

Research Status and Translation Strategies of Guan Hanqing's Zaju

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Abstract: Yuan Zaju was the earliest form of Chinese drama to spread to the West. The foreign dissemination and translation of the Yuan Zaju *The Orphan of Zhao* initiated the first wave of enthusiasm for the translation of Yuan Zaju abroad. The dissemination and translation of the Yuan Zaju brings about positive impact on the dissemination of Chinese culture. After 2010, scholars also focused on exploring the translation methods and strategies and conducted examinations from a cross-cultural perspective in their research. As for the studies on the English translation of Guan Hanqing's Yuan Zaju, scholars mostly take a certain famous play of Guan Hanqing as the entry point. The English translation practices and research hotspots of Guan Hanqing's plays abroad mainly include *Snow in Midsummer*, *Single Sword Meeting* and *The Injustice to Dou E*. In order to truly achieve the goal of conveying the essence and meaning of Guan Hanqing's Zaju, the translator should flexibly utilizes translation strategies and eliminate cultural barriers.

1. Introduction

Drama is a long-standing stage art. Through the ages, domestic and foreign dramatists have inherited classics and been courageous in innovation, creating numerous outstanding drama works and offering countless brilliant treasures to world culture and even human civilization.^[1]

As one of the four major literary genres, drama is of great significance for the inheritance and dissemination of culture. Bearing the functions of cultural symbols, media ties, and national images, the "going global" of Chinese opera has transformed from spontaneity to consciousness, and its overseas attention has continuously increased (Zhou, 2024, pp.66-67). In 1993, the film *Farewell My Concubine*, depicting the art of Peking Opera in China and the lives of Peking Opera actors, won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival for the first time. In 2009, the world's first Confucius Institute of Opera was established at Binghamton University in the United States, offering courses on Chinese culture and drama. From 2011 to 2018, the Shanghai Kun Opera Troupe brought classic plays such as *The Palace of Eternal Youth*, *Leifeng Pagoda*, and *The Peony Pavilion* on tour to the Cologne Opera House in Germany, the New National Opera House in Athens, Greece, the Berlin Art Theater in Germany, and the Sochi Olympic Center in Russia.^[2-3]

For Chinese drama to "go global" and "stay", and to reach more readers and audiences internationally, it must be translated into different languages. Therefore, drama translation has a long

way to go. In recent years, with the vigorous development of disciplines such as comparative literature and cross-cultural communication, drama translation has also become a research hotspot. Scholars have conducted a large number of translation practices and research by looking at plays from different periods.^[4]

Yuan Zaju is a traditional opera form sung in northern tunes during the Yuan Dynasty, widely reflecting social reality and deeply loved by the people. The plays created by Guan Hanqing, a world-renowned cultural figure, have a wide range of themes and are widely popular. His *Snow in Midsummer* is the most outstanding and brilliant script among Yuan Zaju. The *Romance of the Western Chamber* created by Wang Shifu is known as one of the world's three great love classic dramas along with *Sakuntala* and *Romeo and Juliet*.

The foreign dissemination and translation of the Yuan Zaju *The Orphan of Zhao* initiated the first wave of enthusiasm for the translation of Yuan Zaju abroad. In the 18th century, a "China craze" swept across Europe. A series of Chinese cultural classics such as Confucian classics, philosophical works, encyclopedias, and literary works, with strong Chinese characteristics, were disseminated to Europe, causing a huge response. Yuan Zaju was the earliest form of Chinese drama to spread to the West. In 1698, the French missionary Joseph Premare translated the Yuan Zaju *The Orphan of Zhao* created by Ji Junxiang of the Yuan Dynasty into French for the first time, and the script was published in full in *The General History of China in France* in 1735; in 1755, *The Chinese Orphan* adapted by the French thinker and writer Voltaire was staged in Paris and became extremely popular; in 1759, the Irish playwright Arthur Murphy presented the re-adapted *The Chinese Orphan* on the Anglo-American drama stage, and there were more English adaptations of *The Orphan of Zhao*.^[5-6]

