

Translation Strategies for Art Translation in the *Origins and Developments of the Lingnan School of Painting*

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Abstract Taiwan's National Palace Museum published a picture album of Chinese paintings, *Origins and Developments of the Lingnan School of Painting*, when focusing on major works by Lingnan founders and masters. The Lingnan School, a realistic school of art incorporating western elements, has played an important role in modern Chinese painting development during the early twentieth century, and it has had great impact on contemporary art circles. Based on the bilingual album, this paper aims to analyze the translation strategies of art in Taiwan. The main purpose of this study is to find the problems in the translation of the titles of paintings, including the word choice, untranslatability and translationese language. This paper will further discuss whether the translation matches original title and the painting itself. Suggested translation that better meets the purpose is also offered. Since Chinese culture is different from that of the West, not all source language of painting titles can be translated perfectly into the target language, especially when words are used to paint a picture. Word-to-word translation and improper word choice may cause the loss of the imagination and the beauty in the translation of painting titles. As a result, different strategies should be applied in art translation.

Keywords Lingnan School, Translation Strategy, Untranslatability, Art Translation

1. Introduction

National Palace Museum (NPM) is the most famous museum in Taiwan. The main collection of cultural artifacts held inside the National Palace Museum consists an enormous treasure trove of objects from the Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties [1]. But NPM is not comprehensive in the nineteenth century Chinese paintings. In 2013, National Palace Museum cooperated with Au Ho-Nien Culture Foundation holding an exhibition of Lingnan School paintings. And the National Palace Museum publishing this picture album, *Origins and Developments of the Lingnan School of Painting*, for the art amateurs and readers to further recognize and understand the artistic

achievements of these Lingnan School masters [2].

This paper focus on analyzing the translation strategies of this bilingual album. First, I briefly introduce the Lingnan School's history, including its origin and painting style. The main purpose of this study is to find the problems in the translation of painting titles, including the word choice, untranslatability and translationese language, discussing whether the translation matches the meaning of its source language and the painting itself. Since the characteristics of Chinese culture and language are different from that of the West, not all source language can be translated perfectly into the target language, especially when words are used to paint a picture. In this album, the translator uses the literal translation method, but some word-to-word translation and improper word choice may cause the loss of the imagination and the beauty in the translation of painting titles. As a result, different strategies should be applied in art translation. And this research is going to provide suggested translations that better meet the purpose.

2. Literature Review

Lingnan School

The Lingnan School, a realistic school of art incorporated with western elements, has played an important role in modern Chinese painting development during the early twentieth century, and it has had great impact on contemporary art circles in China, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan [2, p. 2]. Lingnan School has already become an important subject in researching modern Chinese art history. Southeast China is the cultural center of Lingnan School. It originated in Tayyu Mountains, Qitian Mountains, Dupang Mountains, Mengzhu Mountains, and Yuecheng Mountains also known as, "the Five Ranges". The area was known as Lingnan, but now the name has changed to be Guangdong [3].

In the late Qing dynasty, Guangdong was one of the important mercantile port in China. Then the various developments led to a turning point for revolutionary change in the practice of art in Lingnan area with the appearance of many promising and talented painters. The fame of Lingnan artists quickly spread to Shanghai, Beijing and Tianjing

areas. Painters in Lingnan leapt to the forefront of art circle to form a core group in Southern China [2, p.11]. The innovations in modern Lingnan painting can be traced back to two progenitors, the cousins Ju Chao (居巢, 1811-1865) and Ju Lian (居廉, 1928-1904). Their painting style continued in the “boneless” tradition of color washes employed by the early Qing painter Yun Shouping (恽壽平, 1633-1690), but in terms of subject matter and methods of expression, they branched out on their own new painting style. They specialized in the techniques of adding water and powder to still-drying washes, demonstrating full command of various changes to the subjects depicted. In the beginning of the twentieth century, Gao Jian-Fu (高劍父, 1879-1951), Gao Qi-Feng (高奇峯, 1889-1933) and Chen Shu-Ren (陳樹人, 1884-1948) were their most famous followers [2, p.11]. They created a new Chinese art through a synthesis of East and West and brought forth a new movement in Chinese painting [3]. Therefore, they became known as the “Three Masters of Lingnan”.

