A Study on Zhang Peiji’s Selected Modern Chinese Essays from the Perspective of Xu Yuanchong’s “Three-Beauty” Principle

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Abstract. Prose, together with poetry, novel and drama, is regarded as one of the most important literary genre in both China and western countries. Since 1990s, Zhang Peiji began to translate modern Chinese essays into English out of his fondness of English language and Chinese prose. This paper attempts to use Xu Yuanchong’s “Three-Beauty” principle to analyze Zhang Peiji’s Selected Modern Chinese Essays to see if Zhang has displayed the beauties of the original text. The study shows that Zhang succeeded in reproducing the beauty of sense, sound and form of the original.

Introduction

Chinese prose, which is characterized by free form, tight spirit, deep conception, sincere emotions, beautiful language as well as literary grace, enjoys a time-honored history and has obtained remarkable achievements in modern China. As a distinguished translator in China, Zhang Peiji has made great contributions to the translation cause. As of 2014, Zhang has published four volumes of Selected Modern Chinese Essays respectively in 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2012. The articles he selected in the book include the masterpieces of many outstanding writers such as Lu Xun, Bing Xin and so on. His English version of Selected Modern Chinese Essays has enjoyed great popularity among readers and scholars both at home and aboard.

Xu Yuanchong has devoted himself to spreading Chinese classical literature and culture to the world by contributing most of his lifetime and energy to do translation work for more than sixty years. Xu Yuanchong has been an expert in literature translation and has published more than sixty pieces of poem both in China and foreign countries. He is not only an excellent translator, but also a great translation theorist in China. The theory of “Three-Beauty”, namely, beauty in sense, beauty in sound and beauty in form, is one of the most famous theories and is widely accepted as one of the standards for literary translation.

Analysis of Zhang Peiji’s Selected Modern Chinese Essays from the Perspective of “Three-Beauty” Principle

Many specific examples are displayed and analyzed here to examine whether the English version of the Chinese prose follow the principle of beauty in sense, form and sound during translation.

Beauty in Sense

Example 1: 它可能是一条现代的乌衣巷，家家有自己的一本哀乐帐，一部兴衰史，可是重门叠户，讳莫如深，夕阳影里，野草闲花，燕子低飞，寻觅归家。

--------------《巷》（《英译中国现代散文选1》，2007:267）

It may be a modern version of Wu Yi Xiang, a special residential area of nobility in the Jin Dynasty southeast of today’s Nanjing, where each family, secluded behind closed doors, has its own
covered-up story of joys and sorrows, and rise and decline. When the sun is setting, swallows will fly low over wild flowers and grass on their way to their nests.

The original text is smooth and succinct, former part of the sentence uses short verses and the later part of the sentence uses four-word structure, which is the typical pattern of prose. The form is loose, while the relation between the short verses, words, and phrases is not clear and concealed, but the readers can get what the author tries to express, that is what often called “tight in spirit”. Original author make full use of the advantage of the Chinese language, evoking a sense of poetic and beautiful picture. Professor Zhang reveals the concealed logistic relation between the short verses, words, and phrases by using “where” and “when” to make the translation more understandable, but also full of sense of beauty. The expressions like “joys and sorrows”, “rise and decline”, are very native expressions.

Example 2: 我携着三个孩子在屋后草场中嬉戏着的时候, 夕阳正烧着海上的天壁, 眉痕的新月已经出现在鲜红的云缝里了。

While my three kids, accompanied by myself, were frolicking about on the meadow behind our house, the sky above the distant edge of the sea was aglow with the setting sun and the crescent new moon was already peeping out from behind the scarlet clouds.

Example 3: 燕子去了, 有再来的时候; 杨柳枯的时候, 有再青的时候; 桃花谢了, 有再开的时候。

If swallows go away, they will come back again. If willows wither, they will turn green again. If peaches shed their blossoms, they will flower again.

Example 4: 在南方每年到了秋天, 总要想起陶然亭的芦花, 钓鱼台的柳影, 西山的虫唱, 玉泉的夜月, 潭柘寺的钟声。

When I am in the South, the arrival of each autumn will put me in mind of Peiping’s Tao Ran Ting with its reed catkins, Diao Yu Tai with its shady willow trees, Western Hills with their chirping insects, Yu Qan Shan Mountain on a moonlight evening and Tan Zhe Si with its reverberating bell.

