

Research on Recontextualization Strategies in Translation of Quotations from Chinese Classics in The Governance of China from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

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Received: 19 Jul 2024; Received in revised form: 20 Aug 2024; Accepted: 26 Aug 2024

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Abstract

From the perspective of Skopos Theory, this study compares the English translation of quotations in The Governance of China with Xu Yuanchong's translation, and analyzes the recontextualization strategy adopted in the English translation of allusions in The Governance of China to adapt to the change of context. It has been found that when translating allusions in political texts, it is necessary to consider not only the historical context in which the allusions are produced, but also the contemporary context in which they are quoted. Under the fidelity rule, recontextualization should be carried out according to the speaker's purpose, and various recontextualization strategies such as domestication, foreignization, and explicitation should be appropriately adopted in order to achieve the translation purpose and be widely accepted by readers.

Keywords— English translation of quotations, Recontextualization, The Governance of China

I. INTRODUCTION

Quotations refer to stories or phrases from ancient books cited in poetry and literature (Modern Chinese Dictionary, 7th edition, 2018). The use of allusions is a rhetorical device that refers to the explicit or implicit use of ancient stories or phrases in one's own language works for a certain rhetorical purpose (Luo Jiyong, 2005). When rhetorical devices such as allusions are placed in a diplomatic context, they possess some characteristics of diplomatic language and are endowed with distinct features of the times, new political connotations, and policy significance. As an enrichment of General Secretary Xi's concept of governing the country, *The Governance of China* also quoted a lot of allusions. The translation of political texts is mainly aimed at conveying Chinese ideas and spreading Chinese culture to the world. The English translation of political texts and classics extends, shrinks,

migrates, and even subverts with changes in context. At present, the academic community has made many useful explorations and practices on the translation of *The Governance of China*. The existing research on the English translation of *The Governance of China* mainly focuses on specific words, poetry, rhetoric from the perspectives of corpus, cultural translation view, eco-translatology. Some scholars have considered the impact of the special political context in which allusions are located on their translation, but have not analyzed the contextual changes from the historical context to the contemporary context in which they are cited. Therefore, this study adopts the perspective of Skopos theory to analyze the recontextualization strategy adopted by the English translation of allusions in *The Governance of China* to adapt to the changing context.

II. SKOPOS THEORY AND CONTEXT

Functionalist Skopos Theory is a German functionalist translation theory that emerged in the 1970s and is still being revised and developed today. For functionalist translators, due to differences in cultural environment and language characteristics, the source language and target language are different. Translation is a series of social behavior under specific conditions, and it is not an action of word-to-word replacement, but a behavior meets specific communication needs (Nord, 1997). According to the skopos theory, translators can adjust the target language in order to achieve specific translation goals, but this does not mean that translators can arbitrarily delete or enlarge the content of the target language. Adjustments must comply with the rules of skopos, coherence, and fidelity.

The skopos in the Skopos rule mostly refers to the "communicative purpose". The translation purpose of the translator in the cultural context of the target language determines the translation methods and strategies they adopt. (Vermeer, 1989; Nord, 2001)

The coherence rule means that the translation must meet the criteria of intra-textual coherence, that is, the translation is readable and acceptable. The translation need produce meaning in the cultural environment of the target language, and can be understood by the target language readers. The target text must be internally coherent so that readers can understand it, and it must be meaningful in the target text in which it is used. The coherence principle requires that the translation must be intra-textual coherence

The fidelity rule refers to the fidelity of the target language text to the original text, in accordance with intertextual coherence. The coherence rule and fidelity rule are both subordinate to the principle of purpose.

