

On the Two English Translations of *Bian Cheng* From the Perspective of Bourdieu's Sociology

MO Lin

University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China

Nowadays, an increasing number of scholars realize that the translation study should not be limited to the translation itself, but to place translation in a wider context. Based on Bourdieu's three core concepts—field, capital, and habitus, the paper analyzes Jeffrey Kinkley's and Gladys Yang's translations of *Bian Cheng*. The paper aims to conduct comparative studies to clarify two translators' field, capital, and habitus and to explore their translation strategies.

Keywords: Bourdieu's sociology, *Bian Cheng*, comparative study, field, habitus

Introduction

Pierre Bourdieu, a well-known French anthropologist and sociologist, makes a significant impact on the world for his creative thoughts and works. Among all the sociological theories, Bourdieu's sociology, featuring in habitus, field, and capital, is widely recognized by scholars. Wolf and Fukari (2007, p. 12) asserted, "Pierre Bourdieu offered one of the most influential frameworks for studying of the factors which condition the power relations inherent in both the practice and theory of translation".

Bian Cheng, a masterpiece of Shen Congwen, is regarded as a model of his ideal art (Jin & Ai, 1982), which vividly depicts Chinese unique folklore, beautiful scenery, and sincere characters. Regarding the selection of English versions, the one is Gladys Yang's version, and the other is Jeffrey Kinkley's. The Yangs, who have been highly recognized and appraised by the translation field, have devoted themselves to translating fruitful Chinese literature and introducing Chinese culture abroad. As a prominent expert on studying Shen Congwen, Kinkley has developed a deeper comprehension of the writer and the novel.

Scholars at home and abroad have made great contributions to utilizing Bourdieu's theory into translation studies. Drawing on Bourdieu's notion, Wolf and Fukari (2007) sorted out previous studies in detail and carried out a systematic study on sociology of translation, which had improved the theoretical framework of Bourdieu's theory in translation study. Through analyses of translation of Mo Yan's *Wa*, Chen (2020) concluded that Howard Goldblatt has occupied a dominant position in the translation field by virtue of his capital advantage, which lays a solid foundation for the success of his English version of *Wa*.

Overview of Bourdieu's Sociology

Bourdieu's sociological theories aim at exploring the relationship between human's behavior and social structure. His three core concepts—field, capital, and habitus have developed throughout his works. In the first

place, Bourdieu defines “field” as “a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 97). To be more specific, it can be explained as space where agents in different positions, by virtue of their own habitus, use various capitals they possess to compare, exchange, and compete with others. Field has several prominent features. First, it is an area of struggle for resources, which is designed to maintain or expand power. Second, although each field possesses their own rules, it does not have clear boundaries. Among all the fields, the field of power leads a dominant position over others. In the second place, Bourdieu links “capital” to power—a wider field which includes various types of material, culture, and society. The struggle for capitals in a field shows an unequal allocation between different people, promoting competition of agents and evolution of the field. Bourdieu has divided “capital” into four types, which are economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital. Bourdieu claims that “economic capital is at the root of all other types of capital” (Swartz, 1997, p. 92). Besides, different capitals can be transformed into each other. In the third place, “habitus” is a stable and transposable system of dispositions including perception, judgement, and action, which is affected by both the social institution and personal factors. Habitus is strongly related to field. For one thing, field structures habitus, which is a necessary embodiment of field. For another, habitus is conducive to changing field into a world of significance and value.

Analysis of Two Translations

Analysis of the Field in the Two Translations

As for power field, China’s comprehensive national strength and international status were on the rise. Led by the Communist Party of China, Chinese people made joint efforts to build a promising country. In 2009, the incumbent American president, Obama visited China, which ushered a new chapter of Sino-US relationship. Due to the open and inclusive social context, Kinkley’s translation is largely unconstrained by political factors. With the boost of China’s comprehensive national strength, its cultural soft power was constantly developing, hence an increasing number of people expressed interests in Chinese culture and literature. Impacted by the active literary field, Kinkley was apt to working on translation. Moreover, publishing field played an important part in literary field. The publisher, Harper Collins, the world’s second largest book publishing company, is of great benefit to promote Shen Congwen’s books.