As a "pioneer" for Chinese dramas going abroad, domestic scholars' research on the translation of *The Orphan of Zhao* features a large time span and numerous research achievements. The research around the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries mainly focused on introducing and sorting out the first round of translation and introduction of *The Orphan of Zhao*. Scholars summarized the dissemination and translation versions of *The Orphan of Zhao* in different regions and countries, analyzed the translation practices of Joseph Premare and others, and explored the favorable conditions and a series of challenges faced in the dissemination of the drama in light of the social and historical background of Europe at that time. "Every process of accepting foreign works is a national re-creation activity carried out by the subject based on the cultural and psychological structure of their own nation for the works, and it is also a process of endowing the works with new life and cultural meanings." (Yang, 2002, p.14). Due to regional cultural differences, there would be national variations in the artistic acceptance of *The Orphan of Zhao* during its spread to the West. That is to say, as the subjects of artistic acceptance, Europeans, when translating and introducing the completely different Eastern art, inevitably had resistance and rejection. When it was necessary to forcibly assimilate the accepted object, although there were disputes between negative deletion and modification and positive identification, a special sense of novelty was maintained. (Yang, 2002, pp.15-19) Yang Jianping believes that this phenomenon is evidence of the extraordinary response *The Orphan of Zhao* elicited in Europe and is beneficial for cultural dissemination. In addition, Ao Yichang and Fan Wanqing (2007), starting from Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogue theory, believe that the dissemination process of *The Orphan of Zhao* in Europe during the Enlightenment period was a cross-cultural dialogue process through literature. This dialogue and blending constituted a benign interaction and was the driving force for the development of culture itself, playing a positive role in cultural exchanges between China and the West.^[7-8]

In addition to analyzing the positive impact of the translation and introduction of *The Orphan of Zhao* on the dissemination of Chinese culture, after 2010, scholars also focused on exploring the translation methods and strategies used in the translations of *The Orphan of Zhao* and conducted examinations using a cross-cultural perspective in their research. Lu Ying (2014), starting from the

"performability" principle of drama translation, discussed the adaptation strategies of reduction and modification adopted in the English translation of *The Orphan of Zhao* from four aspects of the differences in dramatic thinking between China and the West --- narration and lyricism, plot and melody, reality and virtuality, and narrative through characters and story narration. Lv Shisheng believes that in addition to using translation text strategies, achieving cultural adaptation through rewriting and ultimately pointing to the integration and sublimation of the source text and the target language culture is also a realistic path for the dissemination of Chinese culture to the West. "When Chinese texts enter the Western context, adaptation to Western aesthetic norms is an important condition for achieving the expected acceptance effect." (Lv, 2012, pp.65-67) Different from the above viewpoints, Zhu Shu (2013) believes that the wide dissemination of *The Orphan of Zhao* in the West was mainly introduced as an "idea", and its dramatic essence was largely ignored. "When drama translation is used as cultural utilization, true drama translation cannot be mentioned. What Joseph Premare translated was only the plot framework and could not reflect the 'wonderful combination of lyrics and dialogues'." (Zhu, 2013, p.107) Therefore, she proposed the need to define "drama translation" and emphasized the return of text translation and language transmission.^[9-10]

Entering 2020, scholars continue to explore the reasons for the successful entry of *The Orphan of Zhao* into Europe in the 18th century from a cross-cultural perspective, learn from history, use history as a mirror, bring forth the new through the old, view the contemporary transformation of traditional plays from the adaptation of *The Orphan of Zhao*, and explore and develop the possibilities for Chinese dramas to "go global" in the new era. Zhang Xin pays attention to the cross-genre adaptation of *The Orphan of Zhao*. In 2021, the musical *The Orphan of Zhao*, adapted by British scholar James Fenton and directed by Xu Jun, integrated the traditional moral concepts of loyalty, integrity, and righteousness with modern humanistic care, continuing the "eternity" of literary classics. (Zhang, 2023, pp.53-56) Li Jingwei and Xu Xiaohui (2024) believe that Voltaire's adaptation of *The Chinese Orphan* fully utilized Confucian morality and the idea of benevolence and righteousness, conformed to the social reality of France, and advocated enlightenment thoughts, representing a deep exchange and "dialogue" between Chinese and Western dramatic literature. Their viewpoints are similar to those of Ao and Fan mentioned above.^[11-12]

