

Study on the Translation of Wilde's Poetry by Chinese Female Translator Zhang Jinfen

Jiarui Li

School of Foreign Studies, Minzu University of China, Beijing 100081, China

Abstract

Oscar Wilde is one of the representative figures of aestheticism, and his poems were translated into China in the early 20th century. As a progressive female poet and translator of that time, Zhang Jinfen was one of the first translators to translate Wilde's poetry into China. This paper will analyze the selection and translation process of Zhang Jinfen's translations of Wilde's poetry, and compare other contemporaneous and modern translations to discover the unique features of Zhang's translations. Meanwhile, this paper will also study the impact of Zhang's translations on herself as an individual and on the times.

Keywords

Female Translator; Jinfen Zhang; Oscar Wilde; Chinese Translation of English Poetry.

1. Research Background

Oscar Wilde is one of the representative figures of 19th century aestheticism, and his works take various forms, including plays, novels, fairy tales, and poems. Wilde was first translated into China in the early 20th century, with the earliest known translation of his poetry being Yu Zhi's translation of *Student* (a prose poem) in *Oriental Magazine* (1920, Vol. 17, No. 1) in 1920. Later, Liu Fu published Five Wilde Prose Poems in *Fiction Monthly* (Vol. 12, No. 11, 1921) in 1921. In the 1920s, Meng Yun, Zhu Danan, and Chen Shouzhu also translated Wilde's prose poems in *Morning Glory* and *Art Lent*, and Xubai translated *The Disciple* and *The Master* (Zhen Mei Shan 1928, no. 7 and no. 9). This led to a wave of "Wilde fever" in the era. Chen Duxiu (1915) also referred to Wilde, along with Ibsen, Turgenev and Maeterlinck, as the "Four representative writers of modern times" in his *History of Modern European Literature and Art*.

Zhang Jinfen (? -1939), styled herself as "Chongnan", was a progressive female poet and translator in the 20th century. A pioneer of children's literature, she translated *The Story of the Spinning Wheel* and *The Traveling Companion*. As a progressive poet and translator, Zhang Jinfen preferred new literature and Romantic poetry, mostly using new poetry and prose style for her translations and compositions. She began to publish her translations in the early 1920s in newspapers such as *Republic of China Daily: Consciousness*, *Republic of China Daily: Women's Review*, and *Student Magazine*. She was one of the earliest translators of Wilde's poetry into China.

At present, there are few studies on Zhang Jinfen in China, mainly the work on her poems collection *The Waves*. Besides, there are few studies on her translation of Wilde's works. In this paper, through the study of Zhang translating Wilde's poetry, we may find out the impact of this behavior on the translator herself, on the spread of Wilde's works in China and also on the development of the literature of the times.

2. Analysis of Selected Materials for Translation by Zhang Jinfen

Translator lived and the changes of the times. Wilde witnessed the decadence of the late Victorian era, and these aestheticist writers, with the slogan "Art for art's sake", were eager to

rebel against reality and repair the society. The 20th century when Zhang Jinfen lived was a time of great change for China. From the decadent feudalism to the emerging democracy, from old traditions to new ideas, the dramatic changes brought by the powerful ships and cannons not only swept China's politics and economy, but also awakened generations of insightful people to raise the sleeping Chinese people up by literary works. In the eyes of these progressive youth and reformers, Wilde's poetry and works represented not only literature itself, but also a vehicle for rebelling ideas. He was even held up at the time as an ideological resource for reforming society (Song Da, 2008: 14). Therefore, Wilde became one of the first Western writers to be translated into China, which is one of the factors why Zhang Jinfen chose him as a source.

In addition, the selection of materials for translation reflects the translator's personal preferences and interests and aspirations. Among Wilde's poems, Zhang Jinfen chose to translate the short poems *Impression Le Réveillon*, *Symphony in Yellow* and *Requiescat* as well as the prose poems *The disciple* and *The Savior*. Although Wilde's poetry received relatively less attention compared with his plays, a careful reading of Wilde's poetry will also reveal his lifelong belief in "Beauty" and "Romance". According to Yuan Xianjun (2008), he tried to awaken the dormant beauty in the musicality and visual effect of language, and then brought it into people's consciousness. From this, it can be seen that Zhang Jinfen's selection of Wilde's poetry reflected her preference for romantic poetry and her pursuit of beauty. In addition, Zhang Jinfen (1922) also indicated her preference for works that were rich in the spirit of courageous and straightforward, freedom and self-reliance. This also reflects Zhang Jinfen's anti-feudal and progressive ideology of pursuing freedom and equality.

