

Literary Translation Creation from the Perspective of Domestication—A Practice Report on the Chinese Translation of James Joyce's *The Dead* (Excerpt)

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Abstract

Literary translation inherently involves the translator's subjectivity and the selection of cultural strategies, with domestication and foreignization being the two core approaches. Against the background of China's pursuit of more equitable cultural dissemination, this study focuses on the creative dimension of literary translation from the perspective of domestication. Taking excerpts from James Joyce's *The Dead* as the source text, the research integrates Vermeer's *Skopos Theory*, Schleiermacher's and Venuti's domestication theories, and Chinese theories such as Xu Yuanchong's *Three Beauties Theory*. It conducts a comparative analysis of two existing Chinese translations (by Wang Fengzhen and Wang Zhiliang) and presents the author's own translation practice. The study explores how to exert translator subjectivity and apply creative techniques under the framework of domestication to balance the original text's artistic value and the target readers' cultural adaptability. Research findings indicate that domestication, when guided by clear translation purposes, can effectively convey the emotional tension and cultural connotations of the source text. The study also reflects on limitations such as insufficient comparative cases and proposes directions for further improvement. This research aims to enrich the academic discourse on literary translation creativity and provide practical insights for promoting cross-cultural communication and Chinese cultural dissemination.

Keywords: literary translation creation, domestication, translator's subjectivity, *Skopos Theory*, *The Dead*, James Joyce

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Due to its inherent nature, literary translation inevitably involves the translator's subjectivity. As fundamental dimensions of literary translation, they often govern the ultimate effect

of the translated work in terms of linguistic nuances. The creativity in literary translations thus becomes an important discussion in literary translation. Akin to all types of translation, the process involves the deliberate selection of cultural strategies. Two strategies, namely domestication and foreignization, come to the

fore.

Domestic translation theories since the May Fourth Movement reveals a prevailing emphasis on coexistence, guiding translations towards achieving a state of “harmony”. Within this overarching framework, ensuring the translator’s subjectivity and fostering creativity in translations aligns aptly with domestication. It is within this academic context that the current research is undertaken.

1.2 Research Purpose and Significance

Academic attention towards the creation of literary translation remains relatively limited despite the diversity in global literary translation. Being the largest populous country and the second-largest economy globally, China’s cultural dissemination remains in a marginalized position, progressing towards a more equitable cultural context. The selected case for practice stems from *The Dead* by James Joyce, the greatest Irish writer of the 20th century and a pioneer in postcolonial literature. Corresponding Chinese translation analysis of his works provides a means to highlight the motif from both theoretical and practical perspectives.

This study centers on the crucial module of the creative aspect of contemporary literary translation. The research delves into the application of creativity in literary translation with domestication. The dual purposes are to contribute to the research landscape of this specific module and to facilitate breakthroughs in translation theory for the monumental task of introducing and disseminating Chinese culture.

2. Researches and Theories

2.1 Research Status Review

We conduct a comprehensive analysis of the literary translation history after the Qing Dynasty, concurrently assessing the current state of China-related literary translation research globally. Regardless of the diversity in nationalities and motifs, there is an increasing trend in the innovation of literary translation theories. Additionally, interdisciplinary research phenomena involving literary translation and Computer-Aided Translation (CAT), corpus translation, linguistics, law, psychology, and others are gaining prominence. These trends collectively indicate that China’s literary translation and research are currently in an ascendant process. However, the aesthetic value

of some classical translators and translations is being questioned. The development of literary translation criticism gives rise to numerous challenges.

Professor Yang Wuneng, a renowned Chinese translator of German literature, asserts in his paper *Reflections on Literary Translation Criticism* published in *Chinese Translation* in May (Ma Huijuan, 2013), “Since the reform and opening up, we have witnessed a considerable number of renowned literary works and translations. However, scholars of translation criticism are rarely esteemed.” Translation critics align their practice with research, while the “reclusive” type of translation critics prefer to remain isolated within the realm of literary translation. It often results in outstanding translations sinking into oblivion along with the translator’s anonymity, exemplified by works such as Professor Xu Jun’s *Literary Translation Criticism* and Mr. Qian Zhongshu’s *Lin Shu’s Translation*. Xie Tianzhen and Zha Mingjian, in their collaborative work *A History of Foreign Literature Translation in 20th Century China*, divide this history into three phases: 1898–1949, 1949–1976, and 1977–today. Through analysis, the authors attempt to elucidate the development of each phase from perspectives such as cultural context and manipulation. For instance, political-based restrictions of literary genres after 1949 experienced a revival after 1977.