2. The English Translation of Guan Hanqing's Plays Abroad: Translation Practices and Research Hotspots

Snow in Midsummer created by Guan Hanqing, the foremost of the "Four Great Masters of Yuan Opera" and the founder of Yuan Zaju, is one of the four major tragedies of Yuan Zaju. The entire play consists of four acts and one prologue. The partial translation of the third act published by Adolf E. Zucker, a professor of comparative literature at the University of Maryland in the United States in 1935, took the first step in the translation of this play abroad. In 1958, the complete translation of *The Injustice to Dou E* was included in *Selected Plays of Guan Hanqing* jointly translated by the Chinese translator Yang Xianyi and Gladys B. Tayler, a British Sinologist and translator. In 1972, the monograph *Injustice to Tou O Yüan: A Study and Translation* by Shih Chung-wen, a Chinese-American Sinologist, was published by Cambridge University Press, which included the complete translation of *Snow in Midsummer*.^[13]

In 2010, *Monks, Bandits, Lovers, and Immortals: Eleven Early Chinese Plays*, jointly translated and published by Wilt L. Idema and Stephen H. West, included the English translation of *Snow in Midsummer*. As mentioned above, choosing which base text is a problem that most translators such as Stephen H. West encounter at the beginning of the translation work. For example, the revised version of *The Romance of the Western Chamber* by Jin Shengtan is a very classic literary text, but its rewriting of the original text, such as the weakening of certain vulgar parts, will have an impact

on later translations. Regarding the English translation of *Snow in Midsummer*, Stephen H. West still focuses on the version and language. Drama is not only a literary text; it "has a collective communication with other forms of popular literature" (West, 2020, p.54) and is an art form that can reflect the social style and humanistic spirit of that time. Therefore, Stephen H. West's thoughts on whether to retain the colloquial and popularization of the dramatic language also provide valuable practical experience for the English translation of Chinese drama.^[14]

In addition, the research on translation strategies for the English translation of *Snow in Midsummer* is relatively common in recent years, among which the translation methods of lyrics, allusions, and cultural characteristic words are the focus of researchers.

Single Sword Meeting is another Zaju created by Guan Hanqing. The complete translation of *Single Sword Meeting* was included in *Selected Plays of Guan Hanqing* jointly translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys B. Tayler in 1958, followed by two English translations by Gordon V. Ross in 1976 and Wilt L. Idema and Stephen H. West in 2012.

Cao Guangtao (2018) examined the translation research and the quality assessment model of opera translation from the perspective of metafunctions in systemic functional linguistics, starting from the two metafunctions of conceptual meaning and interpersonal meaning, and evaluated the deviation phenomenon in the translation of the Yang and Gladys B. Tayler's version of *Single Sword Meeting*. In addition, the base text selection of the Yang and Gladys B. Tayler's translation lacks mutual collation with other versions, and cultural carrying words such as dialects, numbers, and addressing terms also increase the difficulty of accurate translation of this play. The above problems echo the two major translation difficulties of Yuan Zaju mentioned repeatedly by Stephen H. West, namely version and language.^[15]

The above-mentioned studies on the English translation of Guan Hanqing's Yuan Zaju mostly take a certain famous play of Guan Hanqing as the entry point. By studying the English translation cases of a certain play, analyzing translation strategies, evaluating translation quality, and exploring the overall characteristics of the foreign translation of Chinese drama, they provide experience for the "going global" of Chinese drama.

