

Analysis of Translation of Wuhan Diary: Dispatches from Original Epicenter by Michael Berry in a Post-colonialist Perspective

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Abstract. The West always abashes China by public opinion not only in news report and literature, but also in translation including the ones of the Chinese literature and the ones of diaries, news report, documentaries, government announcement, etc. Researchers have worked on several translations of Chinese literary works; however, they have rarely much worked on diaries. Michael Berry is a professor of Contemporary Chinese Cultural Studies at UCLA and the Director of the UCLA Center for Chinese Studies. He has been a translator who translates from Chinese into English for many years as well, his works include *Speaking in Images: Interviews with Contemporary Chinese Filmmakers*, *A History of Pain: Trauma in Modern Chinese Fiction and Film*, and *Jia Zhangke's Hometown Trilogy*. Therefore, this analysis focuses on the translation strategy of translation of *Wuhan Diary: Dispatches from Original Epicenter* by Michael Berry, and observe if the translator has demonized China by his translation strategy.

Keywords: Translation strategies; post-colonialism; China.

1. Introduction

Ever since Treaty of Shimonoseki was made, foreign powers started attempting to loot China [1]. In the end of Qing dynasty, they made China sign several unequal treaties, so that the Chinese society had become half-colonized and half-feudalist, the situation continued during Republic of China and ended in 1949 where People's Republic of China was founded and became a total sovereign state. However, the west had not stopped but continued to attack China. Under this circumstance, the west bashed China with the pandemic of covid-19 by creating public opinion against her. In the beginning of the pandemic, the situation of Wuhan was so serious that the city had been lockdowned in order to block the means of the transfer of virus. The West claimed that China violated human rights by her pandemic prevention, meanwhile, Fang Fang, a Chinese writer, wrote *Wuhan Diary* which records a great number of false information and rumors. After a couple of days, the English translation of the diary was published, causing a great impact overseas. The West seemed to hit the jackpot and bash China with the diary. What kind of translation strategies is used by the West to maintain the right of speech in public opinion can be revealed by comparison between the original work and its English translation. However, the bulk of researches on the diary have only pointed out the misinformation of the diary, a few have pointed out how the translation of the diary demonizes the original, currently there is lack of researches in the sight of post-colonialism. Therefore, this analysis is dedicated to compare *Wuhan: Feng Cheng Ri Ji* by Fang Fang (方方) and its English translation *Wuhan Diary: Dispatches from Original Epicenter* by Michael Berry in a post-colonial point of view and reveal what kind of translation strategy the translator used to make the diary that demonizes China more demonize China.

2. Literature References

The scholars like Raman Selden believe that post-colonial criticism allows people to find the struggle for power between all kinds of “centers” and “others”, the West always considers itself to be the “center” of the world and other Asian, African and Latin American nations the “others”, and vilifies them, by which it strengthen its own ideology [2]. It is like what Susan Bassnett, a famous translation researcher, says “We must admit what Niranjana said that controlling strategies are within translation, ‘Translation strengthen the impression of colonizees presented by colonizers, so that colonizees have only gained what Edward Said says the reappearance or fact of no history.’ [3]” [4]

Siting Translation: History, Post-structurism, and the Colonial Context by Niranjana performs that translation can not only help colonization tyrannize the world, but also can be used to defend against and deconstruct it, and help Asian, African and Latin American nations that are victims of it rise and revive. Spivak believes that post-colonialist criticism aims at defending against the cultural dominance of the West over non-western nations. Homi K. Bhabha believes when the weak non-western cultures copies from the mighty one, they simply have to add alloplasm from the colony in order to weaken the mighty one and its influence, so that they can eventually rise [5]. Lawrence Venuti points out that translation can adopt foreignizing strategy, which means to remain the foreign identity of the original by incoherent and weird parole in order to struggle against the western cultural dominance [6]. As well as Antoine Berman believes that foreignizing strategy aims at the inequality of cultural communication between English-speaking countries and the other, which is resistance to imperialism [7]. Said criticizes the perspective of the West towards the East in his *Orientalism*: the West is the “center”, and the East is the “other”; the significant of the East completely depends on the expectation and cliché of the West [8]. The East fabricated by Orientalism allows the West to always view the East in a strange light, considering the East to be savage and ignorant, so that the East becomes a weirdo [9]. The domesticating strategy has always been adopted in the history of western translation, especially the UK, the ethnocentrism behind it leads its extrinsic behaviour [10]. When an individual text is translated from Bengali into such a tyrannous language like English, the point of view by Bengalis are often not translated out of English readers’ preference, therefore the difference is assimilated [11]. The translation of *Wuhan Diary* by Berry adopt pretty much domesticating strategy, making the difference between Chinese and English invisible.