As for Chinese literature translation, Australian sinologist Bonnie Macdougall (2011:5) outlines four modes of Chinese literary translation: academic mode, commercial mode, political mode, and personal mode (Yang Wuneng, 2023). Her analysis suggests that the latter two modes, involving routine international publishing, have gradually become the mainstream models, which requires multiple number of renowned translators. Howard Goldblatt, American sinologist and world-famous translator, encompasses all four modes. He points out that many English readers are not solely drawn to Chinese literature for its literary charm but as a window to understand China.

James Joyce, author of the selected source text in this research, is normally referred within the stream of consciousness literature. From 1949 to 1978, translation and study of this subject was restricted for the representative expression of the decadent bourgeois culture, leading to its suppression in translation. It flourished, however, following the reform and opening up.

Joyce's works by Shanghai Translation Publishing House went through multiple editions, with Xiao Qian, Jin Di, and Wang Zhiliang being the most representative translators.

Overall, the Chinese translation of classic foreign literature reached a critical point by the early 2000s, while related translation criticism lags behind (Xu Yuanchong, 2016). The Chinese literature translation is still in the early stage, with researchers inheriting ancient approaches but facing a quantifiable shortage.

2.2 Theoretical Review

The adoption of translation theories determines the academic degree of this research. Here are the translation theories to be adopted during the research. Hans Vermeer, German translation theorist, introduced *Skopos Theory* during the 1960s and 1970s. "Skopos Rule" governing translation activities determines translation strategies, methods, and techniques. Following this principle, the source language holds not a central position but an open entity providing information to the translator.

The standpoint of translation creation involves highlighting the translator's subjectivity while dealing with the relationships between the source text and the translated text, the source language and the target language, and the author and the translator, where domestication and foreignization are adopted. Domestication is defined in translation studies as a translation strategy in which a transparent, fluent style is adopted in order to minimize the strangeness of the foreign text for the target language reader (Venuti, 1995:15), i.e., it assimilates texts to target linguistic and cultural values. The source of this thought derives from Schleiermacher, who states that the such a translation "leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him" (Venuti, 1995: 19–20; Huijun & Sun Zhili, 2006). In actual fact, the strategy of domestication "brings the reader to the author"; it is the case "when the text is accommodated to the reader". Subsequently, Andre Lefevere, spokesman of the "translation studies" school, advocates for the application of domestication. In his *Translation, Rewriting, and Manipulation of Literary Fame*, Lefevere argued that translation is a form of rewriting, inevitably constrained by ideological factors like poetics. As the manipulators, translators should pay more attention to translation purposes and

target text functions other than the author or source text.

In China, the rise of domestication is exemplified by Fu Lei's *Resemblance Theory*, Qian Zhongshu's *Transformation Theory*, and Xu Yuanchong's *Three Beauties Theory*. In 2016, Xu Yuanchong proposed the development of distinctive Chinese literary translation theories, emphasizing literary translation theory as part of translation philosophies. In literary translation, translators' subjectivity is imperative for purposes to better serve domestic readers (Shen Fuying, 2020).

3. Case Analysis and Practice

3.1 James Joyce and *The Dead*

As one of the three forerunners of modernism along with Franz Kafka and Marcel Proust, James Joyce is widely acknowledged as the greatest Irish writer. He frequently employs the stream of consciousness, using his unique voice to narrate the hidden corners of the human psyche. Growing up in a fragmented nation perennially struggling on the edge of independence, Joyce is also the best spokesman of postcolonial literature (Carmen Millán-Varela, 2004).

Such desire is ubiquitous in his creation including *The Dead*. *The Dead* symbolizes the "moral petrification of all the Dubliners who appeared throughout the pages of the book". We read of Joyce's intention to write a moral history of his country, and his choice of Dublin because it represented the centre of what "paralysis" means (Mary T. Reynolds, 1999).

Joyce's book carries a message to which readers can respond in all ages and in all parts of the world, as it express fundamental truths about human beings. Through their stories, Joyce shows the sad futility of war and violence, the sorrowful picture of the Irish people living under colonial domination, and, above all, the sad condition of men and women when they are eaten up by envy and jealousy and anger. Yet Joyce creates comedy to carry this message, and he leaves the reader with the possibility of hope for the future. The world by his portrayal is utterly different from that of Homer, Shakespeare, and Dante, but the human spirit continues and survives. His description of translation method as accurate, slow, and fastidious seems to be an exact description of approach to the Chinese translation. His goal, as Jin Di has written, was to produce as nearly as

possible the closest approximation to the author's total effect—not just a word-for-word equivalent, but the full sense of the author's words in the original context (Nigora Negmatova, 2022).