“Three Masters of Lingnan” had traveled and studied art in Japan, influenced by realism and bright colors prevalent in Japanese painting at the time. When coming back to China, they created a new Chinese art through a synthesis of East and West and brought forth a new movement in Chinese painting. The revolutionary slogan of their claim is “Balancing Chinese elements and foreign ones. Blending ancient traits and modern ones.” in the early Republican era, trying to confront traditional art that laid emphasis on imitation. The impact of the Lingnan School’s “new Chinese painting” on contemporary art circles is not only limited to the area of Guangzhou, it also has great influence in Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan areas [2, p.11].

There are two main techniques in Chinese painting: traditional Chinese realistic painting (工筆畫) and ink and wash painting (水墨畫). The brushstroke of the former emphasizes lines and details of the subjects; the latter focuses on spontaneous style [4, pp. 530-537]. Lingnan School are based on the traditional Chinese painting skills and ink and wash painting. Firstly, painters leave blank space while arranging the picture. They are influenced by traditional Chinese philosophy, Taoism in which the philosopher, Zhuangzi (莊子, 369-286 BC), wisdom can be obtained while in peace. Secondly, they are influenced by the Western painting style, impressionism, while painters of the Lingnan School focus on the appearance of light and vivid colors [5].

Text Purpose and Text Function

The translator need to understand the characteristic of the original text before translating, which the process might help translator more understanding about the purpose of the text. According to Katharina Reiss (1971), there are three types of text: Informative, expressive and operative [6, pp.67-69]. Each one of them has differences of intention, rhetorical purpose and functions [6, p.281]. The text of this Chinese painting album belongs to expressive type for aesthetic

language, form-focused and adopting perspective of ST are the characteristics of expressive text. Therefore, when translators translate the title of these paintings, they need to understand thoroughly the meaning of the titles.

Decision-making

Translation involves a complex decision-making process which the Leipzig-based translation theorist Jiri Levy (1967) explains as “moves” in a game of chess, and choices to make among several alternatives. In doing any kind of translation, there will always be a ‘problem’, and a number of possible ‘solutions’ [6, p.52]. The translator face totally different problems from the author’s. At every stage of the translation process, choices are made, and these obviously influence subsequent choices. Like all matters to do with text in context, however, translation decision tend to be highly complex [6, p.52].

Iterative nature of decision-making is often driven by a number of fairly subjective factors such as the translator’s own ‘aesthetic standard’ (Levy 1967). A factor that is less subjective than aesthetics is the translator’s own socio-cognitive system (the translator’s culture and system of values, beliefs, etc.). The nature of the commission is a crucial factor in defining the purpose of the translation. The decision-making involved would be partly subject to system criteria such as grammar and diction, and partly to contextual factors surrounding the use of language in a given text [6, pp.52-55].

During the decision-making process, the translator opts for that solution which yields maximum effect for minimum effort [6, p.56]. In other words, readers would be able to understand easily and quickly about the concept of the target language by translator’s minimum effort.

3. Word Choice of Painting Titles

There are, in total, ninety paintings in this album, and they are divided into four sections: “Figures”, “Birds, Flowers, Fish, and Insects”, “Birds of Prey and Other Animals”, and “Landscapes”. The translator uses the literal translation method for the titles of painting. Some of the translations can match the source language, but some do not. Since the problem of word choice might influence the results of translation quality, I will now discuss some problems in the translator’s word choice.

The problem of word choice in the first one, “Ruddiness Vying with Peach Blossoms Red”, is the word, “vie”. According to the explanation of *Longman Contemporary English* dictionary, “vie” means “to compete very hard with someone in order to get something”. This meaning does not quite match the Chinese meaning of “相映” [7, p.1594]. There are two different meanings in “相映”. According to one of the greatest Chinese novels, *A Dream of Red Mansions* by Cao Xueqin (曹雪芹, 1715-1764), 相映 means “lighting up each other”; The term is also used in another poem, Meet the Spring in Eastern City by Tang dynasty poet,

Han Yu (韓愈, 768-824), meaning “making each other look attractive” [9]. The Chinese title of picture is named by the Chinese poem, (題都城南莊) (Lines Written on Capital Wall) [2, p.247].



Figure 1.

