

Study of Yu Guangzhong's Diasporic Identity and His Works in Translation: A Case Study of *The Old Man and the Sea*

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Abstract

Mr. Yu Guangzhong, who reigns in the poetry world, has rarely been studied for his translation career. In fact, his translation and literary creation are started at the same time, and it can be said that the two influenced each other. The migrant experiences he has experienced in his life leaving a significant impact on his translation philosophy. This paper analyzes his translation of *The Old Man and the Sea* in terms of his diasporic identity, and finds that his translation has the characteristics of many diasporic translators: the gatekeeper of Chinese culture; the matchmaker of words; and the model of the translation community. His novel translations have rarely been studied by scholars, combining this with his diasporic identity allows us to observe his translation philosophy from a new perspective, with a view to providing some inspiration for the study on Yu Guangzhong.

Keywords

Yu Guangzhong; Diasporic identity; *The Old Man and the Sea*.

1. Introduction

The term "diaspora" originally referred to the Jews scattered all over the world, wandering outside their homeland but maintaining a constant longing and connection to their native land (Tong Ming: 2004). Yu Guangzhong lived a tough life, moving to Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the United States successively in pursuit of academic career. Although he was unable to visit his homeland due to the tensions between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait, he often expressed his deep longing for the mainland after settling in Taiwan. A poem called "Nostalgia" of Yu Guangzhong has spread all over China and is still heard today. In addition to the great achievements in poetic career, his translation career was also colorful and diversified. Starting with the translation of *The Old Man and the Sea* at the age of 24, his translation career has been almost simultaneous with his literary creation for decades. From his translation of the novel, we can find that his diasporic experiences have had a significant impact on his translation values.

2. The Gatekeeper of Chinese Culture

One of the major characteristics of diasporic translators is that they take it as their mission to guard and spread Chinese culture. The themes of Chinese diasporic writers' works have entrenched Chinese features, and Chinese elements are their eternal inspiration and source of creation (Wang Shirong: 2015). At present, the English proficiency of Chinese students has generally improved; however, students with solid Chinese language skills are rare. For many students studying translation, the increasing proliferation of translation styles and the gradual weakening of pure Chinese have caused Yu Guangzhong to cry out: "Concise words, grammatical

symmetry, flexible syntax, and resonant voice are all constants to the life of Chinese. If we can follow such an ecology, the health of Chinese can be maintained. If you violate this ecology in every way, over time, Chinese will be polluted and clogged, and a crisis will loom (Yu Guangzhong: 2002)". In his opinion, Chinese has a long history of more than two thousand years and is the most precious treasure of the Chinese nation, and its flexibility and neatness are incomparable by Western literature. After a lifetime of wandering outside his homeland, Yu Guangzhong experienced the impact of various cultures and ideologies, but among the different trends of thought, he firmly chose Chinese culture as his spiritual hometown, and his literary creation and translation activities were always supported by this belief. In addition, his cultural identity as a diasporic translator also makes him responsible for safeguarding and spreading Chinese culture, prompting him to consciously choose appropriate translation strategies when translating his works in order to preserve and pass on Chinese cultural characteristics. In response to the prevalence of translation styles in the translation community and the phenomenon of translators indiscriminately pursuing utilitarianism at the expense of protecting their mother tongue, he could not help but be saddened and wrote a series of critical articles such as "The Normal and Perversion of Chinese", "Mourning the Decline of Chinese", as a way to appeal to and admonish young translators to not only translate English well but also use pure Chinese expression to conquer Chinese readers. Yu Guangzhong's sense of worry about the erosion of Chinese reflects his spiritual attachment to the Chinese language, he has experienced the greatness of Chinese language and feels proud and pride when translating works, which is also a kind of cultural identity. He began to translate *The Old Man and the Sea* when he graduated from college at the age of 24, and after a lapse of fifty-three years, he retranslated the novel. In the preface of the novel translation, he wrote: "When I translated this book, I had just graduated from Taiwan University, and I was not yet proficient and experienced in translation. With today's standard, I can only score seventy points for this translation back then (Yu Guangzhong: 2010)." The reason why he came to this conclusion is that in his practice of translation, his Chinese level has improved by leaps and bounds, and he feels that there are many shortcomings in the previous translation. Therefore, for some of the syntax in the former translation that he was unable to resolve, "because of my experience and understanding of English grammar, the new translation is much smoother to read because I know how to balance now." In his retranslation of *The Old Man and the Sea*, he practiced the principle of "using mandarin Chinese most of the time and classical Chinese as an alternative," so as to approximate the sophistication of the original text (Yu Guangzhong: 2002). This can not only make the translation concise, but also protect the authentic Chinese. The following are two examples of how Yu Guangzhong has fulfilled his role as the gatekeeper of Chinese culture in the translation of *The Old Man and the Sea*.