Context was first proposed by Malinowski (1923), who believed that discourse and context are closely practiced together, and language environment is essential for understanding language. Firth (1950) inherited and developed his viewpoint, dividing context into linguistic context and situational context. Hu Zhuanglin (1998) divided context into three categories: contextual context, situational context, and cultural context. Contextual context refer to the linguistic components such as words, phrases, sentences, chapters, and passages that can influence and constrain interpretation in language activities. It about

understanding the dialogue, what does this sentence mean, and understanding a certain word. Situational context refers to the surrounding situation, nature of events, relationships between participants, time, place, and manner in which a text is produced. Cultural context refers to the history, culture, and customs of the language community where the speaker or author belongs.

The English translation of the quotations in *The Governance of China* involves changes in historical context to contemporary context. House (2006) defined "recontextualization" as the process of extracting text from the source context and placing it in the expectation of new relationships and cultural conditions. He believed that translation is a form of recontextualization, as the source text and the translated text involve different contexts. Therefore, recontextualization is necessary during translation. The translation of *The Governance of China* is mainly aimed at conveying Chinese ideas and spreading Chinese culture to the world. The purpose of translating its allusions into English is different from literary translation. The context and meaning of the source text may change accordingly, and may extend, shrink, transfer, or even subvert with the change of context. Therefore, in order to achieve translation goals, the English translation of allusions requires the use of recontextualization strategies.

This article analyzes the historical context, contemporary citation context, and translation context of allusions, and then analyzes the contextualization strategies adopted by translators to adapt to these contextual changes and achieve translation goals from the perspective of the three rules of skopos theory.

III. CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

According to the definition of allusions in Cihai, "ancient stories and words with historical origins quoted in poetry and literature", volumes one to four of *The Governance of China* have identified 342 allusions. The quantities of volumes one to four are 112, 99, 64, and 67, accounting for 33%, 29%, 18%, and 20% respectively.

These allusions mostly come from ancient classics, such as, "The Analects" , "Mencius", "Lao Zi", "Xun Zi", as well as poetry and some ancient articles and novels, which are from multiple dynasties such as the Spring and Autumn Period, Warring States Period, and modern times. Most of

these allusions are from the feudal dynasties and monarchic periods of ancient Chinese society. It involves the relationship of teachers and students, the monarch and the people, the monarch and his subordinates, and covers many aspects of wisdom, such as natural philosophy, life principles, moral cultivation, governance and administration. It is the representative of the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation and still has a significant impact on the thinking of the Chinese people today.

From November 2012 to May 2022, the General Secretary Xi Jinping cited these quotations in numerous meetings and important speeches, involving multiple themes such as self-cultivation, faith, clean governance, rule of law, governance, and diplomacy. Most of them were warnings and advice to cadres and the people, and were vivid interpretations of the socialist ideology with Chinese characteristics in the era. Nowadays, China, which is rapidly developing, hopes to engage in timely and effective communication and dialogue with countries around the world, and is actively building a new type of external discourse system. Translation plays an important role in constructing the external discourse system. The translation of *The Governance of China* was carried out in the context of that era. More than 20 translators from subordinate units of the new Foreign Languages Bureau participated in the translation work, combined with foreign editing experts who understand the culture and language habits of English-speaking countries. Based on the fidelity rule, the translation was carried out.

IV. CASE STUDY

This paper makes a comparative study of the English versions of several quoted quotations from volumes 1-4 of *The Governance of China* and Xu Yuanchong's English version, and explores the recontextualization strategies adopted by the translator

(1) Skopos Rule

Example 1 “生年不满百，常怀千岁忧”

This sentence can be found in the 15th poem of the "Nineteen Ancient Poems" titled "Born Less than a Hundred Years Old". This poem originated on the era of the collapse of the Eastern Han Dynasty, when political corruption and decadence had reached their peak. Intellectuals had fallen

into a deep valley of decadence and sentimentality due to the disillusionment of their life ideals. In order to relieve their depression, they reflect on their values and ultimate destination in life. The meaning of this poem is that life is short, only a hundred years, but it often brings its own troubles and worries about things that are out of reach all day long- The main theme conveyed by the original sentence of the poem is "enjoy the moment", advocating not to worry excessively.

