

Original Paper

A Study on the Translation Strategy by Comparing the Translation of Reduplications and Image Words: Three English Versions of *Sheng Sheng Man* as the Case Study

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Abstract

The study is based on the translators' respective cultural identities, and compares, evaluates and validates the translation strategies of the three translations in terms of dealing with reduplications and image words in the translations. This study proves that Lin Yutang believes that the most important thing in translating poetry is considering the context, and finally translate the beauty of poetry through the techniques of "using words to convey the spirit" and "using words to condense the poetry". Xu Yuanchong insists on his own translation ideas: the "Three Beauties Theory", which contains beauty in sound, beauty in form and beauty in sense. As a result, Xu's translations have a high degree of unity of "loose in form but not in spirit", and his translation versions are even more remarkable in terms of "conveying the spirit" of the image in the text. Yang Xianyi & Gladys Yang attach great importance to "fidelity" in translation, giving priority to the strategy of "foreignization" in all matters relating to national cultural characteristics, and translating poetry by means of literal translation, transliteration and paraphrase.

Keywords

cultural identity, reduplications, image words, translation strategy, Sheng Sheng Man

1. Introduction

The study of classical Chinese poetry in translation is a part of the translation studies of ancient Chinese codes and records (Yan & Yan, 2022). As a famous female poet of the Southern Song Dynasty euphemism, Li Qingzhao left behind many immortal masterpieces, and one of the most representative works of her later years is *Sheng Sheng Man*. It has a profound impact on global culture, and many people can recite it fluently. In the context of the country's cultural confidence and its strategy of going

global, it is no doubt that scholars' studies of *Sheng Sheng Man* should also be an integral part of the translation studies of ancient Chinese works (Fan, 2021). As a result, many translation scholars in China have translated and published it, and even some foreign native English-speaking scholars have translated it in different styles. As we know, translation is a creative practical activity, and the translator is a key role in linking the original work, the original author and the reader. Cultural identity of the translator has a crucial influence on the selection of the translated text and the use of translation strategies (Lou, 2015). It also affects the translator's cultural attitude, which in turn determines the translation strategy orientation to some extent and then affects the image of the translated text in the target language (Chen, 2017). Based on the translators' respective cultural identities, this paper selects the translations of several Chinese masters as reference objects, and according to the publication time, the order is Lin Yutang (1963), Xu Yuanchong (1981) and Yang Xiangyi & Gladys Yang (1984). Then, the study focuses on analyzing the translation of reduplicative words and several image words in the three versions, so as to explore the translation strategies adopted by the translators.

2. Cultural Identities of Three Translators

Cultural identity is a collection of traits and characters, a very abstract concept with values and value systems at its core. The cultural values that lie deep in the soul of a translator are often reflected in the original work and the translation strategy. In other words, the original texts that translators choose and the translation strategies they use are the concrete expression of the construction of their intercultural identity (Wang, 2017).

2.1 Lin Yutang's Cultural Identity

Lin Yutang (1895-1976), a native of Fujian province, was a famous modern Chinese writer, scholar, translator, lexicographer and linguist, and a member of the Jingxing Society. He received a great education at home, studied abroad in his early years, and settled in the United States at the age of 40. He translated *Sheng Sheng Man* in 1963, by which time he had a good command of both languages and was already very familiar with both cultures, therefore, his version can be considered mature and perfect.

2.1.1 Lin Yutang's Research Field

As a famous translator, Lin Yutang has translated eight Chinese books into English, and all of them are Chinese classic works. His translations of classic Chinese texts into English were best sellers in the West. Among his translations, the masterpiece, *Six Records of a Floating Life*, was translated before he went to the United States.

As a writer, Lin not only had a great command of the language of classical Chinese literature, but also had a high level of attainment in English. The quality of his works is high in both English and Chinese. He produced more than 40 works, including novels, essays, literary criticisms, cultural commentary biographies, etc. (Xu, 2014).