For power field, Chinese society faced a special situation in the early 1960s. Gladys Yang’s translation was to some extent affected by such political factors. Not only her translation quality may have been influenced since the requirement of speed might reduce the time of translation but also her translation selection and style must have been affected by the authority. As China started a new era of the reform and opening up in 1978, the literary field experienced a prosperity. Accordingly, the editor of Chinese literature—Yang Xianyi promoted the project of publishing *Panda Book* series. This series was home to fruitful classic Chinese works in English, which was an essential window to show Chinese culture to the English world. The transformation of political field and context contributed to the production of new book series.

Analysis of the Capital in the Two Translations

In terms of cultural capital, Kinkley is a man of great learning. In terms of symbolic capital, Kinkley is a recognized expert at studying Shen Congwen, who has not only received the writer’s acknowledgement, but also got the praise within the industry. He started to explore Shen Congwen in 1972. During the early period, Kinkley has translated many works of this Chinese writer. Besides, his masterpiece, *The Odyssey of Shen Congwen*, is a

biography of Shen Congwen. With detailed content and accurate information, this work had paved the way for others who wanted to know more about Shen.

Gladys Yang obsessed abundant cultural capitals, who became an expert and major translator of Chinese literature. Concerning social capital, Gladys Yang has an extensive social network. The Yangs work at the publishing house, providing a strong network of friends, which is beneficial to their translation. As to symbolic capital, the Yangs enjoy a high reputation in the translation field, who have translated a great quantity of books including *A Dream of Red Mansions*, *Call to Arms*, *The Scholars*, etc.

Analysis of the Habitus of Two Translators

Kinkley majored in history in Harvard University and he was interested in Chinese history. Additionally, Kinkley once visited Shen Congwen's hometown and interviewed Shen Congwen and his friends. This trip helped him acquire an amount of first-handed data, which established a firm foundation for his following researches. Kinkley proposed his translation view in an interview. He holds that "the translation is ultimately the result of compromise, which means the translation must be faithful to the meaning and beauty of the original text, while keeping translating naturally and concisely" (Zhang, 2020, p. 71). When translating *Bian Cheng*, Kinkley abides by his translation ideas, and attempts to represent literary value of this novel.

When translating *Bian Cheng*, Gladys Yang worked in the publisher and was required to finish the political task of quickly introducing Chinese traditional literature to the western world. In consequence, her translation activities were restricted by China's political and social factors to some extent. Despite of her complicated experiences, her translation ideas also influence her habitus. The purpose of the Yangs' translation is to spread Chinese culture to foreigners and to introduce western classic works to Chinese readers. The couple claim that translation should avoid making excessive changes to the original text; hence they tend to employ translation strategies of foreignization and literal translation.

A Comparative Analysis of Translation Strategies

1. Difference in translation of names and addresses:

Example 1

ST: 为了住处两山多簕竹，翠色逼人而来，老船夫随便为这可怜的孤雏拾取了一个近身的名字，叫作“翠翠”。

Kinkley: Because of the compelling deep, emerald green of bamboo stands covering the mountains on either side by the stream where they lived, the old ferryman, without a second thought, named the girl after what was close at hand: Cuicui, or "Jade Green."

Gladys Yang: Because their home was among bamboos and hills of a glorious emerald green, the old boatman gave the poor mite the name Emerald.

The first version translates “翠翠” into “Cuicui, or Jade Green”. First, Kinkley employs transliteration to directly present this Chinese name. He has also explained the meaning, which is better for foreigners to understand the girl's name and grasp the beauty of the name. However, the second version translates “翠翠” into “Emerald”, which means “a bright green color like that of an emerald”. This free translation seems very concise, but it lacks the beauty of the heroine's name to some extent.

Example 2

ST: 他把长子取名天保，次子取名傩送。

Kinkley: This unconscious preference led him to name the elder son Tianbao (Heaven-protected), and his

younger brother Nuosong (Sent by the Nuo Gods).

Gladys Yang: He had a soft spot in his heart for the younger, giving him the name Nuosong, his brother that of Tianbao.

It is evident that the brothers' names—Tianbao and Nuosong bear expectations and wishes from his father, which requires translators to pay much attention to their deeper meanings. Kinkley not only transliterates their names, but also adds the implied meaning. Nevertheless, Gladys Yang only uses transliteration to translate their names, who ignores the significance behind the name. In terms of the translation of the names, transliteration and explanation employed by Kinkley can show huge impacts of his powerful cultural capitals and professional habitus on his translation strategies.