The translation of Xu Yuanchong is:

Few live as long as a hundred years.

Why grieve over a thousand in tears!

Xu Yuanchong believes that translating poetry is an art of seeking beauty, and regards spreading China's beauty to the world as his own responsibility and the highest joy (Li Zhengshuan, 2024). Therefore, Xu, with the aim of spreading traditional Chinese culture while balancing the pursuit of truth and beauty, faithfully conveyed the original text and adopted an explicit translation strategy. He remained faithful to the source text in both form and content, using the word “few” to express the negative meaning and the word “why” to lead exclamation sentences to express that there was no need to worry about things a hundred years later in the original poem. Besides, using the word “tears” at the end of the sentence to convey the image of worry, and using the rhyme “year” and “tea” to achieve rhythmic beauty, making the poem more catchy to read.

The translation of this sentence in *The Governance of China* is:

We worry about the next one thousand years when we are only to last less than a hundred.

This sentence was quoted by Xi in his speech at the Second Plenary Session of the 19th Central Commission for Discipline Inspection of the Communist Party of China. It emphasizes party discipline. The language is a warning from superiors to subordinates, warning members of party organizations at all levels to uphold their ideals and beliefs and adhere to the education of ideals and beliefs in order to achieve communism. Therefore, in the contemporary context, this sentence conveys a sense of crisis and a lofty goal in mind, requiring rulers to think of lofty goals even though in the primary stage of socialism and working on the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics. At the same time, this sense of crisis has existed since ancient times, thus

inheriting the long-standing Chinese culture and inspiring the present and future.

The purpose of the English translation of *The Governance of China* can be roughly summed up in three points: first, faithfully convey the governance strategy of the Chinese party; Secondly, constructing and innovating a system of external political discourse; Thirdly, enabling people from English-speaking countries to better understand China through translations and promoting communication and cooperation between China and the world (Zhao Xiangyun, 2017). Therefore, the purpose of this sentence is to convey the sense of crisis emphasized by General Secretary Xi. Based on functionalism, the purpose of translation requires a change in the function of the source text. Besides, the standard for translation is no longer coherence between the source text and the language, but rather coherence with the translation purpose (Nord, 2001). Therefore, the translation clarified the meaning of the source text and then reconstructed the context according to the purpose, conveying the speaker's true intention, following the purpose of translation, expressing the efforts to prevent and resolve various risks, and highlighting a strong sense of crisis and risk awareness. This sentence adopts the domestication strategy, without translating according to the format of the original poem. It focuses on conveying the meaning and uses the word "when" to highlight the comparison between a hundred and a thousand years, and the efforts made by the Party to achieve its great mission. Omitting "years" at the end of the sentence to avoid repetition is in line with the conventions of the target language.

Example 2. 见善如不及，见不善如探汤

This sentence is found in the *Analects of Confucius: Ji Shi*, and means that when one sees good deeds, they are afraid that they will not achieve them. Seeing bad behavior is like reaching into boiling water and quickly avoiding it. Soup, in ancient times, referred to hot water. Confucius used the phrase "probing soup" to illustrate the attitude a person should take hands back when seeing something bad. This sentence is often used in later generations to warn politicians to constantly cultivate the virtue of governance, to constantly contemplate the harm of greed, and to always have a sense of awe.

Xu Yuanchong's translation in *The Analects* is:

I have heard, said Confucius, of those who would lose no time to do what is good when they see it, and to shrink from what is harmful as from boiling water, and I have seen such men.

For the purpose of conveying Confucianism, Xu Yuanchong mainly adopts a literal translation strategy to faithfully convey the meaning of the source text. At the same time, he integrates the last two sentences for translation, pointing out the speaker Confucius. Added "lose no time" to enhance the tone and advise to learn to do good deeds.

