

Research on the Translation of Du Fu's Poetry in the BBC Documentary "Du Fu: China's Greatest Poet" from the Perspective of Variational Translation Theory

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Abstract: Poetry is rich in cultural imagery and complex rhetoric, making cross-cultural translation extremely challenging. The BBC documentary "Du Fu: China's Greatest Poet" introduces Du's poetry into the Western cultural perspective, aiming to discuss how classical Chinese poetry can be disseminated and reconstructed in cross-cultural contexts, so that the world can have a deeper understanding of the poet and Chinese culture from Du Fu's original intention, thoughts and other aspects. Based on Professor Huang Zhonglian's "Variational Translation Theory", this paper analyzes the linguistic characteristics of Du Fu's poetry in the documentary, explores the translator's linguistic transformation, the subtleties of diction, and cultural recreation in the translation process, and discusses the role of the three elements of translation in Du Fu's poetry in terms of the connotation and emotion, the translator's subjectivity, and the translator's fidelity. We discuss the role of the three elements of translation in the connotation and emotion of the original work, the subjectivity of the translator and the diversity of faithfulness in Du's poetry, and explore the effective dissemination of Du's poetry in a cross-cultural context.

Keywords: Variational Translation Theory; Du Fu; Poetry; Translation.

1. Introduction

Since ancient times, poetry has been a form of transmission of Chinese culture, a carrier of Chinese culture, and an important means of cultural exchange between the East and the West. With the promotion of the strategy of "going global" of Chinese culture, how to accurately convey the cultural flavor and connotation of the original poetry under different linguistic patterns, social backgrounds and economic conditions has become an issue of great concern in the translation field. For this reason, poetry translation has become the pursuit of many scholars, and scholars who study or understand bilingualism have produced a series of translations based on their own experiences and knowledge reserves, and the translation of classical Chinese poetry is often regarded as the most difficult part of literary translation. In particular, Du Fu, as the "Sage of Poetry" in ancient Chinese poetry, takes his refined linguistic skills and rich connotation as the starting point, combining rich cultural imagery, complex rhetorical techniques and unique aesthetic interests, which are even more difficult to translate. The BBC documentary "Du Fu: China's Greatest Poet" introduced Du Fu's life and his poetry to the global audience for the first time in the form of a documentary, which is an important medium to bring Du Fu's works into the Western cultural field of vision. Taking into account the specificity of the target language audience, the translator was adept at decoding the "oriental secret language" in Du Fu's poetry under the view of the theory of translation, so that the short and concise Chinese characters can be transformed into concrete images in English, which enables people to deeply understand the contents and thoughts embodied in the poetry. In addition, Huang Zhonglian's theory of translation suggests that translation is not only a conversion between languages, but also a re-creation of cultural aspects. Using the variational translation theory to study the translation of Du's poetry in documentaries

can help reveal how to adapt and reconstruct the meaning of the original text without losing the charm of the original, balance the fidelity and flexibility between the original text and the translation, and carry out this kind of highly condensed and effective inter-cultural conversion, so that Western viewers can better understand and appreciate Du's poetry. In the following, we interpret the translation strategies and cultural connotations of Du's Poetry from the theory of variable translation perspective on Du's Poetry.

2. Variational Translation Theory Research

The theory of variable translation is a translation theory proposed by Prof. Huang Zhonglian after a long period of academic exploration and practical testing, corresponding to "full translation". According to him, "variational translation" refers to the translation activities in which the translator takes in the relevant contents of the original work according to the special needs of the particular readers under the specific conditions by adopting the seven alternative means of adding, deleting, editing, narrating, condensing, integrating and altering as well as the eleven methods of selected translation, edited translation, narrated translation, condensed translation, summarized translation, translation plus comment, translation plus writing, translation plus explanation, translation plus rewriting, translation plus quotation and translation plus imitation to the original work (Huang Zhonglian 2002).