Example 5: 比起北国的秋来, 正像是黄酒之与白干, 稀饭之与馍馍, 鲈鱼之与大蟹, 黄犬之与骆驼。

But they all lack strong color and lingering flavor. Southern autumn is to Northern autumn what yellow rice wine is to kaoliang wine, congee to steamed buns, perches to crabs, yellow dogs to camels.
The same as the two examples mentioned above, this sentence also employs the parallelism and comparison to expound the characters of Southern autumn as well as to express author’s deep love of the autumn in his hometown. Zhang Peiji adopts the English expression of comparison “A is to B what C is to D” to reproduce the emotion of the original work. The translation’s structure is well-balanced, when reading, the translation is beautiful as the original.

**Beauty in Sound**

*Example 6: 昨夜雨雪, 一点星光都看不见*

---《雨雪时候的星辰》 (《英译中国现代散文选1》, 2007:99)

*It had been snowing all night, not a single star in sight.*

---Stars on a Snowy Night (Zhang Peiji, 2007:100)

The sentence in the original text is very simple in language, however the translation employs the alliteration to add the sense of beauty, make the translation more poetic. In this connection, the translation may surpass the original work, and makes full use of the advantage of the target language.

*Example 7: 在灰沉沉的天底下, 忽而来一阵凉风, 便息列索落的下起雨来了。*

---《故都的秋》 (《英译中国现代散文选1》, 2007:158)

*A sudden gust of cool wind under the slaty sky, and raindrops will start pitter-pattering.*

---Autumn in Peiping (Zhang Peiji, 2007:163)

In the original text, “灰沉沉” is used to describe the sky, is a quite common word, but professor Zhang chooses the classic and novel word “slaty” to form alliteration with the “sky”, and the original text used “索落” to depict the action and sound of rain, “索落” is in end rhyme. In Zhang’s translation, he uses the alliteration to reproduce the beauty of rhyme of the original text, maintain the sense of beauty.

*Example 8: 在八千多日的匆匆里， 除徘徊外，又剩下些什么呢？*

---《匆匆》 (《英译中国现代散文选1》，2007:56)

*What I have been doing during the 8,000 fleeting days except wavering and wandering?* 

---Transient Days (Zhang Peiji, 2007:58)

In the original text, the words “徘徊” shares the same Chinese radicals (偏旁〈彳〉) and the word “徘徊” is “disyllabic binding word” (联绵字) sharing the same vowel (/ai/)[i.e., assonance], thus, generating us a sense of beauty and pleasing to our ears. Professor Zhang renders the Chinese word into “wavering and wandering” using the device of alliteration (/w/) and the end rhyme (/ing/), which, together with the preceding word “doing”, “during”, “fleeting” representing the lingering flavor of the original text. In this sense, the translation may surpass the original.

*Example 9: 它为着向往阳光, 为着达成它生之意志, 不管上面的石块如何重, 石块与石块之如何狭, 它必定要曲曲折折地, 但是顽强不屈地透到地面上来。*

---《野草》 (《英译中国现代散文选1》，2007:186)

*Seeking sunlight survival, the young plant will labor tenaciously through twists and turns to bring itself to the surface of the ground no matter how heavy the rocks overhead may be or how narrow the opening between them.*

---Wild Grass (Zhang Peiji, 2007:188)

In the original, the author uses two “为着” to show the reason for why the grass could be so powerful and dogged, professor Zhang also employs alliteration, using the three “s” to produce the same effect that the original has brought to us.

Undoubtedly, more examples could be found in Zhang’s translation works which follow Xu Yuchong’s theory of “Three-Beauty”. That is why professor Zhang’s translation of Selected Modern Chinese Essays is widely acclaimed for its beauty and smoothness.
Summary

This thesis makes tentative efforts to study Zhang Peiji’s *Selected Modern Chinese Essays* from the perspective of Xu Yuanchong’s “Three-Beauty” principle. The paper first gives an overview of Zhang Peiji’s life and his translation activities as well as brief introduction of Xu Yuanchong and his “Three-Beauty” principle. Then specific examples are given to illustrate the representation of beauty of sound, form and sense from the perspective of “Three-Beauty” principle. The study demonstrates the adoption of “Three-Beauty” principle is practical in safeguarding the expressiveness and elegance in translating prose.

References