Example 3

ST: 以“龙头管事”作中心，谈论点本地时事。

Kinkley: With the “Dragon Head” lodge master at the center of things, they talked about local affairs.

Gladys Yang: They discuss local happenings.

The underlined word means the person in charge. “龙头” stands for a leader of the local affairs, bearing unique Chinese characteristics. It can be seen that Kinkley translates word for word, which maintains the features of Chinese language and political culture. Notably, the translation of Gladys Yang's is quite obscure. She does not translate it at all, but uses “they” to blur this address, which might hinder the coherence of reading.

Example 4

ST: 由四川过湖南去，靠东有一条官路。

Kinkley: An old imperial highway running east from Sichuan into Hunan province leads.

Gladys Yang: The highway running east from Sichuan to Hunan comes.

“官路” here means roads built by the royal government, which lasts for a long time. Obviously, Kinkley's version has given an explicit translation for this word, showing that it is an imperial highway with a long history, while Gladys Yang's version only translates it into a common road, which omits its political meaning. Since the power field in 2009 is open and inclusive, Kinkley finds it easier to translate political terms of the old time. Nevertheless, affected by the political environment, Gladys Yang has to observe its rule and tends to blur the meaning of political terms.

2. Difference in translation of cultural-loaded words:

Example 5

ST: 节日里自己不能包粽子。

Kinkley: They are too poor to wrap their own zongzi dumplings for the festival.

Endnote: Dumplings made of sticky rice, often filled with meat, eggs, and vegetables, shaped like a pyramid and wrapped in palm leaves. They commemorate food that, according to legend, was thrown into the river in memory of Qu Yuan, the ancient virtuous and wronged minister who drowned himself in a river in Hunan and whose legend is honored on “Duanwu”, the fifth day of the fifth month, the Dragon Boat Festival.

Gladys Yang: Knowing that she and her grandfather lived in too humble a way to make “zong zi” for the festival.

Footnote: Glutinous rice wrapped in palm leaves, often stuffed with sweetmeats, always eaten during the Dragon Boat Festival.

“Zongzi” is a unique traditional food of China. It is translated into many versions such as dumplings or rice dumplings, but essentially “粽子” is different from dumplings. Since China has increasingly gained popularity

in the world, many translators are inclined to select literal translation to promote Chinese culture. Both Kinkley and Gladys Yang transliterate it into “zongzi” and add notes to further explain its ingredients, use, and origin, which is beneficial for the western readers to learn about Chinese food culture; thus power field brings major effects to their translations.

Example 6

ST: 人家房子多一半着陆, 一半在水, 因为余地有限, 那些房子莫不设有吊脚楼。

Kinkley: Land was scarce, so most people's houses were “dangling-foot houses,” half on land, half on stilts built over the water.

Gladys Yang: On the frontage between the wharves space is so limited that most houses are built on stilts overhanging the water.

“吊脚楼” is a traditional dwelling of the Miao nationality and Tujia nationality and other ethnic minorities in China, which is regarded as a representative building in Western Hunan. It is easy to understand this building owing to its name. The feature is that the main house is built of the ground, and the other three sides are dangling and supported by pillars. The first version employs literal translation to maintain the original meaning of the Chinese building, which can attract foreigners' interests in Chinese architectural culture. The second version does not translate the name of the building, but to briefly introduce its features. It is clearly seen that different habitus affect their translation strategies.

Conclusion

To sum up, based on the society of Xiangxi in the 1930s, *Bian Cheng* is featured in many kind characters, different social status and charming customs, so this analysis focuses on the translation of names, addresses, and cultural-loaded words. Considering Kinkley lived in a more open and inclusive society and had powerful capitals, he was inclined to employ transliteration and literal translation which was conducive to promoting characteristics of Chinese culture to the world. Additionally, he is an expert at studying Shen Congwen; hence he always added explanation and endnotes to expound local custom of this novel. Undeniably, Gladys Yang fully mastered the knowledge of Chinese traditional culture. What's more, given that she was restricted by the political task at that time, Gladys Yang tended to omit or blur the original meaning when translating political and military terms. Thus, her translation is partly short of Chinese traditional charm. Different from her previous habitus of translation concepts, Gladys Yang adopted free translation and domestication to translate many idioms and cultural-loaded words of this novel.

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