Giles' Choices in His English Translation of *Liao Zhai*

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Abstract

The paper aims to investigate the issue of ideology and poetics as a form of control over translator which results in the manipulation or rewriting of the source text(s) by analyzing Herbert A. Giles' English translation of *Liaozhai*. Giles is a great sinologist, who published the first edition of *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* in 1880, during the Victorian era. He left out many stories that were erotic or which were viewed as offensive. He chose to rewrite the sexual descriptions and remove the author's notes after the stories. The choices he made in translating this Chinese classic works is the result of the prevailing political and moral values and predominating poetics standards of the Victoria Age. Translation is a cross-cultural activity which takes place in real socio-political and economic situations where people may have significant interests in the production or reproduction of a specific text in a given community. Translators may face a great deal of pressure in their work in terms of quality standards, faithfulness, ideology and poetics. Therefore, translation may be subjected to several conscious acts of selection, addition or omission.

Keywords: *Liao Zhai*, ideology, moral, poetics, translation

1. Introduction

Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio or L*iaozhai Zhiyi* is a collection of nearly five hundred mostly supernatural tales written by Pu Songling in Classical Chinese during the early Qing Dynasty (1613-1912). The compilation was first circulated in manuscript form before it was published posthumously. Sources differ in their account of the year of publication. One source claims the "Strange Tales" were published by Pu's grandson in 1740. However, the earliest existing print version today dates to 1766. Pu is believed to have completed the majority of the tales sometime in 1679, though he could have added entries as late as 1707. Pu borrows from a folk tradition of oral storytelling to put to paper a series of captivating, colorful stories, where the boundary between reality and the odd or fantastic is blurred. The cast of characters include vixen spirits, ghosts, scholars, court officials, Taoist exorcists and beasts. Moral purposes are often inverted between humans and the supposedly degenerate ghosts or spirits, resulting in a satirical edge to some of the stories. Ghosts and spirits are often bold and trustworthy, while humans are on the other hand weak, indecisive and easily manipulated, reflecting the author's own disillusionment with his society. The stories differ broadly in length. Conciseness is the key, with the shortest stories under a page in length.

As such a famous book teems with ghosts and foxes, *Liao Zhai Zhi Yi*, is always praised with its significant thematic and artistic achievements, and has been translated into more than twenty languages since its publication (Li & Peng, 2010). Among the many English versions, Herbert Allen Giles'—*Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*, published in 1908, not only shares the highest reputation, but also is claimed widely to contain the most stories. His translation is among the first to introduce Chinese classics to the English speaking world, and since publication it has been considered the spokesman of its author—Pu Songling, for well over one hundred years in the west (He, 2009). As a distinguished scholar on Chinese history and culture, Giles does the translation to provide "knowledge of the folk-lore of China" (Giles, 1880) "as a guide to the manners, customs, and social life of that vast Empire" (Giles, 1880). To realize this, the very first thing for him is to arouse target readers' curiosity about this "vast Empire" and to minimize the strangeness of the foreign text for the readers of the translation (Giles, 1880). For this purpose Giles makes a lot of changes and adaptions to cater to the target readers. If Giles' English version was translated back into Chinese, Chinese people would be definitely shocked because his translation actually differs in many ways from the original stories which the Chinese readers are familiar with (Zeng, 2010).

With his extraordinary achievements on researches of Sinology, how can Giles go that far away from the original book? In fact, his choices in translating can be accounted in a social way rather than in a linguistic way. The motivations of a translator is always fettered by the social-cultural context within which the process of translating takes place. Consequently, it is justifiable to judge translating activity only by considering its social context. The need for translation is the premise of the act of translating. It may be driven by client, because when someone requires for a translation; it may also be driven by market when publishers detect the demand for a translation of foreign literature; it may even be driven by translation itself, as when someone feels that a work of ancient literature need to be translated or re-translated because of the ever changing social values (Yu, 2011). All the above factors may influence the act of translating. Then what is it that forces Giles to make his choices when he does the translation of *Liao Zhai*? This issue is so important that its conclusion may rehabilitate Giles' as an outstanding translator since his translation has long been blamed as going a little far away from the original work according to detailed researches on Giles' version and especially those on comparative studies between his version and other translators' as Yang Xianyi—a prestigious translator in China, and Denis C. and Victor H. Mair. Therefore, this paper aims to investigate the issue of ideology and poetics as a form of control over translator which results in the manipulation or rewriting of the source text(s) to justify Giles' choices in his translation of *Liao Zhai* by analyzing the elements which push him to make his decisions.