3. Translation Strategies of Guan Hanqing's Zaju

3.1 Translation Strategy from the Perspective of Pragmatics and Systemic Functional Linguistics

According to Verschueren's Linguistic Adaptation Theory, "using language must consist of the continuous making of linguistic choices, consciously or unconsciously, for language-internal (i.e. structural) and/or language-external reasons" (Verschueren, 1999, pp.55-56). The reason why language users make various appropriate choices in the process of using language is because language has the characteristics of variability, negotiability and adaptability. Verschueren proposes variability, negotiability and adaptability as the three properties of language. As the text of translation will ultimately be embodied by using language, thus, the three properties of language should unquestionably be the fundamentals in text translation.

According to Verschueren, variability refers to "the property of language which defines the range of possibilities from which choices can be made" (Verschueren, 1999, p.59), negotiability refers to "the property of language responsible for the fact that choices are not made mechanically or according to strict rules or fixed form-function relationships, but rather on the basis of highly flexible principles and strategies" (Verschueren, 1999, p.59), while adaptability refers to the property of language "which enables human beings to make negotiable choices from a variable range of possibilities in such a way as to approach points of satisfaction of communicative needs" (Verschueren, 1999, p.61).

In the process of translating dramatic texts, translators need to make language choices in the

cognitive context of the translation, with the target readers at the center, using acceptable expression habits of the target readers to convey the intention of the original author, ensuring successful cross-cultural communication, and successfully reproducing the contextual effects that the author attempts to convey to the original readers in the target readers. Choices in translation are not always based on strict rules or fixed form-function relationships, but rather on the basis of highly flexible principles and strategies (Verschueren, 1999, p.59).

Systemic functional linguistics and pragmatics have both developed into relatively mature systems. Both disciplines focus on the issue of how to use language for communication. Both disciplines attach great importance to the study of the function, context, and meaning of language, and are complementary in terms of language function, context, and meaning. Thus, we should also explore translation Strategies from the perspective of systemic functional linguistics. Systemic functional linguistics plays an indispensable role in the translation of discourse.

From the perspective of systemic functional linguistics, the essence of translation is to maintain the same meaning when transferring from one language to another. Translation, from a process perspective, refers to the translator discovering the meaning contained in the original text, identifying its function, and then, based on a comprehensive consideration of various factors such as text type, target language characteristics, cultural environment, translation purpose, and reader object, formulating translation strategies and selecting translation methods around the purpose of reproducing the original text's discourse function. Finally, it manifests as conscious selection and manipulation of vocabulary grammar resources in the target language system at the discourse level; From the perspective of the results, it is a translation text that reflects its own characteristics in the form of the attributes or features of the translated text (Si, 2017, pp.8-9).^[16]

3.2 Translation Strategy from the Perspective of Communication Studies

Essentially, translation is a communicative event that involves the original text, the original author, the translated text, the translator, and the reader of the translated text. Therefore, translation is both a product and a process, involving different translation strategies, methods, and techniques (Si, 2017, p.1).

Translation is a cross-cultural communication activity that uses language media. To do a good job in translation, the translator first needs to be familiar with language relationships. Language relationships often involve differences in language style, logic, culture, and other aspects. Exploring the different contrastive relationships and differences between languages is the basic guarantee for achieving high-quality translation, and the accurate application of translation strategies depends on the translator's accurate identification of these linguistic contrastive relationships. As an English translator of Chinese cultural classics, one should fully exert their subjectivity, reasonably observe the different comparative relationships between Chinese and English languages, flexibly and effectively applying translation strategies to eliminate cultural barriers in the translation of cultural classics, and truly achieve the goal of "conveying the essence and meaning" on the one hand, and not "getting carried away" on the other hand, so that the English translation of cultural classics can reach a high quality and high realm of "combining form and spirit, and being extraordinary" (Zhou & Lu, 2024, pp.76-82).

Translation is a form of cross-cultural communication, and cultural factors beyond language also have a corresponding impact on the choice of translation methods and strategies. In the process of translation, it is necessary to break out of the narrow perspective of language and take cultural factors into account. In the course of translation, translation methods and techniques should be flexibly applied according to the context. Zhou Xiaoya (2024) proposes four translation strategies in the translation of Chinese cultural classics into English, including literal translation and free translation,

foreignization and domestication, implicit and explicit translation, and addition and omission translation.

