

*A Sociological Analysis of Translator's Roles in the Production of English-translated *The Last Lover**

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Abstract: Translation is a social production process. This paper takes Can Xue's award-winning works *The Last Lover* as a case to investigate the translator's roles in the translation production. Annelise Finegan Wasmoen is the English-language translator of this novel. She acts as an important actor and plays effective parts in the translation production. Specifically, based on the Actor-network Theory in sociology, Annelise's roles are analyzed in the translation^{ANT} of the translation project initiation, in the translation^{ANT} of the translation process, and in the translation^{ANT} of the publication and dissemination. With the efforts of all the involved translation actors including the translator, the production of English-translated *The Last Lover* was successful.

1. Introduction

Over the past 30 years, Can Xue has published more than 90 offprints in various genres, including novels, short stories, literary criticism, philosophy, prose and translation, with the total words of more than six million. She is a controversial writer in China whereas she is one of the Chinese contemporary female writers with the most translated and published works overseas. Particularly, Can Xue's *The Last Lover* is favored in the Western world. It was voted The Independent's Book of the Year 2014, was long-listed for The Independent Foreign Fiction Prize 2015, and won the Best Translated Book Award 2015. Since then, Can Xue has been attracting increasing attention in the English-speaking world.

In terms of the reasons of Can Xue's works translation and acceptance overseas, the translator, as a very important actor in the process, must be a great contributor to its success. However, the translator does not work alone, and the translation of any works in target language is not only a text conversion between two languages. According to sociology, translation is a social production process involving many factors. Therefore, based on the Actor-network Theory in sociology, this study takes Can Xue's award-winning works *The Last Lover* as a case to analyze the translator's roles in the translation production process. It mainly focuses on two questions: First, how does the translator build connections with other translation actors in the whole translation production process? Second, how does the translator play his or her role in the process, and what are the roles? It is hoped that this study can explore some successful experiences in the foreign translation of Can Xue's works, and further provide some ideas for Chinese modern and contemporary literature "going out".

2. Theoretical Framework: ANT and Translation^{ANT}

The Actor-network Theory (ANT), developed in the 1980s by French sociologists Bruno Latour and Michel Callon and British sociologist John Law, occupies an important part in the sociological landscape. It is also known as sociology of translation. It is noted that the term translation in ANT is different from translation in linguistics, so translation^{ANT} is used to refer to the former in order to differentiate it from the latter^[1].

During the social production process, the function of translation^{ANT} is to construct the actor network. Callon^[2] points out that it consists of four key moments: problematisation, interessement, enrolment and mobilisation. In the moment of “problematisation”, the problem or the target is posed and one actor will initiate the network by tentatively contacting the other actors; and in the second moment, other actors will be interested and attracted into the network by negotiations, persuasion or even compulsion, and their roles or duties will be specified; in the third moment, the necessary actors will be enrolled into the network and the unnecessary will be dismissed; and then, in the last moment, all the actors will be mobilized to ensure the successful function of the network until the production is completed. Therefore, in short, translation^{ANT} is the process of gradually building the relations between different actors.

Since the translation of any works is a kind of social production involving the translation actors and the translation network, its translation^{ANT} is very important. Only when the translation^{ANT} is successful can the production proceed smoothly. Otherwise, translation production process will be interrupted at any time.

3. An Analysis of Translator’s Roles in the Translation^{ANT} of *The Last Lover* Translation Production

Annelise Finegan Wasmoen is the English-language translator of Can Xue’s works *The Last Lover*, which is her first book-length translation. Before it, her translations included short stories and essays by authors such as Jiang Yun, Lu Min, and Wang Meng. She has worked for academic and textbook publishers as an acquisitions editor, publishing coordinator, copy editor, and project manager. When translating *The Last Lover*, she was pursuing a PhD in Comparative Literature at Washington University in St. Louis., and there she got a graduate certificate in translation. Her rich experience in translation practice, academic research and work enables her to play effective roles in the translation and dissemination of *The Last Lover*. In this part, based on ANT, this paper will conduct a detailed analysis of the behaviors and roles of Annelise in the translation^{ANT} of *The Last Lover* translation actor network. Due to the three stages of translating process, the detailed analysis of Annelise’s roles in *The Last Lover* translation production will be made from three angles, which are the translation^{ANT} of the translation project initiation, the translation^{ANT} of the translation process and the translation^{ANT} of publication and dissemination.