3. Chinese Translation of Wilde's Poetry by Zhang Jinfen

3.1. Horizontal Comparison: Fidelity

This section focuses on the characteristics of Zhang Jinfen's translation of Wilde's poem, using *Requiescat* (This poem is said to have been written in memory of Oscar Wilde's late sister Isola.) as an example. Meanwhile, the translations by Xiao Shi and Jiang Ailun, who were Zhang's contemporaries, were also selected for comparative and analysis.

The poem is divided into five stanzas, each with four sentences. The first and third lines of each stanzas contain six syllables and the second and fourth lines have four syllables. The poem rhymes in intervals, with an ABAB rhyme scheme. The poem uses a lot of imagery including snowflakes, daisies, golden hair, coffin and heavy stones to depict the holy beauty of the woman in the tomb and the silence and sadness of her death. The author's sorrow for the death of beauty and loneliness are conveyed by through it.

In the context of the 1920s, the crisis facing Chinese culture led the young intellectuals to import a large number of new ideas into China with the aim of introducing foreign poetic forms and spirits, which made the change of Chinese poetic forms an inevitable trend during the New Culture Movement. (Xiong Hui, 2008: 30) However, since the vernacular translation of new poetry was still in its infancy, this liberalized method of translating poetry without regard to the metre of the original began to gradually become mainstream, starting with Hu Shi's translation of a small poem *Over the Roof* (Wang Dongfeng, 2015: 221). Therefore, comparing the translations of Zhang Jinfen, Xiaoshi and Jiang Ailun, it is easy to see that their works can basically be faithful and consistent with the original poem in terms of stanzas and sub-stanzas that have no translation difficulties. However, the poetic style, such as rhyme and syllables, is not taken into consideration. In terms of the external form of the poem and the transformation of words, Zhang's translation is more faithful to the original and more inclined to direct translation, as the following is a comparison of the three translations.

Example 1

ST: Peace, Peace, she cannot hear

Lyre or sonnet,

TTA: 寂静，寂静，伊不能闻

诗歌或琴声 (Zhang Jinfen, 1922)

TTB: 安静，安静，

伊不能听见琴声和歌声 (Xiao Shi, 1921)

TTC: 伊不能领略甜蜜的

情歌和温和的小曲 (Jiang Ailun, 1924)

From the above comparison, we can see that Zhang's translation is the most faithful to the original poem in terms of its form. She has arranged “伊不能闻”(she cannot hear) and “寂静”(peace) in the same line as the original poem, and has kept the repetitive words of the original poem in the translation. In terms of the meaning of the poem, Zhang did not add or delete as much as Jiang Ailun's translation, which omits “peace” and adds “甜蜜的”(sweet) and “温和的”(mild). The translation by Zhang and Xiao Shi is more faithful, as it favors direct translation.

Wilde's prose poems, *The disciple*, tells the story of Narcissus, a beautiful boy who was drowned in Greek mythology because he was obsessed with his own reflection in the lake. The following is a comparison of the translations by three translators, Zhang Jinfen, Xing Guangzu and Xi Bai.

Example 2

ST: they loosened the green tresses of their hair and cried to the pool and said,

TTA: 他们解松的绿的卷发，向池沼哭而且说 (Zhang Jinfen, 1923)

TTB: 他们便松解了她们绿色的发髻，并对那水潭喊到 (Xing Guangzu, 1935)

TTC: 就披散了头上的绿发，哭着对池沼道 (Xu Bai, 1928)

For “tresses” and “cried” in the original poem, Zhang Jinfen directly translated the meaning of the two words, without adding any personal emotions to the translation. In contrast, Xing Guangzu simply translated “cried” as “喊”(shouted) and Xu Bai translated “tresses” as “发”(hair). From the comparison, we can see that although Zhang's expressions still have the incompatibility of being English Chinese, she still adhered to the direct translation in most places. And she was firmly faithful to the original words and phrases. On this basis, Zhang Jinfen's treatment of some words was still quite characteristic of her personal interpretation, for example, in *Requiescat*:

Example 3

ST: I vex my heart alone.

