



AN ANALYSIS OF XU YUANCHONG'S ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF ZHANG XIAN'S "BUDDHIST DANCERS" FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TOURY'S TRANSLATION NORM THEORY

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Abstract:

Since the 1980s, descriptive translation studies have come into being. Influenced by the polysystem theory of Zohar, a representative of the descriptive school, Toury proposed the translation norm theory, which includes preliminary norms, initial norms and operational norms. Xu Yuanchong is a great translator of Chinese classics, and his translations are of high artistic quality and great appreciation value. Based on Toury's translation norm theory, this paper analyses Xu Yuanchong's English-translated Song Ci "*Buddhist Dancers: missing my lord, I lean on railings of the tower*" from three normative categories, which is conducive to strengthening the depth and breadth of research in its field and promoting the spread of excellent traditional Chinese culture.

Keywords: translation norm theory; Xu Yuanchong; Zhang Xian; "*Buddhist Dancers*"

1. Introduction

Chinese classics are important carriers of the excellent culture of the Chinese nation, so their translation quality and international dissemination effect are particularly important. Song Ci is not only the essence of Chinese classical literature, but also the treasure of world literature. At present, there are many related studies on the English translation of Song Ci, but as the longest-lived and the most active poet in the Northern Song Dynasty, compared with Liu Yong, Su Shi, Ouyang Xiu, etc., Zhang Xian has seldom been studied for his works. We retrieved only one document on the English translation of Zhang Xian's works in CNKI. "*Buddhist Dancers: missing my lord, I lean on railings of the tower*" is Zhang Xian's masterpiece. The original text and its translation are shown in Table 1. The first half of the lyric focuses on the same colour green in the grass and the hero's robe, connecting the nearby herbs isolated by space with the hero in the

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distance, and making what is seen today isolated by time communicate with what was seen in the past, so that the scene before the building and the feelings of the heart are integrated into the atmosphere of this Song Ci. The latter part of it focuses on the difference between the old and the new in colour, contrasting the robes of the past in the memory with the robes of today in the imagination, comparing the clothes to the hero in the scenario, and contrasting the old face with the new flowers and plants. This Song poem takes the feelings for spring and the missing for people as the main content, expressing the young woman's yearning for her lover (Liu, 2011: 154-158).

Table 1: "Buddhist Dancers" Chinese-English Comparison

Original text	Target text
《菩萨蛮》张先 忆郎还上层楼曲， 楼前芳草年年绿。 绿似去时袍， 回头风袖飘。 郎袍应已旧， 颜色非长久。 惜恐镜中春， 不如花草新。 (Zhou, 2013: 240)	Tune: Buddhist Dancers by Zhang Xian Missing my lord, I lean on railings of the tower; From year to year sweet grass turns green before my bower. Green as the gown he wore on taking leave, Turning his head, the wind wafted his sleeve. His gown must be outworn and old, How can its green colour long hold? I fear my mirrored spring, alas! Cannot renew as bloom and grass. translated by Xu Yuanchong (Zhou, 2013: 33)

Xu Yuanchong is a famous contemporary translator in China, the winner of the "Lifetime Achievement Award in Translation" of the Translators Association of China as well as the "Aurora Borealis" Prize for Outstanding Translation of Fiction Literature of the International Federation of Translators. Since the 1980s, Mr. Xu Yuanchong has been engaged in poetry translation, summarizing relevant experiences and providing theories and methods. Based on Toury's translation norm theory, this paper analyses Xu Yuanchong's translation of the above Ci from three aspects: preliminary norms, initial norms and operational norms and explores the effect of translation norms on translators' strategy selection, which is helpful to analyse the application of this theory in the English translation of Song Ci, to expand the breadth and depth of the English translation of Song Ci, and to help Chinese culture "go global".

2. Translation Norm Theory

Before the 1980s, translation studies were all centered on the source text. It was believed that a good translation should be "faithful" to the original text, "equivalent" or "fluent" (Wang, 2013: 5-13). This kind of translation standard with value judgment is characteristic of prescriptive translation studies, which have always dominated the translation field. The concepts such as the translation methods enumerated in the translation-oriented contrastive grammatical and stylistic analysis of French and English by Vinay and Darbelnet in 1958 and the translation steps proposed by Newmark in his *Textbook of Translation* are both focused on language norms (Tong,

