Original Paper

A Comparison of Two Chinese Versions of *Red Star Over China* from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

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Abstract

Functionalist Skopos theory holds that the purpose of translation determines the translator's choice of translation strategies. This theory is widely adopted in translation studies, and it also has instructive significance for the comparative study on different translations of same original text. In Red Star Over China, Edgar Snow described his experiences in the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region in the first-person perspective. Chinese scholars have carried out thorough researches on the Chinese translations of Red Star Over China, but they have not paid enough attention to the different translation strategies adopted in different Chinese versions. From the perspective of Skopos theory, this paper studies the differences in translation strategies between Dong Leshan's version and Wang Tao's version of Red Star Over China. Dong's translation applies literal translation for the purpose of faithfulness to the original text, while Wang's translation is more inclined to liberal translation. Both versions bear some weak points in coherence, fidelity, and over-domestication, which need to be improved in future translations.

Keywords

Red Star Over China, Skopos Theory, translation strategies

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Red Star Over China written by the American correspondent Edgar Snow (1905-1972) was firstly published in October 1937. It is a significant and classic documentary work based on the first-hand materials collected by Snow himself during his trip in northwest China in 1936. The first fully translated Chinese version, Fushe (Note 1)'s translation has been published for 84 years. Due to the limitation at that time, there are many shortcomings in it. Fortunately, such a great opus doesn't fade into oblivion, and it has kept developing through various versions. Out of different translation purposes,

different version has its own distinctive features of the time.

Dong Leshan's translation is recognized as the most far-reaching, widely disseminated, and most faithful version to the original text. And it was his translation that endowed the most famous Chinese name to the book, *Hongxing Zhaoyao Zhongguo*. Wang Tao's translation is recommended as a must-read book for secondary school students by Dr. Wen (2018), the chief editor of Chinese textbooks for primary and secondary schools of Ministry of Education. As a required reading in secondary school, its target recipient group is under age students. Thus the purpose of Wang's version is to express the information more smoothly and understandable.

"Skopos theory" offers an insight into the nature of translation as a purposeful activity. It is suitable for a comparative study of Chinese versions of *Red Star Over China* so as to observe different purposes of translators.

This paper is aimed at a comparative study of two Chinese versions of *Red Star Over China* from the perspective of Skopos Theory. One version is translated by Dong Leshan, the other by Wang Tao, and the original text is the latest edition revised by Snow himself in 1968.

1.2 Objectives and Significance

From the perspective of Skopos theory, a comparative study of two widely acclaimed Chinese translations of *Red Star Over China* was conducted in this paper. With some examples and based on the Skopos theory, skopos rule, coherence rule and fidelity rule to be more exact, the present author analyzes the different translation strategies and translation techniques in these two Chinese versions, and puts forward some suggestions for further improvement.

Through this comparative study from the view of Skopos theory, the paper is helpful for readers to fully grasp the information that the original text wants to deliver. At the same time, this research might contribute to international communication, foreign publicity and facilitate to the building of China's global image in the new era.

2. Three Rules of Skopos Theory

Skopos theory includes three rules: skopos rule, coherence rule, and fidelity rule. Skopos theory holds that all the translation actions should follow skopos rule firstly, that is, the purpose of translation action determines the whole process of translation. Usually, skopos rule refers to the communicative purpose of the translation, which means the communicative function of the translation for the target language readers in the social and cultural context of the target language (Nord, 2018, p. 35).

Coherence rule requires that translation must meet the criteria of intra-textual coherence, readable and acceptable, which means it should be understood by the recipient and meaningful in the target language culture and the communicative context in which the translation is used. The fidelity rule means that there should be intertextual coherence between the source text and the target text. Nord proposed fidelity rule to resolve cultural differences and the relationship between participants in translation action.

3. Literature Review

Before 2018, domestic researches on the Chinese translations of *Red Star Over China* mostly focused on the comparative studies of translated versions, such as Shi (2014) and Hu (2015); translation norm's influence on translation process, works and even translators, such as Chen (2014); and earlier, there was a study of the impact of the Chinese translation of *Red Star Over China* on Sino-US relations, such as Zhou (1985).