2.1.2 Lin Yutang's Cultural Identity

Born in 1895 to a Christian family in Longxi, Fujian province, Lin Yutang entered St. John's University in Shanghai in 1912, where he received the best English education and laid a solid foundation for his later English works. In 1922, he received a master's degree from Harvard University and a doctorate in comparative linguistics from Leipzig University in 1923.

His more than three decades of overseas experience has given him a good command of English, and his background of Chinese and western knowledge allows him to present Chinese literature in English with complete clarity. Whether as a literary scholar when creating *The Art of Living, My Country and My People* and other works to meet the expectations of America, or as a translator when translating *The Chinese Legend* and *Six Records of a Floating Life* to tell Chinese stories, Lin Yutang was introducing and spreading Chinese cultural traditions to the West.

2.2 Xu Yuanchong's Cultural Identity

Xu Yuanchong (1921-2021) was a professor at Peking University, and he also has received an equally good educational background at home and abroad. In secondary school, he began reading *The Analects of Confucius* as well as the original collection of *Tales from Shakespeare*, as they were a concentration of Chinese and Western philosophical thought and wisdom. These readings provided him with very strong support for his later English compositions and understanding of classical Chinese works. Then, he translated *Sheng Sheng Man* in 1981 (Zhu & Jia, 2019).

2.2.1 Xu Yuanchong's Research Field

Xu has translated a large number of Chinese works into English and his translations were influential. Thirty of his poems have been selected as teaching materials by foreign universities. In addition to translating classical Chinese poetry into foreign languages, he also translated many English and French classics into Chinese.

In 2010, Xu Yuanchong was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award for Chinese Translation Culture for his outstanding contribution to cultural translation and cultural exchange between China and abroad. The award was established by the Chinese Translation Association in 2006 and is the highest honor in the Chinese translation sector. Since its inception in 2006, 15 renowned translators have received the award.

2.2.2 Xu Yuanchong's Cultural Identity

Born in Nanchang, Jiangxi province, Xu Yuanchong was a professor at Peking University and a famous translator of ancient Chinese works. *The Analects of Confucius* in secondary school laid the foundation for his understanding of ancient Chinese, and three years of study in Europe made him fluent in English. After studying in Paris in 1948, he learned that French scholars knew little about the best Chinese literature, which pushed him to translate the best Chinese texts into foreign languages and to serve his country by promoting the spread of Chinese culture.

After his return to China, Xu has been actively involved in the translation of classical texts while teaching. He has been engaged in literary translation for more than six decades, and his translation

languages include Chinese, English and French, with a focus on English translations of ancient Chinese poetry, and is known as “the only person to have translated poetry into English and French”. He has published 60 books in Chinese, English and French, including *The Book of Songs*, *The Songs of Chu*, and *The Remembrance of Things Past*, all of which have had a great impact on Chinese and foreign readers.

2.3 Yang Xianyi & Gladys Yang's Cultural Identity

Yang Xianyi (1915-2009) has also received a good education in China from an early age. Influenced by his enlightening teacher, he was very interested in the ancient Chinese canon. As a result, he read many classical works, which laid a solid foundation for his later studies of ancient Chinese culture. He went to study at Oxford University in England in 1936, and after these four years of study, he also became an erudite master of both Chinese and Western languages. Yang Xianyi's wife, Gladys Yang (1919-1999), was an English woman born in Beijing and also graduated from Oxford University. The couple later translated *Sheng Sheng Man* together in 1984.

2.3.1 Yang Xianyi & Gladys Yang's Research Field

This couple have translated many Chinese classics into English, amounting to over ten million words. Their translations reflect an unbounded respect for Chinese culture and have played a positive role in promoting the Chinese language to the world, the most representative being *Dream of the Red Chamber*. They were the first to translate *Li Sao* and the first to bring *Records of the Historian* to the world. Translation is not only their interest, but also a way to promote the cultural progress of the nation, a way to serve their country. In 2009, Yang Xianyi was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award for Chinese Translation Culture for his outstanding contribution to cultural translation and cultural exchange between China and abroad.

