

A Study on Fang Zhong's Translation of Tao Yuan-Ming's Poems from the Perspective of Supermemes of Translation

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In the background of different language among different countries, a good translation becomes important when we communicate with foreigners and at the same time, some theories are concerned by the translators and learners of translation. This paper is to describe Fang Zhong's translation version of Tao Yuan-Ming's poems, the masterpieces favored by the public, using supermemes as follows: Source-target, the equivalence, untranslatability, Free-vs-literal, all-writing-is-translating, which are the inheritance and deepening of memes of translation, which naturally promotes cultural communication and mutual understanding among countries.

Keywords: supermemes, Fang Zhong's translation version, Tao Yuan-Ming's poems

Introduction

Since memes of translation was first introduced into China by He Ziran in 2003, a famous linguist and professor in China, it has successfully grabbed many translators' and translation learners' attention, who are professional or just amateurish. And after that, memes of translation began to be extensively applied in various fields like English teaching for instructors, translation work for translators, interdisciplinary studies for scholars, and so on. A psychologist called Blackmore believes that human language and even the development of our brain are the result of the drive of memes (Blackmore, Susan, 1999). Translation are survival machines for memes (Chesterman, 1997, p. 5). The concept of memes, which is in fact a kind of metaphor, owes to a study of interdisciplinary, and that is sociobiology, where it was introduced by Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene* in 1976 and he explains how he wanted a term which would be parallel to "gene" to describe the evolution of cultural phenomena, which (he argues) are subject to the same kinds of Darwinian laws of natural selection as genes proper: A meme is a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation (ibid, p. 5). And supermemes are the inheritance and deepening of memes, which are more detailed, precise and practical. Andrew Chesterman regarded supermemes as the important and core conceptual unit to replicate, spread and develop ideas of the theory of translation, just like Gene's function of heredity and propagation, except its harmful properties, and like a morpheme is the smallest meaningful unit in one language. Inspired by homespun philosophy and influenced by the philosophy of Karl Popper and then based on Popper's concepts and schema which he uses to describe the process of scientific studies and methodology, and in fact to describe the acquisition of all rational knowledge,

Andrew Chesterman gives a descriptive study of supermemes, translation norms like expectancy norms, strategies like translation strategies, and assessments including retrospective assessment and prospective assessment, etc. Besides, it combines plenty of important translation theories and translation points of view by different philosophers, linguists, translators and so on as well as proper description and explanation of their essence across different historical period, thus establishing the systematic translation theory framework, substantial contents, and useful theories which is applied in a wide range of translation practice. *Memes of Translation: The Spread of Ideas in Translation Theory*, which is one of the series of books on Foreign Translation Studies, can solve the problem of the lack of original reference books for both translation learners and translation teaching, for professional translators and amateurs in domestic areas for many years, which is indeed a timely treasure which as guiding star for translation and theoretical research in China, when we lack the meta-study and metatheoretical paradigm when translation theories are the research focus in domestic fields in recent years (Lin, Wang, 2020). In addition, it is suitable for those who engage in related research work of translation theory and translators including professional ones and translation trainees.

Many western sinologists like Arthur Waley, James Robert Hightower and William Acker interpreted Tao's poetry from many aspects, making it gradually accepted by people in the English-speaking countries (Yan, 2020). Out of a sense of historical mission, social responsibility and national pride (Yan, 2020), the author of *Gleanings from Tao Yuan-Ming*, Fang Zhong devoted himself to the translation of Tao's poems, which is famous for its intensive research. In English, the word "poet" comes from a Greek word "maker", which means "creator", so a great poet is the creator of a great poetry (Fang, 1984, p. 5). Fang Zhong deeply felt that he had a strong responsibility to introduce the great poet Tao Yuan-Ming to the English-Speaking countries and not to allow his noble moral principle, unsullied personality, as well as optimistic, free and open-minded attitude to life to be ignored or even misinterpreted. Tao had successfully opened up a rich and colorful literary and art field for mankind, which can be our guide into the spiritual realm gradually and naturally when we are immersed in and enjoy his great masterpieces and then image his experience as well as surroundings as if in it.

A Brief Introduction of Tao Yuan-Ming's Poetry

After serving as a country magistrate, Tao Yuan-Ming abandoned his official position to live a reclusive life because of his unbearable placeman and he was not willing to give in to vile characters. Thus, he tilled by himself and led an idyllic life in the countryside for more than twenty years which was far from officialdom then, which gave him abundant inspiration to output quite a few great pastoral poems. His returning to nature is a meaningful practice of moral freedom personality, which is also a new reference material and also a new perspective recently in moral education for children, teenagers, adults and also the old in modern times, whose masterpieces including poems can be read, understood, and spread among people of all ages. It is true that Tao is one of the luminaries in the cultural history, whose poetry and prose are the most attractive masterpieces in ancient Chinese literature, which is favoured by the public for thousands of years. Tao has many poems like *Drinking Wine*, *early crop*, *Return to nature* and *Prose-poem like Ah, Homeward Bound I Go*, etc.

