短策都没有啦.

(Zhu Huanran: At this moment, I have not even a short-term strategy.)

Wichmann’s Translation:

Madam: Esteemed Son-in-law!

Zhu: There’s steam around here to cook my goose!

Madam: Now that things have come to this pass, how are you planning to support my daughter? Have you an inspiration?

Zhu: An inspiration! No, just a lot of perspiration.

There are two highlights in Chinese version: one is “Xian(virtuous)” and “Xian(salty)” , two homonyms in Chinese language; the other is “long strategy” and “short policy”, antonymous words.

In the translation of the first round of dialogue, homonyms of “esteemed” and “steam” are used to produce sound effect similar to the original text; and “cook one’s goose” is an English proverb, meaning “destroyed the future”, close to the original “destroyed”. In the second round of dialogue, Wichmann uses the “inspiration” (idea) and “perspiration” (sweating) rhymes to convey the contrast between the “long strategy” and “short policy” in the original text, creating similar comic effect in English.

2.3 Ethics of Communication

Translation activities are essentially an intercultural communication activity. The ultimate goal of translation is to improve the relationship between the original language culture and the target language culture, and to promote exchanges and cooperation between the two sides^[6]. Chesterman believes that translation is not just recreating the original text, but more importantly, communicating with the target text^[2]. In translation, the translator acts as a coordinator and coordinates the relationship between the original text and the target text, the target text and the target readers, the original language culture and the target language culture, thus to achieve cross-cultural understanding.

Due to accumulation of historical and cultural heritage, Peking Opera contains rich dialects, allusions, and proverbs, which present big challenges in translation of Peking Opera. Wichmann flexibly employs translation strategies when translating such texts, helping foreign audiences to experience the charm of China’s “national quintessence”. In order for the audience to understand the comedy connotation of *The Phoenix Returns to its Nest*, Wichmann added notes to the text. For example, in the story, Mr. Hong Gong promises to preside over the marriage of Mr. Mu and Miss Cheng, saying, “此乃大喜之事,又是军中一段佳巧,有何不可(This is a big joy, and it’s a good

thing in the military. What not)?” Wichmann made an addition skillfully: “Such an important, joyous event -- like the return of the phoenix to its nest-- how could I not agree?” This echoes what Mr. Hong Gong says on Mr. Mu and Miss Cheng’s wedding night: “Today the phoenix returns to its nest, congratulations!” and Mr. Chengpu’s words “celebration of the return of the phoenix”. Correspondingly, the theme of the opera is clarified. One more example comes from Mrs. Cheng’s line: “井臼操持以教女 (well and mortar to manage to teach daughter)”. The two words “well and mortar” may produce confusion, for they come from the allusion of an ancient book, respectively meaning watering in the well and husking rice in the mortar, which jointly refer to housework. Chinese domestic audience may have difficulties in understanding, let alone westerners. In this case Wichmann adopted free translation: “I teach my girls how to run a proper home.” Likeness in spirit between two cultures is thus maintained.

2.4 Norm-Based Ethics

The norm-based ethics is proposed to the translator from perspective of the target language readers. This includes two aspects: expectation norms and professional norms. The translator’s behavior should follow the social norms of the target language culture to meet the expectations of the target language readers.

In terms of expectation norms, Wichmann’s decision to employ English to perform Peking Opera was seriously questioned: “Does English Peking Opera remain a Peking Opera?” Such a question could be answered from the perspective of norm-based ethics. To perform Peking Opera in English is undoubtedly an attempt and an innovation for the traditional Chinese Peking Opera. Its purpose is not to reform Peking Opera, but to try to perform in a new way that is more acceptable to foreign audiences. On the one hand, why are the domestic audiences still scrambling for Peking Opera even after they have watched the repertoires several times and the lines could be reversed? This is because they fully accept the artistic characteristics and aesthetic system of Peking Opera. Peking Opera makes lingering charm for them. On the other hand, Peking Opera is a brand new art form to the foreign audiences, so they have expectations: Firstly, the novelty brings them a completely different stage art form; Secondly, Peking Opera gives them an opportunity to closely contact with the prestigious “quintessence of Chinese country”; Thirdly, they feel the sense of satisfaction in understanding and appreciating the culture and aesthetics in Chinese Peking opera. If *The Phoenix Returns to its Nest* was not performed in English, could it satisfy the above three expectations of foreign audiences? Obviously not.

In terms of profession norms, translation is regarded as a profession, and practitioners must abide by the recognized professional ethics of the profession. Originally *The Phoenix Returns to its Nest* script was translated by Wichmann’s Chinese husband, Mr. Li Dan. Literal translation plus explanatory notes was adopted in his translation. Later, considering that the purpose of the performance was to arouse the audiences’ interest in Peking Opera, and there’s little cultural overlap between China and the United States, Wichmann finally decided to employ the strategy of free translation. As a combination of several identities, Wichmann invited experts from China to solve professional problems, to sponsor domestic funds to solve financial problems, to exert her utmost to students of the University of Hawaii to practise in Peking Opera, and to adjust and revise the English script in the rehearsal process . . . It is because of her many efforts that the performance, “the milestone in the history of Sino-US cultural exchanges”^[7] has the opportunity to be seen on the stage and to win the popularity in the United States.

3. Conclusion

Chesterman’s theory reveals translation ethics from different levels, breaking the traditional limitations of ethics just on “loyalty”, eliminating the neglect of the discussion of ethical issues after shift of cultural studies, and broadening and deepening understanding of translation ethics issues^[8]. For such reason, Chesterman’s translation ethics is regarded as the largest contribution to translation ethics research to date. The English Peking Opera *The Phoenix Returns to its Nest* was performed as early as in 1986, and Chesterman’s translation ethics was proposed in 1998. So it was not under the

guidance of Chesterman's translation ethics that Wichmann completed the translation. However, when employing Chesterman's translation ethics to explain Wichmann's translation behavior, we find that it is impossible to achieve the success of the performance without Wichmann's unconscious conformance to the ethics of reproducing the original drama, serving the audience, cultural exchanges and professional norms in the process of organizing the translation of the English Peking Opera *The Phoenix Returns to its Nest*.

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