Jin Di once commented on the history of translation in various linguistic cultures: "Generally speaking, it tends to be an alternation between direct translation and unfettered free translation." (Jin Di. & Eugene A. Nida 1984) The translator takes the content or part of the center of the original text according to the special needs of the readers by means of expanding, taking away, condensing, elaborating, merging, transforming and other alternatives (Li Xiangfei 2016), thus forming the following theoretical propositions of the theory

of variable translation.

Among them, there are four elements of variable translation, namely, the reader, the translator, the variable translation and the original work, which constitute the system of variable translation. The system can be divided into three subsystems or three levels: variational translation subject, variational translation object and variational translation intermediary. The system of variational translation refers to the system of translation activities, which is a system of relations around the act of translation (Huang Zhonglian 2002). The system of variational translation is divided into three subsystems as shown in Figure 1:

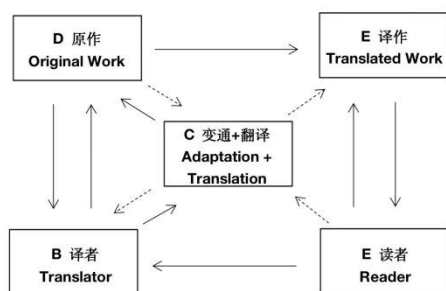


Fig 1. Variational Translation System

Variational translation subject, including the translator and the reader, is shown as A and B in Fig. 1. The needs of the reader determine the translation strategy to be chosen by the translator, who takes the satisfaction of the reader's needs as the guide of translation.

Variational translation object, including the original work and the translated work, is shown in Figure 1 as D and E. As the object of variational translation by the translator and the object to be examined by the reader, the original work is presented in a new form through adaptation and translation, and finally examined in the hands of the reader.

Variational translation intermediary, including adaptation and translation, is shown as C in Fig. 1, which is in the middle between the subject and the object, and is the intermediate link between the two in terms of mutual influence, interconnection and transformation.

The three elements can adapt to each other, interact with each other, minimize the consumption of each element, and make this complete system reach the optimal effect.

3. Analysis of Du Poetry Translation in the BBC Documentary "Du Fu: China's Greatest Poet" from the Three Elements of Variant Translation

3.1. Manifestation of Variational Translation Object

Variational translation object refers to the object that the translator translates and the object that the reader accepts, which includes the theme connotation, emotional expression and history and culture contained in the original text. In the translation of Du's poetry, the object of variational translation also includes the cultural imagery, rhetorical devices, historical background and complex emotions expressed by the poet, and how to convey these to the audience of the target language is a major challenge in translation. The translation

of poetic imagery and emotions is the most important thing if the audience or readers want to feel the same state of mind as the original language author. Therefore, when dealing with the variable objects in Du Fu's poetry, a variety of alternatives are used, such as imagery substitution, emotional enhancement and contextualization, to ensure that the cultural connotations in the poetry resonate with the Western audience, and the following are examples of how the expression of the variable objects is indispensable in the translation process:

Example 1.

何时倚虚幌，双照泪痕干。

When shall we lean in the empty window together in brightness? Our tears dried up.

As the eye of the poem, "双眼" is skillfully translated as "together in brightness" without fixed translation, transforming the verb into an adverb, which is in line with the comprehension habits of the translated readers, and fully takes into account the comprehension of the translated audience. This kind of oral description also naturally makes the readers associate the picture of the moon looking at each other, stimulates the readers' empathy, and makes the delivery of the scenario's meaning clearer. By linking the moon and separation in a dynamic way, and expressing the abstract imagery of Eastern poetry in a way that is more common in Western cultures, the original contextualization of the poem speaks for itself, allowing the audience to better understand the loneliness and longing in the poem. This embodies the so-called "meaning potential" of M.A.K. Halliday, which emphasizes the dynamics of language and the diversity of meaning expression. From the point of view of text translation, the translator, by converting the lexical characters, shows that he has not only refined his choice of words in the translated language, but also has a deep understanding and grasp of the text, and strives for excellence under the premise of respecting the linguistic characteristics of the text and the cultural background.

