

Translator's Purposeful Act in International Publicity of Endangered Chinese Operas

-- A Case Study of Tui Opera

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Abstract

Thanks to globalization, the cultural exchanges have been much more frequent and intensive. However, at the same time, the local traditional culture might face risks of marginalization and extinction. Operas are unique cultural form of human civilization. Its protection and inheritance demand for greater care and harder work. When it comes to the opera protection and inheritance through translation, the care and work largely rely on the translator's purposeful act. As one of typical endangered operas in the Huai River Valley, Tui Opera calls for more attention and efforts on its global communication. Its translation and international communication require adaptation and selection by translators, placing the translator at the center of translation activities and granting him more autonomy in translation. The theory of the translator's purposeful act guides the translator in adopting various translation strategies to preserve rich regional historical and cultural marks embodied in Tui Opera.

Keywords

Endangered Operas; Tui Opera; Translator's Purposeful Act; Communication.

1. Introduction

Since the 21st century, the communication and inheritance of Chinese traditional culture has received wide attention. Chinese governments at different levels have enacted laws and regulations to protect and popularize the local traditional cultures. As the fossil of the regional culture and history, operas, rich in visual and audial information, are of great importance to the inheritance of local cultures. China is a large country with many types of local operas. Some of those operas are almost on the verge of extinction. This paper is focused on the international communication of the endangered opera and takes Tui Opera as an example. Studies, made through literature review and case analysis, aim to find out some practical approaches to handle well the translation and communication of endangered operas to the western world. As for the publicity of endangered Chinese operas, efforts have been mainly made by Chinese translators and entities, even though the related work is quite limited. Still less research work has been made from the perspective of translation, since translators are not familiar with the opera and the translation of the opera is quite different from either written translation or interpreting. This paper reviews the past research on the translator's purposeful act from different theories at home and abroad. Based on the discussion, the paper explores the translator's purposeful act on motivation and culture by analyzing concrete examples.

2. Protection of Endangered Operas

Since 1990s, the issue of endangered operas has gradually arrested the public attention in China. Scholars and researchers tried to propose definition and features of endangered operas from various angles. Among them, Fu Jin put forward three criteria for the endangered opera: firstly, the opera should boast a long historical tradition and rich cultural connotation; secondly, the opera has faced serious threat for survival under a natural circumstance; thirdly, the opera could still be supported by at least one or two troupes which could help its revitalization [1]. The potential risk of the opera's extinction and the constant influence of the opera on people's life, thoughts and values are major features of the endangered opera[2]. In 2021, the Ministry of China and Tourism issued a Notice on Protective Work of Performance of Local Endangered Operas and released a list of 170 endangered operas[3].

Over the past three decades, many Chinese operas have lost their market and become degraded in the face of globalization. However, thanks to intensified consciousness of cultural heritage, the value of endangered operas has been rediscovered or even recreated in some sense. From such a perspective, revitalized operas belong to their original creators as well as the following interpreters[4].

The opera by nature is an inheritance of human wisdom, culture and feeling through language, music, and body movement. Therefore, the most realistic way of protecting and inheriting endangered operas is performances by local troupes [5]. The development of local endangered operas has been obstructed by poor historical accumulation, obscure aesthetic features, serious detachment between design and reality as well as ineffective publicity measures. Besides, lack of theoretical guidance, incomplete inheritance mechanism and demise of social memory are also blamed for the declination of endangered operas [6].

As an important form of human intangible cultural heritage, the opera symbolizes a national identity externally and functions as a vehicle of internal cohesion. The extinction of endangered operas means the death of national identity and the end of cultural diversity. However, the declination of the local operas cannot be simply attributed to their loss of vitality; rather they are becoming more invisible in modern society. Most of endangered operas are staying far from the internet and become speechless in the new communication space. As for the protection of endangered operas, what remains under discussion is not whether the protection is worthwhile but what can be done to turn the tide. Redoubled efforts should be made on innovating the playwright, adjusting the language to the time and revolutionize the communication and publicity mode. Very limited researches can be found on the international communication of Chinese endangered operas.

3. Tui Opera

Tui Opera, originally named as "four-line Tuizi", is one of traditional local operas in Anhui Province. Born in the Huai River valley area and growing in Fengtai County of Huainan City, Tui Opera evolved from the back-stage opera performance for Huagudeng(Flower Drum Song) to an independent opera incorporating folk songs, dramas and folk art forms[7]. In recent years, through researches on various fronts, scholars and researchers intensified explorations on Tui Opera to the melody, lyrics, plot design, rhyme, intonation of the opera[8]. The opera took its initial shape in 1930s and met its first boom in 1970s. However, thanks to the rapid revival of modern entertainments like gala and TV programs, Tui Opera together with other local operas started to decline. Since the 21st century, with growing awareness of revitalizing traditional cultures, governments at different levels have spared no efforts in popularizing traditional operas[9]. In November 2011, Tui Opera was added into the protection list of local operas at the 25th session by the 9th Anhui NPC Standing Committee. In 2009, Tui Opera

research institute was established in Huainan Normal University, marking a milestone in systematic and specialized study on the opera. One year later, the running of China Tui Opera website initiated its large-scaled popularization at home and abroad.

