

Creative Treason in Shirly M. Black's Translation of Chapters from a Floating Life

ZHOU Xu, WANG Peng-fei

Southwest Jiaotong University, Chengdu, China

Fu Sheng Liu Ji is a collection of autobiographical essays written by Shen Fu and it occupies a rather important place in the notebook literature of the Qing Dynasty, which has also been widely translated and spread abroad. So far, there have been four English translation versions. Based on the theory of creative treason, this paper analyzed Black's English translation from the aspects of the choice of content and the restructure, culture and language. It has been found that, as a result of the translator's conscious or unconscious creative treason, translations may have the effect of engaging readers of the target language, transmitting the culture of the source language and facilitating literary exchange, but they may also have caused misinterpretation by readers and the loss of Chinese cultural imagery.

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I. *Fu Sheng Liu Ji* and Its English Translations

Known as "a brief *Hong Lou Meng*", *Fu Sheng Liu Ji* is an autobiographical work written by Shen Fu, a writer and litterateur of the Qing Dynasty. Much of ancient Chinese traditional culture is contained in this autobiography, such as the imperial examination system, the folk marriage and funeral, traditional filial piety, and so on. It has been described as "an important work in the history of Chinese literature and a milestone in the development of Chinese fiction" (Zhang, 2003, p. 218). The first four chapters of *Fu Sheng Liu Ji* are "Wedded Bliss", "the Little Pleasure of Life", "Sorrow", and "the Joys of Travel". Each chapter has its own focus. "Wedded Bliss" is about the love between Shen Fu and Chen Yun and the daily life of ordinary people in the Qing Dynasty, while "the Little Pleasure of Life" shows the hobbies and habits of the literati in the Qing Dynasty and the daily leisure of the literati. "Sorrow" depicts the sadness brought about by life's disappointments, indirectly reflecting the social environment of the time, and "the Joys of Travel" shows the scenic beauty and the pleasure of traveling around ancient China.

Four English translations of *Fu Sheng Liu Ji* can be found, which are as follows: Lin Yutang's 1935 translation of *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* published by Shanghai West Wind Press, English sinologist Shirley M. Black's 1960 translation of *Chapters from a Floating Life: Autobiography of a Chinese Artist* published by Oxford University Press. The Autobiography of a Chinese Artist, Leonard Pratt and Chiang

ZHOU Xu, M.A. Lecturer, Department of Country and Regional Studies, Southwest Jiaotong University, China.

WANG Peng-fei, Ph.D., Professor, Southwest Jiaotong University. Research areas: Comparative Literature, Chinese American Literature and Translation Studies.

Su-hui's 1983 translation *Six Records of a Floating Life* published by Penguin Press, and Graham Sanders' 2011 translation *Six Records of a Life Adrift* published by Hackett Publishing Company. Lin Yutang's Chinese-English version is very popular among Chinese and Western readers and has a profound influence, which put *Fu Sheng Liu Ji* on the world stage. The English version co-translated by American Sinologist Leonard Pratt and Chinese (Taiwan) writer Chiang Suhui, provides detailed side-text information. And Canadian Sinologist Graham Saunders' version contains more detailed sub-textual information, drawing on the manuscript by Lin Yutang (1942).

And Black, a British Sinologist, retells the original text in chronological order, abridging many chapters of the original work and rearranging the structure of the chapters. Black's translation shows obvious unique features in a number of ways, including the title of the book, original content selection, the language and the culture, and some scholars claim that Black's translation is "the only variant translation of *Fu Sheng Liu Ji*." (Cheng, 2013, p. 96)

Among the four English translations, Shirley M. Black's English translation was the first to be done independently by a foreign scholar. However, this translation has received less academic attention compared with other translations.

II. Theoretical Basis: Creative Treason

The term "creative treason" was first coined by the French literary sociologist Robert Escarpit.

Translation is always a kind of creative treason. He says that translation is a treason because it places the work in a completely unexpected frame of reference (in terms of language); it is creative because it gives the work a new face, a new literary exchange with more audiences, and because it not only prolongs the life of the work, but gives it a second life. (Yu, 1987, p. 122)

After this concept was put forward, Xie Tianzhen, a famous translation scholar and translation theorist in China, scientified and systematized creative treason, arguing that the most fundamental characteristic of creative treason in literary translation is that it introduces the original work into a reception environment that the author did not anticipate and changes the form originally given to the work by the original author (Xie, 1999, p. 134). This is followed by a detailed summary and classification of creative treason. He made a claim that translators' creative treason (CT) can be divided into two types: conscious CT and unconscious CT, which are manifested in the form of individualized translations, mistranslations and omissions, abridged translations and edited translations, as well as transcriptions and adaptations.

