

Research on the English Version of The Last Quarter of the Moon from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics

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Abstract: Based on the theory of reception aesthetics and through the study on the English translation of *The Last Quarter of the Moon*, this paper will analyze *The Last Quarter of the Moon* translated by Bruce Humes from three aspects, choice of object, the translator and the choice of translation strategies. Then summing up experience and lessons in order to learn effective methods to improve the translation effects, pointing out the effect that the reception aesthetics to the research of translation, and promote the readers to accept translations so that effectively disseminating culture.

Keywords: Theory of reception aesthetics, *The Last Quarter of the Moon*, Culture, Reader.

1. Introduction

Under the background of economic globalization, cultural communication is not only an inevitable trend but also a necessary action. With the increasingly frequent exchanges among countries around the world, China's position in the world stage is increasingly strengthened. The promotion of Chinese culture is an important expression of the confidence of Chinese culture and the enrichment of world culture. In order to make the world understanding Chinese culture, translation of Excellent Chinese literary works into foreign languages and direct introduction to foreign readers can effectively spread and popularize Chinese characteristic culture.

Among many English translations, this paper selects the English version of *The Last Quarter of the Moon* translated by Bruce Humes as the research object, and tries to make a descriptive study of the translation from the theoretical perspective of reception aesthetics. To begin with the selection of translation objects, the selection of translators and the treatment of specific translation problems, this paper comprehensively demonstrates the formation process of the translation and shows that although there are some minor problems in the translation, the flaws do not overshadow the shortcomings, and overall the translation is successful. Besides above, its translation strategy is worthy of reference, because it helps the translation to be accepted by the target readers, and then promotes the cultivation of a group of readers interested in Chinese culture. Therefore, we can know that every work successfully accepted by the target readers is continuously consolidating the reader base for the subsequent foreign translation. It is worthy of further study in that *The Last Quarter of the Moon* is a relatively successful translation work from the perspective of its overseas distribution institutions, translator selection and the reaction of media and readers at home and abroad. This paper illustrates the reception of the English translation of " *The Last Quarter of the Moon* " and provides some reference and inspiration for Chinese culture to go abroad.

2. The Last Quarter of the Moon and its English Translation

The Last Quarter of the Moon is a full-length novel written by Chi Zijian, which won the seventh MAO Dun Literature Prize. Published in 2005, it is refreshing for its unique ethnic life and the change of folk culture handed down from generation to generation as a representative of ethnic literature, attracting lots of readers' attention.

In this novel, a woman in her late nineties, the last chief of Ewenki nation, tells the story of the nation's tenacious struggle against all kinds of difficulties and hardships, and describes various characters in the nation and their entanglements of love and hate, either regret or beautiful love. It shows the Ewenki's tenacious struggle, unyielding spirit and their unique ethnic culture. The novel is set on the right bank of the Erguna River on the border between China and Russia. The Ewenki are accompanied by reindeer and live by hunting and relying on nature. They were devout Shamans who lived in the woods and had to turn to shamans for help when they in sickness and discomfort. They move with the reindeer so they can find the food that reindeer like and survive better. While living in harmony with nature, they also suffered from white disasters, beast attacks, outbreaks of plague, Japanese aggression, the shadow of the "Cultural Revolution" and the heavy oppression of modern civilization. But in the face of fate, they showed indomitable vitality. The novel with exquisite language incisively and vividly show a little-known nation - Ewenki in front of the reader.

3. The Theory of Reception Aesthetics

For a long time, many literary translation theories have focused on the original text and ignored the active role of readers. In the 1970s, The Konstanz school in Germany put forward a new literary theory: reception aesthetics. Reception aesthetics mainly discusses the position and function of readers in literary communication, and its most basic feature is to put readers into the central position of literary theory and aesthetic research. (Zhu Liyuan, 2004) Since then, reception

aesthetics has provided a new perspective for literary creation and translation. (Zhu Liyuan, 2004)

"Reception aesthetics was applied in the field of translation studies in the west in the late 1970s. Since 1975, when George Steiner described in detail the hermeneutic translation model, reception aesthetics has become an important aspect of contemporary translation studies." (Chen Fengdan, 2009:74) Jaws was influenced by Gadamer's hermeneutics, so many of his studies always combine hermeneutics with reception aesthetics.