Example 2:

随风潜入夜，润物细无声。

The good rain knows its season, when spring arrives. It brings life.

In the process of translating poetry, the inherent characteristics of the language itself should be fully taken into account. The translator has used anthropomorphism in this paragraph, the original poem's "随风潜入夜" is transformed into "know its season", which will be a kind of altering of the technique of spring rain personified as the "rain" that understands the time of the year. This personifies the spring rain as a "rain" that knows the season and gives it a sense of life, forming a more concrete picture that is in line with Western aesthetics. At the same time, the presentation of "bringing life" expresses the implied meaning of spring rain promotes the growth of everything, which is not only a creative translation of the soft imagery of "润物细无声", but also enhances the dynamics and comprehensibility of the translation, enabling the Western audience to feel the natural emotions of the original poem in a more concrete way. This rhetorical adaptation effectively carries out cultural debugging and preserves the original poem's mood and core emotions.

To a certain extent, "poetic flavor" is indispensable to the object of translation. "Poetic flavor is immaterial, showing a wandering form and containing endless aftertaste" (Zhang Bohong 2004). The rhythm, diction and meaning of the

original sentence make the sentence full of poetic flavor, and the translator's treatment of the object of Du's poetry has aptly reproduced the "poetic flavor" of the original text. Du's Poetry is famous for its delicate emotions and profound mood, and the performance of the translated object captures these "poetic flavors" accurately, preserves the cultural elements of the translated object in different ways, and amplifies or reinterprets the core emotions through cultural recreation, so that it realizes the connotation of the original poem beyond time and culture while remaining faithful to the original text.

3.2. Role of Variational Translation Subject

Huang Zhonglian once pointed out that "the translator's adaptation of the original work is subject to the deeper requirements of the readers" (Huang Zhonglian 2005). For the translation of poetry, the reader's or audience's linguistic receptivity, knowledge level and cultural background are the main factors affecting the translator. From this point of view, the value of the theory of variable translation lies first of all in its emphasis on taking the needs of the readers of the translated text as the potential motivation for the translator to carry out variable translation (Che Mingming 2020). So in the process of spreading Chinese poetry, "translators bear the responsibility of recreating new life of Chinese classical poetry in the world. In the face of this duty, translators should pay attention to the differences in linguistic rules between the original language and the target language, and should not take 'faithfulness' as the standard and reduce the translation and the translator to the slaves of the original." (Wang Bohua 2009) The translator is not only a language converter, but also a cultural adjuster. In the process of translation, the translator's cultural literacy, linguistic ability and understanding of the target audience's needs directly affect the quality and effect of translation. This requires the translator to play his role in the three elements of variational translation, and the following is an example of the role of the subject of variational translation embodied in the translation of Du's poetry:

Example 1.

尽室久徒步，逢人多厚颜。

The whole family trudging endlessly, begging without shame from the people we met.

Returning to the context of the original text, in "Balled of Peng Ya Road", the phrase "逢人多厚颜" in the original text expresses Du Fu's sense of shame in having to ask for help from others in the process of fleeing, so it requires the translator not only to understand the meaning of the word when translating, but also to give the connotations behind the word itself, to accurately locate the corresponding words and phrases, and finally to give the translation through his own understanding of the original text. Finally, the translator gives the translation through his own understanding of the original text. In order to make it easier for the Western audience to understand, the translator added the action of "begging" in the translation to express the meaning of asking for help on the way to escape. In fact, the original sentence does not directly mention begging, but the translator, by means of the adding, expresses the sense of shame and suffering in the original poem more intuitively and clearly with the specific action of "begging without shame". The translator has reduced the subtlety of Chinese culture and instead presented the emotions in a more straightforward manner, making it easier for Western audiences to understand Du Fu's inner struggles. This translation strategy reflects the high sensitivity and adaptability of the subject of variational translation to the

cultural habits of the target readers in cross-cultural translation.