In the study of Medio-Translatology, the subjects of creative treason include the media, the translator, the receiver and the receiving environment. Among them, translators have the most direct and closely related relationship with creative treason in literary translation due to the different translation theories, views on the original works and translation ethos of their times. In addition, the difference between the receiver and the receiving environment can also affect the effectiveness of the translation. In a broad sense, the receiver in literary translation should include the translator and also the reader (Xie, 1999, p. 165). Since the translator is also a reader of the original work, and a recipient of its message, so the creative treason of the translator as a receiver and his creative treason as a mediator have merged into one. And the process of reading and understanding the translation with the reader's own knowledge and life experience is also a form of translation,

which is based on a re-morphing of the translation, thus enriching the creative treason in literary translation with the inclusion of the reader. The creative treason of the readers is mainly due to their subjective view of the world, their outlook on life, their values, their attitude to literature, and their personal experiences. On an objective level, the geographical and historical environment in which readers live also affects their habit of "translation".

III. Creative Treason in Chapters from a Floating Life

3.1 Creative Treason in the Choice of Content

The first four chapters in the original text of *Fu Sheng Liu Ji* are "Wedded Bliss", "the Little Pleasure of Life", "Sorrow", and "the Joys of Travel". Unlike the other three English versions, Black's translation removes almost all of chapter 4, from the original text, makes extensive cuts to chapter 2, and removes the couple's discussion about the genre of the ancient Chinese literature recorded in chapter 1. And in Black's translation, only the author's happy wedded life with his wife and the frustrations he encountered after his marriage are largely preserved, and the original text as translated is largely inseparable from the character of Yuen. The original work is a record of the author's life, especially chapter four, in which Shen Fu travels through the mountains and rivers, depicting the scenic beauty of the landscape and the curiosities and anecdotes, and when Black removes this part, the word autobiography in her title seems incomplete. Black's abridged translation, especially the minor cuts to the first chapter of the original, did improve the reader's acceptability, but the drastic cuts to chapter four combined with the two chapters already missing from the original resulted in a less complete translation that diminished the richness of the text and tended to mislead the reader into thinking that the original author's life experience was shallow.

3.2 Creative Treason in Restructure

Black does not use the narrative technique of the original text but arranges the events of the original text in chronological order. Black rearranged the events of the original text chronologically, rewriting the four chapters of the original work into two parts, divided into twelve chapters, using July 1794 as the point of time to recount Shen Fu's life from his childhood to July 1805. She adds to the account of the author's acquaintance with his wife as a child in the first chapter of the translation of the author's childlike life as it appears in the fourth chapter of the original. And then Black includes the couple's sweet early married life in the second chapter. In the third chapter of the translation, Black takes into account the fact that the birthday of the goddess and the festival of the Herd-boy and the Weaver-girl are on the same day, so she writes about the shopping event immediately after the birthday of the goddess, before translating the account of the Ghost Festival on July 15 in the original text which gives the reader a clearer sense of the joyous atmosphere of the birthday of the goddess and the festival of the Herd-boy and the Weaver-girl, and the eerie atmosphere of the Ghost Festival. The first four chapters of the first part of the translation are mainly about the harmonious wedded life between Shen Fu and Yuen, while the last three chapters are about Shen Fu's affair with prostitutes and concubines after his marriage. This division of chapters by Black clearly reflects the changes in Shen Fu's life after his marriage and creates a strong emotional contrast between the two. For the second part of the translation, Black has essentially integrated the text without reordering it. The remaining four chapters are respectively divided by Black according to her own understanding of the original text into the reasons for the downfall of Shen Fu and his

wife, the aggravation of their poverty, the pathos of losing their beloved wife, and the sadness of the years since the loss of their wife.

3.3 Creative Treason on Cultural Level

According to Medio-Translatology, three forms of cultural images have been presented including natural images, social images, and material images (Xie, 1999, p. 103). Social images account for the majority in *Fu Sheng Liu Ji*, such as literary images and social cultural images. Literary images are some references to the Chinese allusions, idioms, poems and tales, etc. Social cultural images involve social customs, food cultural, patriarchal clan ideas and religions, etc. In the thesis, the analysis on the allusions, poems, idioms and customs are carried out.

