

A Study on Translator's Subjectivity in the English Version of *The Razor's Edge* from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics

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Abstract: Reception aesthetics is different from other traditional translation theories. It holds that the process of literary translation is the process of accepting literary, which should not only respect the original work, but also pay attention to the translator's subjectivity. Meanwhile, reception aesthetics holds that it also should pay attention to the reader. From the perspective of reception aesthetics, the translator is a special reader. Therefore, reception aesthetics provides a new perspective to study the subjectivity of translator. The author, based on the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics, selecting *The razor's edge* translated by Zhou Xuliang, studies the exertion of the subjectivity of Zhou Xuliang, in order to provide some references for the study of translator's subjectivity and provide some references for readers when choosing a translation. It hopes more domestic readers can know Maugham's works, and promote the spread of good foreign works in China to promote cultural exchanges.

Keywords: Reception aesthetics; The translator's subjectivity; *The razor's edge*; Zhou Xuliang

1. Introduction

The *razor's edge* is a novel written by English writer William Somerset Maugham. The novel is about a young American pilot, Laurence Darrell, who fights in World War I. He makes friend with an Irish guy in the army, a pilot, who is vigorous and fearless of life and death. However, he was sacrificed in an encounter to save Larry. After that, Larry has changed a lot. He is confused about his life and he can't understand that why there is evil and misfortune in the world. The theme of this novel is to explore the meaning of the life. The *razor's edge* has been translated into many versions. Zhou Xuliang is a famous translator of English literature and many researchers pay attention to him. Therefore, the author selects this version to study. Different from the traditional perspective of studying the translators' subjectivity, this paper, from the perspective of the theory of reception aesthetics, studies the exertion of the subjectivity of translators by Zhou Xuliang, in order to provide some references for the study of translator's subjectivity.

2. Reception aesthetics and translator's subjectivity

2.1 Reception aesthetics

In the mid-1960s, "the Constance School" led by Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser put forward the theory of reception aesthetics. In the 1980s of the last century, the theory was introduced into China. There are two important concepts. Jauss defines the concept of "Horizon of expectation" as "the thinking orientation or preexisting structure formed by readers' literary reading experience when reading a work".^[2] Aesthetic distance refers to the distance between the reader's horizon of expectation and the original literary works.^[3] Fusion of horizons is a vital principle in reception aesthetic. Only when the fusion of the reader's horizon of expectation and the literary text is promoted, can the reader accept and understand the translation.^[5]

2.2 Translator's subjectivity

The translator's subjectivity refers to the subjective initiative that the translator shows in the translation activities to realize the translation purpose under the premise of respecting the translation object. Its basic characteristics are the conscious cultural consciousness, humanistic character and cultural aesthetic creativity of the translator.^[4]

2.3 Summary

Reception aesthetics holds that the process of literary translation is the process of accepting literary and the translator is a special reader. When the translator exerts the subjective initiative, he should completely understand the original work, based on the reader's horizon of expectation, filling in the meaning "blank" of the text. In addition, on the premise of respecting the aesthetic of the original text, the translator should create his aesthetic and use appropriate translation strategies to create excellent translations that meet the taste of readers.

3. Studies of translator's subjectivity as a special reader from the perspective of reception aesthetics

In the concept of Reception aesthetics, the role of reader is crucial. The translator, firstly as a special reader, translates the original work.

3.1 Text selection

Firstly, the translators' subjectivity is reflected in his choice of literary works. He can actively choose the works that meet his horizon of expectations. There are various factors affecting his choice. This paper chooses two factors to study, that is, individual preference and social background.

3.1.1 Individual preference

No matter for what reason the translator decides to translate a work, only he prefers to the work, he will try his best to translate well. Zhou Xuliang has been engaged in translation activities for nearly half a century. He has made important contributions to literary translation and scientific translation. Moreover, Zhou Xuliang has translated many English works. Maugham, as a famous British novelist, naturally attracted the attention of Zhou Xuliang. Besides, *The razor's edge* tells many people's stories related to Larry and embodies the meaning of life. It satisfies the translator's taste.

3.1.2 Social background

After the establishment of People's Republic of China, excellent foreign works need to be introduced to our country. To realize it, it is necessary that the translator should be the intermediary. On the social background of that time, China entered a new era of modernization. People are far from enough to know the western works. *The razor's edge* shows the cultural decline and spiritual crisis of the Western world after the war. *The razor's edge* fits the background of that time. There is no doubt that it resonates with the newly born Chinese people who have just experienced the war.