Example 2:

长夏江村事事幽。

On a long summer day, everything has a secret beauty.

In the original poem, the word "幽" is meant to express the tranquility and relaxation of the countryside life, and only with a deep understanding of Chinese history and culture can one realize that this place is full of the idea of seclusion in classical Chinese poetry. It can be seen from the translation that the translator did not translate directly, but after understanding the original author's intention here, he exerted his own subjective initiative and chose the expression "secret beauty" with aesthetic interest. In the process of translation, in order to compensate for the existence of linguistic and cultural differences in the translation of the micro "adding", with "everything has a secret beauty" to the original "事事幽" explanatory additions. The translation concretizes the connotation of "幽" and strengthens the mystery and hiddenness of the beauty of the countryside, so that western readers who have little contact with Chinese culture can understand it better. The romantic imagination of idyllic life establishes a connection with their own cultural experience. The translator's innovative spirit and professionalism in translating the original work that is easy for readers to understand is a credit to the translator.

As the main subject of translation, the translator's subjectivity is reflected in the understanding and selective treatment of the original work. When dealing with the emotional expression and cultural imagery in Du Fu's poetry, the translator must take into account the cultural background and acceptance habits of the Western audience, thus his translation not only requires linguistic accuracy, but also conforms to the aesthetic logic of Western culture. In the BBC documentary, the translator did not use the method of full translation to copy the original work absolutely faithfully, but gave full play to the translator's subjectivity, adopted alternative ways of contextualization and cultural adaptation to restore the original work, and strived to make the translation easy to understand and smooth, which not only maintains respect for the original work, but also injects creativity into the translation in the new context, successfully connecting Du Fu's poetry with the emotions of the Western audience, and highlighting the unique value of Du Poetry's dissemination.

3.3. Use of Variational Translation Intermediary

When translating, the translator should first consider the reading group and the acceptability of the English readers. It is important to fit the original text, but if fitting the original text affects the smoothness of reading and storytelling, then the original text has to be translated. (Zhao Pan 2022) This emphasizes that in the process of translation, in order to meet the specific needs of readers, on the basis of taking in the information of the original text, it is also necessary to use all kinds of alternatives to break the linguistic and formal restrictions of the original text. From this, it can be seen that the adaptation of translation is a flexible change of the original work in order to meet the special needs of specific readers under specific conditions (Huang Zhonglian 2002).

Variant translation intermediary refers to the specific strategies and methods used in the translation process. In the

translation of Du Fu's poetry, the language, imagery and rhetoric are often highly condensed, and it is difficult to reproduce them completely in English because of their characteristics. At this time, the variable translation intermediary plays a crucial role, and in order to maintain the emotional tension and formal beauty of the poetry, the translators have to make sure that the core meaning and the deeper cultural connotations of the original poetry can be conveyed by flexibly utilizing the variable translation intermediary, the following examples of the variable translation intermediary are used in translating Du Fu's poetry example:

Example 1.

江南瘴疠地，逐客无消息。

No word from you, old friend.

In the translation of the poetry, the translator chose a simple and straightforward language expression, omitting those parts that are difficult to be digested by the target audience, and avoiding the specific cultural imagery of "瘴疠地" and "逐客", which are characterized by Chinese culture and geography. Since the Western audience may not understand the complex background of the miasma in Jiangnan and the banishment of the guests in ancient China, the translator has simplified the cultural content by deleting the specific imagery and omitting it, retaining only the core message of "无消息", avoiding the problem of hardness and obscurity in the translation process.. It conveys Du Fu's feelings of longing for his friends directly and clearly to the Western audience without causing them to have comprehension barriers due to cultural differences. This strategy is in line with the core of variable translation intermediation, that is, to ensure the acceptability of the translated text through moderate deletion in the translation process.