2. Ideology

Ideology is "the set of factual and evaluative beliefs—that is the knowledge and opinions—of a group. In other words, a bit like the axioms of a formal system, ideologies consist of those general and abstract beliefs and opinions of a group." (Baker, 2004) "Ideology is not limited to political spheres. Instead, it allows researchers to investigation modes of thinking, forms of evaluating, and codes of behaviour which govern a community by virtue of being regarded as norm." (Baker, 2004) The above definitions highlight the point that ideology derives from and reflects in the interests of a peculiar society. As a member of a certain society, like an author, a translator, is not simply a 'person' but a historically and socially constituted subject. Translators interpret texts by way of setting them against their backdrop of known expressions, existing statements, familiar conventions, anterior texts, or, in other words, their general knowledge which is ideological. This knowledge requires them to understand the text and meanwhile limits the range of their interpretation as Robinson aptly notices: "Translators…are those people who let their knowledge govern their behavior. And that knowledge is ideological. It is controlled by ideological norms. If you want to become a translator you must submit to the translator's submissive role, submit to being possessed by what ideological norms inform you." (qtd. in Calzada-Pérez, 2003) Schäffner (2003) further explains: Ideological aspect can…be determined within a text itself, both at the lexical level (reflected, for example, in the deliberate choice or avoidance of a particular word…) and the grammatical level (for example, use of passive structures to avoid an expression of agency). Ideological aspects can be more or less obvious in texts, depending on the topic of a text, its genre and communicative purposes.

2.1 Politics

The term 'ideology' has been always accompanied by its political connotation as it is evident in its dictionary definition as 'a system of ideas and ideals, especially one which forms the basis of economic or political theory and policy' (The New Oxford Dictionary of English). Translation scholars who slant in favor of the political definitions of ideology mainly believe that translating itself is a political act as Tahir-Gürçağlar (2003) argues, 'Translation is political because, both as activity and product, it displays process of negotiation among different agents. On micro-level, these agents are translators, authors, critics, publishers, editors, and readers'. Politics plays a prime and influential manipulating role in translation which dictates selections of source texts as well as the motivation of the translation. It is seldom the case that when a piece of work is translated into another language merely because of its literary magnificence or stylistic attractions. It is common that translators find themselves smitten with the beauty of the source text, particularly if it is a literary one. "Even if they are moved to transpose texts into works in their own language，but they may find that they have no direct control over the product or desirable acceptance of the translated works. If their work is to have any impact at all, they will have to persuade an institution of power—if only a publishing house, or an editor of literary journal—to disseminate the translation" (Pollard, 1998). Pollard's viewpoint clearly shows that a translator seldom does his translation in a fairly independent and pure vacuum. As an individual in society, the translator will always choose works that are in concert with the dominant ideology, current cultural trends in an appropriate poetical sens. As an individual in society, translator makes his decisions in the process of translating in accordance with the dominant ideology and current cultural trends.

Obviously Giles is an individual of his society, therefore it is quite natural that he cannot escape the pervasive political power, which impresses us deeply by his choice of the stories in *Liao Zhai* that he chooses to translate.

In the introduction of his translation, Giles says, "I too had originally determined to publish a full and complete translation of the whole of these sixteen volumes; but on a closer acquaintance many of the stories turned out to be quite unsuitable for the age in which we live, forcibly recalling the coarseness of our own writers of diction in the eighteenth century. Others, again, were utterly pointless, or mere repetitions in a slightly altered form. From the whole, I therefore selected one hundred and sixty-four of the best and most characteristic stories, …" (Giles, 1926). From this comment, it is obvious that Giles' choice of the stories to translate is on the criterion that whether it is suitable to the then society.

2.2 Morality

Morality is a complex system of general principles and particular judgments based on cultural, religious, and philosophical concepts and beliefs. Cultures and or groups regulate and generalize these concepts, thus regulating behavior. When someone conforms to the codification, he or she is considered to be moral. As an individual in a certain society, translator finds no escape from the control of prevailing moral values. Therefore, the social background of a translator poses significant influence on his choices during the process of translating. His understanding and interpreting of the original texts will be surely affected by the limitations of his time. With his adaptions, abridgments and rewriting, Giles' rendition of *Liao Zhai* did cater the western readers of the Victorian society he belongs to.

