

Translation of the Shanghai School Exhibition: Re-establishing Evocative Resonance and Situational Context

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Abstract: *The Shanghai School (海上画派), a style of Chinese art present in the late 19th century and centered in Shanghai, is the witness and contributor to the advancement of modern Chinese art, embodying all the facts and specimens from that time, and regards the process of Chinese painting from ancient to unique and distinct style as the corresponding modernization. Inspired by the translation project of the grand opening exhibition of Cheng Shifa Art Museum, this paper discusses how to reestablish evocative resonance and situational context in the translation process. Guided by the aesthetics of translation and the psychology of art, the translators try to reemerge the context, connotation, artistry, and creativity of the works of the exhibition in the Chinese-English translations, and to reach the dialogue between the audience and the artists featuring bilingual compatibility, emotional connection, and aesthetic isomorphism.*

Keywords: The Shanghai School; Chinese-English Translation; The Aesthetics Of Translation; Evocative Resonances; Situational Context.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Shanghai School painting referred to as the Shanghai School, one of the schools of Chinese painting, generally epitomized the work and style of the community of excellent artists who were gathered in Shanghai from 1843 to 1927[1]. No other era in Chinese history can produce and embrace such diverse and contradictory artistic discourse as the modern era since the second half of the 19th century, and the Shanghai School, as its witnesses, embodies almost all the facts and specimens for it. This is also the crux of why the Shanghai School is distinguished from the traditional schools of Chinese paintings. However, according to the current research literature that the author can collect, the translation study of Chinese painting has historically been underappreciated and, consequently, understudied in both the translation and the Chinese painting communities, let alone the Shanghai School. This paper provides meaningful insights into how the translation of the Shanghai School descriptions and inscriptions can promote the generation of aesthetic imagination and the realization of evocative resonance and situational context, thus reaching the dialogue between the appreciators and the artists to reveal the deep texture and interaction between aesthetics, psychology, and conception.

2. Introduction to the Shanghai School and the Translation Project

2.1 Brief History and Connotation of the Shanghai School

The birth and development of the Shanghai School, which evolved from the stormy days of the Qing Dynasty to China's peaceful rise, has witnessed the re-emergence of an ancient nation on the international stage. The ups and downs of what the Chinese painting forged ahead from ancient to modern times can be echoed through the unique and distinct style that captured the essence of Oriental and Western aesthetic philosophies called the Shanghai School. Furthermore, no matter the value and path of modernization spanning from offense to defense, or even the positive and negative effects exerted via the introduction of the essences in Western artistic achievements, they are all condensed and documented by the numerous events synched with the progress of the Shanghai School. This not only testifies to the intrinsic rationale of the transformation of Chinese art, but also reveals the trajectory of the modern evolution of China's history of material culture, visual modality, and ideology.

Chinese painting is a main branch of China's traditional arts. Confucianism's emphasis on self-cultivation, Taoism's promotion of the unity of heaven and man, and Buddhism's pursuit of wonderful nature and the peace of life have permeated each other's ideas and become the ideological basis of Chinese painting. The formation and development of the Shanghai School are directly related to the rise of the treaty port Shanghai. Since the opening

of the port in 1840, Shanghai has become not only an international melting pot for the penetration of Western colonialists into China, but also a convergence joint between Chinese and Western civilizations. The Shanghai School artists utilized bolder colors and exaggerated the forms to increase their works' visual impacts, leading to a distinct personality and novel art form to reflect the new artistic direction of Shanghai.

The Shanghai School favored portraiture, popular narrative subjects, and colorful flower-and-bird compositions. In the traditional sense, there are poems and literature from ancient times as the keynote, supplemented by Western contrast method, structural method, coloring method, etc. With the increase in trade from the West, Shanghai became a hub of economic prosperity. A new market emerged in lieu of Shanghai's change and patrons sought something fresh and different from the traditional style of painting that has been present for the past centuries. Artists utilized bolder colors and exaggerated the forms to increase their works' visual impacts, leading to a distinct personality and novel art form to reflect the new artistic direction of Shanghai[2]. The introduction of Chinese paintings often focuses on the painter's art philosophy, life perception, painting techniques, and the profound connotation contained in the paintings with refined language and evocative expressions. Through the Shanghai School, Chinese painting has derived from the branch of modern art.