According to Baidu, a popular Chinese online search engine, the search result of Tui Opera amounts to 7,520,000, while that of Peking Opera reaches 100,000,000 at the same time. Despite all those efforts mentioned, Tui Opera is still struggling at the brink of extinction. Up to date, the opera is supported by just one state-funded troupe and the performance of the opera remains irregular [10]. As mentioned above, there are few researches on the protection and publicity of Chinese endangered operas from the angle of language and cultural translation, let alone Tui Opera.

4. Translator's Behavior

In his book "Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functional Approaches Explained", Christine Nord describes translation as an intentional interaction to change the existing state of affairs. The intention might be different from the initial wish of guiding the original sender or producer of the text [11]. However, there are many uncertainties about the purpose of the translation action.

It is those uncertainties that challenge and, at the same time, empower the translator, making translation a purposeful activity and the translator's act worth study. In Dictionary of Translation Studies, Mark Shuttleworth suggests that translatorial action has a wider connotation than translation, because it still covers other literary work like paraphrasing and reediting. The translator can assume several social roles at the same time. As a result, if he abuses his roles, the translation can be employed as a tool to satisfy the translator's personal desires[12].

Meanwhile, Chinese scholars have also made fruitful explorations on the translator's purposeful act. Professor Hu Gengshen advocates a holistic study between the translator and the ecological environment of the translation, arguing translation should be purposeful and meaningful. The purpose and meaning are mainly manifested in two aspects: firstly, the translator carries out the translation task under the guidance by specific purpose; secondly, the translation can achieve a certain purpose and fulfill a certain task[13]. According to Professor Zhou Lingshun, translator's behavior might be the best word to describe the translation process which can be further divided into broad and narrow senses. The former refers to both linguistic translation and non-translation acts assuming some social roles and transcending the translation itself. The narrow sense is restricted to the translation act within the identity and role as a translator[14].

5. Translator's Purposeful Act in the International Communication of Tui Opera

5.1. Translator's Purposeful Acts on Motivation

In general, motivations behind a translator's act fall into two categories: active and passive. Here the paper will not dwell on the passive motivation. For the active one, it will not necessarily lead to the successful performance of the translator. If the translator's motivation does not match the reality, the translation effect will suffer. For the publicity translation of endangered operas in the world, if the translator neglects the receptivity of the target language receivers, the communication of the operas will be obstructed. Besides, on the issue of loyalty, the translator's motivation also matters. When he stays too close to the source text, the translated version might be too far for the target language receivers to understand. On the contrary, if the translator blindly caters to the target language receivers, the translated opera might be distorted and lose its original flavor. Take Tui Opera as an example, the very purpose

of its international communication is to make its voice heard and secure its revival in the world. Thanks to globalization and acculturation, its growth and popularity in the world will bring about a new round of its development at home. Considering this, governments, NGOs and research institutions have realized the urgency of the globalization of Tui Opera and take concrete measures to achieve the purpose. In the translation practice, the translator should make a prudent selection of the works to be translated. The selection should be responsive to the target language receivers' interest and taste. The translation of endangered operas like Tui Opera should be carried out by steps. At the initial stage, works with rich cultural and historic features are fit for translation. When the target language receiver base reach to a certain scale, the operas publicized can be diversified in content and complex in plot.

Furthermore, according to the text typology theory by Katharina Reiss, there are intricate relationships between text types and translation. For informative text, the content is the focus of the translation; the translation of expressive text emphasizes creative composition and aesthetics, while the translator strives to persuade or urge his readers to take actions during the translation of vocative text. Later, Reiss identified a fourth category, audio-visual texts. As a mixed category, audio-medial texts include all the other categories and heavily rely on audio-visual forms of expression for full realization. She later replaced audio-medial with multi-medial to incorporate those visual materials without acoustic features [15]. In the case of the audio-medial text, the translation strategy should depend on the possibilities of expression inherent in the human voice. The translator could use interplay, rhythm, antithesis and other rhetorical devices to inject life into the target text[16].

5.2. Translator's Purposeful Acts on Culture

Since Chinese and English are from two utterly different language families. Besides phonetical, lexical, and syntactical differences, the two languages differ vastly in language sense and culture. When it comes to opera translation, the challenges caused by language difference are unavoidably magnified. Under such a circumstance, the translator's purposeful act is needed to get over language barriers and help the communication goals achieved. To make it specific, the study selects some examples and generalizes the translator's purposeful act from the angle of language as follows:

5.2.1. Substitution

As mentioned above, Chinese and English differ dramatically. In translation, the language transfer can not satisfactorily convey the cultural and historical elements. For example, the witty expressions in one language are heavily loaded with cultural traditions. The literal translation often leads to mechanical translation, deprives the target language receivers of original beauty and causes confusion or even misunderstanding.

Example 1: “没办法,我端他的碗,受他的管”。

Translation Version: “gifts blind the eyes.”