3.2 Text interpretation

As a special reader, the translator should understand the original text fully. In this process, the translator's subjectivity has a certain degree of play.

3.2.1 Horizon of expectation

On the one hand, the horizon of expectation of the readers can deepen the understanding of the original work. On the other hand, it can restrict their imagination. Only when the translator's horizon of expectation is close to that of the original author can he better understand the original text. Zhou Xuliang has extensive knowledge of English literature and culture. Meanwhile, he is a writer. Therefore, under the dual identity, Zhou Xuliang can try his best to present this work to readers perfectly.

3.2.2 Aesthetic distance

Zhou Xuliang has contributed to translation in many fields. He formed his translation theories and views. Furthermore, he once studied in the UK. His enrich experience and achievements in translation led to a broad aesthetic. Therefore, he can translate *The razor's edge* to suit the reader's aesthetic.

3.2.3 Fusion of horizons

The translator, as a special reader, he should understand the original text fully and try to fill in the meaning gaps in the text. When filling in the blank, the translator considers the reader's expectations and achieves the fusion of the translation and the reader's horizon. Zhou Xuliang was engaged in foreign language teaching, and taught English literature class. He had translated many literary works before he translated *The razor's edge*. *The razor's edge* is the translation he insisted on finishing after his illness. When translating *The razor's edge*, he can finish the fusion of his horizon and Maugham's work for his experience, knowledge and unique insight into translation.

4. Studies of translator's subjectivity as a creator from the perspective of reception aesthetics

When translating a work, the translator should use appropriate translation strategies to recreate the original work, and in this

process, the translator should fully exert to his subjective initiative.

4.1 The application of translator's subjectivity in language diction

There is a lot of polysemy in English vocabulary. In doing translation, the translator should not only consider the meaning of the word, but also consider the culture background. Here are some examples of the translator's subjectivity in language diction.

4.1.1 They were afraid he was a snob. And of course he was. He was a colossal snob. He was a snob without shame.^[1]

她们担心他是个势利鬼，当然他是个势利鬼，他是个大大的势利鬼，他势利得毫不顾旁人齿冷。^[6]

4.1.2 "He's nothing but a dirty little snob, and if there's one thing in the world I detest and despise it's snobbishness."^[1]

“他是一个卑鄙无耻的势利小人，世界上我最深恶痛绝的就是势利。”^[6]

In the original text, the word “snob” appears several times. The word “snob”, was used by Cambridge University students in 1796 to refer to “a small townsman” and eventually to the literary term “snob”. He's referring to Elliott Templeton in the first examples. Elliott was a vain, hospitable man. Zhou Xuliang translated “snob” as “势利鬼”, with a sense of teasing. This translation draws the reader closer. In the second example, “snob” describes a young man named Paul Barton. This saying is attributed to Elliott. In Elliott's mind, he helped the young man, but he didn't appreciate him and became more popular than Elliot. It must have been with disgust that he judged Paul Barton's snobbery. The translation of Zhou Xuliang as “势利小人” here reflects the mood of Elliot at that time, and readers can also deeply feel this emotion. These examples fully demonstrate that Zhou Xuliang exerts his subjective initiative fully when dealing with the translation of similar words and meets readers' expectations.

4.1.3 For my part, except in a few short stories I have never attempted to deal with any but my own countrymen, and if I have ventured to do otherwise in short stories it is because in them you can treat your characters more summarily.^[1]

至于我，几篇短篇小说除外，从没有打算写过本国以外的人；短篇小说里敢于写外国人的缘故，是因为短篇的人物只要一点粗枝大叶；^[6]

4.1.4 When he was asked why a particular piece had vanished he very plausibly explained that he hadn't thought it quite up to his mark and had exchanged it for one of much finer quality.^[1]

等到有人问他怎么某一件东西不见了，他就花言巧语地说，那个他觉得还不上品，因此拿去换了一件更好的。^[6]

Observing the above two examples, it is obviously find that Zhou Xuliang used four-character idioms. If the translator can use idioms reasonably, it will increase more intimacy with the reader. There are a large number of four-character idioms in the translation, which fully reflects the subjectivity of the translator. Here, only a few examples are selected for elaboration.

