An Analysis of the Chinese Translation of De Profundis from the Perspective of Communicative Translation

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Abstract: This thesis is based on Zhu Chunshen's translation of *De Profundis*. The original text is the prison memoir of Oscar Wilde, reflecting on his relationship with his lover-- Bosie, but also involving topics such as art, life and religion, and it discusses the emotions and arts based on the inextricable relationship in the context of suffering. Due to its profound content and meaningful prose, as well as the language and cultural differences between China and the UK, it is difficult to fully convey the original meaning in translation. Regardless of it, Mr. Zhu Chunshen's translation is widely circulated in the industry and highly praised. This work uses Newmark's translation theory to analyse this translation from three aspects, namely 'the application of four-character phrases', 'the adjustments of sentence structures' and 'the reformation of the original forms', so as to understand the deep meaning and translation art conveyed by the translator.

Keywords: translation analysis, communicative translation, *De Profundis*

1.   Introduction

In 1895, Oscar Wilde engaged in a legal dispute with the Marquess of Queensberry, who is the father of his lover, Lord Alfred Douglas, resulting in imprisonment and public disgrace of Wilde. During his confinement, Wilde composed the renowned lengthy epistle De Profundis to Douglas, which is widely regarded as a sensational and groundbreaking love letter in literary history. James Joyce highly praised it, saying, "It is a beautiful and precious thing; it is a true work of art, and the form as well as the matter are of the very finest quality[1]." Wilde's composition traversed various emotional states, from ridiculing society's idiosyncrasies to evoking deep-seated melancholy, as he recounted the anguish that Douglas had caused him. The letter also explored the intertwined themes of love and literature and conveyed a sense of expectation for the future. Wilde wrote fervently, likening himself to Christ, and described his ascent to magnanimity and redemption after tasting the bitterness of life. De Profundis is a splendid yet ineffable work, replete with contradictions and interwoven emotions that present a challenge to translators due to its sophisticated language and profound humanistic

meanings. Chunshen Zhu's translation skillfully resolves the the difficulties in two aspects: according to the text, Zhu's work meticulously follows the language's focus, emphasizing the significance highlighted by sound, form, and meaning in the sentence's informational structure, as well as the consequential problem effects caused by the distribution of focus. Beyond the text, Zhu incorporates the intertextual network's overarching effect outside of the text, stimulating cultural imagination. As Zhu himself states, "Translation, approached with humility, is a means of redirecting people's thoughts and attention towards reflection on life and existence." This thesis employs Newmark's eight translation modes theory to analyze Zhu's translation, revealing Zhu's exquisite and profound reflections conveyed through the lens of the utilization of four-character words, the deconstruction of syntactic arrangements, and the reenactment of formal aesthetics.

2. Literature Review

Peter Newmark is one of the significant pioneers of English translation theory in the 20th century in the United Kingdom. His concise and wide-ranging theoretical propositions have addressed both the fundamental theoretical aspects and practical translation strategies. In this paper, we primarily adopt Newmark's eight translation strategies and his text classification theory[2] to conduct our translation research.

2.1. Translation Strategies

Newmark's eight translation theories are classified into two categories based on the principles of target-language priority and source-language priority. Source-language-priority methods include semantic translation, faithful translation, literal translation, and word-for-word translation; and target-language-priority methods consist communicative translation, idiom translation, free translation, and adoption. We will focus on the translation strategies employed in this paper. The following part will be a detailed review of the methods of idiomatic translation, semantic translation and communicative translation, as they are the methods found applied in the source text of this study.

2.1.1. Idiomatic Translation

Idiomatic translation is based on the core semantic meaning in the source text and replaces the language form of the source text with commonly used phrases, idioms, and slang expressions in the target language context. This approach facilitates the smooth understanding of the original text by the target language readers. However, the translator's choice may easily result in a distortion of the original content meaning.

2.1.2. Semantic Translation

In the methodology of semantic translation, Newmark believes that translators should attach great importance to the source text. The sentence structure, clauses' positions and completeness, and the word order in the original text should be preserved as much as possible, with the author and source language at the center[3]. For example, when the author uses puns, homophones, and other rhetorical devices, the translator should retain the original meaning and form rather than extract the main information for rephrasing.