2.2 The Translation Project of the Grand Opening Exhibition of Cheng Shifa Art Museum

After more than three years of preparation, Cheng Shifa Art Museum opened on schedule. As one of the key projects for the construction of cultural facilities in Shanghai during the "13th Five-Year Plan" period, Cheng Shifa Art Museum will assume the cultural responsibility for the inheritance and development of the Shanghai School art in the future. The Museum has six major functions: exhibition, academic research, education and promotion, cultural exchange, collection and storage, and public service.

The opening exhibition of Cheng Shifa Art Museum provides visitors with an opportunity to appreciate the excellent works of great artists such as Wang Meng, Chen Hongshou, Tang Yin, Xu Wei, Dong Qichang, Fu Shan, and other great works donated by Mr. Cheng. The opening exhibition of the museum covers four major exhibitions, including "Paradigm of the Shanghai School Painting – Exhibition on Cheng Shifa's Works and Related Literature", "Paradigm of the Shanghai School Painting – Exhibition on Works Donated by Cheng Shifa", "The Pantheon of the Shanghai School Artists – Exhibition on Art Literature of Cheng Shifa and Other Artists" and "The Bright Star — A Special Exhibition of Lin Fengmian", manifesting the artistic career of Cheng Shifa and other artists from multiple angles.

This translation project undertakes all the accompanying texts in the opening exhibition, which are no longer limited to labels and catalogs, but may also include audio guides and promotional materials such as websites and online newsletters

3. Reestablishing Evocative Resonances via Descriptions Translation

The evocative resonance of translation indicates that we put two languages together so that the audience can communicate with the artist and connect emotionally, meanwhile, the information embodied in each language is not detracted. In this sense, the translation contents serve to bring to mind and build a relationship of mutual understanding or trust and agreement between people. The essence of translation is not the reciprocal replacement of discourse meanings, but the interpretation and pursuit of discourse meanings in cross-cultural contexts, as well as the birth of aesthetic sensibility. Accordingly, the dialogical nature of translation must be achieved by grasping the meaning in communication[3].

In the early 21st century, China entered a period of political and economic advancement, Chinese people of all ages are increasingly focusing on spiritual pursuits. As the country's power grows stronger, China's young people, mainly Generation Z, are obtaining cultural confidence and cultural identity, and exhibitions related to traditional culture tend to attract the attention of young people today. Visiting exhibitions has gradually become an integral part of people's offline entertainment consumption, and more and more young people go into exhibition halls in their spare time to seek the freedom and abundance that art brings to their inner worlds. However, the difference in resources between developed and underdeveloped regions has led to a huge gap in the number of audiences, interest tendency, professionalism, and other aspects. What the psychology of art wants to reveal is how art works on people and how people experience art. As Mark Rothko said, "A painting is not a depiction of an experience, it is an experience[4]."

The advancement of the Shanghai School is synching with the urban development of Shanghai. Following the first Opium War, Shanghai, located close to the sea at the heart of the prosperous lower Yangzi River delta, burgeoned into China's leading commercial and transportation center. Benefiting from an influx of refugees as well as from expanding trade with the West, Shanghai rapidly shed its regional character and became an international melting pot. As the center of the Shanghai School culture, this cosmopolitan city not only constructs multiple situations with unprecedented openness but also creates an unmatched social tolerance and cultural depth in nearby cities. The Shanghai School culture, which radiates from Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces and even the whole of China with Shanghai as the stronghold, has cultivated a strong audience with aesthetic ability. The combing, salvaging, and digging of the Shanghai School essence by Shanghai local cultural institutions make the Shanghai School no longer a painting school, but a cultural brand, a special cultural phenomenon in the transition period of modernization. Naming an art museum after Mr. Cheng Shifa, a master of the Shanghai School, is enough to reflect Shanghai's cultural confidence and audience base as a landmark of the Shanghai School culture.

In the process of translating the Shanghai School painting descriptions and texts, it is necessary to grasp the "meaning in communication" and the "meaning in the use of language" so as to reach the dialogue between the appreciators and the artists. The translation of the painting descriptions and materials is a kind of purposeful communication behavior, in which "meaning" is the medium for conveying feelings and expressing meanings, and the means for realizing dialogue and communication, but the meaning is also constrained by communication. In the process of translation, if we deviate from the purpose of dialogue and communication, and actively or passively pursue "semantic equivalence", we will inevitably fall short in the generation of evocative resonances, the realization of aesthetic understanding, and the construction of spiritual value.