2.3.2 Yang Xianyi & Gladys Yang's Cultural Identity

Yang Xiangyi was a renowned Chinese translator and researcher of foreign literature. Born in a wealthy family in Huai'an, Jiangsu province, he was a bright, lively and talented boy from an early age. At the age of 19, he went to Oxford University in England to study Western literature. It was during the period that Yang Xianyi met and later married Gladys Yang, who was also studying at Oxford at that time.

Gladys Yang was born in Beijing, and her parents were British missionaries living there at the time. She was sent to England to study at the age of seven, and in 1937 she entered Oxford University to study Chinese literature. After graduation, she resolutely followed Yang Xianyi back to China, which was in dire straits during that period. Then, Yang became a university professor and a translation expert of foreign language publishing house, and together with his wife, the couple devoted themselves to the study and translation of outstanding Chinese literary works. For more than half a century after their return, they both devoted their lives and passion to the foreign translation of Chinese classics, collaborating on the translation of more than 140 outstanding Chinese literary works, such as *The Songs of Chu*, *The Palace of Eternal Life*, *The Scholars*, *The Anthology of Lu Xun* and *Dream of the Red Chamber*. They have made an irreplaceable contribution to the spread of Chinese culture to the

outside world.

Broadly speaking, as one of the few literary students who were proficient in foreign languages at that time, Yang Xianyi understood the particularity of each nationality's literature and the charm of Chinese literature. To a certain extent, we can say that he had a cultural identity that was mainly national but also a mixture of Chinese and Western. For Gladys Yang, her unique upbringing and life experiences have shaped her miscellaneous cultural identity, as she herself says, "I feel I have two motherlands."

3. Translation of the Reduplications

3.1 The Reduplications' Pragmatic Function in *Sheng Sheng Man*

The poet Li Qingzhao of the Song Dynasty uses reduplications in *Sheng Sheng Man*, which not only depicts the features of the scene vividly, but also brings out the poet's poignant feeling of desolation and country sentiment when facing a bleak landscape.

The appropriate use of reduplications enhances the rhythm between the words of the poem and achieves the beauty of sound harmony. The rhyming reduplications in *Sheng Sheng Man* transform the work into a rhythmic and harmonious whole to some extent, thus enhancing the beauty of the work's sound and rhythm.

It is a masterpiece of Li Qingzhao, and an example of poetic artistic conception. The use of seven simple reduplications at the beginning sublimates the meaning of the poem, making the mood of the poem more hazy and subtle, and the emotions more sincere and rich, thus deeply demonstrating the suffering of women during the war and the poet's sorrow for the country and the people (Luo, 2019).

3.2 Translation of the Reduplications in Three Versions

3.2.1 Translation of the Title

Forlorn (Lin Yutang)

Tune: Slow, Slow Tune (Xu Yuanchong)

Sheng Sheng Man (Yang & Yang)

Sheng Sheng Man is the title of the tune, which contains two reduplicative words to enhance the level of detail. Lin's translation is based on the tone of the Ci-poem, and is translated as "forlorn", which helps the target language readers to understand its theme and to feel its meaning and context, although it is less detailed than the original. Lin Yutang was in America at the time of his translation of *Sheng Sheng Man*, so he shared Li Qingzhao's feelings of loneliness and sorrow. As an excellent writer and translator, Lin wanted the target readers to be able to sense the emotional tone of the poem from its title, hence the use of "Forlorn".

Xu Yuanchong has also dealt with the translation in a very rhythmic form, in accordance with the nature of the reduplicative words. The translation is also in the same slow tone as the original, and is consistent in its level of detail. He insisted on the principle that the translation of ancient Chinese verse should be in verse rhythm but not prose form. When translate the title, Xu chose "Tune: Slow, Slow Tune". The word of "tune" may directly inform the target readers of what type of writing the original

text should be, then he used a colon to explain what kind of tune this Ci-poem is. Besides, Xu also adheres to “three beauties” in his poem translation. First, beauty in form: The original title is composed of three Chinese characters, so the translation also uses three words. Then, beauty in sound: The original text consists two reduplicative words “声声”, and accordingly, the translation also includes two same words “slow, slow”. At last, beauty in sense: The word “slow” refers to “慢” in the original text. All the factors mentioned above prove that Xu Yuanchong’s cultural identities have influenced his translation deeply while he translated the title.

