

# Analyses of Two Translation Versions of *He Tang Yue Se* Under the Guidance of Skopos Theory

Jing Yu

School of Sichuan Normal University, Chengdu 610000, China

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**Abstract:** The translation of Zhu Ziqing's works could help us to introduce more Chinese culture to the world, especially Chinese prose. Therefore, it's very necessary to compare and analyze different translation versions so that the most proper one could be used to propagate Chinese culture. Under the guidance of Skopos theory, the analysis could be more rigorous and convincing.

**Keywords:** Skopos theory, Three rules, *He Tang Yue Se*.

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## 1. Introduction

Modern Chinese prose has developed in several decades and reflects the Chinese social life comprehensively. Prose is defined as a piece of literary writing with clear-cut theme, exquisite language, short length and genuine emotion. It records what I (the author) experience, what I see and hear, what I feel and think. Zhu Ziqing was a renowned Chinese poet and essayist, was a pioneering literature figure in pushing forward China's modernism in the early 20th century. The translation of Zhu Ziqing's works could help us to introduce more Chinese culture to the world. Therefore, it's very necessary to compare and analyze different translation versions so that the most proper one could be used to propagate Chinese culture. Under the guidance of Skopos theory, the analysis could be more rigorous and convincing.

### 1.1. Background Information of *He Tang Yue Se*

*He Tang Yue Se* (namely moonlight in the lotus pond) is a Chinese prose written by Zhu Ziqing, a modern Chinese writer who has taught at Tsinghua University. It is a famous modern lyric prose, widely known for being included in the Chinese textbooks of middle school. The prose describes a beautiful scene of moonlight in the lotus pond in the Tsinghua Garden, which implicitly expresses the author's dissatisfaction with the reality, his longing for freedom, and his complicated thoughts and feelings that he cannot escape. It also expresses the author's political ambitions yearning for the future and his love for the moonlight in the lotus pond. The full text is novel and exquisite, the language is fresh and elegant, while the scenery is delicate and vivid.

### 1.2. An Introduction to Two Translators

This article has chosen two translation versions, one was translated by Zhu Chunshen from China while the other was translated by David E. Pollard, a veteran scholar of sinology.

Zhu Chunshen has taught translation since 1982. Zhu received his PhD from the University of Nottingham, Britain and MA from Fujian Normal University, China. He taught at Fujian Normal University and the National University of Singapore before joining City University of Hong Kong in September 1998.

David E. Pollard, now retired, was formerly Professor of Chinese in the University of London and thereafter Professor

of Translation in The Chinese University of Hong Kong. His principal fields of research and publication have been modern Chinese literature, classical Chinese prose and translation studies. Books published by The Chinese University Press have been *The True Story of Lu Xun (2002)* and *Zhou Zuoren: Selected Essays (2006)*; his *The Chinese Essay (1999)* was published by the Research Centre for Translation, also CUHK.

## 2. Theoretical Basis

The Skopos theory, also called Skopostheorie in German, first appeared in an article published by linguist Hans Josef Vermeer in the German Journal *Lebende Sprachen*, 1978. Skopos is a Greek word defined as "purpose" (Christiane Nord, 2018). It is a technical term coined by Hans Vermeer, representing the aim or target of a translation.

### 2.1. An Overview of Skopos theory

According to Vermeer, there are three possible types of translation purposes. Firstly, a general purpose that every translator may strive for, such as taking translation as way to make money. Secondly, a communicative purpose for the readers to have a communication with the target text. Lastly, the purpose as a translation strategy or approach to show the structure of the original text. In the Skopos theory, it refers to the second one, a communicative purpose for the readers to have a communication with the target text.

However, unlike the past translation theories, the Skopos theory does not require functional equivalence to the original text. Instead, it emphasize the purpose of the translation action. The Skopos Theory suggests that translations should focus on the target culture and language illustrating the source text, their effects on the reader, and the original author's purpose as decisive factors, rather than the effects and purposes of the source language.

As a realisation of James Holmes' map of Translation Studies (1972), skopos theory is the core of the four approaches of German functionalist translation theory that emerged around the late twentieth century. They were part of the development of skopos theory contributed by scholars of translation studies, categorised into four stages: Katharina Reiss's Functional Category, 1971; Hans Vermeer's Skopos theory, 1978; Justa-Holz Manttari's Theory of Translational Action, 1981; Christiane Nord's Theory of 'Function plus Loyalty', 1997 (Du Xiaoyan, 2012).

## 2.2. Major Concepts of Skopos Theory

From Reiß's and Vermeer's development of the Skopos Theory, six directives emerged, based on the three main rules governing Skopos Theory. The six underlying directives are: A translatum is determined by its Skopos; A translatum is an offer of information in a target culture and language concerning an offer of information in a source culture and source language; A translatum does not initiate an offer of information in a clearly reversible way; A translatum must be internally coherent; A translatum must be coherent with the source text; The five rules above stand in hierarchical order, with the Skopos rule predominating. (Katharina and Vermeer, 1984)

The three main rules of the Skopos Theory that encompass the six underlying directives are: the Skopos rule, the Coherence rule and the Fidelity rule (Zhang Lili, 2016). The third rule, the Fidelity rule, is subordinate to the second rule, the Coherence rule, which in turn is subordinate to the Skopos rule.