TTA: 我怅恨我心的孤独 (Zhang Jinfen, 1922)

TTB: 我独自恼我的心 (Xiao Shi, 1921)

TTC: 我独自弄心，(Jiang Ailun, 1924)

In this line, Zhang did not translate “alone” as “独自” with an adverbial function, as the other two translators did, but transformed part of speech and translated it as “我心的孤独”(the loneliness of my heart) combining with the preceding text. At the same time, the verbal function of the predicate verb “vex” in the original poem is retained, and the word “怅恨” (despair) was used to express the author's despair and bitterness.

When she first translated poems, Zhang Jinfen was in the prime of her life, and her major subject was medicine instead of literature or language, nor was she a professional translator. In the preface to the reprint of her first collection of poems, *The Waves*, Zhang Jinfen (1924) wrote:

“In the translation and narrative, of course, the beautiful thoughts of the author must be preserved, and I would never dare to use subjective opinions and lightly determine the words.” Therefore, through horizontal comparison and combining her personal translation thoughts, we can find that Zhang Jinfen strongly emphasized the fidelity of translation, pursued the full conformity and equivalence between the translation and the original text. Through literal translation, she made the target language as close as possible to the thoughts and words of the author of the source language. At the same time, it seems that her statement of “never dare to use subjective opinions and lightly determine the words” tried to deny her own subjective initiative as a translator, but it is easy to see from her wording that Zhang's intention was to make use of the translator's initiative to carefully consider the meaning and form of the words, and finally to achieve fidelity to the original poem.

3.2. Longitudinal Comparison: Periodicity

Due to the influence of the times, Zhang's translations of Wilde's poetry also show a lot of traces of the new literary from the May Fourth Movement. By comparing Zhang's translation with those of modern translators Wang Jianzhao and Yuan Xianjun, we can find these traces. One of them is the use of “伊” as the third person female. In *Requiescat*:

Example 4

ST: She is at rest.

TTA: 伊是在安息了。(Zhang Jinfen, 1922)

TTB: 而她已经安息。(Wang Jianzhao, 2014:7)

TTC: 她恬然苏息。(Yuan Xianjun, 2010:6)

Example 5

ST: Like a white lady from her bed.

TTA: 仿佛一个白衣女子从伊的床上起来。(Zhang Jinfen, 1922)

TTB: 像白肤淑女起身离开她的眠床。(Wang Jianzhao 2014: 123)

TTC: 俨然起床的少女白皙的体肤。(Yuan Xianjun 2010: 167)

From the above comparison, we can see that Zhang Jinfen translated all the “she” as well as “her” as “伊”, while contemporary translators treated them as “她” which appeared after the New culture movement or simply omit them. The word “伊” was generally used as a referential pronoun in the pre-Qin dynasty, and began to develop into a three person pronoun in the Wei and Jin dynasties. And from the Song dynasty onwards, “伊” was also used as a second person. (Lv Shuxiang, 2017: 18) The use of this word as the third person for women was a product of new literature in the May Fourth Movement. Chen Wangdao, Shen Xuanlu, and Li Hanjun jointly proposed that “伊” could be used as the third person for women. For example, “伊” was widely used in the works of famous writers Lu Xun, Bingxin, and Mao Dun in that period. (Zhao Jing, Shi Xiaohui, 2011: 54) After that, Liu Hannong published an article. *The Problem of the word “她”*, in which “她” was clearly proposed to be used as a third-person pronoun for women. This shows that the rise of new literature and new poetry influenced by the era also awakened the feminist consciousness. The use of the word “伊” was an intermediate expression in the emergence of Chinese female third person expression. In her translation, Zhang Jinfen extensively adopted the word “伊” that is universally acceptable, reflecting the translator's closeness to the readers and the social habits of the time. While conveying the content of the poem to the readers, she also spread the idea of women's liberation and development to the public called for by herself and the times.

