

On the Translated Version of Stray Birds by Feng Tang from the Perspective of Translation Aesthetics

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Abstract: After the publication the translated version of *Stray Birds* by FENG Tang, the public opinion was in an uproar and the academic community was divided in its evaluation. Feng Tang's version of *Stray Birds* integrates his own understanding and remodeling, which is unique in style. It is necessary to reinterpret the translation from the perspective of reception aesthetics, not only to make people realize that the translator plays a key role in the dissemination of foreign literary works, but also to enrich the connotation of translation research and translation practice. The poetic elements of *Stray Birds* are analyzed from the perspective of translation aesthetics. It is timely and necessary to analyze Feng's translation strategies from three aspects of style, diction and culture and to make an aesthetic examination of Feng's translation.

Keywords: Translation Aesthetics, FENG Tang, *Stray Birds*

1. Introduction

The well-known writer and poet Feng Tang published a translation of Tagore's *Stray Birds*, which got mixed reviews. The writer Li Yinhe once praised "Feng's version is by far the best Chinese translation of *Stray Birds*. Feng's translation is poetry, while Zheng Zhenduo's translation is lacking poetic quality (Li, 2015)." Some people claim that Feng's version is absurd and vulgar, which is a terrorist attack in the history of translation field. As opinions vary, no unanimous conclusion can be drawn. Feng's translation of *Stray Birds* is characteristic of a very personal style. From the perspective of translation aesthetics, this paper analyzes the strategies adopted in Feng's translation from three aspects of the style, diction and culture.

2. Theory and Process of Aesthetic Representation in Translation

Poetry is a special kind of literary genre. Some people think that the main theme of poetry is often shaped in the absence of a trace, which is difficult to capture. Poetry translation has its own principle. It is a complete reproduction of poetry itself from form to content. Translator must convey the abstract poetic meaning, and be faithful to the specific form and metrics. Problems in poetry translation are more focused on "spirit" than "form", for it can be intuitively seen whether the "form" of the translation and that of the original text are unified; while the "spirit" is more important and difficult to translate. In the translation of Chinese poetry, Mr. Xu Yuanchong put forward the "Three Beauty" principle, including the beauty of sense, sound and form, in which the beauty of sense is the most principal (Xu, 1979: 61)."

Mr. Liu Miqing proposed, in his book *An Introduction to Translation and Aesthetics*, that literary translation is regarded as a process of decomposing source text and literary aesthetic activity, which involves four steps: comprehension, transformation, improvement and representation (Liu, 2012: 250). Comprehension refers to the formal beauty in phonetic, lexical and semantic level and informal beauty such as image, style, literacy skills and the social and cultural context of the literary works. Transformation refers to the internal form of the literary works, that is, the beauty of image. Improvement is a process that a translator refines the beauty of underlying connotation and the aesthetic feeling during comprehension and transformation.

3. Analysis on Feng's Version from the Perspective of Translation

3.1 Aesthetics Representation at Phonological Level

The poems in the *Stray Birds* are written in a prose style, which is basically not rhyming. As a founder of the Chinese minimalism poetry, Feng Tang seeks rhymes for translating poetry. He believes that "Poetry must rhyme. If a first-rate poetry does not rhyme, it is not as good as a rhymed second-rate poetry. Rhyme is a poet's most powerful weapon (Feng, 2015: 335)." Therefore, Feng "racks his brain finding the best rhyme in the translation (Feng, 2015: 335)."

Example 1:

Dear friend, I feel the silence of your great thoughts of many a deepening eventide on this beach when I listen to these waves. (Tagore, 1916: 37)

In Feng's translation of example 1 (Feng, 2015: 125), it illustrates that poetry without rhythm is like lacking the finishing touch. As an important aesthetic element in poetry, rhyme helps readers to expect, resonate and satisfy. The harmonious combination of "sound", "rhyme" and "tone" in the Chinese language is a significant element for realizing the beauty of sound and sense in poetry translation. Although Feng's obsession with rhyme is sometimes counterproductive, it is admitted that seeking to translate rhymes that were originally not rhymed in the source text is a brave attempt of aesthetic pursuit.