2009: 61-66). However, with the development of translation studies, this kind of research perspective limited to the text is less and less able to explain some translation phenomena. For example, translation methods and the view of translators are different in translations of the same work because of different authors or translation times. How to make a reasonable explanation for the translation facts? A new research method, descriptive translation studies, emerged as the times require in the 1980s. It believes that translation research should not be all "prescriptive", but also need to be "descriptive", the scope of research should not be limited to the source text, but should focus on factors beyond the source text (Peng & Li, 2011: 50-53). With the development of descriptive translation studies, great changes have taken place in the study of translation norms. The nature of the research has become descriptive, the research unit is not limited to sentences, and the research scope is not limited to language norms. The polysystem theory proposed by Zohar, a representative of the descriptive school, in his representative work *Papers in Historical Poetics* has led the study of translation to the path of cultural studies (Liu, 2009: 330-349). Influenced by Zohar, Toury further deepened the polysystem theory and put forward the translation norm theory, becoming the first person to systematically study translation norms. In the long history of translation, the definition of translation norms has been inconclusive. Early norms focused on precise wording, equivalent form, and more on prescriptive nature. Later, the concept of translation norms changed and gradually became descriptive (Hu & Dai, 2022: 78-83). In Toury's view, norms have long been regarded as "the translation of general values or ideas shared by a community—as to what would count as right or wrong, adequate or inadequate—into performance 'instructions' appropriate for and applicable to concrete situations" (Toury, 1995: 63). Toury is concerned with the invisible hand behind the regular character of the text, the dominant norm, that governs the translation behavior of most translators (Yu, 2020: 92-99). These norms have their stability and uniqueness in a certain social and cultural environment and period, and work on translators' decisions. So, translators must obey the translation norms if they want their translation activities to be successful. Toury thinks that the purpose of descriptive translation studies is to reconstruct the norms at work in the actual translation process. At the same time, he also emphasizes the diversity and change of norms, which do not only negate its own stability, but illustrate the multiplicity and complexity of social culture. Toury believes that norms should be discussed in the context of explaining translation behavior, and different norms should be compared with each other, so as to provide reference for future translation practice.

After a large number of case studies, Toury divided translation norms into preliminary norms, initial norms and operational norms. Preliminary norms include "translation policy" and "directness of translation": the former means that the translator should consider the general translation policies of the target language and culture, such as social, political, economic, cultural policies and comprehensive personal preferences to make a choice. The latter mainly refers to whether the source of the text is the source text or the translated text. The initial norms determine the translator's basic attitude towards the text and the translation methods and strategies adopted. If the translator is as close to the source text as possible, the adequacy will be showed; if the translator is partial to the culture represented by the target text, the produced text will show more obvious acceptability. Operational norms refer to the norms that influence the translator's actual translation process and specific translation behaviour, including "matricial

norms" that determine the integrity and actual layout characteristics of the translation version, and "*textual-linguistic norms*" that affect the micro-level characteristics, such as the language and text of the translation version. The former refers to the macro-arrangement of the translation, such as omission, addition, and displacement. The latter refers to the micro-level sentence structure, word choice, sentence construction and so on (Toury, 2012: 79-85).

3. The Translation Norms That Xu's Translation Follows

3.1 Preliminary Norms

Preliminary norms deal with translation policy and the directness of translation. Translation policy refers to the determinants of which texts are selected for translation in a particular language, culture or time. The directness of translation refers to whether the translation needs an intermediate language or not (e.g., Finnish is translated into Greek through English.). Professor Xu Yuanchong had a great interest in English since he was a child, and through his hard work, he became proficient in the translation of Chinese classical poetry. The English translation of "*Buddhist Dancers*" is directly translated from Chinese into English without intermediary language, so the following will not focus on the directness of translation.

For translation policy, this paper will analyse from two aspects: the overall social and cultural background and Xu Yuanchong's personal aesthetics. With economic globalization and China's opening to the outside world, more and more foreign literary works, especially those from the United States in the West, promote their own culture to countries around the world. In Xu Yuanchong's view, Chinese classical poetry should also go out to communicate with foreign readers, so that they can learn more about traditional Chinese literature. But it is quite difficult. Because of the huge difference between Chinese and foreign languages and cultures, it is a big problem whether the poems translated into English can retain the original charm. After returning from studying abroad, Xu Yuanchong devoted himself to the translation career all his life, taking the pursuit of artistic beauty and the promotion of Chinese culture as his duty, and committed himself to the cultural exchange between China and the West. He has communicated different civilizations through his excellent translation works. He said, "*The so-called globalization is not limited to the economic globalization of the West, but also includes the introduction of Eastern culture to the world, so as to make the world 'enjoy' and 'learn' it, and make it a means of promoting international understanding and world peace*" (Yang, 2003: 50). On the basis of the practical investigation of literary translation, he pointed out that literary translation is an art in nature, which is the pursuit of the three beauties (beauty in sense, beauty in sound and beauty in form). Xu Yuanchong also pointed out that, in the "*three beauties*", beauty in sense is the most important, beauty in sound is secondary, and beauty in form is more secondary (Xu, 1984: 60).