Yang Xianyi & Gladys Yang use the strategy of transliteration of the original text as “Sheng Sheng Man”, which highlights the cultural characteristics of Song Ci-poem, but the target language readers (especially foreign readers) cannot understand the emotional tone and other relevant information from it. Due to their cultural identities, they were well aware that there were many cultural differences between Chinese and Western cultures and semantic gaps in order to translate this title. Therefore, they adopted the translation strategy of transliteration, which is a good method to convey our Chinese culture: Foreign readers of the target language do not understand the exact meaning and will search the relevant information and read the reference notes, thus enabling the couple to convey the poem to foreign readers.

3.2.2 Translation of the Reduplications at the Beginning

The original text: 寻寻觅觅，冷冷清清，凄凄惨惨戚戚。

So dim, so dark, So dense, so dull, So damp, so dank, So dead! (Lin Yutang)

I look for what I miss; I know not what it is, I feel so sad, so drear, So lonely, without cheer. (Xu Yuanchong)

Seeking, seeking, Chilly and quiet, Desolate, painful and miserable. (Yang & Yang)

Lin Yutang’s use of double tones and alliteration to translate the original reduplicative words in seven consecutive monosyllabic words beginning with “so” and “d”, which is similar in form and rhyme to the original text. Therefore, a comparative analysis of the translations shows that not every sentence corresponds to the original. The dynamic situation of “seeking” is not translated at the beginning of his version, so that the target readers may overlook this process when understanding it. The original also does not begin with a reference to time, whereas the translation begins with “dim” and “dark” to indicate that it is late. The words “dense” and “dull” express the dreary mood of the speaker; “damp” and “dank” also express his innermost emotions. The seven adjectives are progressive, ending with the word of “dead”, which expresses the overwhelming sense of desolation in Li Qingzhao’s heart from surface to innermost being. The translation of the fourteen words indeed conveys the hopelessly lonely situation of the dusk and drizzle (Pan, 2003). This version has been described as a “superb translation”, vividly portraying the emotions of the poet and achieving the unity of beauty in sound and form. However, functional equivalence stresses the need to reproduce the information in the source language, and Lin Yutang’s translation is too condensed to enable the reader to understand the meaning of the original words effectively.

Xu Yuanchong still adheres to his principle of the three beauties: beauty in sound, beauty in form and beauty in sense. His translation version adds the subject “I”, using “look for” to correspond to the action of “seeking”, and “what I miss” to reject the object to be sought. The second half of the sentence, “I know what I’m looking for”, again adds the object of the search, giving a sense of despair and bewilderment. In addition, he does not directly translate “冷冷清清”, but rather blends it with the following “凄凄惨惨戚戚” as “sad, drear, lonely, cheer”. Most commendably, “miss” and “cheer” also correspond to “觅” and “凄” respectively, achieving the unity of beauty in sense and sound. The translation adopts the strategy of direct semantic translation, which completes the missing subject in the original and presents a very clear logical relationship. The advantage of this is that it conforms to the linguistic habits of the target language readers, without affecting the context of the original (Li & Hu, 2020).

The translation by Yang Xianyi & Gladys Yang is concise and clear, using only nine words to translate the 14 reduplications in the original, faithfully reproducing its mood and style. The repeated use of two “seeking” corresponds to the words “寻” and “觅” in the original text. The phrase of “冷冷清清” owns a double meaning, and the translation uses “chilly and quiet” to express both the coldness of the setting and the implied misery of the poet, making the environment consistent with the her state of mind. Finally, the three adjectives “desolate, painful and miserable” are used in conjunction with the original words of “凄凄惨惨戚戚” to express the loneliness and sorrow of the author, and also to achieve the beauty of the form of *Sheng Sheng Man*.