(題都城南莊) ((Lines Written on Capital Wall)

去年今日此門中，人面桃花相映紅。人面不知何處去，桃花依舊笑春風。

The content of the poem is about the poet thinking about a beautiful lady that he had met last year and the beautiful scene, blooming peach blossoms. To the poet, the memory is unforgettable due to the beautiful lady and the blossoms making each other look attractive. But when the poet came back later to the same place, the lady was gone. The scenery was still there, smiling in the warm spring day [8]. Therefore, the word, “vie”, is not suitable in this situation to translate “相映”, I would suggest to change the title from “Ruddiness Vying with Peach Blossoms Red” to “Ruddiness Setting off by Peach Blossoms Red”.

The translation problem of word choice in the second painting, “Dual Fragrance of the Orchid and Osmanthus”, is the word, “dual”. Dual is an adjective, and it means “two” [7, p. 428]. Although, dual matches the meaning of the Chinese title, according to the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) it is not common that “dual” is used with fragrance [9]. Plus, English title already translated two kinds of plants, so it is not necessary emphasize dual. As a result, I would revise into Fragrance of the Orchid and Osmanthus.



Figure 2.

The translation problem of word choice in the third painting, “Bird Calling on a Branch”, is the word, “calling”. According to *Longman Contemporary English Dictionary*, one of the explanations of “call” is “the sound or cry that a bird or animal makes” [7, p. 180]. Although, the explanation meets the literal meaning of the Chinese title, if I were the translator, I would use the word “singing” instead of “calling”, so “Bird Singing in a Tree” can create a musical atmosphere and aesthetic feeling when the audience read the English title.



Figure 3.

The translation problem of word choice in the fourth painting, “Iris and Grasses”, are the words, “and grasses”. The theme of this painting is about the natural scene, and the meaning of the Chinese title is about one kind of herbaceous plant called “Iris tectorum or Iris” [11]. Iris tectorum is a scientific name and the English title of painting, Iris and Grasses, indicates two kinds of plants, while the Chinese title only indicates one plant, Iris. Therefore, the title would be better to be revised to “Iris”.



Figure 4.

The translation problem of word choice in the fifth painting, “Dew on a Spider Web in Early Morning”, is the words, “early morning”. In Chinese title, only one word, “晨”, to represent the meaning of a period of time when the sun just comes out [12]. In *Longman Contemporary English Dictionary*, one of the explanations of dawn means “the time

at the beginning of the day when the light first appears” [7, p.343]. To match the simple structure as Chinese version, I would suggest Dew on a Spider Web in Early Morning to be rewritten as “Dew on a Spider Web at Dawn”.



Figure 5.

The translation problem of word choice in the sixth painting, “Eagle”, is that it does not use literal translation method or free translation method. Since the Chinese title, 鷹揚, means that the eagle is about to fly, the translator only translates the animal without the movement, lacking the dynamic imagination. According to an official Chinese Dictionary sponsored by MOE, the word, 揚, is a the verb. It has several meanings: “to raise, to lift, to flutter, to manifest, to praise and to cast” [13]. In this painting, the word, 揚, indicates “flutter”. One of the definitions of flutter is that a bird or an insect flutters its wings. If its wings flutter, its wings moves quickly and lightly up and down [7, p.541]. So, in the purpose of matching the Chinese title, I would translate into “Eagle Fluttering”.



Figure 6.

The translation problem of word choice in the seventh painting, “Flames on the Eastern Battlefield”, is the word “battlefront”. The artist, Gao Jianfu, wanted to express the desolate and damaged scene of battlefield according to the description of this painting [2, p.266]. The Chinese title does not indicate which part of the eastern battlefield, but the English translation version narrow down the location. Hence, Flames on the Eastern Battlefield might be more precise than the battlefront, because it indicates a place where a battle is being fought or has been fought [7, p.95].



Figure 7.

The translation problem of word choice in the eighth painting, “Cascades at Lake Ding”, is the word, “cascade”. According to *Longman Contemporary English Dictionary*, one of the explanations of cascade “is a small steep waterfall that is one of several together” [7, p.194]. The Chinese title of the painting describes the magnificent waterfalls, but the word, cascade, cannot show how imposing the landscape is. As a result, I would suggest a new translation version “Waterfalls at Lake Ding” to better demonstrate the greatness of the scenery.