3.1 Annelise’s roles in the translation^{ANT} of the translation project initiation

Annelise came across Canxue's earliest masterpiece, the short story *Hut on the Mountain*, in her study of modern Chinese literature at university, and she liked it very much. She saw it as “pushing the novel form into bold new territory”. After reading *The Last Lover*, Annelise appreciated the novel very much, thinking that it was incredibly complex and exquisite. She said that it is a novel in which readers can make new discoveries every time they read. Although she was busy with her doctorate study at the time, she still decided to translate it. She first contacted Jonathan Brent, then editor-in-chief of Yale University Press, who had been working tirelessly since the 1980s to introduce Can Xue's works to the English-speaking world. Annelise met Brent when she worked as

an assistant editor at Yale University Press from 2007 to 2008. So, thanks to Brent's recommendation, she got in touch with Can Xue, and she sent a sample of her translation of the first chapter of *The Last Lover* to Brent and the author Can Xue for review. Can Xue appreciated her talent and translation very much. Then, in Annelise's words, "things go very smoothly", and "I seized this rare opportunity"^[3]. And she was entitled to translate *The Last Lover* and this English version was eventually published by Yale University Press in 2014.

It can be seen that Annelise played a leading role in the translation^{ANT} of the translation project initiation of *The Last Lover*. After setting the target of translating the novel, she started the project on her own initiative, enrolled and mobilized publishers and authors into the translation project by actively communicating, negotiating and contacting with them. And the non-human actors like work experience, literary accomplishment, reading preference and the translated sample chapter are also made full use of by Annelise to play due roles in the translation^{ANT}.

3.2 Annelise's roles in the translation^{ANT} of the translation process

Translation is mainly the process of converting the text from the source language to the target language, and the translator is undoubtedly the most important actor. On the one hand, the translator should read the source text thoroughly, understand the implied meaning and the intention of the author. On the other hand, the translator also bears the responsibility and obligation to convey the text in the target language, and takes target readers' acceptability into consideration. Therefore, the translator's roles in translation^{ANT} of the translation process can be mainly shown in two aspects—understanding the source text and conveying it in the target language.

Annelise is very good at Chinese and Chinese culture. Besides her own efforts, Annelise kept in close contact with Can Xue by email during the translation. She also sent the manuscript to Can Xue immediately when the translation of every chapter was completed. Since Can Xue has been learning English for many years and has a good command of English, Can Xue can give Annelise useful suggestions on translation. The author therefore is enrolled and mobilized to act actively by translation^{ANT}, providing the translator with the help in understanding the original text and producing the translation.

Based on the deep understanding of the content of *The Last Lover* and Can Xue's writing characteristics, Annelise mainly adopts the translation strategy of fidelity to the original text. She tries her best to keep the overall coherence of the translation and the dependence of the content and plot, so as to maintain the internal logic of Can Xue's writing, rather than just pursue the literal fluency of the writing. She wants to leave room for interpretation to English readers, "so that they can enjoy the novel as much as readers in the source language". At the same time, she also pointed out that this is her first translation, but her translation style is a bit risky, "for those who prefer a more natural and fluent translation style, her translation may be somewhat difficult to read."^[4]. Through the translating behaviors of Annelise, the source text of *The Last Lover*, translation strategies, translation skills and translated works was enrolled and activated in the translation process and become important non-human actors.

It can be seen that Annelise is the core actor and spokesperson in the translation^{ANT} of the translation process of *The Last Lover*. She enrolled and mobilized a lot of actors and because of the cooperation, the translation that is faithful to the original is produced.