Hermeneutics believes that understanding is the way of human being's own existence. Understanding is universal and in principle there is nothing beyond understanding. Language is the medium of understanding, and the history of understanding constitutes "prejudice", which is the premise and starting point of understanding. Understanding is fundamentally a dialogue process between the understanders and their counterparts. "In different times, a text is read by readers of different nationalities. Due to the different objective conditions accepted by readers, a text is very different from the text which was published out of the hands of the author. It has formed different works through the interpretation of readers of different nationalities in history." (Chen Dun, Sun Jingyao, Xie Tiantizhen, 1997) As a result, textual meaning is a kind of dynamic, non-static and relative product, that is, there will be a thousand Hamlets in a thousand readers' hearts. Therefore, the realization of textual meaning depends on the participation of readers. Translation is to create again. The translator should not only ensure the meaning of the original text to the maximum extent, but also consider the receptivity of the target readers. Wu Chizhe(1989) demonstrated "translation is re-creation" in combination with phenomenology, fuzzy linguistics and other principles, and pointed out that reception aesthetics is helpful to expand the vision of literary translation. He Wei(1999) believed that translation is actually an exchange and dialogue between the text and the translator (reader). This also shows that reception aesthetics is conducive to guiding translators in translation successfully.

4. The Reception Aesthetics in The Laster Quarter of the Moon

The translator, Bruce Humes of The Last Quarter of the Moon, has been introduced in the previous article, and here mainly illustrating the influence of such a selection of translator on the formation of the translation with the help of "the expectation horizon of aesthetic experience". Therefore, from the perspective of reception aesthetics, the English translation of The Last Quarter of the Moon is very wise in the selection of translators. An excellent translator is the basic guarantee of an excellent translation, and an excellent translation is the material basis for readers to accept it.

According to an interview with Kang Kai of China Reading Daily, Bruce Humes has been interested in how different ethnic groups are coping with the irresistible tide of modernity. He says China has not been invaded by foreign countries since 1949, but continues to stress how "we Chinese" are different. But few Chinese realize that apart from "foreigners", there are non-Han Chinese who are traditionally called "ethnic minorities" in China. So through his blog, he hopes to explore how mainstream Chinese society views these "minorities" and how non-

Han writers position their own ethnic cultures. He translated The Last Quarter of the Moon because the novel is to let him feel the tragic fate of the Ewenki in the 20th century. The ethnic minority not only lost their cherish forest because of the depredations of outsiders, but also produced some unhealthy habit and mentality (e.g., drinking) thanks to their isolated life, so that they can't well adapt to modern life challenges.

With the unstoppable development of globalization, the cultures of various ethnic groups in the world are increasingly integrated, but the cultures of ethnic minorities are greatly impacted and facing the danger of inheritance. As the fulfillment of human civilization, people all over the world call for active propaganda of national culture, creation of national literature, dissemination of national culture, continuation of the development of national culture. The Last Quarter of the Moon promotes minority culture and meets the appeal of people around the world.

4.1. The themes of the fiction

As a national novel, The Last Quarter of the Moon presents national culture worthy of dissemination and propaganda. As a kind of minority literature novel with historical themes, the book truly and vividly depicts the ups and downs of development of Ewenki nation.

