

A Comparative Appreciation of Chinese Translations of *The Moon and Sixpence*

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Abstract

Since the publication of *The Moon and Sixpence*, it has been doubly popular and readers are delighted with it. There are many translators in China who have translated it, and this paper selects the fragments translated by Yao Jinqing and Liu Yongjun for appreciation, and analyzes their word accuracy, semantic consistency, linguistic styles, and translation strategies by comparing and contrasting them, in the hope of contributing to future translations in a modest way.

Keywords

The Moon and Sixpence; translation; translation methods

1. Introduction

Translation is a vital means of facilitating literary exchange and a pathway for different cultures to learn from one another. It is not merely the conversion of words but also the transformation of literary concepts and cultures, making translation an art form (Jiang Chunlan, 2016). In the process of translation, it is often impossible to achieve equivalence in both form and artistic conception simultaneously. For literary translation, the pursuit of beauty represents the highest ideal. The beauty of literary works manifests in various aspects, such as linguistic beauty, formal beauty, and the beauty of artistic conception. Since its introduction to China, *The Moon and Sixpence* has seen multiple translations, each reflecting the varying levels of skill among translators. This article will conduct a comparative analysis of the translations by Liu Yongjun and Yao Jinqing.

2. Author Background and Introduction to the Work

The Moon and Sixpence is a novel written by the British author William Somerset Maugham, published in 1919. The book narrates the story of Charles Strickland, a

stockbroker leading an ordinary life, who suddenly becomes obsessed with painting. Driven by this newfound passion, he abandons his family, career, and comfortable lifestyle to pursue his dream on the island of Tahiti in the South Pacific. In this tale, “the moon” symbolizes the lofty ideals that reside in people’s hearts, while “sixpence” represents the tangible aspects of material existence. This dichotomy has sparked endless contemplation among readers about the pursuit of life’s aspirations versus the allure of material comforts.

3. Appreciation of the Translations

3.1. Accuracy in Word Choice

ST1: The Avenue de Clichy was crowded at that hour, and a lively fancy might see in the passers-by the personages of many a sordid romance.

姚：这会儿正是克里希大道最热闹的时刻，只要想象力活跃一点，就不难在过往的行人中看出不少低俗浪漫故事中的人物。

刘：这个时候，克利希大街人头攒动，如果能发挥一下丰富的想象力，就能在熙熙攘攘的人群中发现许多庸俗爱情故事中的角色。

Analysis: A point of contention in the text lies in the translation of “sordid romance”, where Yao renders it as “低俗浪漫故事”. Considering the context, the author intends to convey a notion of love that is more aptly captured in Liu’s translation, “庸俗爱情故事”. This rendition not only aligns with the original text but also carries a strong sense of the era, facilitating readers’ comprehension.

ST2: “Poor Amy,” he grinned.

姚：“可怜的艾美。”他咧嘴笑着说。

刘：“可怜的艾米。”他咧嘴笑道。

Analysis: For the translation of this brief sentence, although there is a slight difference in wording between the two translators, the overall meaning remains largely the same. According to the dictionary, “grin” means to smile broadly, showing one’s teeth, or to smirk. In the text, the author uses “grin” to describe the way the protagonist smiles. Both Yao and Liu have adopted a literal translation approach, which aligns well with the original text. This method of translation preserves the vividness of the original and allows readers to accurately grasp the image the author intends to convey.

ST3: Some of them were dressed fashionably, and they said they couldn’t for the life of them see why you should be dowdy just because you had written a novel.

姚：有几位女士衣着时尚，她们说，死活不能明白为什么因为自己写过一部小说就非要穿得邋里邋遢？

刘：有些人穿着入时，她们说怎么也不明白，为什么写小说的非要穿不那么时兴的衣服。

Analysis: According to the dictionary, “dowdy” as an adjective means slovenly, outdated, or shabby; as a noun, it refers to a slovenly or untidy woman. The first half of the sentence aims to convey that the women are fashionable and stylish, so the term

“fashionable” here should form a sharp contrast with what follows. Therefore, Yao translates it as “邈里邈邈”, while Liu's version is “不那么时兴”, both of which are appropriate and align with the original sentiment. Additionally, personally, I believe translating this phrase as “穿那么老土” would also be quite fitting.

3.2. Semantic Consistency

ST4: It seemed to me that the question was beside the point...A course that would have been natural for me was absurd for him. I wished to be quite fair.

姚: 在我看来, 他问的话跟我们谈的话题毫不相干.....对我来说是自然的 人生轨迹, 对他来说应该是不着边际的。我还是想对他公道一些。

刘: 在我看来, 这样的问题跟我们谈论的话题毫不相干.....如果我要去碰运气还正常, 于他而言就有些荒唐了。但我还是希望劝导的时候尽量对他公平一些。

Analysis: The context of this sentence is that the author wants to ask the protagonist why he ran away from home, and the protagonist responds that it was to pursue painting, which leads the author to reflect. In the translation of the sentence “It seemed to me that the question was beside the point”, both translators have correctly understood the meaning, and their translations are quite similar, aligning well with the original text. However, there is a difference in their translations of the final sentence, “I wished to be quite fair”. This sentence expresses the idea that becoming an artist is highly unlikely for the protagonist, but the author hopes not to be too absolute in their statement. Yao's translation adopts a literal approach, which is concise and accurately conveys the author's intent. On the other hand, Liu's translation uses an amplification method, adding a tone of persuasion, which fits the context of the conversation between the two characters.

ST5: It must be remembered that I was very young, and I looked upon him as a middle-aged man. I forgot everything but my own amazement.