Example (1)

ST: 余戏题其签曰“**锦囊佳句**”。不知夭寿之机，此已伏矣。（卷一 三页）

TT: Taking the book of poems from her hand I playfully wrote on the label: '**Beautiful Lines in a Brocade Cover**'. I could not know, then, that hidden within those covers were the reasons for her early death. (Chapter 1, p. 7)

This allusion comes from Li He, a poet in the Tang Dynasty, who liked to put his written poems in a brocade bag and died young at the age of 27. And the author uses this allusion to inscribe the poem of Yuen, suggesting that Yuen would have a short life span, just like Li He. Black's individualized translation is evidently shown here, as she uses the translation method of foreignization to translate the allusion directly. According to the theory of creative treason, such foreignization, as a characteristic of the translator's individualized translation, subordinates the culture of the translated language to the culture of the original (Xie, 1999, p. 150), so the translation fails to convey the original author's intention of linking Yuen's death to the lines in brocade, and instead, it tends to create a reading barrier for readers who, lacking an understanding of Chinese allusions, will inevitably wonder how the label could have caused Yuen's early death.

Example (2)

ST: 佳人已属**沙叱利**矣（卷三 四八页）

TT: 'The beauty was now the property of a **Sha-chih-Li**' (like **Chang-T'aiLiu, wife of the poet Han Hung, who was captured by a barbarian Tartar chieftain during the troubled times in the eighth century**) (Chapter 10, p. 64)

In her translation, Black translated the allusion phonetically and then added context to the allusion by editing it. According to the theory of creative treason, the translator may use edited translation to reduce the reader's barriers to reading and thus add to the content of the original text (Xie, 1999, p. 156), which allowed readers of the target language to understand the meaning of the allusion directly, and naturally to read Sha-chih-Li as the rich mangler and thus understand the translation. Secondly, since the original text shows the beautiful woman—Han-Yuan, committing herself to the wealthy mob against her will for money, Black also adds a metaphor to materialize the beautiful character in the original text as property belonging to others, which fits better with the meaning of the original text and makes the image of the beautiful woman's faithless and heartless image more vivid.

Example (3)

ST: 余启堂弟妇，王虚舟先生孙女也。催妆时偶缺珠花，芸出其纳采所受者呈吾母。（卷一 一六页）

TT: My brother Ch'i-tang's wife, **dressing too hastily one morning**, accidentally broke her pearl hairpin, and Yuen brought out her own **pearl hair ornaments**, which had been her betrothal presents, asking my mother to give them to the young bride. (Chapter 4, p. 25)

“缺” here has two meanings, one for lack and the other for breaking. But the pearl hairpins are not easily broken by accident, and it is not likely that a learned sinologist would have mistranslated them. In line with the theory of creative treason, translators may deliberately fail to adopt the correct means of translation in order to appeal to the cultural mentality and receptive habits of their own readers, thus resulting in conscious mistranslation (Xie, 1999, p. 154). So, I think she was trying to deepen the reader's connection with the author, appealing to the reader's cultural mindset and causing an intentional mistranslation by choosing to translate it as “breaking”, which ties in closely with the bride's hand-wringing in the previous text and demonstrates the integrity of the plot in a very clever translation.

Example (4)

ST: “幸遇曹老，绝处逢生，亦可谓吉人天相矣。”（卷三 五七页）

TT: How fortunate though, that you happened to meet old Mr. Ts'ao. **When things have reached their very worst, it seems as if Heaven takes care of good people.**” (Chapter 11, p. 73)

“绝处逢生” is used to say that a person has survived the most dangerous times, and “吉人天相” is a description of a person who has been blessed by God for doing good deeds. In the original, both words mean that the author was saved from death, but Black has deleted “逢生” in the first idiom and combined the two idioms together. According to the theory of creative treason, translators often use abridged translations to suit the expressive idiom of the target language. Chinese writers like to use many different idioms with the same meaning to express strong feelings, whereas Western writers rarely do so, and because the English language itself is somewhat restrictive, Black has chosen to abridge the original text in accordance with the common narrative style of her country's literature to avoid making the translation redundant.