3. Case Analysis

The translation adopts domesticating strategy. If the wording of a weak language switches into the one of the dominant language when a message is conveyed from the former to the latter, then the culture of the former will be deconstructed and will disappear, although the one of the latter will be strengthen.

Case 1.:

The title of the chapter of Jan. 1 (Chinese calendar) in the original is “高科技作起恶来，一点也不比瘟疫弱。”

Translation: “Technology can sometimes be every bit as evil as a contagious virus.”

“作起恶来” in the source is an action, although the translation uses “Technology...be...evil...” which is an English way of wording, instead of presenting the action. “一点也不比” is a common comparative in Chinese wording, which describe 2 or more objects are similar in some respects. However, in order to incline to the readers of the target language, the translator uses “as...as...” instead of the its counterpart of English, and adds “sometimes”, which throttles the culture of the weak language. The translator is supposed to protect the culture of the weak language, translate the original title into “When technology starts committing crimes, it is not less powerful than contagious virus.” which remains the common comparative of Chinese wording and the coma, raising the position of the weak language.

Case 2.:

Original:

不知道我的微博还能不能发出来. 前一阵, 因为反对年轻人街头集体爆粗口, 导致微博被封 (...), 投诉无门, 起诉无门.

Translation: It wasn’t too long ago that I had my account shut down after I criticized a group of young nationalists who were harassing people on the streets with foul language. (...) I tried to complain to Sina, the company that runs Weibo, yet there is really no way to get through to them.

The sentence “不知道我的微博还能不能发出来.” reflects the author is unaware of the situation of her weibo account, which echoes the ending of the last chapter “先发了试试吧.” (Let’s see if this

post is able to be uploaded.). This sentence is omitted by the translator, causing the absence of coordination. “投诉无门, 起诉无门.” is a common 4-character wording used in Chinese, it applies two “无门”, leading to the effect of parallelism. It is translated into “yet there is really no way to get through to them”, causing the absence of the rhetoric of the original. Instead, it is supposed to translated into “No place to complain, no place to press charges”, so that the Chinese way of rhetoric from the original could be remained in the translation.

Simplifying translation is adopted by the translator, which can simplify the content of the original and reduce the reading amount of readers of the target language, allowing them to read the work more easily. However, it can also incomplete the work so that the readers can only read the work after castration.

Case 3.:

In the original, all chapters of the diary are recorded by both Chinese calendar and the Gregorian one, however, the former was completely deleted in the translation. For example, “正月初一 (1月25日)” means “Jan. 1 (Jan. 25)”, but only the one in the parenthesis, which is Gregorian, is remained in the translation. Chinese calendar is a Chinese traditional way to record date, Gregorian calendar is a western one, especially for the nations that convert to Christianity. The translator transfers Chinese calendar into Gregorian one in order to incline the work to readers of target language, so that they are not capable of connecting with the Chinese culture via Chinese calendar. It is understandable that the translator intends to make the readers understand the work more easily. But he could totally have introduced the Chinese calendar by notes, and remain the parenthesis with the western counterpart inside it, so that the cross-cultural communication could be improved.

Notes can explain different concepts between the context of target language and the one of the source language, which allows the readers of the target language realize the diversity of culture of different languages more explicitly. Although one of the notes by the translator is simplified and thus it is incomplete.

Case 4.:

Original: 武汉人说: 锄禾日当午, 睡觉好辛苦. 睡了一上午, 还有一下午. 这样一来, 不可能没有坦荡感呀.