Example 2.

野哭千家闻战伐，夷歌数处起渔樵。

How many families know of war and loss? The people's songs rise from fishermen and woodcutters.

Confined to the limitations of the poem's structure, rhythm and rhyme, the translator chooses to transform the narrative content of the original, changing the form, changing the original declarative sentence into a question, presenting it as a question with the phrase "How many families know of war loss?". On the basis of keeping the central theme of the original work unchanged, strengthening the tone makes the text more lively, enhances the emotional progression of the poem, conveys the deep sympathy of the translation for the sufferings and disasters of the people brought by the war, and effectively strengthens the readability and enjoyment of the poem. The original poem's "夷歌" refers to the songs of ethnic minorities, and the translator renders it as "the people's songs", which transforms the specific ethnic and cultural background into a broader one for Western readers to understand, and smoothes out the cultural differences through linguistic transformation. This makes the cultural differences smoothed out through linguistic transformation. The English and Chinese languages themselves have some differences, and this treatment of words and phrases in the poem is precisely the flexible use of the intermediary of variable translation, which ensures that the poem not only meets the aesthetic standards of the target language in the process of translation, but also maintains the cultural connotations of the original poem.

In order to preserve the heterogeneity of the original

language, the translator boldly utilizes the alternative means, trying his best to preserve the form and content of the original poetry, deleting the more incomprehensible Chinese cultural words, and even rewriting the form of the narration, and flexibly using the alternative means of translation, so that the Chinese-English translation under the framework of the theory of variant translation adheres to the principle of "conditional fidelity"(Ma Huijuan 2008). "Faithfulness" is not a simple word-for-word translation, but a multifaceted transmission, including the faithful expression of emotion, mood, and cultural background. After understanding Du Fu's life and life background, the translator, on the premise of understanding the original text, uses different variational translation intermediaries in the translation, and conducts meticulous research on the more obscure expressions, and combines the original author's descriptions with the contexts and thoughts and feelings, as well as the translator's own understanding and comprehension of them, to maximize the restoration and extension of the original style of the poem. This kind of linguistic fidelity, emotional fidelity, cultural fidelity, and diversity makes Du Poetry resonate in the globalized context.

4. Discussion and Reflection

4.1. Cultural Representation: Rooted in the Essence of Poetry

The translation of Du's Poetry is a kind of language conversion, and its sentiment and mood have become the root of common understanding among different cultures, which is a literary reconstruction in cross-cultural context. Du's Poetry is full of concern for the people of the country, which transcends the limitations of the region and time, and echoes the caring spirit of the modern society. At the level of the cultural representation, the performance of the translated object conveys the cultural spirit of Du Fu to the English-speaking audience through the delicate reproduction of Du's poetic moods, emotions and philosophies. The themes of deep reflection on family and country, personal destiny and social suffering constitute the essence of Du Fu's poetry, allowing the world to feel the sorrow and ideals embedded in the poem. This cultural reproduction not only makes Du Fu's thoughts spread through the ages, but also transmits the poet's concern and reflection on society to the contemporary society, enabling the audience to experience Du Fu's worldly concern and poetic roots in the context of social themes and livelihood issues of different cultures. In addition, the humanistic spirit and sense of social responsibility in Du's poetry across time and space are reproduced through translation, which not only realizes the docking of language, but also the regeneration of values and aesthetics, and transmits Du Fu's spiritual world and universal sentiments into the hearts of the audience, thus maintaining the fundamentals of poetic meaning.