3.2 Aesthetics Representation at Lexical Level

Example 2:

O Beauty, find thyself in love, not in the flattery of thy mirror. (Tagore, 1916: 13)

Feng mentioned in his postscript that "a fine short poems are not excessive inductions of life, but are the jade in the mountains and the pearls in the sea (Feng, 2015: 340)." From the translation of this poem, we can fully understand the beauty brought from words of the minimalist. Comparing to Zheng's translation (Zheng, 1933:9), Feng, in his translation (Feng, 2015: 31), uses eight words to vividly reveal the "beauty", and deletes some of the images that are less important, leaving only the three key images of "beauty", "love", and "mirror". The reflection of the minimalist poetry that can be presented to the reader is not simple at all, which makes people immersive and thoughtful when reading. It shows Feng's attainment in an ancient poem-like translation, which is a good manifestation of aesthetics representation.

3.3 Beauty of Image

The basic unit of poetry itself is image. Image is the carrier for poets to express their thoughts and feelings. Readers can better appreciate a poem through the image of poetry.

Example 3:

"What language is thine, O sea?"

"The language of eternal question."

"What language is thy answer, O sky?"

"The language of eternal silence." (Tagore, 1916:9)

In the original, there are only two images: "sea" and "sky". Zheng's version reproduces the images from the literal translation perspective. In terms of the word choices, Feng's translation accords with the reading habit and association of target readers, just like a dialogue between lovers. The poet always uses imagery to place his inner feelings, and the readers also realize the abstract and ethereal emotions of the poet through these images. The image of the "sea" in Feng's translation (Feng, 2015:13) is often closely linked to the eternal and vast image of the sea as well as "love" in Chinese ancient poetry, which contains the profound meaning of love. The image of "sky" in Feng's version (Feng, 2015:13) represents the mastery and authority of destiny, which makes one feel deeply helpless. Feng's translation adapts "sea" and "sky" to add a sad poetic touch and affection. In poetry translation, the choice of imagery is particularly important. Expressing the meaning of the original poetry should also be consistent with the reading habits of the reader.

3.4 Beauty of Culture

In *Stray Birds*, Tagore expressed India's philosophical and religious thoughts with concise verses. For example,

In darkness the One appears as uniform; in the light the One appears as manifold. (Tagore, 1916: 29)

Darkness and light, uniform and manifold are the integral whole, which are the embodiment of the basic content of "Brahma" in Hindu religion, philosophy and social life. At first, "Brahma" refers to the God in Hindu religion. He was born in a chaos before the universe was created, he grew himself, and created all things in the universe. "Brahma" depicts the meaning of endless and inexhaustible in philosophy. With such a complex religious philosophic thinking, Tagore expressed it with just fifteen characters. The text did not have a gorgeous decoration, and the beauty was reflected in the natural and plain characters. Here are the two translations:

Compared with the 19 words of Zheng's version, it is clear that Feng's 16-character word is more brief and neat. Using minimal words to express poet's thoughts, Feng has done this very well. In his translation (Feng, 2015: 93), each sentence is in a four-character structure, which is symmetrical and coherent. The translation refers to "Tao" in the Taoist doctrine, which is the ontology of all things in the universe. According to Lao-Tzu, who is founder of philosophical Taoism, his principle "the world was born in all things, was born in no...the Three begets all things of the world" happens to hold the same view with the perspective of "Brahma" in the original poetry. Only when Feng deeply comprehended the implications of this poem could he have this fine piece of translation.

4. Conclusion

Mr. Liu Miqing proposed that the final level of aesthetic translation should be based on imitation as the main method. Translators should focus on the imitation of the literary beauty of image and connotation in the original text (Liu, 2012: 253). From an aesthetic point of view, Feng's translation in some aspects is indeed commendable. However, he also arbitrarily distort some verse's image and connotation with his own falsification, which is a violation of translation. As Liu Miqing mentioned, without the lofty sentiments, it is impossible to hold the emotions in the literary works and reproduce them in the translations (Liu, 2012: 253). Did the veteran translators who had previously translated *Stray Birds* are not match for Feng? Merely they are willing to swallow their prides and only do their own job well as a translator.

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