

# A Comparative Study of Three English Versions of “Qinyuan Chun Changsha” from the Perspective of Chesterman’s Models of Translation Ethics

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**Abstract**—Mao Zedong is regarded as one of the greatest poets in China and his poetry are cherished as the treasure of Chinese culture. With the background of enhancing cultural confidence, many scholars have translated and studies on its English versions from different perspectives. However, studies based on translation ethics are extremely rare. Taking three English versions of “Qinyuan Chun Changsha” as the examples, this paper attempts to apply Chesterman’s five models of ethics to explore how the translators comply with certain or some models of ethics according to different purposes and needs in the process of translation. It is found that it is difficult for translators to satisfy all the models in the meantime to gain an ideal translation. A good translator always knows how to adjust according to specific needs in order to make their translations readable and acceptable.

**Keywords**—English versions of “Qinyuan Chun Changsha”; Chesterman’s models of translation ethics; Comparative study

## I. INTRODUCTION

Translation, as an activity of cross-cultural and cross-language communication, is bound to be constrained by certain moral standards or behavioral norms [1]. Therefore, in the process of translation, to establish the correct ethical consciousness is consequentially conducive to avoid misunderstanding and even cultural conflicts, which will contribute to coordinating the relations between different cultures. In the 1980s, Antoine Behrman, a French translation theorist, first put forward the concept of “translation ethics”. He pointed that as soon as a translator accepts or engages in a translation activity, he begins to assume certain responsibilities and obligations. Behrman’s thought of “translation ethics” has aroused strong repercussions in the translation circle and attracted the attention of a number of scholars. Among those scholars, Chesterman put forward five models of translation ethics (namely, ethics of representation, ethics of service, ethics of communication, norm-based ethics and ethics of commitment) which exert a great influence on the academic circle. These five models not only provide dynamic standards and multi-dimensional ethical views on translation studies, but also enhance the operability of addressing the ethical problems. Therefore, it is of great necessity for translators to cultivate an ethical consciousness of multi-unification and comply with a guiding principle to get rid of the restrictions of binary position, thus better coordinating the clashed between values so as to serve the cross-culture communication practice [1].

## II. THE ORIGINAL POEM AND ITS ENGLISH VERSIONS

As a masterpiece of poetry written by Mao Zedong in the early days, “Qinyuan Chun Changsha” has been receiving much attention. This poem was written by Mao Zedong in Changsha in the late autumn of 1925 when he revisited the Orange Island. Facing the beautiful late autumn scenery on the Xiangjiang River, the author recalled the revolutionary situation at that time, and then wrote this poem. The whole poem depicted a grand and magnificent image and mixed scenery with emotion, reflecting the poet’s ambition and passion.

So far, there are as many as 14 English versions of the poem, and each one of them is very popular. Due to the influence of multiple factors such as politics, society and self-aesthesia, the translations are different, but they can be roughly divided into three categories according to the translators [2]. First, it is translated by the cooperation between the Chinese government and experts. Second, it is translated by some domestic outstanding translators who are highly proficient both in Chinese and in English. Third, it is translated by the Western translators who study the Chinese language. In order to give a comparative study, three representative translations are selected from the three categories for further analysis. These three translations were translated respectively by the Chinese government organizations including Yuan Shui Pai, Qiao Guanhua, Qian Zhongshu, Ye Junjian, Zhao Puchu and Zhou Yuliang, etc. (hereinafter referred to as the official version), by the well-known domestic translator Xu Yuanchong, by the couple of Hua-ling Nieh Engle and Paul Engle

For the convenience of appreciation and comparative analysis, the original poem and three translation versions are now copied as follows:

沁园春 长沙 (1925) [3]

独立寒秋，湘江北去，橘子洲头。看万山红遍，层林尽染；漫江碧透，百舸争流。鹰击长空，鱼翔浅底，万类霜天竞自由。怅寥廓，问苍茫大地，谁主沉浮？

携来百侣曾游，忆往昔峥嵘岁月稠。恰同学少年风华正茂；书生意气，挥斥方遒。指点江山，激扬文字，粪土当年万户侯。曾记否，到中流击水，浪遏飞舟？

The official version [4] :

CHANGSHA

---to the tune of Chin Yuan Chun (1925)

Alone I stand in autumn clod/On the tip of Orange Island/The Hsiang flowing northward/I see a thousand hills crimsoned through/By their serried woods deep-dyed/And a hundred barges vying/Over crystal blue waters/ Eagles cleave the air/Fish glide in the limpid deep/Under freezing skies a million creatures contend in freedom/ Brooding over this immensity/I ask, on this boundless land/Who rules over man's destiny.