2.1.3. Communicative Translation

Newmark suggests that the primary characteristic of communicative translation is to prioritize the target language effect, which may sacrifice the formal or original characteristics. Communicative translation is easy to read, more natural, fluent, simple, clear, direct, traditional, and conforms to

specific language domains, but it may be longer.[3] The translation characteristic of communicative translation, with the original text information at its center, determines that the target language version may be better than the original because of the power and clarity obtained, even if the semantic content is lost. A translator who loses the faithfulness to the original text is rewriting rather than translating. Newmark treats communication as the most significant purpose of translation.[4]

2.2. Text Classification Theory

Newmark took a different approach to traditional subject matter classification and conducted a more accurate classification of texts from the perspective of language functions. Based on Bühler's language function classification, Newmark classified texts into the following three functional categories:

2.2.1. Expressive Function

The expressive function concentrates on the author or speaker themselves. These texts, also known as X-class texts, include literature, opinion essays, prose, autobiographies, and other works where the author's expression is central[5]. When translating such texts, the translator should maintain a focus on the author and attempt to faithfully reproduce the author's intended message while respecting their writing style and expression techniques.

2.2.2. Information Function

The core of the information function is objective knowledge and information. These texts, also known as Y-class texts, include textbooks, academic reports, academic papers, and conference proceedings[5]. When translating such texts, the translator should strive to maximize the efficiency of information dissemination while maintaining maximum fidelity to the original text, making necessary adjustments based on the target readership's language level.

2.2.3. Vocative Function

The vocative function focuses on eliciting empathy between readers, listeners, and the author. These texts, also known as Z-class texts, include promotional materials, case briefs, popular literature, and manuals.[5] When translating such texts, the translator should base their approach on the cultural background of the source language and the intended effect of the target language.

3. Analysis

The analysis of the translation is based on three aspects, namely the application of four-character phrases, the adjustments of sentence structures, and the reformation of the original forms. Peter Newmark's typology on translation methods will be applied in the analysis.

3.1. The Application of Four-character Phrases

The connotations behind the linguistic forms are always the soul of idioms, and they will be disqualified as idioms without the connotations[6].Hence, in Zhu Chunshen's translation of De Profundis, the use of four-character idioms in English reflects his understanding and interpretation of the Chinese cultural background in the original text, particularly the inclusion of profound cultural connotations in the translated idioms. In this part, analysis would be divided into three parts to discuss how the target texts successfully convey author's emotions and meaning behind the words.

3.1.1. On the Linguistic Level

Since four-character phrases is a typical type of expressions in Chinese, the application of it in the translation is always seen as idiomatic translation. Through this method, some nuance differences may occur since some other meanings behind the added words can convey more or less emotions compared with the source text.[7] Zhu captured the feelings from Wilde and processed the words a little bit so as to make them more natural and clearer for readers.

Example 1:
ST: I summed up all systems in a phrase, and all existence in an epigram. [8]
TT: 万象之繁，我一言可以蔽之，万物之妙，我一语足以道破。[9]

"Sum up" in English refers to describe something briefly, however it is interpreted as two verbs in Chinese to achieve the balance the sentence's structure as well as the symmetrical beauty in form as "万物之繁" "万物之妙" and "一言" "一语" is quite similar in its layout.

Example 2:
ST: For I have come, not from obscurity into the momentary notoriety of crime…, that between the famous and the infamous there is but one step, ... [8]
TT: 因为我不是从寂寂无闻跃入一时的罪名昭彰，…, 名闻遐迩与臭名昭著不过是一步之遥，…[9]

In the source text, a series of nouns have been used to describe the situation of author's feeling, which is strong enough to be felt in English. However, if word-to-word translation were adopted, simply a couple of nouns in Chinese would be lame because of the different language flow. Here Zhu applied two four-character phrases to describe the authentic emotion, which can realize the vocative function in the largest extent. What makes the whole sentence more exquisitely designed is that in the latter part, when ST referred to "momentary notoriety of crime" again as "infamous", Zhu didn't use another word for this in TT. Instead, he used the four-character phrase "臭名昭著" quite similar to the former "罪名昭彰" and "名闻遐迩" for "famous", which substantially demonstrate the differences between the two situations of Wilde.[10] In the last part, using three four-character phrases in a row also amplifies the complicated emotions, even though not quite in the same form as the ST does.

3.1.2. On the Contextual Level

The four-character collocations in Chinese are balanced in their structures and concise in their wording, and Chinese people often favor four-character collocations to overstress the aesthetics of balance[6]. Hence, Zhu Chunshen uses the four-character words to combine the beauty of the Chinese translation with the artistic conception of the English original well.

Example 3:
ST:...in entire solitude ... [8]
TT:孑然一身[9]

In Chinese, "孑然一身" describes an alone person with nothing clinging to, feeling extremely lonely and hopeless. This term is often used in Chinese literature to reflect that people itch for retaining someone yet in vain. In English, "in entire solitude" is also a commonly used phrase to

describe the same concept, but it lacks the cultural connotations and depth conveyed by the Chinese idiom. "孑然一身" can help Chinese readers better understand Wilde's feeling of helplessness after the death of Bosie's mother.