As we know, the Victoria Era is an age full of social, political and artistic innovations. Its rigid and restrained writing style and pure literary motivation make it a distinguished era. Born and growing in such a society, Giles' whole life experiences the entire Victorian epoch, and it is inevitable that he is affected greatly by this rigid literary style and the prevailing moral values. On the one hand, years of experience in Chinese impresses him the basic decency and purity in the Chinese literature; on the other hand he knows too well what kind of books will be accepted by the common Victorian people including himself. While sexual description is often found in *Liao Zhai* stories, Giles makes his decisions to remove or rewrite these parts in his translation to keep a pure and satisfactory image in the minds of his target readers.

To illuminate this point one of the typical illustration is Giles' treatment of the sexual description in the sixth story of Volume One. Giles rewrites this part by changing the episode into a traditional Chinese marriage, and hence after the hero and his lover were addressed "Mr. Chu","Mr. Chu's wife" or "the bride". Though their immoral relationship could be confirmed especially by the end of the story when the old priest explains the reason why the hairstyle of the hero's lover is changed and by the author's note after the story which illuminates his own opinion about this obscene relationship, Giles either removes the sexual description completely or rewrites them in accordance with the moral standards of the then society, to present a pure image catering the western readers. It is no doubt Giles' choice in his translation is the result of the social background.

3. Poetics

"Ideology is not only element to determine translator's strategy. Poetics is another." (Lefevere, 2004) Poetics is the dominant concept of what literature should be, or can be allowed to be, in a given society. It is a code which makes literary communication possible. A poetics can be said to consist of two components: one is an inventory of literary devices, genres, motifs, prototypical characters and situations and symbols; the other a concept of what the role of literature is, or should be, in the social system as a whole. For example, some of the narrative models in Chinese traditional literature are also different from those in foreign literature. In order to comply with target readers' reading habit and taste at a specific period the translator would manipulate translation in a way that would in consent with predominant poetics.

Narrators of today all know that too much realist content disorders the narration of stroy. Pu Songling pays attention to narration. He divides narration and comment: the narration is the telling of the story, while the comment is to illuminate the author's moralistic intention of his story. "Yi Shi Shi Yue" after almost every story in *Liao Zhai* is a fixed writing form which was invented by Sima Qian (145 BC-87 BC) and was applied by historians of later generations. Pu Songling employs this genre but adapts in his own style: it becomes an important part of stroy in form of attaching to the story at the end or between two or more stories. Many of them are in a metaphorical manner containing wisdom and philosophical significance or even in form of a maxim, helpful to a further understanding of themes of these stories and the objection of author's composition.

But the fact is that in the 18th century when British novels starts to be in full swing, three types of narrative modes are developed. One is first-person reminiscence represented by Daniel Defoe; the second is epistolary mode with Samuel Richardson' works as typical sample of this type; and the last one is Henry Fielding's third-person narration. The characteristic of Fielding's novels is that the narrator becomes a part of the story because of the frequent appearance with his note inserted in the stroy. The insertion either exposes the fate of the

characters or comments on their behavior. However, the middle of the 19th century witnesses decline of this kind of novels. The insertion narrative mode is criticized and even ridiculed by the contemporaries.

It is apparent that the narrative form with author's note almost after every story which named "Yi Shi Shi Yue" does contradict the popular literary standards of the then British society and disappoint the western readers' expectation. Therefore, it is understandable that Giles' decisions when dealing with this part is shaped in some way by the then dominating poetics.

4. Conclusion

The manipulation that ideology, patronage and poetics execute one translation may be either visible or invisible but they shall never be neglected and eliminated. Giles version of *Liao Zhai Zhi Yi* is the very one which has most changes, and if back translated into Chinese, Chinese readers would definitely be shocked. Giles' removes, omits, and rewrites many episodes of the original book due to his purpose of being corresponding to the expectation of the target society. The target poetics and ideology are the two crucial elements which impinge on translator's choices in translating, and Giles is no exception. The change is so dramatic that the version turned out to be a panorama of the Chinese society of that time, rather than a satire or an attack of some social issues.

The "unfaithful" translation should not be regarded as misconduct on the part of translator. In this way, Giles' choices can be accounted by the requirements of the target society. The prevailing moral values and the predominating poetics of the Victoria Age are the cultural context in which Giles accomplished his translation of *Liao Zhai,* which follows naturally that the sexual descriptions and insertion of author's notes at the end of the stories are the parts to be tackled under the guidance of those moral values and poetics standards. Giles, as both the recipient and conductor, is fettered to do the translation at his will because he is obliged to be responsible for the acceptance of his translation among the then western readers. It is safe to conclude that a translation is a product of a certain ideology of the target culture, and translator's choices are severely influenced therefore.

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