Since 2018, domestic researches on Chinese version of *Red Star Over China* have tend to be various, changing from merely a focus on the translated text to communication effects and factors influencing communication effects. Zhang (2019) compared circulation, publication and repress of three Chinese versions, she believed that social environment, translators, presses and readers would influence the communication effects; Liu (2018) studied the Chinese version's effect on liberated regions images from the view of cross-culture communication; on the basis of behaviorist theory, Zeng and Liao (2020) studied the nature and influence of Fushe' translation on *Red Star Over China*, effects on Chinese people's thought and Sino-US relations at that time, and they believed that the translation disseminated their political opinions and supported anti-Japanese aggression movement; Wu (2020) made a study on reception theory.

In brief, domestic studies on Chinese versions of *Red Star Over China* are beneficial to its communication, effects and even its own development. And the comparatives studies on this book are mostly focus on the Fushe's translation and Dong Leshan's translation, few attentions have been given to Wang Tao's version which is a must-read book for secondary school students.

4. Comparative Study of Dong's and Wang's Translation of *Red Star Over China*

4. 1 Comparative Study under the Skopos Rule

The skopos rule, as mentioned previously, is the primary rule and principle of a translation. Each translation strategy adopted by translator that meets the purpose can be regarded as logical and reasonable. *Red Star Over China* is a non-fiction literary book, which means to convey the true information is the first priority. So the first purpose of two translators is to transmit original meaning and make their expression smooth in target language. Due to their different purposes, strategies and techniques adopted by them would be different, as illustrated in the following examples. Choices of words can reflect their purposes from a micro perspective. Bold words are marked for comparison.

Example 1.

The **Insurrectionist** (Dong, 2005, p. 68)

董：造反者 (Dong, 2005, p. 69)

王：起义者 (Wang, 2018, p. 34)

In the translation of this section name, Dong's version obviously obeys the principle of fidelity, while Wang's version takes into account the feelings and reactions of the readers of the target language and

pursues intra-textual coherence. Because in the Chinese context, "造反者" is a pejorative term. Although Snow wrote from a neutral foreign correspondent's view and described what he saw and heard from the perspective of partisan disputes, it was inevitable that the source text mixed some stereotypical feelings in western countries at that time, especially stereotypes of the "Red Zone" in Northwest China at that time. Obviously Wang's translation will create a positive image of the Red Army throughout the book.

Example 2.

Anatomy of Money (Dong, 2005, p. 372)

董：货币**解剖** (Dong, 2005, p. 373)

王：关于货币的**剖析** (Wang, 2018, p. 182)

In translation of this section name, each expression has its own preference. Dong's translation uses four-character words, which are brief, powerful, and clear, while Wang's translation is more concrete than Dong's translation and is in line with the way of expression in the Chinese language. Dong's translation may lead to ambiguity. The content of this section is mainly about Soviet monetary policy, readers may associate "解剖" with clinical medicine, but they may understand naturally under the title of "剖析". Wang's extension method can avoid potential misunderstandings among readers.

Example 3.

Soviet **Strong Man** (Dong, 2005, p. 104)

董：苏维埃**掌权人物** (Dong, 2005, p. 105)

王：苏维埃 **"巨头"** (Wang, 2018, p. 51)

On this title, if literal translation is adopted, it will not only fail to express the implied meaning of the author, but also appear blunt and obscure in the target language. The two translators extended the meaning of the word according to the context, and turned abstract meaning into concrete, so that readers can understand immediately that this section is about the top leaders of the "Red Zone". Wang's translation translated "Strong Man" into commonly used Chinese phrase "巨头", which is more in line with the expression of the target language. This phrase refers to leaders with enormous power in political, economic and other circles. Such a translation not only fully expresses the meaning of the original title, but also establishes a positive image of the top leaders of the "Red Zone".

Example 4.