Example 4:
ST: …who are made for exceptions, not for laws. [8]
TT: …标新立异而非循规蹈矩的人。[9]

"标新立异" describes someone to be different or unusual in a way that attracts attention or admiration or to stand out from the crowd, and "循规蹈矩" means someone follow the rules and behave in a very strict way as a rigid conformist in Chinese. The brilliance of this translation lies in achieving the maximal, ideal state of definition in translation. That is, the target readers should be able to comprehend the translation in a way the original readers understands the source text[11]. In English, this expression is very common, especially in literature, film and other works of art. This expression emphasizes individuality and rebelliousness, and is often used to describe characters with groundbreaking or unconventional ideas. But with semantic translation, it lacks the cultural background and historical content of the Chinese idiom, which weakens the strong sense of comparison between the two. Therefore, the use of idiom expressions that Chinese readers are more accustomed to can help them better understand the translation.

3.1.3. On the Communicative Level

Communicative translation, according to Newmark, is a good way to convey both the information and style in a conveyable and understandable way to the readers[2]. It is more like striking a balance between the form and the meaning. In some sentences, Zhu applied four-character phrases to present the similar structure as the ST has, such as parallelism, and meaning at the same time.

Example 5:
ST: Out of my nature has come wild despair; an abandonment to grief that was piteous even to look at; terrible and impotent rage; bitterness and scorn; anguish that wept aloud; misery that could find no voice; sorrow that was dumb. [8]
TT: 在我心性的深处升起狂乱的绝望，哀绝的情状不忍卒睹：无力的暴怒、苦涩的鄙夷、欲哭无泪的哀伤、欲唤无声的苦痛、欲说无言的悲怆。[9]

In this sentence, three definitive clauses were used to enhance the dense impotent feeling from Wilde. Zhu chose three phrases in the same form and derived the verbs from the clauses. Though not exactly the same verbs in TT, communicative function has been realized through the similar structure with more understandable modifier for "anguish", "misery" and "sorrow".

Overall, the use of four-character idioms in Zhu Chunshen's translation of "De Profundis" adds depth and richness to the text and helps convey the cultural background of the original work to Chinese readers. This reflects Zhu Chunshen's profound understanding and appreciation of the Chinese language and culture, as well as his ability to bridge the cultural gap between the two languages.[12] Through his translation, readers can gain a deeper understanding of Chinese literature and culture and appreciate the unique beauty and richness of the Chinese language.

3.2. The Adjustments of Sentence Structures

The present section is dedicated to analyzing the rationale underlying the structural adjustments made during the translation process of the selected text, incorporating both the textual dimension of

Newmark's translation theory and the theoretical framework of categorizing the source text. Zhu's translation exhibits several instances of sentence structure reorganization that were implemented for the purpose of facilitating comprehension by the target readership. To this end, a detailed textual analysis of both the original and translated versions will be conducted.

Example 1:

ST: "All that had occurred was but as a feather for the cap that gilds a narrow head①, a flower to pink the doublet that hides a heart② that Hate, and Hate alone, can warm, that Love, and Love alone, finds cold.③"[8]

TT: "所发生的一切，只不过是帽子上的一根羽饰，装点着一个气度狭隘的脑袋，①只不过是别在马甲上的一朵花，遮掩着一颗仇恨，只有仇恨，才能温暖的心。②那颗心中，爱，只有爱，会觉得寒冷。③" [9]

In the initial text, the use of metaphorical language presented a challenge to the translation process due to the absence of clear logical connectors between clauses. Thus, in order to facilitate the comprehension of Chinese readers, slight adjustments to the sentence structure are necessary while retaining the original meaning. The author employed a structure comprising two parallel clauses, ① and ②, followed by a that-clause, ③, in the latter part of the sentence to achieve a layered and emotional effect. However, the original text lacks clear logical connectors between ① and ②, as well as between ①② and ③, which can create significant difficulties in understanding for non-native English speakers. Additionally, the third clause possesses a strong emotive and conjunctive characteristic, a successful translation of which heavily relies on the translator's language proficiency and cultural literacy.

The translation maintains the original order of the clauses ①②③, but segments the sense units into a structure of ①② + ③ to be natural in the target language. This alteration enables the translator to adjust the sentence based on the sense unit structure, with ①② more closely resembling type A texts, and ③ being more akin to type C texts. As a result, the translated text aligns better with the reading habits of Chinese readers, allowing them to more deeply perceive the author's intense emotional state at this point in the text.