Moreover, the phenomenon of using Chinese in English linguistic style can be seen everywhere in Zhang Jinfen's translations. During the New Literary Movement, translators and literary

scholars made different attempts in the process of translating English poetry into Chinese and thus influencing the birth of new Chinese poetry. Among them, using Chinese in English linguistic style is a transitional phenomenon arising from the process of exploration.

As mentioned by Bian Zhilin (1989), from the end of the Qing Dynasty to the New Literary Movement in China, famous scholars like Ma Junwu and Su Manshu had already translated Byron's famous poem *The Isles of Greece* into Chinese, but they both adopted the old poetic style in literary language, which had limited influence and could not directly contribute to the change of the new poetic style in China. The Chinese literary academia was desperate to find a new way out, and Hu Shih's translation of a small poem, *Over the Roof*, started the development of a new poetic style in China at that time. Since then, the new Chinese poetic style was gradually shaped by the influence of translating Western poetry into Chinese.

Unlike the "mother tongue goes first" strategy of poetry translation in the late Qing Dynasty, most translators in the 1920s, who were influenced by copinism, adopted modern vernacular and the original paradigm of English directly, retaining a large number of English grammatical conventions and linguistic features. These all lead to a large-scale of using Chinese in English linguistic style when translating English poetry at that time. For example, they retained unfamiliar imported words, sought to match the linguistic style of Chinese with that of English, abused pronouns, widely used the plural nouns "们". (Liu Rufe, 2018: 135) It is not difficult to find these phenomena in Zhang Jinfen's translation. In the pursuit of Chinese and English morphology, Zhang translated "And all the chestnut tops are stirred." as "所有的栗树的顶都受了惊扰。" in *Impression Le Réveillon*, and in *Yellow in Symphony*, she also created "这里和那里常有一个过客". These two examples is matching the linguistic style of Chinese with that of English). In terms of misusing pronouns, she used the pronoun "伊" extensively in *Requiescat*: "伊几乎不知道/伊是一个妇女, 伊是生长得这样美丽。"

The translators and literary scholars in the 1920s commonly used Chinese in English linguistic style for the sake of this behavior itself. The phenomenon and the use of "伊" in Zhang Jinfen's translation can be seen that She constantly intermingled with the needs and trends of society and influenced each other in the process of translation. These works also constantly integrated into the society and reacted to the times, pushing literature and the times to roll forward.

4. The Influence of Zhang Jinfen's Translation of Wilde's Poetry

4.1. Promote Individual's Translations and Creation

Zhang Jinfen translated Wilde's poetry in 1922 and wrote the short fiction *Or the Love of Man* in 1923. As we all know, at that time, Wilde, who was deeply influenced by Romanticism and ancient Greek culture, pursued what people saw as another kind of love. Therefore, his works also left traces of homosexual tendencies. In 1923, Zhang Jinfen's novel *Or the Love of Man* also presented the "another kind of love" at that time. The novel described two college male students, Xiangting and Zhong, fell in love. At the beginning, they were strolling along a path when they saw two young males in a half-hidden bungalow, holding hands and chatting. Later, they learnt from an old man that the two young men are inseparable from each other from childhood till now. This sighting also made Xiangting and Zhong's hearts moved. In this homosexual novel, the old man and the couple did not criticize or reject the "taboo love", but are tolerant and even affirmative. In the conservative 20th century China, homosexual themes rarely appeared in male writers' works, let alone in female writers works on such themes. It can be seen that Zhang Jinfen's translation of Wilde's poetry not only promoted her own mind, but also had a certain influence on the ideology, subject matter, content and style of her literary creation. And traces of Romanticism, feminist thoughts and new literary forms also appeared in her works.