The Generalissimo Is Arrested (Dong, 2005, p. 652)

董：**总司令**被逮 (Dong, 2005, p. 653)

王：**蒋**被扣留 (Wang, 2018, p. 321)

Dong's translation is faithful to source text, fully expressing the original text information, but it may cause some confusion to readers who are not highly familiar with history of that period, "Who is the Generalissimo? Is it the top commander of the Red Army or the commander of the Kuomintang?". Wang's explanation is clearer, and the "The Generalissimo" is directly interpreted into the specific object of reference, Chiang Kai-shek, so the readers have no difficulty in understanding the section

92

title.

4.2 Comparative Study under the Coherence Rule

4.2.1 Reversion

Different thinking pattern and expression will lead the translators to make some changes on syntax structures. In the Chinese language, the previous event, reason and the secondary information are normally placed at the beginning of a sentence, and the result and the primary information always are placed at the second or later positions. But in English, main clause always put at the beginning of the sentence, analysis or explanation always placed in the later position.

Generally, Chinese expression pattern is "subject + adverbial + predicate + object", quite different from the English "subject + predicate + object + adverbial" structure. Besides, attribute in Chinese always placed before the modifier, whereas it always be placed after modifier in English. So the translators need to change the original sentence order in their E-C translation.

Example 5.

Opium poppies nodded their swollen heads, ready for harvest, <u>along the newly completed motor road</u>—a road already deeply wrinkled with washouts and ruts, so that at times it was scarcely navigable even for our six-ton Dodge truck (Dong, 2005: 41).

董：<u>在那条新修的汽车路上</u>，沿途的罂粟摇摆着肿胀的脑袋，等待收割。新修的路面经过水冲车压，到处都是深沟浅辙，因而我们那部载重 6 吨的道奇卡车，有时也甚至无法通行 (Dong, 2005, p. 40)。

王：<u>在那新近竣工的汽车道上</u>，两侧的罂粟已经成熟了，晃动着胀鼓鼓的脑袋。虽是新修的路面，却也到处是沟壑和车辙，即使是我们那辆载重 6 吨的道奇卡车，有时竟也无法通行 (Wang, 2018, p. 21)。

The underlined part is an adverbial of place. In Chinese versions, both translators reverse the original sentence and put it at the beginning of the sentence, and they all turn the preposition "along" into adjective "沿途的", "两侧的". These two versions comply with the Chinese language features and make the sentence readable and acceptable. If the translator keeps the original sentence and translate as the original order, the sentence would be "罂粟摇摆着肿胀的脑袋，等待收割，（它们）沿着那条新修的汽车路……", the translation is obviously unreadable and vague in meaning.

Example 6.

They sang nearly **all day** <u>on the road</u>, and their supply of songs was endless (Dong, 2005, p. 99).

董：他们<u>在路上</u>几乎**每天**都唱歌，能唱的歌无穷无尽 (Dong, 2005, p. 98)。

王：他们<u>一路</u>欢歌，什么都能被他们唱进歌里 (Wang, 2018, p. 47)。

The underlined part in this example is an adverbial of place. In order to comply with the expression of the target language, both translators put it after the subject of the sentence and before the predicate "sang". And the bold part is an adverbial of time. Dong's translation put it after the adverbial of place, which is a little bit different from Chinese's habit. However, His translation stays fidelity to the source text, for Wang's translation deletes the adverbial.

93

Example 7.

<u>On May 21</u>, the Hsu K'o-hsiang Uprising occurred **in Hunan**. Scores of peasants and workers were killed by the reactionaries (Dong, 2005, p. 249).

董：<u>5 月 21 日</u>，**湖南**发生了许克祥的叛乱，许多农民和工人被反动派杀害 (Dong, 2005, p. 248)。

王：<u>5 月 21 日</u>，许克祥在**湖南**发动叛乱，大量农民和工人被反动派杀害 (Wang, 2018, p. 120)。

The underlined part in the sentence is an adverbial of time, and the bold part is an adverbial of place. There are two adverbials in the sentence, both Dong and Wang change the original sentence order and put the adverbials before the predicate "occurred", which is based on the different position of the adverbial in Chinese and English. Dong put the subject after two adverbials, Wang put the adverbial of time before the subject and put the adverbial of place after the subject. Both techniques conform to target language's expression way.