3.3 Annelise's roles in the translation^{ANT} of the publication and dissemination

The publication and dissemination is related not only to static factors such as the quality of the translation and the translation skills of the translator, but also to dynamic factors like publicity and sales. Although the publishing house is mainly responsible for it, it also involves the dynamic

participation of multiple relevant actors, one of whom is the translator. In particular, well-known translators can attract more readers and comments due to the success of their earlier works, which is more conducive to the sales and dissemination of the present works. For example, Goldblatt's translated works will undoubtedly attract much more attention because of his success in translating Nobel Prize Winner Mo Yan's novels. Annelise had previously worked as a bilingual editor and project manager at Yale University Press, so she was familiar with the publication and dissemination of translated works. After winning the Best Translated Book award, Annelise has been known by more people. She seized all kinds of opportunities to introduce Can Xue and their works in the English-speaking countries. She accepted interviews from well-known universities, websites, newspapers, or journals. Some of the important interviews are listed in the following. She accepted the interview from Rebecca King Pierce, who worked as digital communications editor and content strategist for Arts & Sciences at Washington University in St. Louis, where she was then pursuing her doctorate degree; she was also interviewed by Daniel Medin from the American University of Paris, where he helped direct the Center for Writers and Translators and he was Associate Series Editor of The Cahiers Series; she also conducted an interview with the author Can Xue. These interviews focus on the literary characteristics of Can Xue's works, Can Xue herself, the novel *The Last Lover* and her translation process. And they were published on the official websites of the University of Washington, Three Percent and Bomb, among which the latter two are well-known for literature promotion and dissemination. These platforms are good channels to promote *The Last Lover* and Can Xue's other works in the English-speaking world.

From the above analysis, it can be seen that although Annelise is not the core actor in the translation^{ANT} of the publication and dissemination, she also participates in it and plays the active role. And the interviews, websites, comments, literary critics are also enrolled and mobilized into it.

4. The Outstanding Results of English-translated *The Last Lover*

According to the analysis above, with the efforts of the translation actors including the translator, it can be seen that the production of English-translated *The Last Lover* was successful. And its outstanding results can be shown in the following two aspects.

On the one hand, in terms of the quality of the translation, the English version of *The Last Lover* is well recognized by readers and academics. John Donatch, the current president of Yale University Press, spoke highly of the translation that Annelise Finegan Wasmoen is excellent and her translation of this novel is very successful^[5]. The role of translator is also specifically pointed out by the judges of the Translated Book Award in America, "Annelise F. Wasmoen's translation succeeds in crafting a powerful English voice for a writer of singular imagination and insight"^[4].

On the other hand, in terms of dissemination, *The Last Lover* has been well spread and accepted in the English-speaking world, and has had a good influence on the translation and dissemination of Can Xue subsequent works. First of all, "the influence of Can Xue's works has finally been fully spread overseas"^[6]. In 2015, the International Academic Conference on Can Xue's works was held in Changsha on September 21, with many sinologists and scholars coming from the United States, Denmark, Japan and other countries. In recent years, Can Xue has received far more attention in the world than most contemporary Chinese writers, her reputation abroad has reached new heights^[7], and she even has been a candidate for the Nobel Prize in Literature. Secondly, the number of libraries in the world that collected *The Last Lover* continues to increase. According to the statistics, up to now *The Last Lover* has been collected by 691 libraries in the whole world. This number exceeds that of Mo Yan's *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* (623) and that of Yu Hua's *Brothers* (551), which proves its wide dissemination and good acceptance. "The collection of her works in the libraries world-wide is one of the core indicators to measure her international influence"^[8]. Due to

the large collection of English translated works, Can Xue ranks third among modern and contemporary Chinese female writers in terms of the influence in Europe and the United States, just next to Zhang Ailing and Zhang Jie. Finally, after *The Last Lover*, every time Can Xue's novel was translated into English, a number of famous newspapers and magazines in the English-speaking world would spare no efforts to publish book reviews and promote them.

5. Conclusion

According to the analysis in this study, we find that during the production of English-translated version of Can Xue's *The Last Lover*, the translator Annelise, as one of the main translation actor, plays a very important part in the whole process. To be specific, the roles of the translator can be shown in the translation^{ANT} of the the translation project initiation, in the translation^{ANT} of the translation process, and in the translation^{ANT} of the publication and dissemination. Based on ANT, the black box of the translation production process is uncovered, the actors affecting the translation production are found out, as well as the mechanism of actions and the various social relations hidden behind the process are revealed. It is hoped that the analysis of the success of the translation in this study may provide some insights to the Chinese literature “going out”.

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