I was here with a throng of companions/Vivid yet those crowded months and years/Young we were, schoolmates/At life's full flowering/Filled with students' enthusiasm/Boldly we cast all restraints aside./Pointing to our mountains and rivers/Setting people afire with our words/We counted the mighty no more than muck/ Remember still/How, venturing midstream, we struck the waters/And waves stayed the speeding boats?

Xu's version [3]

CHANGSHA

Tune: Spring in a Pleasure Garden (1925)

In autumn cold alone stand I/Of Orange Islet at the head/Where River Xiang northward goes by/I see hill on hill all in red/And wood on wood in a deep dye/The river green down to the bed/In speed a hundred barges vie/Far and wide eagles cleave the blue/Up and down fish in shallows glide/All creatures strive for freedom under frosty skies/Lost in immensity; I wonder who/Upon this boundless earth, decide/All beings' fall and rise.

With many friends I oft came here/How thick with salient days the bygone times appear/When, students in the flower of our age/Our spirit bright was at its height/Full of the scholar's noble rage/We criticized with all our might/Pointing to stream and hill/Writing in blame or praise/We treat'd like dirt all mighty lords of olden days/Do you remember still/Swimming mid-stream, we struck waves to impede/That boats which passed at flying speed?

The Engle Couple's version [5]

CHANGSHA (1925)

Standing alone in cold autumn/Where the Hsiang River flows north/On the tip of Orange Island/Looking at thousands of hills/Red all over/Row after row of woods, all red/The river is green to the bottom/A hundred boats struggling/Eagles striking the sky/Fish gliding under the clear water/All creatures fight for freedom/Under the frosty sky/Bewildered at empty space/I ask the great, grey earth/Who controls the rise and fall?

Hundreds of friends used to come here/Remember the old times --- the years of fullness/When we were students and young/Blooming and brilliant/With the young intellectuals'/Emotional argument/Fist up, fist down/ Fingers pointing/At river and mountain/Writing full of excitement/Lords of a thousand houses merely

dung/Remember still/How, in the middle of the stream/We struck the water/Making waves which stopped/The running boats?

### III. CHERSTERMAN'S MODELS OF TRANSLATION ETHICS

#### A. *The Ethics of Representation*

This model requires the translator to be faithful to the source text accurately without any addition, deletion or change [6]. It highlights the value of "fidelity" and "truth", that is, the translator must truly represent the source text, the source author's intention and even the culture, and truly reflect the basic characteristics of the source text. Due to the influence of various subjective and objective factors on the translation, "representation" is multi-dimensional, dynamic and hierarchical, but being faithful to the source text is unchangeable in the process of translation.

#### B. *The Ethics of Service*

According to Chesterman, a very different kind of approach is based on the concept of translation as a commercial service, performed for a client. This is the kind of ethics that underlies much of the thinking (1984) and the Skopos theorists. A translator is deemed to act ethically if the translation complies with the instructions set by the client and fulfills the aim of the translation as set by the client and accepted or negotiated by the translator [6].

#### C. *The Ethics of Communication*

The ethics of communication takes translation as a process of communication, which reflects the relationship among the author of the source text, the translator and the recipient of the target language, and also highlights the role of the translator as a bridge between the other two parties. So from the point of view of communication, the ethical translator is a mediator working to achieve cross-cultural understanding [6].

