

Lu Xun's Fiction in English Translation: the early years

Baorong Wang

Zhejiang University of Finance & Economics, CHINA

abrwang.cls2011(a)gmail.com

ABSTRACT

An intellectual titan, a literary colossus and an ideological iconoclast, Lu Xun remains the most translated and studied of modern Chinese writers. While his short stories are now familiar to Western readers, their early English renditions, which brought about the author's immediate international recognition, have not received much scholarly attention. Adopting Toury's Descriptive Translation Studies approach and drawing on Even-Zohar's polysystem theory and Lefevre's rewriting theory, this thesis studies the major English translations of Lu Xun's fiction prior to 1949, attempting to describe the shape of the translation, to explain why it appears in a certain way and to examine the reception of both the story and the translation. The reception study is made possible by excavating large quantities of historical data, consisting of paratextual material (translator's prefaces, advertisements, etc.) and extratextual material (biographies of translators, journal articles, translation reviews, etc.).

Chapter One deals with George Kin Leung, the first English translator of Lu Xun's masterpiece "A Q zhengzhuan" (The true story of Ah Q). Leung's translation is adequacy-oriented and suffers from a stilted English. Chapter Two is concerned with Jing Yinyu, the "unfortunate Chinese boy" who first introduced Lu Xun directly to the West. Jing rendered into French three Lu Xun stories, which were retranslated into English by E. H. F. Mills. Jing's slightly bowdlerized French version of "A Q zhengzhuan" won the acclaim of the French Nobel Laureate Romain Rolland. Chapter Three studies George Kennedy who translated six Lu Xun stories with fairly good quality, balancing adequacy and acceptability. But bad luck and the wrong place of publication reduced his offerings to obscurity. Chapter Four is devoted to Lin Yijin who is credited with renditions of seven pieces. His adequacy-oriented translations are marked with many non-obligatory shifts and an unnatural English. Chapter Five deals with Edgar Snow and Yao Ke who effected the first significant introduction of Lu Xun to the English-speaking world. Their cooperative effort leans towards acceptability, though not without signs of the pursuit of adequacy. Chapter Six examines the case of Chi-chen Wang who produced both adequate and acceptable American-English versions of sixteen pieces, which received warm reception in the United States.

The findings are summarized in the Conclusion, trying to answer the question “What makes the successful dissemination abroad of Lu Xun’s fiction in particular and of modern Chinese literature in general?” This is followed by some informed reflections on China’s ongoing national project of “cultural exportation”, identifying the problems and suggesting solutions for them.

KEYWORDS: descriptive translation studies, explanatory, Lu Xun’s fiction, Lu Xun’s English reception, polysystems, rewriting.

Completion of Thesis

Place: The University of Hong Kong, China

Year: 2011

Supervisor: Professor Joseph H. K. Poon