3.4 Creative Treason on The Language Level

Linguistics “is usually defined as the science of language or, alternatively, as the scientific study of language” and “as a science, linguistics now has a set of established theories, methods and sub-branches” (Hu, 2006, p. 14). As far as the study subject of this thesis concerned, the author of this thesis endeavors to analyze the creative treason from the aspects of sounds, words and sentences in the language level.

Example (5)

ST: 雇骡急返，芸正形容惨变，咻咻涕泣。（卷三 五九页）

TT: I hired a mule at once and hurried home, to find Yuen very upset; **groaning and sobbing.** (Chapter 11, p. 76)

Example (6)

ST: 从此扰扰攘攘，又不知梦醒何时而。（卷三 七零页）

TT: From that time on, my life has seemed unreal, an existence full of **turmoil and trouble**, a dream from which I don't know when I shall awaken. (Chapter 12, p. 87)

In the above examples, “咻咻” and “扰扰攘攘” are reduplicated forms in Chinese. The repetition not only gives the sentences a certain musical rhythm, but also reinforces the meaning of the text through repetition; “咻咻” as an onomatopoeic word vividly expresses Yuen's grief and distress, while “扰扰攘攘” reflects the author's troubled state of mind, which helps to arouse the reader's emotional resonance. Instead of using two English words with the same pronunciation, Black has respectively used two words that rhyme with the end rhyme ‘groaning and sobbing’ and two words that rhyme with the beginning rhyme ‘turmoil and trouble’. According to the theory of creative treason, such foreignization subordinates the culture of the translated language to the culture of the original so that the sound and emotion of the translation are mingled together, and the voice and meaning are one, possessing rhyme and at the same time emphasizing the feelings of the characters, just like the original. This is a strong sense of treason brought about by the translator's individualized translation, and it is where the creative treason of Black comes into full play.

Example (7)

ST: 芸没后, 忆和靖”妻梅子鹤”语, 自号梅逸。(卷三 六四页)

TT: After Yuen's death I remembered the poet Lin Ho-ching of whom it was said he took a plum tree for wife and a stork for son, and decided to take as my intimate name **Mei-i, 'One who has lost his Plum Tree'**. (Chapter 12, p. 81)

In this example, “梅” is from a Chinese allusion used to refer to a wife, and the “逸” is similar in pronunciation to another Chinese character, “遗”, which means lost, and here the author cleverly uses the harmonic to illustrate that the name he has given himself is in memory of his wife's passing. Whereas Black chose to translate the word phonetically, with the addition of a commentary, using an alienating translation strategy. According to the theory of creative treason, such foreignization subordinates the culture of the translated language to the culture of the original, so Black's translation preserves Chinese culture as well as accurately conveys the meaning of the original. However, it is difficult to find the right word or expression in the English language system that can convey the ingenious literary effect brought by the homophony of the original text to the readers.

Example (8)

ST: 《浮生六记》

TT: *Chapters from a Floating Life: The Autobiography of a Chinese Artist*

The original title, *Fu Sheng Liu Ji*, means six chapters of a ‘floating life’. A comparison of the titles of the four translations shows that the titles of Lin Yutang's, Leonard Pratt and Chiang Su-hui's and Graham Sanders' translations all follow the same structure, and none of them has a subtitle. All three translations have the same structure: “six chapters/records of floating/Adrift life”. However, Black does not translate the ‘six’ in the original title, which indicates the number of chapters. The preposition is also changed from ‘of’ to ‘from’, and the subtitle ‘The Autobiography of a Chinese Artist’ is added. The final translation of Black is “Chapters from a Floating Life: The Autobiography of a Chinese Artist”.

One of the reasons Black omits the “six” from the original title when translating is that the original work which was retained has been missing two chapters, and secondly because there are twelve chapters in Black's translation, and a direct translation into six notes would cause the reader to wonder if the title did not match the content. And the direct use of the plural form of chapter, which indicates some, gives the reader an appropriately vague idea.

IV. Conclusion

With the guidance of creative treason, this thesis analyzed its manifestation in Shirley M. Black's translation of *Chapters from a Floating Life* and explored its causes and impact on the translation. It has been found that, as a result of the translator's own conscious or unconscious creative treason, translations may have the effect of engaging readers of the target language, transmitting the culture of the source language and facilitating literary exchange, but they may also, to a certain extent, have also caused misinterpretation by readers and the loss of Chinese cultural imagery.

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