4. Translation of Image Words in Three Versions

4.1 Translation of “乍暖还寒”

The weather, now warm, now cold (Lin Yutang)

lingering cold (Xu Yuanchong)

Even when it’s warmer there is still a chill (Yang & Yang)

When translate this word, Lin Yutang transforms the relational process of the original into a material one, using two “now” to turn “乍暖还寒” into an actor, which is very vivid and interesting. In addition, it corresponds perfectly in meaning and linguistic structure to the phrase “三杯两盏淡酒” in his later translation.

Xu Yuanchong uses the word “lingering” to modify “cold”, as if the reader could see a picture of a stern autumn day, with the autumn wind blowing the flames, and the fire light fluttering, bright and dim. The word “lingering” conveys the feeling of the cold autumn wind, and its cultural image is very effective, representing a perfect version to target readers.

Yang Xianyi and his wife use a direct translation strategy, translating it into a sentence that directly conveys the meaning of “乍暖还寒” to the target language readers.

4.2 Translation of “黄花”

fallen flower (Lin Yutang)

yellow flowers (Xu Yuanchong)

fallen chrysanthemums (Yang & Yang)

Lin tried to seek the harmony of domestication and foreignization, so he translated “黄花” into “fallen flower”. It has two advantages: First, the target reader can understand that “黄花” refers to a kind of flower; second, thanks to the word of “fallen”, they can imagine the picture of “piling up all over the ground”.

Xu Yuanchong always adopts foreignization as his translation strategy, so he translated “黄花” into “yellow flowers” directly. By this, it can allow the target reader to know what kind of flower it is in the text, and they should also understand that it is autumn this poetry describe. Li Qingzhao starts with the yellow flowers in the second stanza. The yellow flowers stand for herself, since she is slender and frail like the chrysanthemum, but she is not in the mood to admire them or bury them. Because her husband has been dead, although he is still alive in her memory, which makes her feel so lonely and crawling time are even more unbearable. The direct translation strategy used here not only enables the intention of the cultural features to be perfectly conveyed and reproduced, but also preserves the feelings of the readers of the original text to the greatest extent possible, and better helps the readers of the translation to understand the subtleties of the original, thus promoting traditional Chinese cultural values. In this way, foreigners may have more opportunities to learn about the culture of the original text. Foreignization is a great way to spread culture, as a result, Xu successfully achieved his goal by using this strategy.

Let's talk about the version of Yang Xianyi & Gladys Yang. The translation of the term “黄花” involves a distinction between detail and omission. When we talk about flowers, we naturally associate them with various colors and types of flowers, which is known as “omission”. But when we qualify the word “花” with “黄”, people only think of yellow flowers, which is known as “detail”. The choice between “detail” and “omission” varies from one image word to another. For the translation of the word “黄花”, it is appropriate to be “detailed” rather than “omitted”, so the degree of detail and omission of “chrysanthemum” has been properly grasped. In addition, the word “chrysanthemum” has long been a household word abroad, and in this cultural context the poem itself has a “Chinese identity”, reflecting a strategy of foreignization. Given the Chinese and western culture background, the couple can fully understand each language and culture, so they usually use domestication plus foreignization as their translation strategy. As a result, they translated “黄花” into “fallen chrysanthemums”. It can better lead the target readers into imagination that those flowers are covering the ground, and they can know the variety of this flower.

4.3 Translation of “梧桐”

kola nut (Lin Yutang)

plane-trees (Xu Yuanchong)

the wutong trees (Yang & Yang)

“梧桐” is a popular cultural image used in Song Ci-poem and is rich in cultural connotations, often used as a synonym for noble qualities, loyalty and love, loneliness and sorrow. Because of cultural differences, different groups of people may have diverse interpretations of the image carried by the same thing, and therefore foreign readers may have different understandings of the word “梧桐”. Lin Yutang’s translation activates the concepts of “native to tropical Africa” and “resembling a chestnut tree”, focusing on the shape of the tree but failing to convey the intent of the tree in the original work. He translated it into “kola nut” because of his special cultural identity, as he thought this kind of African plant was very similar to China’s “梧桐”. But the version may confuse the target readers and they cannot know the correct cultural image of the tree.