The translation in *The Governance of China* is:

Contemplating good and pursuing it, as if you could not reach it; contemplating evil, and shrinking from it, as you would from thrusting a hand into boiling water.

This sentence was quoted in the speech at the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, with the theme of strict governance of the Party, which is a warning from leaders to cadres. This translation adopts an explicitation recontextualization strategy to convey the tone and intonation of the original author. Many of General Secretary's speeches are aimed at cadres and the masses. In translation, it is important to avoid using written language to translate the speeches into articles. (Wang Mingjie, 2020) This translation uses the second person "You" to refer to the officials who received this information, reflecting the Xi's warning to the officials. One of the most important translation purposes is to convey the governing strategies of the Chinese Party and state leaders to foreign countries, as this translation allows foreign readers to directly experience the ideology of the Chinese Party's leadership. The two sentences before and after the translation are symmetrical in structure, the same as the form of the source text. While receiving the meaning, the reader can feel the traditional Chinese culture and ideology.

(2) Coherence rule.

Example 3. 举直错诸枉，则民服；举枉错诸直，则民不服

This sentence comes from *The Analects of Confucius: Governance*. Confucius believed that if a leader can use people with virtue and talent, then his subordinates will be convinced. On the contrary, if those who lack virtue and ability becomes politicians, their subordinates will naturally

be dissatisfied. In his later years, Confucius returned to the state of Lu, and the emperor Ai of Lu often sought advice from Confucius. Although he was the ruler of the state of Lu, the power of the country was in the hands of the "Three Barbarians". There were three sycophants around Duke Ai of Lu who formed factions for personal gain, deceived the monarch, and obstructed scholars from neighboring vassal states from coming to Lu, causing unrest in the country. In response to this situation, Confucius advised Duke Ai of Lu to select capable individuals. Confucius used the phrase "upright" to replace "unjust" to illustrate the importance of appointing upright and wise individuals. This sentence is a dialogue between Confucius and the ruler of the state of Lu, which belongs to admonition. The purpose is to advise the ruler to mainly know how to make good use of people and select capable individuals.

Xu Yuanchong's translation in *The Analects* is:

If honest men are employed and dishonest ones discarded, then people will support you. If dishonest men replace the honest, you will lose the support of the people.

Xu Yuanchong insists on unifying "seeking truth" and "seeking beauty", advocating that beauty should come first when the contradictions between the two are irreconcilable. The structure of this translation is consistent with the original text, using two conditional sentences guided by "if" to express the symmetry of the source text, and using the antonyms of "honest" and "dishonest" to symmetry the falsehood and straightness of the original text, achieving formal beauty. Xu Yuanchong used special projection when translating the *Analects*, with the aim of enabling readers in modern cultural contexts to receive Confucius's ideas in more literary discourse, avoiding the hindrance of readers' reading interest due to the dry and monotonous projection language structure, and making readers pay more attention to Confucius's thoughts. The word "fu" in the source text should have meant obedience in ancient contexts, but Xu Yuanchong chose the word "support", which emphasizes the equal relationship between rulers and the people, which is more easily accepted by Western readers. Simultaneously using passive sentence structures to express the relationship between subject and predicate is in line with the habits of the target language.

The translation in *The Governance of China* is:

People will obey you if you promote righteous men

and suppress evil men. And they will disobey you if you do the contrary.

This sentence was quoted by General Secretary Xi Jinping in his speech at the Second Plenary Session of the Fourth Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. It was used in a serious internal party meeting with the theme of judicial justice, and is a warning from leaders to lower level cadres. The important content of Confucianism is to uphold the principles of justice and uphold the principles of fairness and impartiality. Only by becoming the guardian of justice can the judiciary gain legitimacy and credibility. Xi Jinping took this opportunity to highlight the importance of "fair justice". Judicial personnel should be upright and courageous, dare to eliminate interference from both internal and external sources of the judicial organs in accordance with the law, and adhere to the bottom line of fair justice.