Example 2:

ST: "so the Soul, in its turn, has its nutritive functions also, and can transform into noble moods of thought, and passions of high import,① what in itself is base, cruel, and degrading②: nay more, may find in these its most august modes of assertion, and can often reveal itself most perfectly through what was intended to desecrate or destroy." [8]

Translation: "灵魂，同样地，也有它摄取营养的功能，能把本来是下作的、残忍的、堕落的东西②，化为高尚的思想和高雅的情怀。①不止如此，灵魂还能在这些东西中找到最尊严的方式来伸张自己，也能经常通过本来意在亵渎、毁灭的东西来把自己最完美地彰显出来。"[9]

In the processing of this sentence, the translator made syntactic adjustments to clauses ① and ② based on the literary and hortatory features expressed by the author in the original text. The original

text employs the writing method of emphasizing "transform into" by placing it before the content, in accordance with English inversion emphasis. However, given the absence of inverted emphasis in Chinese, translating according to the original sentence structure may result in reader misunderstandings and awkward sentence structure. Therefore, the translator opted to restore the Chinese word order by reversing the order of clauses ① and ②, thus ensuring a seamless and comprehensible narrative flow in the translation.

3.3. The Reformation of the Original Forms

The beauty of form is a branch of visual aesthetic that highlights the combination, arrangement, and fusion of formal elements. Zhu's translation remains true to the original text while naturally conveying the graceful and dynamic formal style of Oscar Wilde. The translation employs the fundamental principles of the Newmark communicative translation to recreate the beauty of form, considering various aspects such as phonetics, rhetoric, and literary form to offer readers with a reliable, effective, and elegant aesthetic experience.

Example 1:
ST: To reject one's own experiences is to arrest one's own development. To deny one's own experiences is to put a lie into the lips of one's own life. [8]
TT: 抵讳自己的经历就是遏止自己的发展。抵赖自己的经历就是让自己的生命口吐谎言。[9]

The idiomatic translation of '抵讳' and '抵赖' echos with each other, which is a rhetorical device extracted from Chinese, inspired by the emphasis on rhythmic sense in the original work. The use of the two characters '抵' intends to create a succinct and refined parallel sentence group similar to the structure ' ' of the two infinitive subjects. The choice of words '讳' (to avoid mentioning or discussing a certain topic or subject) and '赖'(to refuse to leave or go away) is particularly astute, as they not only conform to the logical collocation with the word 'experience', but also incorporate the same tonal ending.

Example 2:
ST: The beauty of the sun and the moon, the pageant of the seasons, the music of daybreak and the silence of great nights, the rain falling through the leaves, or the dew creeping over the grass and making it silver – would all be tainted for me…[8]
TT: 日月之美、四季之盛、黎明的音乐、长夜的静谧、绿叶间滴落的雨点、悄悄爬上草地把它缀成银光一片的露珠——这一切在我眼里都将蒙上污渍…[9]

This is a semantic translation that adheres the principle of prioritizing meaning (artistic conception) over a literal translation. In terms of sentence structure and syntax, the phrases in the translation are neatly balanced and the modifiers in each clause gradually increase in specificity, thus reinstating the original sentence structure and its progressively developing tone. The supplement and repetition of "这一切""失去"(lose) at the end of the sentence accentuates the emphasis and enhances the coherence of the entire paragraph. In terms of vocabulary and rhetoric, the translator has skillfully utilized condensed and precise expressions, such as "之美" (beauty), "之盛" (pageant), and "长夜" (great night), which enrich the meaning of the text. The phrase "缀成银光一片" (lit. adorned with a sheet of silver light) appropriately extends the Z(subjective - perceptual) dimension of the original text and evokes the reader's experience of Wilde's romantic yearning for the beauty of nature. Moreover, the

translator employs rhetorical devices such as parallelism and contrast to reflect the vividness of the translation, in accordance with the aesthetic standards of the Chinese language and the expressive and imaginative requirements of translation theory.

4.   Conclusion

This essay presents an analysis of Zhu Chunshen's translation of De Profundis through the lens of Peter Newmark's translation method, examining the three aspects of the translation. By selecting multiple examples from both the source and target texts, the work has identified various translation strategies employed by Zhu, providing insight into why his translation is widely regarded as successful. Notably, the analysis reveals that Zhu's translation has made the complex emotions conveyed in Wilde's work more accessible to Chinese readers. In a fast-evolving era, the value of literature conveyed through the translator's efforts is increasingly evident and inspiring for those committed to this field.It also can be seen from the analysis that Newmark's translation methods are highly instructive. By following this translation paradigm, translators can push the boundaries of language and enrich their translations.

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