This is a line from the opera “Silly Girl Gets Married”. In the opera, the matchmaker accepted the gift money from the silly girl's family and tried her best to find a husband for the girl. In Chinese, “Wan” literally means a bowl and “guan” means “control”, so, if literally translated, the Chinese line should be “ I have no other choices, because I hold his bowl and could not get out of his control.” Obviously, this version is incomprehensible and more importantly too long to be the subtitle. The translator borrows a corresponding English idiom-- “gifts blind the eyes”, and the rhyme “an” in “wan” and “guan” is replaced with “s” in “gifts” and “eyes”. By doing so, the translated version becomes smooth and vivid. Such a purposeful act speaks volume for the translator's good will for communication between languages and careful consideration for the opera's better publicity among the target language receivers.

5.2.2. Omission

Language is closely tied with culture. Apart from conveying messages, words and phrases are also indicators of cultural identities. However, the cultural differences created by those words and phrases might not be properly bridged in the process of word-to-word translation. Besides, if the deletion of those words does not incur any difficulties in understanding, the omission will be a good translation option.

Example 2: “媒婆请了有多少，几家提亲也不愿”

Translation Version: “No matter how many matchmakers we found, no one wants to marry our daughter.”

The example here is also a line from “Silly Girl Gets Married”. The literal meaning of this line is that we have hired many matchmakers to propose a marriage, but no one is willing to marry our daughter.” “提亲” which means proposing a marriage by the matchmaker used to be quite common in China. “不愿” used in this line highlights the frustration and anxiety confronting the parents. From the perspective of understanding this sentence, both “提亲” and “不愿” reflect the different values of Chinese parents towards marriage and can be omitted to make the translated version concise and easy to understand. Otherwise, the target language receivers might be distracted by the cultural differences revealed and the distance between them and the opera will be widened.

5.2.3. Addition

The cultural consensus reached in one language sometimes remain invisible. In the translation process, the invisible cultural consensus which used to support the intralingual communication will block smooth communication between languages. In such cases the translator’s purposeful addition seems to be necessary and helpful.

Example 3: “泪水流多，到老了眼花”

Translation Version: “You just gave birth to a baby. Please avoid crying, otherwise your eyes will suffer when growing old.”

This example is from “The Legend of Handkerchief” which depicts a pathetic story of a young mother wronged by her husband for 18 years. The line shows the woman with her newly-born baby was dispelled by her husband and found sobbing on the roadside. The warm-hearted passers-by came over, trying to console the grief-stricken woman. The literal translation of “泪水流多，到老了眼花” is “if you cry too long, you will get eye problems when you are old.” In Chinese culture, it has remained as a time-honored custom for women after childbearing to lie on the bed for a month rest. It is believed that during the rest if the woman cries, she will lose sight when growing old. Here, the translator adds “You just gave birth to a baby” into the translation to offer more background information and help the audience better comprehend the plot.

5.2.4. Annotation

Different from document translation, opera translation largely depends on the visual messages conveyed through body movements like gestures and facial expressions. However, as part of language, gestures are also culturally-loaded. In target language the cultural connotation of gestures, if not fully revealed, might hinder the audience from fully appreciating the plot. To solve the problem, the translator can add the annotation behind the text and offer the audience some cultural backup.

Example 4: “现在就缺这个(a hand gesture in the video).”

Translation Version: “Now what I need badly is this (money).”

The fourth example comes from “Get the Wife and Forget the Mum”. In the opera, the third son of the heroine forced his mom on the New Year’s Eve to take out her money to support his

marriage. The line is accompanied with a gesture of twisting the thumb and the index finger which means money in Chinese culture. If the translator here does not clarify the gesture, the target audience will not be able to know what the gesture refers to. Considering this, the translator purposefully adds “money” as an annotation into the subtitle.

5.2.5. Translation with Explanation

Different from addition, translation with explanation occurs when the translator faces the cultural gap and the corresponding words in the target language fails to fill the gap. At that time, the translator should give up the words and search for the new ones which could match the original meaning in essence.

Example 5: “我哪能要俺娘的养老钱。”

Translation Version: How could I force my mom to take out her meager savings?

The fifth example also originates from the opera, “Get the Wife and Forget the Mum”. In the opera, the second son of the woman loves his mom so deeply that he rejected his wife’s demand of asking his mom for money. The line, if literally translated, means “ how could I want my mum’s money used for supporting herself.” In Chinese “要” often means “want”, but here it means “force”. “养老钱” is not pension but the money saved by the jobless in the countryside to support their later life. For a better communication, the hidden message should be revealed by the translator’s further explanation during the translation.” The words “force” and “meager savings” are selected by the translator to help the target language receivers better understand the feeling of the speaker.

6. Conclusion

Under the context of globalization and acculturation, rescuing local operas, especially those endangered ones, has been an urgent and tough task for all the stakeholders of the opera. The communication and publicity are by no means a single task for translators alone, but translators should play an essential role in the process. The Tui Opera, together with other local endangered operas, carries rich cultural and historical elements, which will pose challenges for both translation and communication. Translators must give full play to their autonomy and creation, take purposeful acts on adjustment and selection, and inject vitality into endangered operas to secure its revitalization and popularity worldwide.

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