3.2 Comparative Analysis of Two Translations

Evident from the comprehensive review above of the aforementioned literature theories is that “translation creation” has increasingly become a research focus for translators at home and abroad. The three principles of translation creation—namely, of harmonious coexistence, of artistic equivalence, and of the translator's subjectivity and its limitations—stand out in balancing domestication and foreignization in terms of translation. Therefore, it is imperative to conduct a comparative analysis of preceding translations. The last two paragraphs from *The Dead* are excerpted as source text. Two parallel Chinese translations are selected for an in-depth case study. Translation A is translated by Wang Fengzhen from the 2012 edition of *Dubliners* by Shanghai Translation Publishing House; Translation B is translated by late translator Wang Zhiliang (1928–2023) from the 1984 edition.

Translation A: 大量的泪水充溢着加布里埃尔的眼睛。他从未觉得自己对任何女人有那样的感情，但他知道，这样一种感情一定是爱情。(Wang Fengzhen, 2012:131)

Translation B: 泪水大量地涌进加布里埃尔的眼睛。他自己从来不曾对任何一个女人有过那样的感情，然而他知道，这种感情一定是爱。(Wang Zhiliang, 1984:260)

The first sentence adheres to the expression of the source language. Both “generous” uses adjective to emphasize strength, while “feel oneself towards” employs a copula-verb structure with an adverb, presenting a static scene. In conjunction with the preceding context, the more static the expression, the better it can convey the emotional tension. Translation A imitates the original text by using “generous” as an adjective and releasing the tension through the term “充溢”; Translation B breaks the static structure by directly translating as “pouring in large quantities.” As for the expressive effect, Translation A maintains the static sense of the original text under foreignization; Translation B directly releases the emotional tension through the predicate under domestication.

Translation A: 它飘落下来，厚厚地堆积在歪斜的十字架和墓碑上，堆积在小门一根根栅栏的尖顶

上，堆积在光秃秃的荆棘丛上。他听着雪花隐隐约约地飘落，慢慢地睡着了，雪花穿过宇宙轻轻地落下，就像他们的结局似的，落到所有生者和死者身上。(Wang Fengzhen, 2012:132)

Translation B: 它纷纷飘落，厚厚积压在歪歪斜斜的十字架上和墓石上，落在一扇扇小墓门的尖顶上，落在荒芜的荆棘丛中。他的灵魂缓缓地昏睡了，当他听着雪花微微地穿过宇宙在飘落，微微地，如同他们最终的结局那样，飘落到所有的生者和死者身上。(Wang Zhiliang, 1984:260)

According to the Joycean “epiphany”, the finale sentences represent the manifestation of such realization. A comparison between Translation A and Translation B reveals that the adoption of domestication and foreignization is not absolute but rather flexibly employed based on the translator's intention and layout, as demonstrated in *Skopos Theory* within the creativity of translation and the translator's subjectivity. Considering the *Skopos Theory*, translators manipulate the final effect of the translation based on the “Skopos Principle”. Besides, by the end of the translation, the distinct styles of the two translators are evident, eliminating the need to emphasize the highlighting of subjectivity.

The final sentence is the most evocative section in *The Dead*. Through the original text analysis, both Translation A and Translation B remain largely consistent, attempting to restore the charm of Joyce's language. However, in the initial part, Translation A employs a technique by reversing the order of the two sentences. The ultimate effect not only meets the conventions of the target language but alters the emotional tone of its first half. The preceding analysis provides an assessment of the effectiveness of the two translations, and the subsequent section will be presented by the author, accompanied by an analysis.