#### D. *Norm-based Ethics*

The norm-based ethics has arisen either explicitly or implicitly from descriptive translation studies and norm theory. These norms state what acceptable translation products should look like, and how they vary from period to period and from culture to culture, about what translations are supposed to be like in that culture at that time [6]. It requires that translators' activity should be in accord with some social norms, so that translation would be accepted by readers in the target culture. Chesterman further divided it into two types: expectancy norms and professional norms.

#### E. *The Ethics of Commitment*

The four models of translation ethics mentioned above all pursue their own values respectively. However, all the former four models have their own shortcomings. Chesterman adds a general profession model---ethics of commitment, to promote genuinely ethical professional behavior. In Chesterman's point of view, "Commitment for translator is the want to be a good translator" and "starve for excellent" [6].

#### IV. THE EMBODIMENT OF TRANSLATION ETHICS IN THREE ENGLISH VERSIONS

##### A. *Based on the translation background and purpose*

Under the special social background at that time, Qian Zhongshu and other final drafting group members were entrusted by the government to translate Mao Zedong's poetry, which was largely restricted by the official norms. It was known that Mao Zedong was not only a famous poet, but also a great politician and leader. Due to his special identity and status, the task of translation was more than a pure translation of literacy work. The translation of Mao's poetry, to some extent, had something to do with the image of the whole country and the leader in different culture; therefore the translators were restricted to a great extent by political factors and social environment. The translators were entrusted with a special historical mission, which is to create "an official version" by the government. This task is a "big responsibility" which the translators must take seriously. Therefore, in the process of translation, the translators should strictly represent the source text.

With the special translation background and purpose, the official version emphasizes "truth". As we can see, the translated poem of "Qinyuan Chun Changsha" was not only arranged strictly according to the number of lines of the original poem, but also the number of words used was almost equal to the original one. The translators did not incorporate their own understanding and emotions to the translation, but grasp the basic idea accurately and convey the content of the original poem fully.

With the gradual expansion of Mao Zedong's influence at home and abroad, Mao Zedong's poetry also attracted a large number of Western scholars to translate. The Engle couple translated and published Mao Zedong's poetry in 1972. Since the translators were abroad at the time when the political environment was much looser than that in China, the translators had plenty freedom to translate Mao's poems according to their own understanding. The Engle couple's version of "Qinyuan Chun Changsha" seemed to be freer in style, not so strict with the lines and numbers of the words.

In order to let the people all over the world better appreciate Mao Zedong's poetry, one of the treasures in Chinese literature, Chinese translators and literary enthusiasts have successively translated Mao's poems in different periods. Xu Yuanchong was one of the famous representatives who published "Mao Zedong's Poetry Selection (Chinese-English)" in 1993. After China's reform and opening up, the domestic political constraints on literary creation gradually became loose, and there was a cultural phenomenon of "hundred flowers blossom and hundreds of schools of thought contend". Xu Yuanchong was more likely to translate Mao Zedong's Poetry as a literary work, so he had the freedom to make full use of his talent, and strived to convey the original poem's literary and artistic value with his understanding and emotion.

For example, in the second sentence "看万山红遍", the three versions had different expressions for "万山" and "红". The first and the third version all used "thousand" to show that there are many hills. However, Xu used "hill on hill" instead of

"thousand" which could create an image of rolling hills. For the translation of "红", the official version chose "crimson" to express the specific deep red to describe the color of the leaves in late autumn which was faithfully based on the image depicted in the poems. The other two versions used "red", because according to the translators' understanding, it was not only a description of the scenery, but also an abstract revolutionary meaning. Not to judge which one is the best, we can see that the official version is the closest and the most faithful to the original text, while the other two versions were integrated into the translators' understanding and ideas.

From the above analysis, we can conclude that the official version has done a better job in complying with the ethics of representation and service due to the special translation background and purpose.

##### B. *Based on the translation strategy*

The tune name is a unique way of literary expression in China, which finds no corresponding equivalent in English. The tune name is an integral part of a Ci-poem. Before filling in a Ci-poem, the poet should first select the tune suitable for the expression of the corresponding content according to his thoughts and feelings. Therefore, when translating the tune name into English, translators should not only convey the charm and aesthetic feeling of the tune name, but also consider its historical origin and metrics, so as to make the translated tune name accord with the artistic conception of the Ci-poem.