The most commonly used translation methods are literal translation and free translation, which are not completely separate but complement each other and cannot go to extremes. Literal translation should follow and preserve the expression, structure, and rhetorical devices of the original text in the translation. Free translation focuses on conveying the meaning of the original text, paying attention to readers' reactions and the effectiveness of the translation. In free translation, translators also need to pay attention to the characteristics of the original text's word choice, sentence structure, and expression methods. Literal translation and free translation need to balance and complement each other in order to achieve the desired translation effect.

Translation is an important site for linguistic and cultural contact. Naturally, it can be a channel whereby both languages and cultures can absorb various means of expression and modes of thinking from each other. If this role of translation gets recognized, the much debated conflict between domestication and foreignization can be better settled. That is, wherever misunderstanding is unlikely, translators should be encouraged to retain the original flavor of the exotic images (Chen, 2021, p.243).

In Relevance Theory, the term “explicit” differs from its usual meaning. According to the theory, an assumption communicated by an utterance U is explicit if, and only if, it is a development of a logical form encoded by U. “Explicature” is invented, as opposed to implicature, to refer to the fully developed assumption or fully fledged propositional form derived from an utterance (Chen, 2021, p.191). According to Relevance Theory, the practical procedure of comprehension begins with the recovery of a linguistically-encoded sentence meaning. Then, following the path of least effort, the hearer has to contextually enrich the coded meaning at an explicit level in a variety of ways to obtain the explicature of the utterance and complement it at an implicit level to derive strong and/or weak implicatures until the resulting interpretation meets his/her expectation of relevance (Chen, 2021, p.192). According to Relevance Theory, such measures as reference assignment, disambiguation and semantic enrichment can be exploited in translation.

Moreover, in translation, equivalence should also be attached importance to. According to Eugene Nida, translation involves the reproduction of the closest natural equivalent of the Source Text message in terms of both meaning and style. He proposes “dynamic equivalence”, that is to say, “stimulating an effect in the reader of the translation similar to that caused in the reader of the original” (Hickey, 1998, p.2). In order to ensure the quality of translation, translators need to examine whether the conceptual meaning, interpersonal meaning and discourse meaning of the translation discourse are equivalent to the original text.

Translating is a human activity or behavior which is embedded in human communication. The ultimate purpose of translational activity is aiming at a successful communication where the translator intends to change an existing state of affairs incommunicable to communicable. Moreover, translational intention or purpose may or may not be similar to the intention or purpose of the original text or text producer (Nord, 1997, p.19). The translator needs to interpret the author's intention and provide readers with crucial information carried by the original text. By successfully presenting the ideological content, language style, and the author's tone of the original text in the translation, the translator can construct the context of the original text in the reader's mind and achieve the contextual effect that the original author wants to produce on the reader. In order to make the translation smooth, it is also necessary to master the thinking mode and speaking habits of the translated language proficiently.

4. Conclusion

The translation and dissemination of the Yuan Zaju *The Orphan of Zhao* initiated the first wave of

enthusiasm for the translation of Yuan Zaju abroad. The translation and practice of representative Yuan Dynasty dramas such as *The Injustice to Dou E*, *Single Sword Meeting* and *Snow in Midsummer* by Guan Hanqing have made significant progress overseas, and their dissemination has played a positive role in promoting traditional Chinese culture.

As a form of cross-cultural communication, translation is to achieve successful communication between the people with different cultures and languages. Based on the analysis of translation from the perspective of pragmatics, systemic functional linguistics, and communication studies, in the process of translating Guan Hanqing's zaju into English, such translation strategies as literal translation and free translation, foreignization and domestication, implicature and explicature, and equivalence should be emphasized. These strategies can ensure translation text to be faithful and fluent.

In the practice of translating Guan Hanqing's plays into English, translation methods and techniques should be flexibly applied according to the actual context to accurately and smoothly convey the essence and meaning of Guan Hanqing's plays to the target readers, arouse their interest in China's excellent culture, and deepen their understanding and love for it.

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