4.2. Cultural Adaptation: Inheriting the Style of Poetry

As the core element in the process of translation, the translator, as a language changer, not only undertakes the important task of cross-cultural debugging, but also is the guardian and disseminator of poetic meaning, and needs to preserve the style and rhythm of Du Fu's poetry in the process of translation. The complex vocabulary, syntax and rhythm of Du Fu's poetry constitute his unique style, which is difficult to be reproduced completely in different languages. Therefore,

to make Du Fu's poetic style inherited in cross-cultural communication through adaptive conversion, translators need to strike a balance between the faithfulness and the adaptation by transforming the complex background and allusions in the poem into elements that are more easily understood by the target culture through cultural adjustment, so that the charm of the poem can be carried on in the translated text. This kind of adjustment is not only to achieve linguistic adaptation, but also to convey the artistic beauty and cultural importance of Du's poetry at a deeper level. The style of Du's poetry is rooted in the ancient Chinese literati's sense of family and country, which is precisely in line with the public spirit of modern society. Through translation, the translator is able to carry forward this long-established poetic style and implant its cultural values into a new language and culture, making Du Fu's poetry an important way to connect the humanistic spirit of the East and the West, and allowing the backbone and commitment of Chinese culture to take on a new significance and vitality in the modern context.

4.3. Cultural Transmission: Building a Bridge for Poetry

In the cross-cultural transmission of Du Fu's poetry, the variable translation intermediary assists the audience to understand the cultural connotation and contemporary background of Du's poetry more deeply through the means of variable translation, which not only supplements the original text, but also extends the context of the poem and the cultural background, helping the audience to understand the historical background, cultural allusions, social situation and emotional vein behind the poem. This function of cultural transmission enables Du poetry to cross over between different cultures, eliminating the gap in cultural understanding, and its meaning can be fully conveyed in new cultural contexts to enhance identity. In the context of contemporary multiculturalism, the sentiments conveyed by Du's poetry do not only belong to China, but also represent a caring heart that transcends the nation and the times. The use of variational translation intermediary magnifies the universality of emotions, people's concerns and national sentiments in Du Fu's poems, so that the audience can see the spiritual glory of this "Sage of Poetry", thus gaining more understanding and respect for traditional Chinese culture in a cross-cultural context, and building a bridge of cultural understanding for cultural identity and sympathy in the midst of globalization.

5. Conclusion

Translation is an activity with a clear purpose to serve the audience of the translated language. The translator has to cater for the aesthetic needs of the audience from the point of view of the audience of the translation into the target language (Gentzler, Edwin 1993), considering the needs of target language readers and viewers, the translator has to think about the artistry and idiomaticity of his language. In the detailed analysis of the translation of Du Fu's Poetry in the BBC documentary, it can be seen that the translator, facing the audience who wishes to understand the beauty of Du's poetry, in order to preserve the cultural uniqueness of the original work, through the expressive conveyance of the object of variational translation, the debugging role of the subject of variational translation, and the flexible use of the intermediary of translation, and by striving to retain the poetic form and content of the original work as the starting point,

follows the logic of the language in the English translation of the poetry and carefully chooses the most appropriate way of expression, and finally succeeds in translating Du's poetry into the English language. In the English translation of the poetry, they follow the language logic and carefully choose the most suitable ways of expression, and finally succeed in conveying the imagery and emotions of Du's poetry to the Western audience. Unfortunately, the challenge of translating poetry still exists in terms of cultural differences and linguistic structure. The translation in the documentary film ignores its rich literary symbolism, and loses the unique beauty of the Tang poetry in the English translation of the Du poetry, which is inevitably a bit regrettable. However, based on the profound analysis of the connotation and emotion of the original work, the creative conversion of the translator's subjectivity, and the faithful and pluralistic play, the national sentiment, social concern and artistic value of Du Fu's poetry have gained a lasting vitality in the new cultural context. This mode of translation not only realizes the cross-cultural dissemination of Du Fu's poetry, but also allows the core values of Chinese culture to enter the hearts and minds of the world audience. Similarly, this kind of communication not merely expands the communication space of the poems and makes Du Fu a humanistic bridge between different cultures, as well as reflecting the profound need for multicultural identity and respect in modern society, providing an important reference for cultural exchange in the era of globalization.

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