In the third example, “summarily” means generally. In this sentence, the author wants to express that the characters in the short story can be described in a general way. “粗枝大叶” means brief or generalized. Now it is often used to describe someone who does not work carefully and does not study the details of something. The translator used “粗枝大叶” here not only faithful to the original meaning, but also improve the reader's interest in reading. In the fourth example, the translator translates “plausibly explained” into “花言巧语”. “花言巧语” used to refer to a false and sweet speech used to deceive people. Elliot is a man of great face, and here he gives others a plausible explanation. The use of “花言巧语” vividly reflects the character of Elliot.

4.2 The application of translator's subjectivity to culture

When the translators translate a work, it is necessary for them to consider the factor of culture. Here are some examples.

4.2.1 "I wanted Louisa to sell the house in Chicago when he passed over," Elliott went on, "but she had a sentiment about it."^[1]

艾略特继续讲下去，“他去世之后，我要路易莎把芝加哥的宅子卖掉，可是，她不忍心。”^[6]

4.2.1 I was worried at not having received an answer to my telegram. Not knowing Isabel's address at La Baule I had sent it to Paris and feared that the concierge had delayed to forward it.^[1]

我对发出的电报没有得到回音感到焦急；由于不知道伊莎贝儿在拉保尔的地址，电报是打到巴黎去的，生怕管家转电报时耽搁了时间。^[6]

In the above two examples, the translators chose words with historical culture. In the fifth example, the word of “house” has many meanings. According to England culture, “house” should be translated to “独栋别墅”. Zhou Xuliang translates it into “宅子”. In the sixth example, “concierge” means a person, especially in France, who takes care of a building containing flats. The translator translates it into “管家”. When dealing with these translations, the translator is well aware of the cultural differences. With the era background of the translator, he deals with these words as words with Chinese cultural significance, so as to make readers feel intimate.

4.2.2 "That's neither here nor there," said Elliott, somewhat irritably.^[1]

“这全是驴头不对马嘴，”艾略特说，人有点儿发毛，^[6]

4.2.3 Elliott could not make head or tail of it.^[1]

艾略特弄得丈二金刚摸不着头脑。^[6]

In these two sentences, the translator used the idiom. In the seventh example, Elliot doesn't understand Isabel's plan to date Larry

even after they broke off their engagement. Elliot couldn't figure out what they were thinking. “丈二和尚摸不着头脑” means to be confused about a situation. Therefore, the translation here fits the situation of this sentence very well. In the eighth example, Larry is a loafer and he doesn't look for a job, so people were talking to him. When someone mentioned that his father had left him in isolation, Elliot said that he went too far and that it had nothing to do with Larry not working now. “驴头不对马嘴” means that the answer is not the right question or that something does not match. The translation here conforms to the situation of speaking at this time. Zhou Xuliang, as a special reader, fully substituted himself into the scene. He used idioms with Chinese cultural characteristics to increase the readability and artistry of the text.

4.2.4 He would be delighted when he had got for me something I fancied for half the asking price. It was a treat to watch him bargain.^[1]

他顶得意的事就是替我弄到一件我看中的东西，价钱只抵要价的一半，看他讲价真是好耍子。^[6]

4.2.5 “Then what do you want to do?” He gave me his radiant, fascinating smile. “Loaf,” he said.^[1]

“那么，你要做什么呢？”他向我来了一下他那明媚迷人的微笑。“晃膀子，”他说。^[6]

In these two examples, the translator added dialect features to the translation. “Treat” means something very pleasant. Maugham and Elliot entered the antique shop. Elliot was a good bargain maker. It was fun for Maugham to watch Elliot bargain. “好耍子” means something interesting. The translation here corresponds to the meaning expressed by the words. “Loaf” means to spend your time not doing anything. “晃膀子” is a southern dialect. The translation here is very vivid. Instead of “闲逛”，the translator uses a distinctive dialect that fits Larry's character and inspires readers' interest.

In short, the translator fully exerts his subjectivity in translation. He adopts words with different cultural characteristics. These words make the translation readable and artistic.

5. Conclusion

Reception aesthetics believes that a good work needs the joint efforts of translators and readers. The translator's subjectivity also directly affects the quality of the work. This paper studies Zhou Xuliang's subjectivity from the perspective of reception aesthetics. It finds that when Zhou Xuliang translated *The Razor's edge*, he considered the language expression and cultural background completely. He used a vivid way to handle different languages and cultures. He fully exerts his subjective initiative and created an excellent translation that meets readers' expectations.

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