姚: 可别忘了, 我那时还很年轻, 他在我眼里已经是个中年人。我只记得自己当时惊诧不已, 此外什么都不记得了。

刘: 你们肯定记得, 我当时还很年轻, 理所当然地把 他当成中年人。当时我除了惊讶什么都不记得了。

Analysis: The context of this sentence is the protagonist telling the author that the reason he abandoned his wife and children and left his family was to learn painting, which leads to the author's shocked inner monologue. In the phrase “It must be remembered that”, Yao employs a method of translating by saying the opposite, while Liu opts for a straightforward literal translation. Both approaches have their merits. Additionally, in the phrase “I forgot everything but my own amazement”, the true meaning in the original text is that the author, at that moment, could think of nothing but their astonishment, highlighting the depth of their shock. Both translations are accurate and free of errors. However, upon closer examination, Yao's translation is somewhat verbose and slightly cumbersome. In contrast, Liu's translation is concise and refined, accurately conveying the original meaning and providing a more enjoyable reading experience.

3.3. Language Style

ST6: I was prepared to be persuasive, touching, and hortatory, admonitory and expostulating, if need be vituperative even, indignant and sarcastic.

姚：我预先准备好了一些套路：说服、打动、规劝、训诫、讲理，如果需要的话干脆严词斥责，连怒骂带讽刺。

刘：我本来准备对他动之以情，晓之以理，好好劝导一番，如果有必要的话，我还可以训诫他一顿，甚至可以发一通脾气，极尽挖苦之能事。

Analysis: This sentence primarily conveys the author's reprimand towards the protagonist for abandoning his wife and children without a care, while the protagonist accepts all his actions without refute. Regarding the translation of this sentence, both versions have their distinct characteristics. Yao employs a literal translation method, using five verb phrases in succession, which makes the text more rhythmic and impactful when read aloud. On the other hand, Liu adopts a free translation approach, succinctly summarizing the original text's meaning with an ancient saying, resulting in concise and refined language.

ST7: “Beastly job for you this, isn't it?”

姚：“这件差事太棘手了吧？”

刘：“这是一份苦差事吧？”

Analysis: The context of this sentence is the author pondering how to explain their intentions to the protagonist. Both Yao's and Liu's translations have their own merits, with “棘手” and “苦” both indicating that persuading the protagonist is a challenging task. In the text, the protagonist is portrayed as someone who has abandoned his wife and children, embodying a carefree and unrestrained personality. The language used aligns well with the protagonist's character. The choice of words is relatively colloquial, fitting the everyday expression habits of the target language readers, thereby enhancing their sense of immersion.

ST8: “I couldn't expect her to love me as I loved her. I'm a buffoon. I'm not the sort of man that women love. I've always known that. I can't blame her if she's fallen in love with Strickland.”

姚：“我不能指望她像我爱她那样深深地爱我。我就是个小丑。我不是那种能让女人迷恋的男人。我一直有自知之明。如果她爱上了史特利克兰，我也不能责怪她。”

刘：“我从来都不奢求她像我爱她那样爱着我。我就是个小丑，我不是那种招女人喜爱的男人，我一向对此心知肚明。所以，就算她爱上了斯特里克兰，我也不能怪她。”

Analysis: One of the distinctive features of Maugham's writing is his humorous and witty style, which makes the reading experience enjoyable, yet leaves readers with an underlying sense of indifference. Given the linguistic style and narrative technique of the source language author, both Yao and Liu have translated the phrase as “我是小丑”, which carries a tone of mockery and sarcasm. In fact, the term “小丑”

refers to a “clown” or “jester”, a character role in traditional Chinese theater. Therefore, considering the context, translating it as “小丑” is highly appropriate and aligns with the readers’ expectations and reading habits.

4. Considerations

As time progresses, talented individuals emerge in abundance. In the dissemination of Chinese and Western cultures, it is essential to extract the essence and discard the dross, embracing a wide range of elements and encompassing all aspects. Literary works, as a medium of cultural transmission, require meticulous attention during translation. Different translations of the same work should draw on the strengths of various versions. Different literary genres possess distinct writing styles and linguistic characteristics, which must be taken into account during the translation process. As a translator, a crucial condition for performing translation work effectively is the ability to distinguish between different genres of English literature. Additionally, the themes of literary works represent different cultural factors. Therefore, the translation process must also consider variations in content and translation techniques. Adjusting translation methods and linguistic expressions according to the genre of the work is necessary to accurately convey the style of the current work, thereby enhancing the quality of the translation and producing high-quality literary translations. Furthermore, during the literary translation process, translators must pay special attention to cultural factors. Beyond conveying the literal meaning to the target language readers, it is more important to extract the ideological connotations within the literary works and present them in a form that is comprehensible to the target language readers. This way, readers can not only fully understand the content of the translation but, more importantly, thoroughly grasp the meanings of the cultural elements embedded in the language. This requires overcoming cultural barriers to produce outstanding literary translations.

5. Conclusion

In summary, by analyzing the different translations of the renowned work *The Moon and Sixpence* by translators Yao Jinqing and Liu Yongjun, it is evident that the quality of their translations varies. This article examines the vocabulary, comprehension of sentence meanings, and language style across the three translators’ versions. To produce high-quality translations, translators should strive to remain faithful to the original text, accurately convey the author’s intended meaning, and align with the reading habits of Chinese readers, thereby maximizing the transmission of the original text’s effective information. Therefore, in future translation practices, we should consider the author’s era and life experiences, deeply understand the original text’s meaning, accurately grasp the language’s grammar, and ensure that the expression aligns with the characters’ personalities. At the same time, we should also meet the needs of modern readers and keep pace with the times. Addi-

tionally, by comparing the differences among the three translators, we can identify their strengths, which will help improve our own translation skills.

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