3.2 Initial Norms

It has proved useful to regard the basic choice which is made—whether consciously or not—between the two contending sources of constraints comprising the value underlying translation as constituting initial norms (Toury, 2012: 79). Translators can choose to follow the norms displayed in the source text, or the norms of the target language or culture. Song Ci is one of the

new style poems compared with the ancient style poems. It emphasizes rhythm and artistic conception, so its translation work is definitely not easy. Zhang Xian's *"Buddhist Dancers"* is a boudoir grievance poem with the feelings for spring and the missing for lover. The whole content is orderly and the structure is clear. In his translation, Xu Yuanchong pays more attention to the receptive ability of target language readers. Under the guidance of the initial norms, focusing on the target language culture is beneficial for poetry to seek a common foundation in different cultures. In this way, it is easier for the target language audience to understand Chinese poetry on the basis of English poetry, and Chinese poetry, as an excellent traditional Chinese culture, can also be spread and appreciated. His theory of *"three beauties"* is mainly aimed at the translation of poetry, and what he tries to embody in the translation is the beauty of artistic conception of poetry. In the theory of *"three beauties"*, the pursuit of *"beauty of sense"* is the most important. In addition to the selection of excellent words, in his translation, Xu Yuanchong also used a large number of modern or classical English words to realize the beauty of sense, which not only reproduced the *"beauty of sense"* of the original poem, but also added some ancient color and taste to the translation, which could be comparable with the Western ancient poetry. For example, in the sentence of the latter part *"I fear my mirrored spring, alas!"*, Xu added the interjection *"alas"* in the English translation, which enhanced the readability of the translation by making an appropriate choice of translation content. In addition, *"spring"* has the meaning of *"people's age"* in ancient times, but *"mirrored spring"* means *"the face in the mirror"* in this poem. Such complex culture-loaded words can be difficult for foreign readers to understand, and Xu translated it as *"my mirrored spring"*, which cannot express this meaning. But he made the word *"spring"* connect with the *"bloom and grass"* in the next sentence. Proper methods can make a translation easy to understand. After a close reading, you will also find that the translated language is authentic and fluent with vivid and flexible wording, rich and changeable sentence patterns, rigorous and standardized grammar, and strong readability.

3.3. Operational Norms

Operational norms may be conceived of as directing the decisions made during the act itself (Toury, 2012: 82). They consist of the matricial norms and the textual-linguistic norms. Matricial norms mainly mean the integrity of the translated text, including deletion, addition, replacement and segmentation of text and addition of footnotes. This translation text, same as the original one, has eight sentences and is divided into two parts. However, Xu Yuanchong follows the target language norms and does not completely copy the structure of the original text. In most cases, he translated the simple subject-verb-object structure and verb predicate sentences of the original text into a sentence pattern that is more in line with the English language norms, using more parentheses and participle phrases, and its syntactic structure is often rich and variable. For example, he combined the second and third sentences of the original text into one sentence, and the seventh and eighth sentences into another sentence, and added subjects in translating the original text, such as *"my"*, *"I"*, *"he"* and *"his"*. What's more, participle phrases, the nominative absolute and other structures are used. The textual-linguistic norms mainly refer to the translator's choice at the level of specific words. Chinese classical poetry has various unique characteristics, the most important of which is rhyme. On the basis of full understanding the

original text, Xu Yuanchong translated it into the target language with rhymes. So, we can find the neat rhyme (aa, bb, cc, dd) when reading the translated text: "tower" rhymes with "bower", "leave" with "sleeve", "old" with "hold", and "alas" with "grass". At the same time, the sentences are of different lengths, giving people a neat and variable feeling. The rhymes at the end of each sentence also achieved phonological beauty. And the whole poem has strong musicality and is catchy to read. In addition, the translation content is complete, and the use of question mark in the sixth sentence and exclamation mark in the seventh sentence conveys the young woman's feelings of missing the far-away wanderer incisively and vividly.

4. Conclusion

Norms can influence not only translation of all kinds, but also at every stage of the act. Indeed, traces of their activity can be noticed in every aspect of the end-product (Toury, 2012: 81). As André Lefevere said, translation does not take place in a vacuum. The choice of translators is restricted by norms, and changes in norms are influenced by social, cultural and historical aspects. As a translator, we must recognize the current translation norms and be sensitive to their changes, so as to make correct choices in translation.

This paper studies Zhang Xian's "Buddhist Dancers" translated by Xu Yuanchong based on Toury's translation norm theory. It can be seen that translation norms play a role in the whole process of translation: both the social and cultural background and the translator's own aesthetic tendency influence the selection of works, which constitutes the preliminary norms; the addition of interjections in translation, the proper translation method of culturally loaded words and the idiomatic English expression constitute the initial norms; the use of variable sentence structures and rhymes constitutes the operational norms. The description of the translation of "Buddhist Dancers" by the translation norm theory not only proves the success of the translation, but also demonstrates the feasibility of the theory. Translation scholars are important disseminators to spread Chinese culture to the world. A single spark can start a prairie fire, and the "going global" of Chinese culture needs translation scholars as well as translators.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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