

Analysis of Kleeman's English Translation of *A God's Own Tale: The Book of Transformations of Wenchang, the Divine Lord of Zitong*

Xiaohong Tang
Mianyang Polytechnic
Mianyang, China

Abstract—*A God's Own Tale: The Book of Transformations of Wenchang, the Divine Lord of Zitong* is a Chinese Taoist classic written in the early twelfth century. Because of its long history and rich religious and folk cultural information, it is difficult to translate this book. This paper analyses and evaluates the English version of *A God's Own Tale: The Book of Transformations of Wenchang, the Divine Lord of Zitong* translated by American Sinologist Terry Kleeman from two aspects, narrative style and translation strategy. Through analysis, it is found that the English translation of this work is a success, which not only faithfully translates the narrative style of the original text, but also fills the cultural gap of the target readers by use of thick translation and promotes cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries.

Keywords—*A God's Own Tale: The Book of Transformations of Wenchang, the Divine Lord of Zitong*; thick translation; culture

I. INTRODUCTION

A God's Own Tale: The Book of Transformations of Wenchang, the Divine Lord of Zitong (hereinafter referred to as "the Book"), also known as The Book of Transformations of Wenchang, was written by a Song-Yuan Taoist who receiving it from the divine lord of Zitong Wenchang. The Book tells the origin of the divine lord of Wenchang, several reincarnation experiences between the divine world and the world, successive ministries and successes and failures. It is a detailed biography. Kleeman (1994: xii) believes that the significance of the Book lies in that it is the first classic written in the way of "receiving from a spirit". It is an early representative work of autobiographical literature, marking a stage of development of Chinese fiction, as well as a unique example of early "morality book". More importantly, the Book outlines the blueprint for the Wenchang culture - a major force in the religious world of late imperial China. Just as Kleeman wrote: "the text is important as the first scripture explicitly revealed through spirit writing, as an early example of autobiography, as a stage in the development of Chinese fiction, and as a unique, early example of the genre of the 'morality books'. But more than any of these, this book was the defining blueprint for the Wenchang culture, a major force in the religious world of late imperial China.

Terry Kleeman, an American sinologist, is "the most enthusiastic scholar in the study of Wenchang culture in the

West". He devoted himself to writing Wenchang's works and translating Wenchang's classics. In 1994, he published the English translation of *A God's Own Tale: The Book of Transformations of Wenchang, the Divine Lord of Zitong* (Wang Xingping, 2001: 35). This paper evaluates the English translation of the Book from two aspects of narrative style and translation strategy, and analyses to what extent Kleeman retained the narrative style of the original text and the specific translation strategies adopted in the process of translating this Taoist classic in the Middle Ages, hoping to enrich the theory and practice of English translation of Chinese classics and promote the spread of excellent traditional Chinese culture including Wenchang culture to the whole world, tell Chinese stories well and make a contribution to the promotion of cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries and the promotion of China's international soft power.

II. NARRATIVE STYLE IN TRANSLATION

There are many versions of *A God's Own Tale: The Book of Transformations of Wenchang, the Divine Lord of Zitong* because of its wide spread and long existing. "The earliest was Liu Ansheng's writing from spirit of 73 series. Hence, many writers continued this book by writing from spirit and then there are versions of 79 series, 93 series, 94 series, 97 series and 99 series. Among them, the Book of 97 series was written by Feng Ruyi" (Yang Jinlong, 2001: 588). The original text Kleeman selected is the version of 73 series in 1181. In 1181, it was the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279 A.D.). Chinese literature was undergoing a transformation from "elegance" to "vulgarity". "The new vernacular novels and operas circulating in the streets and cities were booming quietly, showing strong artistic vitality" (Wang Shuizhao, 2010: 54). The Book was inevitably influenced by the vernacular novels of that time and the tradition of historical biography. Because the Book takes the form of first person autobiography, the narrative style of this book is unique. Whether the narrative style of the Book can be accurately translated has also become an important criterion for judging the English version of the Book.

A. Pre-Hui Poems

There is usually a poem before "Hui" or "Chapter" (that is the body of each chapter) in Chinese classical novels, which is called "Pre-Hui Poem". In front of every chapter of the Book,

there is also a poem with seven-character rhythm. Most of Pre-Hui poems have the function of summarizing the content of this chapter (e.g. the Pre-Hui poem Qu Yu in Chapter 39). Some of them are used as an introduction to draw the focus of this chapter's story, clearly point out the edifying significance of the story and exhort the world (e.g. Dongguo in Chapter 55). Some are used to remind the plot of the next story (e.g. Stone Bull in Chapter 45). In translating these Pre-Hui poems, Kleeman (1994: xiii) wrote, "I have largely resisted the temptation to rewrite the short, parallel sentences of the original into long, flowing English phrases and converting metaphors into Western near-equivalents". Therefore, Kleeman adopted the method of "translating poetry into poetry" to retain the characteristics of the original text to the greatest extent. For example,

A donkey dashed amidst the clamor of wind and rain,

A Shangyang danced in the shade of mulberry and hemp.
(Terry Kleeman, 1994: 288)