4. Reestablishing Situational Context via Descriptions Translation

Translation work cannot cater to people of all aesthetic groups, because the "vogue" of language art is a diachronic issue, and people's aesthetic capability is constantly changing over time. Therefore, a translated version of the exhibition is more in the present moment, expressing the translator's interpretation and opinion of the artwork. However, the correct interpretation of art and the world is not to unify it by a schema with strict symmetry and order but to reflect the complex relations among various forces through complex interaction[5]. This is the so-called "translation of the future is better than the translation of the present". In this context, if the art of translation aesthetics overemphasizes the order and lacks the material with enough vitality to arrange it, it will inevitably lead to a kind of rigidity.

Therefore, the translator should analyze the ideological content, genre, literary talent, language variation, and overall style of the work before translation. In addition, it is necessary to obtain the corresponding appropriateness of the translation style to the original language style on this basis. Then the following points should be done when translating: (1) Explore the stylistic significance of the original text in the work: comprehensively grasp the content, connotation, and significance of the work through the study and research of the painter's life, creation method, era background, painting style or relevant commentary and analysis. (2) Complete the conversion of interlingual style meaning: most style marks can be converted, whether they are formal marks or non-formal marks[6]. The avenue and technique of the translator to deal with the meta content of the painting have a great relationship with the translator's ability of interlingual conversion, aesthetic ability, and talent, which can be said to be the re-creation of the meaning of the work. (3) Consider the audience and the current aesthetic demands of the times: In communication, creators should not blindly pursue the "adaptability" of the original text and their own translation conventions without taking into account the changes and development of the times, readers' aesthetic quality and artistic pursuit.

Accordingly, the following translation methods can be provided:

4.1 Dynamic Imitation

Dynamic imitation is based on dynamic equivalence (B. Hatim, 2006:40), which is clearly principled. This type of imitation takes the best of both the source language and the target language, and is a kind of synthesized imitation. That is to say, imitation is based on the original language when it is as per the original language, and on the source language when it is as per the source language, all depending on the optimum. Therefore, dynamic imitation is also called "optimized imitation"[7]. Dynamic imitation requires the translator to be more adaptable and to regard imitation as a means of adaptation and optimization rather than a set pattern. An example is as follows:

Example 1: "应野平传统功力深厚,遵循"笔墨当随时代"的创作理念,能深入大自然,外师造化,并借鉴西画,格调清新,气韵生动,最终自成一派,为丰富、完善现代水墨山水画具有不可磨灭的成就。"(作品:《毛主席登庐山诗》,作者:应野平)

Translation: Ying had a good command of Chinese painting while he drew on Western paintings and learned from nature, developing his unique style especially revealed in the lucid and lively brushwork and the vivid depiction of natural landscapes. He followed the creative concept of "painting with the times" and scored indelible achievements in enriching and perfecting modern ink landscape painting. (*Inspired by Chairman Mao's Poem Composed After Climbing the Mount Lu*, by Ying Yeping)

Dynamic imitation should maintain or essentially maintain the original meaning. The imitation should not violate the original meaning of the text or inscription: semantics can be integrated, but not shortened or contradicted. The translator tries best to keep the basic original meaning, flexibly handles the format beauty of the original text, does not insist on the correspondence of the text on the diction including the word order, and tries to seek parallel correspondences or substitutions in the translation, and translates the descriptions and texts in a different way.

4.2 Combination of Styles

The so-called combination of styles has two layers of meanings: one is that the genre or writing style of the work in the source language has changed, forming a blended style, and the translator has to change the style or register level of the translation with the change of the genre or style; the other is that the original paragraph or text style does not change, but the translator mixes the translation into the translator's appropriate style variation as per the content[8]. The following is an example:

Example 2: "1958年夏月,苏州洞庭东山与西山的枇杷、杨梅大丰收,画家有感而发,创作了《洞庭丰产》图。这幅画行笔浑朴遒劲,似信手所至,出神入化,设色厚重浓艳,色墨交融,古意盎然;画面上方的题诗,说明画家善于以诗意入画,以书法入画,是现实与浪漫相结合。"(作品:《洞庭丰产》,作者:王个簃)