Translation: Everyone in Wuhan is saying: “On those sunny days when we till the crops, it’s hard to get a good night’s rest! We sleep all morning; we sleep all afternoon.”

Translator’s note: This is a reference to a comic coronavirus song that became an online hit in China during the early outbreak. The full lyrics read: “On those sunny days when we till the crops, it’s hard to get a good night’s rest! We sleep all morning; We sleep all afternoon; We sleep today, we sleep tomorrow; and the day after tomorrow too; We sleep for our country and our family; carrying on with the cause no matter how difficult it may be; I’d rather sit home and gain weight, than go anywhere outside; Putting on some pounds is a luxury, going out leads to disaster; I beg you to follow the rules, and take care of yourself; Staying in bed every day is our pride, and it helps the nation save on face masks.”

The original refers to “Wuhan Sleep Song”, which contains an allusion to an ancient Chinese poem Sympathy for the peasants (II) by Li Shen, the bulk of Chinese people will be reminded of the whole poem as they see “锄禾日当午” (On those sunny days when we till the crops), Chinese people are able to find such allusion hilarious, however, the translator has not concluded it in the note, so that the readers of the target language are not able to receive such a hilarity, and the position of Chinese culture has become lower.

The translator uses Adaptation and some content of the original has been replaced by what the translator attempts to convey to the readers of the target language, therefore the original intention of the author has changed.

Case 5.:

Original title of the diary: 《武汉: 封城日记》

Former translation: Wuhan Diary: Dispatches from Original Epicenter

Latest translation: Wuhan Diary: Dispatches from a Quarantined City

On the former translation, the translator calls Wuhan the origin and hypocenter, by which he conveys to the readers from English-speaking countries that Wuhan is where covid-19 originated and where the pandemic situation is the most serious. Later on the experts proved that Wuhan was not the origin of covid-19, therefore the translation title has changed, calling Wuhan a quarantined city and a city where everybody is quarantined. However, Wuhan had only lockdowned the city because of the serious pandemic and quarantined the infected people for the purpose of the blocking the ways of which covid-19 transfers, and the Wuhan residents who were not infected were not quarantined. The title is supposed to be translated into “Wuhan: Diary during the Lockdown” which conveys the original intension of the author.

Translators have to adopt amplification when they translate from a language into another due to cultural difference, what is familiar to the source language speakers may be strange to target language speakers. Therefore translators have to add more details when translating so that the readers of the target language can receive the message the author conveys. However, amplification can also be adopted to distort the original intension of the original work.

Case 6.:

The original: 刚才《收获》程永新给我信息，说不妨写写“封城记”。

Translation: I just received a message from Cheng Yongxin, an editor for the literary journal Harvest, suggesting that I start writing a series that we could call “Wuhan Diary,” or “Notes from a Quarantined City.”

“封城记” is translated into “Wuhan Diary,” and “Notes from a Quarantined City.”, because the translator attempts to echo the title of the original work. Although it is supposed to be translated into “Notes from a Lockdown City” which is the original intension of the author.

The translator adopts domesticating strategy, Simplifying translation, Notes, Adaptation, amplification to translate the diary from Chinese to English, improving the demonization towards China of the original and allowing the world to blame China for covid-19.

4. Summary

Covid-19 is a global disaster for every individual, taking the lives of a great number of civilians. Although doctors and volunteers all over the world are working to save lives around the clock, some people in the West are attacking China for that. Under these circumstances, Wuhan Diary diluted people into believing that the virus originated in China with no scientific basis or evidence, and thus create a worldwide hatred towards China. Michael Berry, the translator of Wuhan Diary, assists such hatred with his translation strategies. Post-colonialism says that the West always regards itself as the “center” and regards the rest of the world as the “others”, and the West believes only the “Center” is civilized and elegant and the “others” is savage and uncivilized. The English version of Wuhan Diary has strengthened the self-centered framework of the West and the image of savage “others” of China. There need to be more translators who can raise the position of the Orient when translating from Eastern languages to western ones, unlike Michael Berry. Research in translation studies in the post-colonialist view can not only focus on literary translation, but also on diaries, news reports, etc.

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