Example 8.

<u>During the great Northwest famine</u>, which lasted roughly for three years and affected four huge provinces, I visited some of the drought-stricken areas in Suiyuan, **on the edge of Mongolia**, <u>in June,</u> <u>1929</u> (Dong, 2005, p. 347).

董：西北大灾荒曾经持续约有 3 年，遍及四大省份，我在 1929 年 6 月访问了蒙古边缘上的绥远省的几个旱灾区 (Dong, 2005, p. 346)。

王：在西北大饥荒期间，我曾于 1929 年 6 月造访蒙古边上绥远省的几个遭受旱灾的区域。这场饥荒持续了大约 3 年，影响范围达四大省份 (Wang, 2018, p. 170)。

There are two adverbials in this sentence, adverbials of time are underlined and the adverbial of place is marked as bold. Dong reverses the first adverbial of time "during the great Northwest famine" into noun "西北大灾荒", while Wang translates it as "在西北大灾荒期间" which is literal translation but the expression is smooth and common in Chinese. Dong's translation on this adverbial is flexible and can smoothly connect the following attribute "which lasted roughly for three years and affected four huge provinces". Wang's method makes him has to translate the attribute as a single sentence.

And for the second adverbial of time and the adverbial of place, they all place the adverbial of time before the adverbial of place, which is idiomatic in Chinese expression.

Example 9.

And so on, right up to the point where, **if he knew the whole five or six hundred characters** <u>before</u> <u>anyone else</u>, the youth could collect the red tassel or pencil or whatever was promised (Dong, 2005, p. 391).

董：如此等等，一直到如果这个青年走在别人前面，第一个学会五六百字，就可以得奖，不是红旗，就是铅笔，或者别的奖品 (Dong, 2005, p. 390)。

王；就这样念下去，直到某个青年掌握了全部 500 个或者 600 个字，第一个学会的，就可以得到红缨、铅笔或者别的什么奖品 (Wang, 2018, p. 191)。

There are two adverbials in this sentence, the bold part is an adverbial of condition which and the

underlined part is an adverbial of time. In Chinese versions, both Dong and Wang reverse the original pattern, place the adverbial of time "before anyone else" before the predicate "学会" and translate it into "第一个".

Dong translate the adverbial of condition into two short sentences "一直到如果这个青年走在别人前面，第一个学会五六百字", and Wang translate it into "直到某个青年掌握了全部 500 个或者 600 个字". Wang's translation is more brief and fluent than Dong's, Chinese preposition "直到/一直到" perfectly connect the content before. But Dong's translation is incoherent in Chinese due to the combination of a preposition "一直到" and a conjunction "如果" which is faithful to the original text but not coherent in target language.

4.2.2 Division

Long sentences are commonly found in English, to put them into Chinese language is no easy sometimes because the translation might be awkward, unnatural and unintelligible. To cope with such complicated sentences, translators always divide the sentence into several short sentence to create a smooth, natural flow of language. This translation strategy is called division.

Example 10.

I had just sat down and begun an interview with a soviet functionary to whom Yao had introduced me in Pai Chia P'ing, when a young commander, wearing a Sam Browne belt, stumbled up on a sweating horse and plunged to the ground. He looked curiously at me (Dong, 2005, p. 65).

董：姚在百家坪介绍给我一个苏维埃工作人员。我刚刚坐下，准备和他开始谈话，突然一个束着军官皮带的青年指挥官骑了一匹汗流浃背的马疾驰而到，跨下马背。他好奇地端详着我 (Dong, 2005, p. 64)。

王：姚在百家坪将一名苏维埃工作人员介绍给我。我刚坐下，开始和他谈话，突然，一名青年指挥官骑着汗淋淋的马进来。他腰间系着武装带，跨下马背，好奇地打量着我 (Wang, 2018, p. 33)。

For this sentence, both translators divide it into several short sentences. Dong divides it into two complete short sentences; Wang divides it into three complete short sentences, and he combines the last short sentence with the following sentence in source text.