A donkey dashed amidst the clamor of wind and rain,

A Shangyang danced in the shade of mulberry and hemp.
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The above text is the fifth and sixth sentences of the Pre-Hui poem Water Tank in Chapter 72. These two sentences have the same sentence pattern, the same sentence structure and contrast with each other. For example, "风雨声中" corresponds to "桑麻阴下", "奔卫子" to "舞商阳", forming a very neat and complete antithesis, which makes the sentences more charming. Kleeman's translation not only retains the form of the original poem, but also uses an antithesis way in the translation, using "A donkey" to correspond to "A Shangyang", "wind and rain" to "mulberry and hemp" and "dashed" to "danced". (Zhao Yanchun 2005: 46) "When form is meaningful, if this form does not undergo corresponding transformation, it is tantamount to the abolition of literature or art". Pre-Hui poetry is a major feature of Chinese classical fiction. Many famous classical fictions, such as *A Dream of Red Mansions*, have Pre-Hui poetry. Antithesis is one of the forms of expression of ancient poetry metrics. Kleeman's English translation not only retains the style of Pre-Hui poetry in the original text, but also preciously uses English antithesis sentences to translate Chinese antithesis sentences, which not only conveys the content letter of the original text. At the same time, it perfectly conveys the meaning expressed in the form of the original text.

B. Narrative Perspective

The autobiographical form of the Book determines that it mainly uses the first person perspective to tell the story. When narrators use the first person perspective to tell stories, they "try to replace their own eyes with the eyes of the characters, so that readers can observe the world of stories directly through the eyes of the characters" (Shen Dan, 1998: 218-219). The advantage of this narrative method is that it can fully display the characters' views, hearings, thoughts and feelings, increase the intimacy and authenticity of the narrative. As of a morality book, the effect of punishing evil and promoting good can be

greatly enhanced by strengthening the authenticity of the story. For example,

“予方游人间，忽至会稽之阴”。(Shengmin in Chapter 3)

I had just begun my sojourn among men when I found myself in the shadow of Guiji. (Terry Kleeman, 1994: 89)

The divine lord of Zitong entered the human world from the divine world and was born as the son of an anchorite, surnamed Zhang. Shengmin in Chapter 3 describes the story of the divine lord of Zitong who met and chose Mr. Zhang to be his father in the world. "忽至" in the original text reflects that the mental state of Emperor Zitong at that time was aimless. He did not presuppose that he had to go somewhere to be born. The description of "忽至" made the reader and the lord feel like waking up from a dream: "How did I come to the north of Guiji at once?" This is a typical first-person inner-perspective narrative mode. If the narrator is an omniscient narrator, his narrative tone will be much more objective and calm, because the narrator knows the emperor's course of action well and will not be surprised that the lord came to the north of Guiji. Kleeman translated "忽至会稽之阴" into "I found myself in the shadow of Guiji". "Find oneself" means to find oneself in a certain situation or state, reflecting the subject's self-feeling. Kleeman's translation restricts the narrative perspective strictly to the perspective of the protagonist Zitong, and successfully retains the narrative features of the perspective in the original text.

III. TRANSLATION STRATEGIES

The choice of translation strategies is related to many factors, of which the two most important factors are the target reader and the characteristics of the original text. First of all, the author has already set the target reader in mind when writing, hoping to influence or infect the readers with his own works, and hoping that the readers can make some response to his own works. Therefore, the writing methods of different target readers are different. The same is true of translation. In the preface to the English translation of the Book, Kleeman talks about his principle: "translating is always a struggle to maintain fidelity to the original while making the text comprehensible to a modern, non-specialist audience, and this is especially the case in translating from medieval Chinese". It can be seen that Kleeman believes in translating faithfully to the original text. His presupposed target readers are "modern, non-specialist audiences". Secondly, as a Taoist classic, the Book contains rich cultural information. To understand this classic, readers need to possess Chinese religious knowledge, folk knowledge, historical knowledge and so on. However, the "non-specialist audience" presupposed by Kleeman are generally unable to possess such rich Encyclopedia knowledge, and he need to supplement background knowledge for readers. The best way to acquire it is to adopt the translation strategy of "thick translation".

The term "thick translation" was first proposed by Kwame Anthony Appiah, an American political philosopher, cultural theorist and novelist, in 1993. "The connotation of thick translation is interpretative textual material. Its forms of expression are footnotes, endnotes, in-text explanations, out-text explanations, prefaces, introductory notes and postscripts

and other expansion means. Its main purpose is to provide background information for readers to understand and appreciate". (Zhou Fangzhu, 2011: 44) There are prefaces, introductory remarks, comments and a large number of annotations and indexes in the English translation of Kleeman, which all show typical characteristics of thick translation.