This translation method adopts the explicitation recontextualization strategy, which is more in line with the characteristics of political texts, concise, avoids repetition, and reduces reading barriers for readers. When translating, the active sentence structure is used to emphasize the determination and efforts of our party to promote judicial reform. The word "obey" is used to translate the original text, emphasizing the recognition and obedience of the people to the judicial organs in judicial practice. Both "unjust" and "upright" are translated as "Righteous" and "evil" according to the judicial context, corresponding to two types of people: those who abide by the law with integrity and those who commit evil and violate the law, making it easier for readers to understand the meaning expressed in the source text.

(3) Fidelity Rule

Example 4. 君子之德风，小人之德草，草上之风必偃

This sentence comes from *the Analects of Confucius, Ji Shi*. During the Spring and Autumn Period, Ji Kangzi, a powerful minister of the State of Lu, sought advice from Confucius on how to govern political affairs. Confucius replied, "What if you kill the unrighteous to fulfill the righteous?" Confucius replied, "Why do you need to resort to killing when governing political affairs? As long as you want to do good deeds, the people will naturally follow suit." He used the analogy of "the moral style of a gentleman,

the moral style of a petty person, and the wind on the grass will surely dissipate. This gave rise to the idiom "The grass withers and the wind follows", which metaphorically refers to those who can use virtue to transform the people, and then the people will turn towards it. It is like the wind blowing the grass, leading the way to goodness. At this time, the imperial court of the State of Lu was in decline, and the head of the Ji Kangzi, held a high position of power and authority, He was a powerful minister of the State of Lu at that time. Confucius wanted to influence Ji Kangzi with the concept of "benevolent governance", so this sentence also belonged to the dialogue between the monarch and the minister. The purpose of the minister's admonition to those in power was to hope that Ji Kangzi would implement benevolent governance.

The translation in Xu Yuanchong's *Analects* is:

The relation between the ruler and the ruled is like that between the wind and the grass. When the wind blows, the grass will bend down."

Xu Yuanchong uses the antonyms "ruler" and "ruled" to translate "gentleman" and "villain". According to historical context, "gentlemen" refers to those in power such as Ji Zikang, so gentleman is translated as ruler, while refers to the people under his rule, expressed as ruled. The latter half of the sentence is translated using a literal translation method, allowing foreign readers to also obtain relevant images.

The translation in *The Governance of China* is:

The rulers' virtue is like wind, and commoners' virtue like grass, which always bends in the direction of the wind.

General Secretary Xi quoted in the chapter "Continuously Promoting the Whole Party". It is not as effective to demand people from above or push them from behind as to lead them in front. Never forget the original intention and keep in mind the mission. Leading organs and cadres must set an example and take the lead. This translation adopts a strategy of foreignization/recontextualization strategy. The structure is closer to that of original text. When translating "gentleman" historical context is also referenced, but "villain" takes into account the changes in contemporary context. Leaders and the people are no longer in a relationship of ruling and being ruled, but an equal relationship. "commoner" in the Oxford

Dictionary refers to people who enjoy common ownership, so this translation is accurate and in line with contemporary social and political reality. "Yan" means to fall, and here "bend in the direction" is used to translate, indicating that the people will follow the leader's words and actions.

V. CONCLUSION

The Governance of China covers all aspects of socialism with Chinese characteristics. It is the overview and concentration of General Secretary Xi's views of governance. Therefore, its English translation is of great significance for conveying Chinese ideas, conveying Chinese voices and building a Chinese discourse system. The great success of the English translation has also given us many inspirations. When translating quotations in political texts, it is necessary to consider not only the historical context in which they are produced, but also the contemporary context in which they are quoted. Recontextualization should be carried out according to the speaker's use of quotations, and various recontextualization strategies such as domestication, foreignization, and explicitation should be appropriately adopted to achieve the translation purpose and be widely accepted by readers.

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