The sentence structure of English is totally different from that of Chinese, the English sentence always has a long and strict form while Chinese sentence is brief and loose in form. If translators do not change the structure of the original sentence, their language in Chinese may be incoherent.

Example 11.

As an outstanding achievement, opium had been completely eliminated in north Shensi, and in fact I did not see any sign of poppies after I entered the soviet districts (Dong, 2005, p. 369).

董：陕北已经彻底消灭了鸦片，这是个杰出的成就。事实上，我一进苏区以后就没有看到过什么罂粟的影子 (Dong, 2005, p. 368)。

王：其中一项显著的成就是在陕北彻底消灭了鸦片。实际上，在进入苏区后，我压根没有看见过罂粟 (Wang, 2018, p. 180)。

Both translators divide the sentence into two complete sentences. Dong translates the adverbial of place

95

"in north Shensi" in first sentence into noun "陕北", which serves as subject in translation. And this kind of expression is common in both Chinese and English: use capital name to refer to the government of the regime. Wang keeps the adverbial of place in his translation, but his translation is faulty. There is no subject in his translated sentence, "whose achievement? who eliminated opium in north Shensi?" From this point, Wang's translation has a grammatical mistake, which means his expression does not conform with target language.

Example 12.

This was manifestly true economically, and although in the social, political, and cultural life of the organized soviets there was a crude Marxist guidance, limitations of material conditions were everywhere obvious (Dong, 2005, p. 357).

董：这在经济上尤其显著。在有组织的苏区的社会、政治、文化生活中，虽然有一种马克思主义的简单指导，但是物质条件的局限性到处是显而易见的 (Dong, 2005, p. 356)。

王：在经济方面，这种情况表现得尤为显著。在有组织的苏维埃社会、政治和文化生活中，虽然有一种朴素的马克思主义指导着，但物质条件的局限性却随处可见、一目了然 (Wang, 2018, p. 175)。

To fully grasp the meaning of the sentence, we should consider it in the context. Before this sentence, Snow expressed his own opinion on the society in the Northwest that he preferred to call the situation as rural equalitarianism than anything Marx, then he explained why. The sentence explains his opinion.

It's not fair to discuss both translations out of the context. Dong uses an indicative pronoun "这" in the first sentence of his translation of the original sentence, which makes his translation concise and coherent to the former contents. And the first sentence of Wang's translation is more detailed than Dong's, which makes his translation more formal. Both translations are meaningful and clear, Dong's translation transmits same information in less words so that it reflects his good contextual understanding, clear explanation and concise presentation.

And for the second separated sentence, Wang translates the adverb "everywhere" and adjective "obvious" into two four-character words which are more fluent and acceptable in target language. Two translators provide different translations of the adjective "crude" that modifies "Marxist guidance" in the original sentence. Dong translates it into "简单的", while Wang translates it into "朴素的". "简单的" expresses similar meaning with "crude", readers may doubt political qualities in the "Red Zone" at that time. But what Snow wants to convey to the readers is that the "Red Zone" in China at that time was primary due to various limitations, especially material conditions. So, we can infer that the adjective "crude" here can be understood as "rudimentary".

4.3 Comparative Study under the Fidelity Rule

This part will use some section titles of the original text to make a comparison between the two translations from the perspective of fidelity rule. Section titles should be brief and meaningful. How to transmit the necessary information and extended meaning at the same time is not easy. Due to different purposes, two translators adopted different translation strategies and techniques.

Example 13.

Some Han Bronzes (Dong, 2005, p. 25)

董：汉代青铜 (Dong, 2005, p. 24)

王：大汉子孙 (Wang, 2018, p. 14)

The content of this section is mainly about the connection between the "Red Zone" and Chang Hsueh-liang that Snow learned through Pastor Wang after arriving in Xi'an. At the end of this section, under the pretext of taking Snow to the ancient cite of the Han Dynasty outside Xi'an city, they met one of the Kuomintang's most wanted men on the ruins of the Han Dynasty palace who work in secret under the enemy's very nose, Deng Fa. Kuomintang offers a reward of 50,000 yuan. At the end of this section, Snow uses this sentence: "How incongruous and yet how logical it was that this place should seem to the Communists the one rendezvous where we four could safely meet, the exact spot where, two millenniums ago, Han Wu Ti had ruled a united China, and so successfully consolidated a people and a culture from the chaos of warring states that their descendants, ever since, had been content to call themselves Sons of Han" (Dong, 2005, p. 39).