In the novel, the woman of the last chieftains of Ewenki vividly depicts the unique national culture charm of the nation in life style, belief, ethnic activities, wedding and other aspects. The different national culture it shows is also expected to be understood by readers around the world today. At present, many excellent works of Chinese minority novels have been translated and loved by the majority of readers abroad. For example, Howard Goldblatt's translation of Wolf Totem, which describes Inner Mongolia ethnic culture; the translator Gladys Yang's translation of Ashima opens the door for expanding the influence of Yunnan minority literature in the world. South Korean professor Luo Xiangzhen translated Meige -- Yi ethnic minority's creation epic which was welcomed by Korean and other foreign readers. It can be said that the novels like The Last Quarter of the Moon, are within their "expectation horizon of aesthetic experience". The theme of the novel -- advocating minority culture and advocating harmonious coexistence between human and natural ecological environment -- also accords with the appeal of people around the world for cultural diversity. Therefore, The Last Quarter of The Moon, as a suitable translation object, lays a foundation for the initial acceptance of its translation.

4.2. The content of the fiction

In terms of content, first of all, the background of the novel is set in the 20th century in the sino-russian border, the differences between Chinese and western, Han nationality and Ewenki ethnical minority, alien, harmony together to produce a variety of collision, can stimulate the reader's reading interest to a great extent and it's are particularly attractive for those who advocating personality and keen to explore exotic western readers.

As a typical national literature, The Last Quarter of the Moon comprehensively shows the unique national culture of Ewenki again. For Both Chinese readers and English-speaking readers, their daily cognition has been greatly impacted, resulting in invisible conflicts. Therefore, it is easy

to produce the "strangeness" of cultural loss, which brings readers a brand new experience. "The charm of ethnic minority literature lies in the defamiliarization of its subject, point of view, language use, cultural imagery and other elements. How to deal with the inherent strangeness of such works will affect their literary value and readers' acceptability." (Jiang Xia, 2017) It can be seen that the crux to the translation of national literature lies in the proper handling of defamiliarization expressions with national characteristics. The contents of proper nouns, rhetoric and folk customs in *The Last Quarter of The Moon* have the most national characteristics, often bringing readers a sense of refreshing.

When Bruce Humes translated these words, he used appropriate translation methods to reflect cultural differences and shock readers. These methods and strategies are detailed in the next section.

4.3. The choice of translation strategy

Currently, the English translation of this novel has attracted the attention of a mass of translation researchers. The research point of each researcher is different, but the research of this novel based on the theory of reception aesthetics is not abundant. This is fragmentary and incomplete for the study of a translation. We should not only explain the translation strategy theoretically, but also examine the overall practical effect of the translation from the practicality, that is, to analyze the translation as an independent work.

The descriptive translation research theory centers on the translation of *The Last Quarter of the Moon*. The paper analyzes the translation on the basis of this principle, finding that there are slight differences in the details of the fiction, such as differences in sentence structure that lead to varied artistic conception. Meanwhile, the translation is fluent and authentic on the whole that in line with the target readers' reading habits, but at the same time maintaining the language characteristics of the original. From the perspective of reception aesthetics, this paper analyzes the translation finesse of the novel, hoping to find out the key points worthy of reference. Taking the translated version as an independent novel, from the three elements of the novel -- characters, plot and environment, it is found that compared with the original novel, the translated version has the following points: In terms of form, the length of the novel does not change much, although the translated version has been deleted in some content, such as: Chi Zijian describes the background, initial intention and fountain of inspiration within the chapter of the novel: *From Mountains to Ocean*, which was omitted from the English translation of *The Last Quarter of The Moon*. But on the whole, it is pretty much the same. From characterization, the translation is faithful to the original text, and each character has its own characteristics. The story is generally more tightly paced and story-oriented; From environment, the translation of natural environment description is faithful to the original text, while the translation of social environment content adopts a more flexible way, which will be analyzed in detail below.