As for this poem, the translators of the three versions adopted different translation strategies. The official version used transliteration due to the background and political environment of that time, and the translators had to adopt a conservative and cautious attitude, which made the cultural connotation of the tune name have been lost. The second version used free translation, and Xu Yuanchong had sufficient space to explore the connotative and innovative meaning of the tune name as much as possible, which was convenient for target readers to understand and accept. The third version adopted a zero translation, probably because the Engle couple could not understand the tune name so thoroughly that they gave up translating it.

With respect to this poem, translators would be confronted with cultural barriers that give rise to misunderstanding when translating. Hence translators should take the responsibility to represent the deep cultural connotations rather than only pay much attention to linguistic elements [1].

In the seventh sentence, "粪土" was used as a verb to mean "regard sth./sb. as muck and dirt", which expressed extreme contempt and hatred for sth./sb. in Chinese. "Muck" in the official version and "dirt" in Xu's version are closer to the meaning that the poet intended to convey in the poem. However, "dung" in the third version would give the readers a picture of "manure, animal feces", which was easy for readers to misunderstand and failed to meet the purpose of communication. In addition, in the same sentence, "万户侯" which came from "Historical Records", originally referred to the feudal lord who ruled the households. Herein the author alluded to all the warlords and reactionary rulers in China at that time. In the three versions, "mighty", "mighty lords",

“lords of a thousand houses” were used respectively. In contrast, Xu’s version of “mighty lords” retained both the original meaning and the western readers’ relevant cultural schemas. Since “万户侯” originated from Han Dynasty’s ruling system, which is very similar to that of the United Kingdom, it was easy for western readers to understand and accept.

In view of the comparative analysis above, Xu Yuanchong pays much more attention to enhancing the communication effect rather than simply conveying all the information of original text to make his translation acceptable [1]. Accordingly, he adopts some omissions and rewritings in the process of translation. With these strategies, his translation is in line with ethics of communication. However, the official version and the Engle couple applied literal translation and transliteration mostly, which sometimes lead to a failure of communication.

### *C. Based on translation acceptability*

As it has been discussed above, the translators of the official version were entrusted by the government to disseminate Mao Zedong’s poetry and the Mao Zedong’s thoughts in the world. Due to the special status of the author and the special nature of the task, the translators were so cautious when translating that they could not dare. As a result, the translation could not fully demonstrate the charm of the original poems and hardly reached the readers’ expectancy norms.

However, as China’s comprehensive strength continues to increase, Chinese and Western cultures have also entered the stage of equal dialogue, which requires the creation of new translations to meet the needs of readers at a higher cultural level. In a more relaxed environment, translators can give full play to the subjectivity, delve into the beauty of the original poems, actively and rationally use the essence of the target language, and reproduce the phonological beauty and artistic style of the original poems. As a whole, Xu’s version is more faithful to the source text by retaining the beauty of meaning, form and sound as much as possible.

From this standpoint, Xu’s version has succeeded in satisfying the expectancy norms. However, all the translators of the three versions have different academic achievements, and they undoubtedly meet the requirements and win the readers’ trust from the professional norms.

At the same time, the principle of “survival of the fittest” also applies to the translation version. The above three versions could be accepted by readers and withstand the test of time, which was because of the translators’ spirit of self-discipline, dedication and professionalism that has enabled them to successfully complete their excellent translations [2]. In term of this point, all the translators did very well in the ethics of commitment.

## V. CONCLUSION

According to the comparative study, it can be concluded as follows. First, the official version has done a relatively better job in complying with the ethics of representation and service. Second, Xu’s version spared no efforts to conform to the ethics of communication. Third, all of the three versions satisfied professional norms, but Xu’s version performed better in expectancy norms, and the official version was not so good as the Engle couple’s version in terms of expectancy norms. Lastly, the three versions all did well in the ethics of commitment.

It is found that it is difficult for translators to satisfy all the models in the meantime to gain an ideal translation. A good translator always knows how to adjust according to the specific needs in order to make their translations readable and acceptable.

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