Example 1 Source language: "He was an old man who fished alone in a skiff in the Gulf Stream and he had gone eighty- four days now without taking a fish."

Translation: "那老人独驾轻舟，在墨西哥湾暖流里捕鱼，如今出海已有八十四天，仍是一鱼不获。"

This sentence translated by Yu Guangzhong undoubtedly reflects his profound literary skills. In comparison with other translations of *The Old Man and the Sea*, the translation of this sentence is similar and does not go beyond the confinement of the English syntax for the translator. However, he divides a long English sentence into four small phrases, which is in line with authentic Chinese expression habits. The use of typical Chinese four-character idioms, such as "独驾轻舟" and "一鱼不获", reveals a strong "Chinese style". The compact form and fluent flow of the translation are not only the manifestation of his profound linguistic skills, but also the love and protection for his native language. He said that the four-character phrase sounds "resonant and steady and melodious to the ear", and that "idioms have survived for thousands of years and are part of the culture, containing the history of China."

Example 2 Source language: "There was nothing ever like them. He hits the longest ball I have ever seen."

Translation: "简直天下无敌。我一辈子看过的球算他打的最远。"

This is a scene of the old man and the boy discussing baseball after dinner. The old man always said that the North American team won, and even if the boy told him that the North American team lost, he was still convinced that the North American team was the real winner, so the old man's inner belief was very strong. While translating this sentence, the novice may write like this: "没有和这同样漂亮的球。在我所见过的球员中他打球打的最远。" But again, he used a four-character idiom "天下无敌", highlighting the old man's high expectations for the North American team, while conveying the meaning of the original language in a concise and sophisticated manner. Such a translation belongs to the authentic Chinese expression, which makes Chinese readers feel very literary and can't help but linger and feel the beauty of Chinese. Although the idiom is short, the meaning behind it is much more than that. The paucity and monotony of the vernacular will be exposed in the translation. This is why Yu Guangzhong painstakingly calls on young translators to read more Chinese classics. "Because translating in vernacular is just as creating in vernacular, when troubles arise and there is a need for extraordinary syntax, compressed diction, neat counterpoint, etc., it is more effective to use classical Chinese to strengthen, tighten, and blend the language. (Yu Guangzhong: 2002)."

3. The Matchmaker of Words

Yu Guangzhong spent his high school years at Nanjing YMCA High School, where the school's rigorous teaching style provided him with a solid foundation both in Chinese and English. Later, he enrolled in Jinling University, a former American church university in Nanjing, which was especially known for its English department. His ability to navigate through various original works in English was inextricably linked to his studies in the Foreign Languages Department at Jinling University. Outside of school, his family did not relax in his classical education, either. His bilingualism level has been enhanced by his extensive study of Chinese and English classics, and he has gained a deeper appreciation of the similarities and differences between the two languages. In addition to literary translation, he is also a veteran translation critic. In his article "The Art of Adaptation", he said: "Translation, especially literary translation, is an art, just as marriage is the art of getting along between a husband and wife, which requires a compromise between the two sides, so translation is the same as marriage. (Yu Guangzhong: 2002). As a translator, he or she must first be knowledgeable and proficient in at least two languages, not only do they need to understand the subtleties of both languages, but also be able to use them skillfully. Secondly, a translator should also have a considerable understanding of the professional knowledge of his or her studies. Only after understanding the differences between Chinese and Western cultures and languages can one know how to balance between the two languages. In the case of the two languages, the translator is just like a matchmaker who communicates between Chinese and English, and has to understand the strengths and weaknesses of both sides, and constantly make the two fit together in order to achieve the best effect and realize the "marriage" of the two languages. For example, when translating from English to Chinese, one should not be overly influenced by English, making Chinese inauthentic, nor should one pursue Chinese as a priority, turning it into pedantic Chinese, but one needs to compromise between Chinese and English in order to achieve best results. As for how to adapt, it depends on the translator's cultivation.