Xu Yuanchong’s translation version activates the concepts of “broad-ovate leaves in profile” and “grey-brown bark”, also focusing on the shape of the tree, which is more in keeping with the connotation of the original than Lin’s version. However, although he has described the shape of this tree, it cannot contain its cultural image. He also points out the scene of autumn rain dripping off the leaves, so that one can feel the melancholy of the rain hitting the leaves.

The version by Yang Xianyi & Gladys Yang, on the other hand, uses Pinyin of Chinese language and focuses on the overall concept, thus best matching the focus pattern of the original work. Besides, using “wutong trees” will stimulate the target readers’ curiosity that they may wonder the tree’s variety, thus they achieve the opportunity to know its cultural image.

4.4 Translation of “雁”

geese (Lin Yutang)

wild geese (Xu Yuanchong), (Yang & Yang)

Lin chose the word “geese”, which may not as good as “wild geese”. Looking up at the sky, the poet saw a line of “雁” passing by. Li Qingzhao recalled that in the words she had sent to her husband in the past, she had envisaged using this kind of bird to exchange messages. But now that her husband has left, there is no one to send her letters to, so when she sees “雁” coming from the north, she feels even sadder. In ancient Chinese poetry, “雁” was always used by people to express their melancholy emotions. “geese” may refer to ducks or swans, but both of them cannot convey the cultural image to the foreign readers.

While the other two versions use “wild geese”, which will be more correct than Lin’s version. However, though “wild geese” express the right meaning of the bird’s variety, they may not command its implied meaning. As a result, some translators choose to add notes to show the implied meaning of this cultural image.

5. Result

Cultural identity can affect the translator’s cultural attitudes and further determines the translator’s strategic orientation in translation. By presenting the cultural identities of the translators and analyzing

the translation of the reduplications and image words of *Sheng Sheng Man*, the following conclusions can be drawn.

As a master of Chinese studies, Lin Yutang's interest in ancient Chinese literature surpassed that of other scholars of his generation. Throughout his life, Lin Yutang introduced the essence and core values of ancient Chinese culture to the West, making a great contribution to the promotion of Chinese culture. In Lin Yutang's system of translation aesthetics, translation standards are a central part of it. His translation criteria consist of three parts: faithfulness, fluency and beauty. In fact, the criterion of "beauty" is specifically for literary works like poetry. Lin Yutang attached great importance to beauty in the translation of poetry, as can be seen from the translation of reduplicative words at the beginning of *Sheng Sheng Man*, and his use of alliteration preserved its beauty of sound and form to a great extent. In addition, he believed that the most important thing in poetry translation was the translation of the context, with the techniques of "using words to convey the spirit" and "using words to condense the original", thus translating the beauty of poetry (Huang, 2012).

Xu Yuanchong adheres to his three principles of beauty in his translation, so that his translation versions have a high degree of unity of "loose in form but not in spirit". Whether from the title to the whole text or from the words to rhythm, Xu sticks to the standards of poetry in the process of translation. In his translation of the title of the Ci-poem, he has perfectly conveyed the intended meaning of the original text while adhering to the "three beauties". In the translation of the cultural image of "乍暖还寒", he uses the word "lingering" to vividly portray the sorrowful feeling of the autumn breeze, which makes his translation even more remarkable in terms of the "conveyance of the image".

Yang Xianyi & Gladys Yang are very passionate about Chinese culture, and they have always had a strong sense of mission when introducing ancient and modern Chinese works to the West, with "fidelity" as the first priority in translation. When it comes to national cultural features, such as the translation of the cultural image words "黄花" and "梧桐", they priority to the strategy of foreignization, using literal translation, transliteration and paraphrase to convey Chinese culture to foreign readers.

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