Tao Yuan-Ming had the ambition to help the world, but he lived in the period when the Eastern Jin Dynasty and the Liu and Song dynasties alternated. This was a time when the politic was unstable, the political situation was dim, the atmosphere was uncomfortable, the social relations were strained and complicated, the rules were

disordered and confused, and the national contradictions were intensified and exacerbated. So there was a great conflict between his ideals and the reality. So Tao wrote some poems to express how people suffered in the painful life caused by war at that time! After he regarded his official career as an arduous one, he longed for a plain and natural life, thus to live in deep rusticity, which provided him a great pleasure to compose poems of related theme types.

The philosophic flavor in Tao Yuan-Ming's poems was related to the emergence and prevailing of metaphysics in the Wei and Jin dynasties. But Tao told reasons in the form of poems, so his philosophy was different from metaphysical abstraction and after all, he is a poet but not a philosopher (Gong, 2015, p. 2). Among his works, the poem *the Flesh, the Shadow and the spirit* assumes dialogues among the three, which illustrate Tao's opinion about various questions like heaven and earth, life and death, weal and woe, etc (ibid, p. 2). The influence of metaphysics at that time made him pursue the self-cognition, self-identification and self-adaption of soul as well as integrity, honest and firmness of personality. The contradiction between officialdom and seclusion troubled Tao Yuan-Ming for nineteen years and finally, he chose to resign in his prime and retire from officialdom and never worked as an official again. During the period of his seclusion, Tao Yuan-Ming wrote some poems which reflect people's suffering and disaster brought by the war. What's more, his poems sang the praises of reclusive life and portrayed rural scenery. Tao's poems are natural and plain, not to be modified and mainly in the style of freehand brushwork, which is incompatible with the aesthetic fashion of the times then, so they were not valued in the contemporary period and in Liu Song Period and until to the Liang Dynasty, Tao Yuan-Ming and his poetry's value was first recognized (ibid, p. 3). There are some poems with artistic conception of Zhuangzi thoughts, so Tao Yuan-Ming is called "the ancestor of reclusive poets of ancient and modern times" (ibid, p. 3). Zhong Rong included Tao in *ShiPin*, which has a proper evaluation on the origin, style, language and position of Tao's poetry in the history of poetry. Tao Yuan-Ming experienced twists and turns, resigned from his office, and tilled by himself in Nanyang away from secular society. He enjoyed the beauty of the countryside and rural life, whose poems are simple and insipid, which reflect the poet's love for nature, peace, and happiness, perseverance and pursuit of freedom, whose famous quotation "Picking chrysanthemums under the eastern fence, leisurely I look up and see the Southern Mountains" spread through ages and is favoured by us.

Five Supermemes and Their Application in Tao's Poetry

Chesterman believes that there are five supermemes in translation. The first one is Source-target. It is the idea that translation is directional, going from somewhere to somewhere and the widespread acceptance of this supermeme has, in modern translation studies, given us the notions of Source Text (ST) and Target Text (TT) (Chesterman, 1997, p. 8). There should be an additive relation (Chesterman, 2000, pp. 1-17) between source language and target language, which is as follows: $A \rightarrow A+A'$ (ibid, pp. 1-17). That is to say, when the source language is translated into the target language, there will be a target language and a replica (Gao, 2016, p. 212). Generally speaking, when translation is finished, the target language expresses correspondent words, sentences, and meaning of the source language. However, there will be an additional A' , which should be the organization of sentences, implicit emotional conveyance and cultural transition. Next one is the equivalence supermeme, which is the big bugbear of translation, more argued about than any other single idea: a translation is, or must be, equivalent to the source, in some sense at least (Chesterman, 1997, p. 9). That is to say, when a word or a

sentence is translated into another language, there will be equivalent meaning in both versions. The third one is untranslatability and this supermeme is closely linked to the previous one: if translation is defined in terms of equivalence, and since equivalence is unattainable, translation must be impossible (ibid, p. 10). Another classical variant of this supreme is the traditional argument that poetry is untranslatable (ibid, p. 11). "Poetry by definition is untranslatable" claimed Jacobson (Jacobson, 1959, 1989, pp. 59-60). Untranslatability is a parasitic meme, which believes that the original text is untranslatable and will have a negative impact on the host like virus' invasion of the body, which is actually controversial. In fact the original text including poems is translatable. Here, Tao Yuan-Ming's poems have been translated into different language versions including English. Tao Yuan-Ming is the first person who regarded rurality as the important subject (Wang, 1980, pp. 3-4). Tao's lines of English translation version, the target text "Of all the interests in our earthly life, food and clothing should come foremost; if one toils not for such simple needs, however could he live in content or peace?" Accurately shows the source text's connotation and expresses Tao's view that life should be based on productive labor and self-supporting clothing and food. And if he loses his independent personality in order to get a salary for his food and clothing, he would rather abandon his official position and go back to the land and work for himself. This is the profound implication of these lines, which embodies a kind of philosophic flavor in Tao Yuan-Ming's poetry, influenced by the prevailing of metaphysics in the Wei and Jin dynasties. Thus, the original text is translatable and when the source Text is translated into the target text, there should be some emotional meaning contained.