4.4. Translation strategies for topics

The Last Quarter of the Moon has diversified themes, including the elegy of national extinction, the nostalgia for the homeland, the ecological consciousness and so on. In order to ensure the conformity with the original text and maximize the

presentation of various themes in the novel to the target readers, Bruce Humes conducted a lot of research and investigation, consulted many experts, and translated the novel on the premise of fully understanding the Ewenki culture. As for the title of the novel, it was literally translated into *The Right Bank of the Argun* as suggested by The translator Bruce Humes which was not only faithful to the expression habits of original language, but also easier to arouse the curiosity of western readers. Western readers are used to expressing the location of rivers in terms of southeast, northwest and northwest, so they are very interested in the translation of "right bank". And the reservation of Argun can also reflect the background of the Argun river as the boundary line between China and Russia. The publishers, however, were attracted by an earlier Italian translation of The title "*Ultimo Quarto di Luna*" and then translated it into an English equivalent, "*The Last Quarter of The Moon*." Compared with the two, the latter is more consistent with the tone of the novel story, a sense of sad and desolate, also echoes the main tone of the novel, highlighting the anxiety and appeal of the national culture from the author of the original novel.

As for the ecological theme in the novel and the description of natural environment, Bruce Humes adopts direct translation, faithful to the original text, and the translation is easy to understand. In the selection of national vocabulary, translators mostly adopt transliteration to retain national characteristics. For example, the residence of Ewenki people, "希楞柱", translated as "Shirangju". The Ewenki folk dance "斡日切", transliterated as "Uubchu", "靠老宝" is transliterated as "Kolob", and "玛鲁神" is translated as "Malu" -- a god worshipped by Ewenki. On the one hand, the transliteration of these national words reflects the characteristics of Ewenki ethnic culture, on the other hand, it arouses readers' interest in exploration and leads them to enter the novel to feel the elegance of national culture. And the words are explained in the novel so that the reader is not confused. As explained in the original text, "希楞柱": "希楞柱很容易建造, 砍上二三十根的落叶松, 锯成两人高的样子, 剥了皮, 将一头削尖了, 让尖头朝向天空, 汇集在一起; 松木杆的另一端则戳着地, 均匀地散步开来, 好像无数条跳舞的腿, 形成一个大圆圈, 外面苫上挡风御寒的围子, 希楞柱就建成了。" 译文: You chop down twenty or thirty larch trees, saw the trunks into poles about twice a man's height, peel off the bark, sharpen one end, and gather the poles together with the sharp ends pointing to the sky. The poles are evenly spaced in the soil, like countless dancing legs forming a big circle, and then a covering is wrapped around them to protect against the wind and the cold (Humes, 2013:8). Through the contextual information provided by the context, the meaning of "Shirangju" is clear and can satisfy the reader's needs without additional redundant explanation.

5. Conclusion

Cultural translation is a development strategy arising from the cross-border dissemination of culture. As a means of "Chinese culture going out", translation plays an essential role in cultural communication. We can draw the following three conclusions from the success of *The Last Quarter of the Moon*.

Firstly, the choice of the subject matters to translation. The selection of source text is very important. In the process of cultural transmission, what kind of literary works will be accepted and liked by people is a significant driving force for the effective transmission of culture. In terms of material selection, *The Last Quarter of the Moon* meets the aesthetic expectation of western readers, which is one of the important reasons for the success of Bruce Humes' English translation. Secondly, the choice of translator. Only an excellent translator can translate literary works effectively. The detailed introduction of Bruce Humes has been made above, from which we can know that his translation skills are very strong, and he mainly studies Chinese culture deeply. He has lived in China for more than 30 years and has rich experience, which has provided powerful help for his translation of *The Last Quarter of the Moon*. Thirdly, the cultivation of readers. *The Last Quarter of the Moon* is popular abroad, which plays an important and positive role in cultivating foreign readers' "interest in Chinese culture". Therefore, cultivating a group of such readers is conducive to the development of "Chinese culture going out". With the

effect of one stone to arouse thousands of waves, arouse foreign readers' interest in all aspects of China, so that they take the initiative to understand Chinese culture.

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