Figure 8.

The translation problem of word choice in the ninth painting, “Sound of a Cuckoo in Rain as Thick as Smoke”, is that the translation cannot express the original poem’s spirit. Since the Chinese title is borrowed from one sentence of the poem, 鄉村四月 (April in the Countryside) by Southern Song Dynasty poet, Weng Juan (翁卷, unknown) [12].



Figure 9.

(鄉村四月) (April in the Countryside)

綠遍山原白滿川，子規聲裡雨如煙。鄉村四月間人少，
才了蠶桑又插田。

The content of the poem is about the scenes in the countryside in April. A river runs through the green valleys, and a cuckoo sings happily in the breezy drizzle. Villagers are quite busy during April, because they need to transplant rice seedlings right after finishing planting mulberries and raising silkworms [14]. Therefore, in my opinion, the original translation version, “Sound of a Cuckoo in Rain as Thick as Smoke”, is too long and word-by-word translation. I would suggest to translate into “Cuckoo sings in Misty Drizzle”. The word, my suggested version will match the atmosphere of the poem. The words, “Misty Drizzle” that I used can sound in the original translation, Rain as Thick as Smoke.

The translation in the tenth painting, “Colors of Forest Greenery” that it is a misunderstanding of the meaning of the Chinese title. In the Chinese title, it focus on the red blossoms among the luxuriant forest. The concept is from Chinese idiom “萬綠叢中一點紅”. It has two different meanings, one means “a single red in the midst of thick foliage”; The other means “very outstanding or eye-catching” [15]. The English title of this painting, Colors of Forest Greenery, loses the focal point of this picture; therefore, I would translate it into “Blossom Stands out in Greenery”. The word, blossom, explains Chinese meaning of the red. Since, Chinese title has the dynamic verb, 點破, I would use the phrase, stand out, to response Chinese title of the painting

and emphasize the important figure, blossom, in the painting.



Figure 10.

4. Conclusions

In this painting album, the titles of Chinese painting sometime are named the theme directly, especially in the section of “Birds, Flowers, Fish, and Insects” and “Birds of Prey and Other Animals”. Sometimes the titles are borrowed or paraphrased from the classic Chinese idioms, phrases, poem or one line from a well-known book or novel.

The German American translator, David Brix, prefers to use the literal translation strategy on art translation of Chinese paintings’ title. He believes that the method is good for the audiences to understand the artists’ theme quickly. However, when the translator misunderstood or did not study thoroughly the background of the Chinese titles and the meaning of each word, he might use the wrong word and cause some difficulties for readers to imagine the art.

As a result, when translators deal with the art translation, though they do not necessarily have the solid background knowledge and ample experiences of art, they need to do more research. Instead of translating word by word, translators need to be able to distinguish whether the painting titles are from the classic Chinese literature, such as “Ruddiness setting of by Peach Blossoms Red”, or they just simply point out the theme of the paintings, such as Iris. If the title is borrowed or paraphrased from the literature of source language, translator needs to understand the origin and artistic conception, because the comprehension will affect the word choice during the translation process. Once the translator had carefully selected the most precise target language words, they have to take the aesthetic into consideration, so final translation version can match the original title and the painting itself.

Appendix

Chinese Title	Original English Translation Title	Improved English Translation Title
人面桃花相映紅	Ruddiness Vying with Peach Blossoms Red	Ruddiness setting off by Peach Blossoms Red
蘭桂雙馨	Dual Fragrance of the Orchid and Osmanthus	Fragrance of the Orchid and Osmanthus.
鳥鳴枝頭	Bird Calling on a Branch	Bird Singing in a Tree
鳶尾草	Iris and Grasses	Iris
蛛絲網晨露	Dew on a Spider Web in Early Morning	Dew on a Spider Web at Dawn
鷹揚	Eagle	Eagle Fluttering
東戰場的烈火	Flames on the Eastern Battlefield	Flames on the Eastern Battlefield
鼎湖飛瀑	Cascades at Lake Ding	Waterfalls at Lake Ding
杜鵑聲裏雨如煙	Sound of a Cuckoo in Rain as Think as Smoke	Cuckoo Sings in Misty Drizzle
微丹點破一林綠	Colors of Forest Greenery	Blossoms Stands out in Greenery

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