Next one is about Free-vs-literal. Given that translation is nevertheless done, despite the impossibility of perfect equivalence, the term in which it has been discussed have long been dominated by a single supermeme: the binary opposition between free and literal translation (Wang, 1980, p. 12). And this supermeme believes that the smaller the translation unit, the more inclined it is to literal translation, and the larger the unit, the more inclined it is to free translation. One of Tao Yuan-Ming's poetry 《饮酒》 was translated into "Drinking Wine", using the translation strategy of literal translation, which is better than "Wine Poems" or "Written While Drunk" because the first one is more like a poem rather than emphasizing the drunk state of the poet. The poem of "Drinking Wine" reflects Tao's life attitude of being far from secularity and the pleasure of returning to nature (Wang, 1998, pp. 3-5). Understanding of poems' theme is the basis of translation, and then one can accurately choose the word or expression of translation version. His verses "When spring calls, I start work on farm, so I should expect my year's yield" seems plain, but provides us with a real and honest feeling of relief. Because the word "spring" is a small unit, it uses the strategy of literal translation. The whole sentence of the target text is larger so as to take the free translation strategy. And actually the form of the target text is a rewriting of the original one because their length and form is different in fact.

And the supermeme of all- writing-is-translating provides the ideas that translation can be regarded as a rewriting of the original text, which is also somewhat controversial in the translation community (Gao, 2016, p. 212). From "At sunrise I go to try my muscles, and return by sunset, shouldering the plough", we know that the work in the farm is actually a toil when Tao began to work at sunrise and retired at sunset. His verses "The mountain valley, thick with frosty dew, Here the cold air makes its earliest visit" tells readers that the weather in the mountains was cold and frosty and it is the time for frost's descent in mid-September. From the four sentences above, we see the spring sowing and also a good harvest, actually as well as a year of hard work. This is a kind of experience and feeling of common farmers. "See how the farms toil! Hardship their lot, to which they needs must

resign.” embodies Tao’s strong and firm will and duty-bound determination to till by himself though it is hard and difficult to sow and reap. From “Thus under the shed let me wash myself, before I take my night’s repose; and with a flask of wine, I shall refresh my heart and mien”, we recognize that the poet was actually happy for a free life and the fruits of labor when he enjoyed his wine, who was a scholar cultivated by traditional culture rather than a peasant. The words “sunrise”, “sunset”, “mountain”, “frost”, “toil” and etc. all use literal translation, because they are small units. And the whole sentences uses the strategy of free translation and when they are translated into the target language, there is a rewriting and a kind of additional emotion that readers can understand from lines.

With the change of times, translation supermemes and memes will appear in different forms and constantly reproduce and spread (Gao, 2016, p. 212). It’s true that various translation theories have been put forward by different translators related to diverse research fields and disciplines. And these five supermemes above have successfully withstood the tests of time in the survival of the fittest, thus influencing the development of translation theories and practice (Gao, 2016, p. 212).

Conclusion

Maybe Tao Yuan-Ming is regarded as a potential escapist who can only make up the life in seclusion by someone who consider themselves to be people living in the advanced world of the 21st century. However, Tao’s life is full of poetic quality and it is comfortable to see that his love for free life has appeared and reflected between the lines of his works, which show that he has realized the essence of life and realized the value of his life. He designed a harmonious world with no army and no officials, creating happy room for people who are suffering. He was full of wit and elegance, like the chrysanthemum pattern he loved. Throughout the long course of history, he left people with a supreme outlook on life and timeless classic poems not only in the domestic academic field, but also in worldwide scope. Thus the proper and accurate translation becomes really important. The present of memes of translation solve the problem of the lack of original reference books for translation in China for many years. Supermemes of translation is a theory about the inheritance, evolution and variation among cultures. The core concept of this theory is imitation, replica and propaganda. Translation is an activity of cultural transmission and communication, so translation theory follows the development path of memes. Chesterman emphasized that theories play strong roles of guiding practice and he pointed out that the conception of theories are the fundamental instruments of translation strategies (Zhang, Yang, 2007, pp. 57-60). From the new point of view of translation memes, Andrew described five kinds of translation supermemes and he built the system of a theory of translation memes. This provides us with a new tool to explore the internal law of the development of translation theory, which can not only establish translation studies and other disciplines, but also break down the barriers between different translation theories. The translation of Tao Yuan-Ming’s poetry conveys Tao’s poetic realm of life to the English-speaking countries, guides the target language readers to understand the essence of his life and seek spiritual conversion, promotes cultural communication and mutual understanding among countries, which is really a valuable contribution.

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