4.2. Promote the Development of the Times and Literatures

Since Zhang Jinfen was not a professional translator and specialized in medicine rather than translation when she studied abroad, the number of her translations and literary works was relatively small. And her purpose of translation was more to express her personal opinions and aspirations, and to translate new Western thinking and literature into China. Therefore, the microscopic influence of her translations on individuals is greater than the influence on the overall environment. However, in the wave of translating Western poetry during that time, Zhang's translations undoubtedly added to the spread of Wilde in China, and her subsequent work *Or the Love of Man* paved the way for new literary themes and new ideas. Although few translations were made, it was each small poems that forged the flame for the rise of a new culture and new ideas, and contributed to the spread of new poetry, new literature and Romanticism in China.

5. Conclusion

As a non-professional translator in early 20th century China, Zhang Jinfen's translation behavior could not be separated from her own thoughts, literary pursuits and social background at that time. In terms of her translation behavior, Zhang Jinfen was more concerned with the formal equivalence of the symbols of the two languages. Although there are mistranslations, neglect of rhyme and rigid direct translations in the text, the translator strived to preserve Wilde's aestheticism, and carefully refined the specific words. In terms of the impact of her translations, Zhang Jinfen not only promoted the translation and dissemination of Wilde's poetry in China, but also highlighted the new poetic paradigm of the New Literary Movement in her translations. While being influenced by the society, she also reacted to the development of society and promoted the progress of new culture and new thoughts.

References

- [1] O.Wilde, J.F. Zhang: The Loneliness of My Heart (Republic of China Daily: Consciousness), Vol. 7 (1922), p.7: 3. (In Chinese).
- [2] O.Wilde, Shi X: The Tomb of Idi (Republic of China Daily: Consciousness), Vol.6 (1921), p.7: 1.(In Chinese).
- [3] O.Wilde, A.L. Jiang: A psalm for the dead (Republic of China Daily: Consciousness), Vol. 6 (1924), p.1: 4. (In Chinese).
- [4] G.Z. Xing: Selected Poems of Guanghai: 4. Translated Poems: Three Translations of Wilde's Prose Poems with Preamble (Guanghai Annual Journal), Vol. 10 (1935), p.43-46.
- [5] B. Xu: Wilde's Prose Poems: Disciples (Zhen Mei Shan), Vol. 1 (1928), p.7: 1.
- [6] O. Wilde, X.J. Yuan: Selected Poems of Oscar Wilde (Fujian Education Press, China 2014).
- [7] O. Wilde, J.Z. Wang: Selected Poems of Oscar Wilde (Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, China 2014).
- [8] D.X. Chen: History of Modern European Literature and Art (Youth Journal), Vol. 1 (1915), p.40-41.
- [9] X.J. Yuan: The Magic of Language: On the "Aesthetic" Characteristics of Wilde's Poetry. (Journal of Beijing International Studies University), Vol.12 (2008), p.25-33.
- [10] D. Song: An Analysis of the History of Wilde's Chinese Translation before and after the May Fourth Movement -- A Study on the Gains and Losses of Wilde's Works in Chinese Translation (I) (Journal of Beijing International Studies University), Vol.04 (2008), p.11-17.
- [11] J.G. Whittier, C.F.: Mademilu: Porety (Poetry), Vol. 1 (1922) No.4, p.44-49.
- [12] H. Xiong: The May Fourth Translation of Poetry and the Establishment of Chinese New Poetic Form Concept (Journal of Southwest University: Social Science Edition), Vol.3 (2008), p.30-34.

- [13] D.F. Wang: Six Misunderstandings of Chinese translation of western poetry in the Early May Fourth Movement and their Misdirection to Chinese New Poetry (Foreign Literature Review), Vol.02 (2015), p.218-237.
- [14] J.F. Zhang: The Waves (Xinchao Press of Peking University, China 1924).
- [15] S.X. Lv: Modern Chinese Referential Pronoun (The Commercial Press, China 2017).
- [16] J. Zhao, X.H. Shi: The differentiation and development of the third person pronoun "He" and "She" (Qunwen World), Vol.07 (2011).
- [17] Z.L. Bian: The Achievements and Shortcomings of Translation on Chinese New Poetry since the May Fourth Movement (Translation Forest), Vol.4 (1989).
- [18] R.F. Liu: The Shaping of Early New Poetry Language in the May Fourth Translation (Journal of Wuhan University of Technology: Social Science Edition), Vol.31 (2018) No.3, p.135-141.