A. *Extra-textual Thick Translation*

The translator wrote the preface and introduction before the English translation of the text of the Book. The preface consists of four pages. The main contents are as follows: a brief description of the identity of Wenchang and his belief; a brief introduction to the Book; the selection of translation version; translation principles and acknowledgement. For the target language reader, it is the elaborate introduction written by the translator that can better provide cultural background information to fill in the cognitive context deficiencies. The introduction consists of 83 pages, which are divided into three parts. First part is the early history of Wenchang's belief. The second part is the content framework, doctrine and significance of the Book. The third part is the subsequent edition changes of the Book. By reading the preface and introduction, the target language readers have a general understanding of the main content of the Book on the one hand, and on the other hand, they have a better understanding of the historical background and the teachings of the Book so as to make it easier for readers to read. In addition, there are appendices (mainly introducing the version information of some existing versions of the Book), bibliographies (mainly the bibliographies of Chinese and English references involved in the translation text), and indexes (mainly some important entries involved in the translation text) after the translation of main body. This part provides helpful information for some readers who are interested in Wenchang Culture and the Book and intend to do further research.

B. *In-text Thick Translation*

The thick translation of the Book is mainly embodied in two aspects: annotations and comments.

Translational annotation is the most important form of thick translation. "In order to achieve the purpose of translation, the translator enriches and intensifies the atmosphere of the source language and its culture through annotations outside the target text, goes deep into cultural connotation and maximizes the information, color and degree of the source culture" (Huang Xiaopeng, 2014: 75). There are 396 annotations in the English version of the Book. The main function of these annotations is to supplement and explain the text. For example,

“北堂一夕梦吞珠” (Shengmin in Chapter 3)

One night my mother dreamed she had swallowed a pearl. (Terry Kleeman, 1994: 90)

Kleeman first adopted the domestication translation method to translate “北堂”, a special cultural item with Chinese characteristics, into “my mother”, so that readers can read uninterruptedly and obtain the information meaning of the original text, and ensure the reader's reading fluency. However, the translator immediately added a footnote to "my mother", i.e. "Note 13", in which the translator first transliterated "北堂" into

"Beitang", then Chinese character "北堂" and finally gave literal translation "northern hall" to highlight the cultural exoticism of the term by means of foreignization, and then explained that "北堂" refers to "mother" in Chinese cultural context. Through annotations, the translator succeeded in constructing a Chinese cultural context, in which the reader has a profound perception of Chinese culture as well as the text information of the original text.

Another feature of the English translation of the Book is that after each chapter of the text, Kleeman also wrote comments. Through these comments, the translator can retell the story in the main text, point out the enlightening significance of the story and add the translator's point of view, or explain the cultural phenomena or cultural vocabulary in the main text (for example, in the comment after the text of Ningqin in Chapter 7, the translator interpreted and commented on "filial piety" adhered to by the ancients in China).

IV. A LITTLE DISCUSSION

As a knowledgeable and rigorous translator, Kleeman did achieve what he called "faithfulness" to the original text in his preface. However, the Book, as a Taoist classic in the Middle Ages of China, has to undergo two conversion processes to translate it into English. First, it is the intralingual conversion of ancient Chinese to modern Chinese and then the interlingual conversion of Chinese to English. In order to ensure the accuracy of the translation, there should be no omission in the two conversion processes. Let's look at the following examples,

“不因梦里腾魂出，争得山边避雨来” (Fengshan in Chapter 52)

It was not because he went soaring through the clouds in a dream

That he fought his way through the rain to the mountainside. (Terry Kleeman, 1994: 225)

Fengshan in Chapter 52 tells the story of a rich man Wang Ji. His wife An couldn't bear children, so he bought a concubine surnamed Liu and she gave birth to a son named Yishou. Later An drove Liu out of his home, and Yishou searched for his biological mother after the death of his father and An. Zitong appeared in the dream of Yishou, and Yishou arrived at Fengshan according to the instruction of Zitong and met with his mother who was taking shelter from rain. According to the context of this story, the modern Chinese of the two sentences of “不因梦里腾魂出，争得山边避雨来” is “如果不是因为梦里腾魂出，又怎么会到山边避雨来呢？”。“争” means “how” in ancient Chinese, so the translator translated them into “If it was not because he went soaring through the clouds in a dream, how did he find his way through the rain to the mountainside?”. According to the translation of Kleeman, he accurately expressed the meaning of the original text.

V. CONCLUSION

The Lives and Teaching of the Divine Lord of Zitong “has a great span of time and space. It is full of myths and legends. It involves politics, military affairs, religion and culture. Its writing is complicated and confusing, and its style is mixed with rhyme. The difficulty of its translation can be imagined. It

is amazing that Kleeman can eventually overcome the obstacles and complete it smoothly". (Wang Xingping, 2001: 35) Kleeman translated Pre-Hui Poem by the way of "translating poems into poems" and maintained the same narrative perspective as the original, so as to achieve the equivalence of the original and the translation in narrative style. In addition, Kleeman also adopted thick translation methods such as preface, introduction, notes and commentary to supplement the cultural background knowledge missing by the target readers and clear the barriers for readers to read. At the same time, it also strengthens Western readers' understanding of Chinese culture and promotes cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries. Kleeman's English translation of the Book is a great success, which has great reference significance for the English translation of Chinese classics. He has translated it carefully and elaborately, which can be our example of learning in translation.

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