3.3 Translation Practice and Analysis

恍然间，加布列尔眼间盈满泪水。自己从未被其他女人这样触动，但他很清楚这触动便是爱。泪水越积越满，或明或暗间，他仿佛看见一颗湿漉漉的树，底下站着位年轻人。其他身影愈靠愈近，自己的灵魂则愈行愈远，向着那片亡灵国度慢慢靠过去。亡灵们时隐时现，他感知得到，却难以触及。接着，他自己也越来越模糊，逐渐融进一个灰暗虚无的世界里。这里曾坚不可摧，无数亡灵在此繁衍生息。此时却正在一点点瓦解，最终消逝。

玻璃上传来几声轻击，他转向窗户这边：雪又下起来了。他睡眼惺忪，眼前银色黑色的雪花迎着灯光斜落而下。该出发西行了。报纸上写的不错：整个

爱尔兰都在下雪。雪落在阴郁中部平原的每片土地，又落在光秃秃的山丘，然后轻轻落进艾伦沼泽，再向西，最终轻轻落进香农河汹涌的黑浪中。山丘上孤寂的教堂墓地一片白茫茫，里面长眠着迈克尔·富里。大雪随风滑落，积在歪斜的十字架和墓碑上，堆在小门的尖顶上，落在荒芜的荆棘丛中。在他灵魂昏睡之时，大雪正穿过宇宙，落向每一个死者，也落向每一个生者，指向他们的结局。

In accordance with the motif of this research report, my translation is grounded in the creativity of the translation and the translator's subjectivity, primarily drawing upon Veemer's *Skopos Theory* and domestication of Schleiermacher and Venuti. Adhering to the cultural context of domestication, I directly embody the emotional tension in the term “盈满” in this sentence. Besides emotion, it strives to maintain the modality present in the original text. For the second sentence, I employ amplification, breaking down the sentence and subsequently altering the perspective of the first half. “Dripping” as a gerund transformed into an adjective is generally translated to its dynamic sense. However, considering the preceding context, I translate “dripping” as “湿漉漉”, capturing both a dynamic sensation and a suppressed emotional feel. This insertion reflects my own interpretation, showcasing the subjectivity of the translator based on the purpose of translation.

For the third sentence, “where dwells...” is translated as “亡灵国度” to adhere to the conventions of the target language, reflecting the creative equivalence principle in translation. To achieve a similar artistic expression, the predicate is nominalized, with the term “亡灵国度” in the target language still exuding foreignization. In the second paragraph, the third sentence from the end similarly involves a shift in the perspective of the source text during translation to avoid imbalance in sentence structure.

In the final two sentences, the three prepositions “on” in the original text are translated environmentally and emotionally as “堆” and “落”. Amplification technique is also adopted in the last sentence. Upon completing the translation, it occurred to me that the creativity of the translation and the translator's subjectivity can be achieved through a wide range of translation techniques. Particularly, when a translator develops a specific translation style, it's needless to pursue subjectivity, but rather rethinking the adoption of harmonious

coexistence. This might be a modest gain from this practice.

4. Reflection and Summary

4.1 Reflection on Translation Process and Result

This research practice can be broadly divided into six stages: the selection of theoretical perspectives, the collection and reading of literature, the selection and excerpting of the source text, the selection of translated cases, the conduct of translation practice, and the analysis of translations. The most challenging aspects relatively throughout the entire process were the selection of theoretical perspectives and analyzing translations. In terms of integrating theories with practice, the endeavor yielded certain valuable insights. Three personal reflections, however, are still to be improved. Firstly, the limited comparative case translations hindered the formation of more comprehensive analysis. Secondly, haste was observed in analyzing previous translations, leaving room for exploration in specific details. Thirdly, when citing theoretical support for practice, it would be beneficial to incorporate one's own translation for parallel analysis, thus rendering the translation practice more valuable.

Throughout this research practice, I have upgraded my understanding of how the creativity of the translation and the translator's subjectivity are manifested in translation. However, it's important to note that while the translation represents a static outcome, the process of practice is dynamic and constantly evolving. Attempting to solidify translation thinking based on a single translated work is not advisable, nor is it appropriate to detach translation reflection from practical application. Both aspects should be intertwined and considered together.

4.2 Summary of Translation Insights and Experience

Fundamentally, culture is exposed behind techniques, methods, and strategies in terms of translation, giving rise to the concept of “cultural untranslatability”. Even between two closely related cultures, there exist numerous unthinkable aspects. For instance, *The Dead* was authored by Joyce, who lived in early 20th-century Ireland, seeking independence and liberation. As Chinese readers and translators, we volunteer to have better access to Joyce's context within postcolonial Irish literature. Yet, there remain more cultural symbols inherent to Irish post-colonialism undecipherable to us

upon analyzing *Dubliners* or *Ulysses*. However, the closing sentence of *The Dead* has resonated with countless readers worldwide, indicating the enduring influence of culture. A translator who uses a cultural approach is simply recognizing that each language contains elements which are derived from its culture that every text is anchored in a specific culture, and that conventions of text production and reception vary from culture to culture (Zsuzsanna Ajtony, 2017).

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