Considering the content of this section, it is clear that Wang Tao's translation is more appropriate, while Dong's translation will inevitably make readers a little confused. Because this section does not involve anything about "Bronze of the Han Dynasty", but his translation is obviously faithful to the original title. Obviously, Wang Tao adopted the translation method of domestication, and translated it into "大汉子孙" which is more suitable for the context, while Dong's translation is the literal translation method under foreignization strategy.

Example 14.

Four Great Horses (Dong, 2005, p. 515)

董：四大马 (Dong, 2005, p. 514)

王：西北四马 (Wang, 2018, p. 256)

Dong's translation is a literal translation of the original text. Readers may think that the content of this section is about varieties of horse in Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region. In fact, it's about four warlords named Ma that once ruled the northwest region of China for a long time. They are Ma Hung-kuei, Ma Hung-ping, Ma Pu-fang, and Ma Pu-ch'ing. Compared with Dong's version, Wang's translation adds two characters to make the information meaningful, and replaces the general expression of the original title with a more precise and comprehensive one. Moreover, Wang's translation is similar to a widely accepted and unique statement called "西北四大马" in Chinese history, therefore, his version perfectly fits the target language culture.

Example 15.

Moslem and Marxist (Dong, 2005, p. 529)

董：穆斯林和马克思主义者 (Dong, 2005, p. 528)

王：回民与马克思主义者 (Wang, 2018, p. 259)

This section is about the Moslem training regiment in the Red Army. Dong's translation is faithful to

the original section name, focusing on expressing the message intended by the source text. Wang's version, on the other hand, is more in line with the target language culture and history. This kind of expression not only conforms to reality and fits the translation environment, but also enables readers to accurately get the meaning of the text.

Example 16.

Life Begins at Fifty (Dong, 2005, p. 385)

董：人生五十始 (Dong, 2005, p. 384)

王：五十始知天命 (Wang, 2018, p. 188)

Dong's translation is straightforward, faithful to the source text, and does not appear to be eloquent in the target language. Wang's translation is more in line with the context of the target language, because there is a saying in traditional Chinese culture that called "五十知天命". Such an expression perfectly fits in with the target language situation.

5. Conclusion

From the perspective of Skopos rule, it can be concluded that Dong's translation prefers to pursue fidelity to the source text, and his choice of words is a balance between foreignization and domestication. From the view of coherence rule, they all use reversion and division to cope with some long sentences in order to create smooth flow of their language. Through the analysis of examples above, Dong's translation generally achieves coherence and keeps fidelity to the original text at the same time. Wang's method prefers to pursue coherence than fidelity. From the perspective of fidelity rule, Dong's translation keeps fidelity to the source text to the greatest extent, he uses literal translation more, while Wang adopts liberal translation mostly. Dong's version is a good choice for those readers who want to seek a Chinese version which keeps the style and features of the original text and restore the original structure naturally above the narration throughout the book, and Wang's version is mostly suitable for those who want to read the book from the role of Chinese people and know more about the history from a foreigner's view. Wang's translation transmits information fully through his preference on domestication. And Dong's translation can be regarded as a great, flexible balance between domestication and foreignization.

On the other hand, there are some weaknesses in both versions. In Dong's version, flaws are mainly concentrating on coherence and readability, while Wang's flaws are mainly about fidelity to the original text, especially his deletion and over-domestication.

Although this study proves that Skopos theory is pragmatic in guiding the comparative study of two Chinese versions of *Red Star Over China*, limitations still exist in this paper: researcher lists 16 examples to find how translators adopt different translation strategies and techniques under their different purposes, but it's not enough to fully demonstrate their respective translations aims due to the limited knowledge and academic ability of the author, which await further study with more examples.

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Note

Note 1. Fushe: a secret press founded by Hu Yuzhi in Shanghai in 1938.