Translation: In the summer of 1958, Suzhou Dongshan Island (respectively fully named Dongting Dongshan and Dongting Xishan) enjoyed a good harvest of loquat and red bayberry. Inspired by such a magnificent scene, Wang created this work in bold, vigorous, yet seemingly freehand strokes. The rich and thick tones blend, and the color and ink turn this painting exuding the makings of quaintness. The inscription on the top of the work manifests that the painter is adept at combining the artistic essence of poetry and calligraphy with painting, as well as the perfect combination of reality with romance. (*Good Harvest of Dongting Islands*, by Wang Geyi)

The classical or literary Chinese ("浑朴遒劲,似信手所至,出神入化,设色厚重浓艳,色墨交融,古意盎然") is distinct in the original text. The rich and heavy tones of colors and the harmonious blend of colors and ink give this picture a quality of quaintness. Experienced translators usually pay great attention to the characteristics of their own style, the overall style of the original text, and the adaptation in translation, so as to correspond with the source language especially the original author's rhetoric at all levels of the language and seek the same spirit.

4.3 Stylistic Dilution

The essence of "stylistic dilution" is that the stylistic significance of the original text has to be abandoned or partially abandoned on the premise of ensuring the conceptual significance. All works in the past and present, at home and abroad, have their own unique "sentiment", so it is almost impossible for the translation to reproduce the original character completely. The reason for this lies in the differences in language and culture among nations, the difference between the translator's knowledge structure, artistic accomplishment, and aesthetic ability and the artist's, and the difference between the translator's understanding of the original style and the original author's, and the differences between the translator's understanding of the style of the original work and the original artist's, so that the translator often encounters all kinds of contradictions and is forced to preserve or give up certain things, for example, so that the adoption of a diluted conversion style can be said to be both an artistic necessity and an artistic inevitability. Take the following example:

Example 3: "其时为避战乱,他举家迁至杭州,借用龚自珍的《己亥杂诗》,以花自喻,意谓自己虽处境艰难,载着浩荡离愁,依然心系国家命运,不为独香,而为护花,至死仍要为国尽力。伤怀之意,壮怀之情,含而不露。"(作品:《落红不是无情物》,作者:丰子恺)

Translation: The painting was created during his flight to Hangzhou with his family from the war-torn area. The inscription on the work is a line quoted from a well-known poem by Gong Zizhen, a famous poet in the Qing

Dynasty (1636-1912), which indicates that he still cares about the fate of the country though in a tough situation, and was ready to dedicate his all and even his life to the country. The sad sentiments and heroic spirit in this painting appeal to the hearts of the visitors. (*Falling Petals Are Not Cold-hearted*, by Feng Zikai)

The essence of diluting the style is to give up part of the original stylistic meaning under the premise of ensuring the conceptual meaning, for example, "浩荡离愁"(vast sadness), "伤怀之意,壮怀之情,含而不露"(sadness and strong feelings, containing but not revealing). Therefore, in the process of style conversion from Chinese to English, attention should be paid to preventing the copying of the content. Sometimes, in order to accurately express the content and style of the original work, certain expressions in the original work have to be added, deleted, and appropriately changed.

5. Conclusion

The re-establishing of evocative resonance and situational context in the translation of paintings of the Shanghai School depends on the corresponding appropriateness of the translation style to the original language style, so it is necessary to maintain a moderate relationship between the translation subject, the object, and the meaning, and grasp the meaning in the communication. In translation practice, the translator is required to maintain a moderate understanding, aesthetic kinships, and comprehension of the original text, and at the same time, leave a certain imagination space for the recipient in the translation process; for the audience, it should be based on different aesthetic, linguistic and cultural contexts.

For the promotion of Chinese culture in Western countries or regions, most of the translation work will have to confront and deal with cross-contextual obstacles, so it is difficult to avoid the prelude in syntax semantics analysis and temporal semantics analysis, and the efforts in meticulous background research. In the limited space available, we have to leave some space in advance for ourselves and the audience to interpret figures and events that are interdisciplinary, transnational, and transhistorical, or that have grown out of a process of multiplicity collision, empathy, and fusion, including the concepts, systems, media, discourses, and social contexts involved.

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