As a diasporic translator, Yu Guangzhong's subjectivity to Chinese cultural identity cannot be ignored. The multiple crossings in time, space and language usually lead to a crisis of identity for the diasporic translator. After a series of self-explorations and struggles, he gradually developed into a "Chinese consciousness" and finally established his cultural identity of

“returning to Chinese culture”. His strong “Chinese complex” is omnipresent in his translations. His guarding and spreading the essence of traditional Chinese culture is the best manifestation of his spiritual belonging to maintain his cultural identity and pursue his nostalgia (Wang Shirong: 2015). Having experienced many different cultural environments, the diasporic translators have a deeper understanding of the acceptability of foreign cultures, so the “faithfulness” and “elegance” of the translation need to be coordinated while translating. In response to the excessive proliferation of translation styles, Yu Guangzhong proposes the idea of “sound westernization”, which means that Chinese can also adopt some English sentence forms to make Chinese more vivid and innovative. Therefore, Chinese can also draw nutrients from other languages to expand and enrich itself. Maintaining the norm in the trend of constant development and change should be based on retaining the norm, so as to achieve the effect of “sound westernization”.

Example 3 Source language: “Good luck old man.”

Translation: “一帆风顺，老头子。”

This sentence is very short and seems easy, but the translation of short sentences is the real test of a translator’s level. Even a novice knows to translate “Good luck” as “祝你好运”. But Yu Guangzhong translates it as “一帆风顺” here, which makes it catchy to read in the first place and shows the beauty of authentic Chinese. Secondly, regarding the context back then, the boy said these words to the old man before he was ready to go to sea. The translation here is a four-character idiom “一帆风顺”, which is very appropriate to the meaning of the original text. In addition, the phrase “一帆风顺” is a pun, which not only refers to a boat running with full sails, but also refers to doing something very smoothly and without any obstacles. It can be seen that “using idioms flexibly is like borrowing capital from traditional culture and adding some ingenuity, one can earn the interest of creation (Yu Guangzhong: 2004).” In this case, the boy expressed his hope that the old man could catch big fish and return smoothly from the sea. The word “old man” is translated as “老头子”, which is a kind of intimate name. And only when people have a close relationship will they use it, otherwise it is disrespectful to others. The use of the term here also reflects the translator’s insight into the close relationship between the old man and the boy. The translator prefers to use the traditional Chinese four-character idioms to make the translation more consistent with the reading habits of Chinese readers.

Example 4, Source language: “The fish had turned silver from his original purple and silver, and the stripes showed the same pale violet color as his tail. They were wilder than a man’s hand with his fingers spread and the fish’s eye looked as detached as the mirrors in a periscope or as a saint in a procession.”

Translation: “大鱼已从原来紫银相间的颜色转成银白，那些条纹也显出像尾巴一样的淡紫的颜色。条纹比伸开五指的人手还要宽阔，那鱼眼已经淡漠，像潜望镜的镜片，又像游行行列里的圣徒。”

The translation of this long sentence shows that the translator has made some adjustments and coordination in order to make the readers not feel the translation is awkward and stiff. The Old Man and the Sea uses a “telegraphic” sentence style, and the average length of each sentence is about 14.7 words (Chen Yibai: 2011). Yu Guangzhong analyzed the characteristics of the sentence structure: Hemingway’s original sentence structure is simple and compact, and the paragraphs are shorter, and the complex sentence structure of multiple subordinate clauses under one main clause is intentionally reduced and replaced by simple sentences. Therefore, he translated this sentence by turning the long English sentence into several short sentences in Chinese, and tried to make the words between the short sentences contrast and match the number of words with his scholarly rigorous attitude and poet’s creative habits. By adjusting and compromising the sentence, the translator creates an atmosphere of poetry, which makes

the reader feel a sense of beauty and helps the reader integrate into the context. This act of turning a long sentence into several short sentences is a reflection of the translator's efforts to reconcile the gap between the Chinese and Western languages. If the long sentences are translated literally, it will make the readers tired of reading, so the translator acts as a "matchmaker" of the language all the time.

4. The Model of the Translation Community

JinQibin writes that translators in Hong Kong and Taiwan have a deep Chinese complex and advocate the use of authentic and pure Chinese (JinQibin: 2017). Yu Guangzhong himself physically advocates the philosophy of using classical Chinese combined with modern vernacular, which is reflected in many places in his translation of *The Old Man and the Sea*. "This comprehensive grammar, in which vernacular is the norm and classical Chinese is the alternative, has been practiced for a long time in my own poetry and prose compositions, and I have also applied it randomly in my translation in order to approximate the sophisticated mix of the original text (Yu Guangzhong: 2002)." The excellent linguistic and textual talents make him meticulous in his translation, and even a very simple sentence has to be thought over for a long time in order to achieve the best reading effect. At the same time, he has a keen insight into the expectations of different readers, and because of his own uneven experiences in life, he would subconsciously think more about their readers and try to make his translation free of translation traces as much as possible, so that readers can experience the pleasure of reading. Finally, from the perspective of diasporic translators, translation is the continuation of their writing career, and they are worried about the degradation of Chinese, especially for the proliferation of translation styles. Translation plays a role of practical benefits, cultural enlightenment and the spread of civilization, and it can even influence the thoughts of several generations. As of the so-called "scholar translation", translators must take it as their mission to spread culture and translate masterpieces when they start to translate (JinShenghua: 2004). This strong sense of mission made the diasporic translators devote themselves to their work. It can be found in the translation preface of *The Old Man and the Sea*: "When I handed over the translation of this book to the Yilin Publishing House for publication more than fifty years later, I had to make a lot of corrections, as few as ten or as many as twenty per page. Over a thousand places had been rectified by fits and parts and it took two months to finish the job (Yu Guangzhong: 2010)." They have translated a number of excellent translations and set an example for young translators, and the above points are worthy to be studied by young translators.

Example 5, Source language: "But now he said his thoughts aloud many times since there was no one that they could annoy."

Translation: "可是现在，因为旁边没有人讨厌说话，他便屡次大声说出自己的心思。"

Before translating a masterpiece, the first thing a translator needs to do is to understand the author's life experience and personal character. Yu Guangzhong worked hard on this and after his research, he found that "Hemingway worked as a journalist for most of his life, so his writing style is concise and compact, with few long sentences and the paragraphs are short." From the example sentence, we can find that this is just in line with the conclusion reached by Yu Guangzhong. The translation of example sentence is also concise and compact, with sentence structure as consistent as possible with the original. In addition, he prefers to use the strategy of domestication when translating, so his translation has a distinctive personal style. The literal translation of this sentence would read: "But now he said his thoughts out loud many times, because no one would be disturbed here." It can be seen that he puts the reason in the front: There is no one next to him, so the old man will speak out loud. In English the former sentence usually is the focus, while in Chinese the latter sentence is the focus. It is the customary

expression in Chinese to say the reason first and then depict the fact. Therefore, young translators should learn from Mr. Yu that doing translation is not just a transformation between languages, there are many unnoticed efforts of translators in the translation process, the purpose of which is to make the readers have a better reading experience.

Example 6, Source language: "He did not know the name of Rigel but he saw it and knew soon they would all be out and he would have all his distant friends."

Translation: "他不识莱吉尔的名字，却望得见它，并且知道不久后群星都会出齐，都成了他的远方朋友了。"

This sentence highlights Yu Guangzhong's image as an exemplary translator. While translating *The Old Man and the Sea*, he not only carefully consulted various materials to come up with a high-quality translation, but also pointed out many fallacies in the original text, his scholarly spirit of questioning is worth learning. Reading the original text of *The Old Man and the Sea*, we can find that the total number of words does not exceed 30,000, and Hemingway himself once said that he had read the book more than two hundred times, so it can be said that the book was really sophisticated. However, the name of one planet, "Rigel", was wrongly written. Yu Guangzhong wrote about one-fifth preface of the book to tell readers why "Rigel" would not appear in the sky of the New Mainland late September. He once said that if a translator finished a translation of a masterpiece without writing a preface or a postscript to share with readers, his translation will be suspect. His careful and meticulous craftsmanship contrasts with the unhealthy culture of young translators who are impatient and eager for success, and is a model for young translators to follow.

5. Conclusion

Yu Guangzhong devoted his whole life to preserving Chinese culture and praising Chinese language, which is perfectly reflected in his translation of *The Old Man and the Sea*. From the perspective of his diasporic identity, he constantly calls on the Chinese people to promote the strengths of Chinese, advocating that translation should be done with "vernacular complementary to classical Chinese". And translators should abandon the clumsy "translationese", which shows his identification to "Chinese culture", and this identity gives him a sense of mission. At the same time, in his retranslation of *The Old Man and the Sea*, he revised the translation in more than 1,000 places and spare no effects to point out the absurd errors in the original text, which is truly a "scholarly translation", and it is worthy of study by the younger generation of translators. Nowadays, the literary translation is inundated by awkward "translationese", and the study on Yu Guangzhong's translation of *The Old Man and the Sea* from his diasporic identity can give us a new perspective to discover his translation philosophy, leaving many valuable inspirations for young translators.

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