The Skopos rule thus reads as follows: translate/interpret/speak/write in a way that enables your text/translation to function in the situation it is used and with the people who want to use it and precisely in the way they want it to function (Nord, 1997). It places emphasis on a top-down approach that underscores the target text.

The Coherence rule requires the translator to produce meaningful translations. That means while the translator is doing the translation, he or she should take the receivers' cultural background and social circumstances into consideration so that the meaning of the original text could be conveyed to the receivers accurately. As quoted from Nord, this rule states: A translation should be acceptable in a sense that it is coherent with the receivers' situation. Nord went on to elaborate that: A communicative interaction can only be regarded as successful if the receivers interpret it as being sufficiently coherent with their situation (Christiane Nord, 2018).

The Fidelity rule shows that the form of the target text would be determined by both the translator's interpretation of the source text and the translation's purpose, where form and degree of the translation changes depending on the translator's interpretation of the source text. The Fidelity rule only requires either maximal faithful imitations or minimal to no relevance to the source (or anything within this range).

## 3. Analyses of Two Translation Versions Under the Guidance of Skopos Theory

### Example 1

Source text: 于是又记起《西洲曲》里的句子: 采莲南塘秋, 莲花过人头; 低头弄莲子, 莲子清如水。

Zhu's translation: Then I recall those lines in *Ballad of Xizhou Island*: *Gathering the lotus, I am in the South Pond, /The lilies in autumn reach over my head; /Lowering my head I toy with the lotus seeds. /Look, they are as fresh as the water underneath.*

David's translation: I went on to recall these lines from "Song of the Western Eyot": We gather from the South pond in autumn. The lotus flowers are higher than a man's head. We bend to get the lotus seeds up. The lotus seeds are as green as water.

Analyses: "《西洲曲》" is a famous and representative work

of Yuefu folk songs in the Southern Dynasty, belonging to typical Chinese culture. When doing the translation, the translator should keep the Chinese characteristic as far as possible so as to make the receivers know more about Chinese culture. At the same time, in accordance with the Skopos theory, the translator also should take the receivers' cultural background and social circumstances into consideration so that the meaning of the original text could be conveyed to the receivers accurately.

"曲" is translated as "ballad" in Zhu's translation, and translated as "song" in David's translation. It has been mentioned that "《西洲曲》" is a famous and representative work of Yuefu folk songs in the Southern Dynasty. "Song" means a short piece of music with words that you sing, which cannot show up the Chinese characteristic of "曲". "Ballad" means a poem that tells a story, which is much better than "song" to some degree. Therefore, it's not proper to translate "曲" into "song" or "ballad" only. We can add some explanation or modifier to make it more complete with Chinese characteristic. For example, we can translate it into "Chinese ballad". Or we can keep the Pinyin of "曲", and make an explanation after it, such as "qu (Chinese ballad)".

In ancient Chinese, "西洲" is usually used to refer to a place where people who fall in love with each other to gather or say goodbye. "洲" means small island or eyot. In Zhu's translation, "西洲" is translated as "Xizhou Island" which keeps its Chinese Pinyin and adds an explanation. It follows the Skopos theory which not only take the receivers' background into consideration, but also is helpful to spread Chinese culture to foreigners. In David's translation, "西洲" is translated as "the Western Eyot". It may confuse the receivers to believe that "西洲" is just an eyot in the west, which cannot represent Chinese characteristic. Therefore, in accordance with the Skopos theory, "Xizhou Island" is much more suitable.

"采莲南塘秋, 莲花过人头; 低头弄莲子, 莲子清如水" is a Chinese ballad, which is much more like a poem. There are four small sentences in it and each of them has five Chinese characters. In Zhu's translation, there are nine words each in the first, third and fourth sentences, and eight words only in the second sentence. In David's translation, there are there are eight words each in the first, third and fourth sentences, and nine words only in the second sentence. Both of them have paid much attention to the number of words which is helpful to keep the characteristic of this poem. However, in Zhu's translation, he used some commas to add some parenthesis, embodying the Fidelity rule which requires either maximal faithful imitations or minimal to no relevance to the source (or anything within this range).

### Example 2

Source text: 月光是隔了树照过来的, 高处丛生的灌木, 落下参差的斑驳的黑影, 峭楞楞如鬼一般; 弯弯的杨柳的稀疏的倩影, 却又像是画在荷叶上。塘中的月色并不均匀; 但光与影有着和谐的旋律, 如梵婀玲上奏着的名曲。

Zhu's translation: The moonlight is streaming down through the foliage, casting bushy shadows on the ground from high above, dark and checkered, like an army of ghosts; whereas the benign figures of the drooping willows, here and there, look like paintings on the lotus leaves. The moonlight is not spread evenly over the pond, but rather in a harmonious rhythm of light and shade, like a famous melody played on a violin.

David's translation: The moonlight was filtered through the

trees, while the clumps of bushes on the high ground cast heavy irregular mottled shadows. The spare silhouettes of the arching willows appeared to be painted on the lotus leaves. The moonlight on the pond was not all smooth and even, but the rhythm of light and shade was harmonious, like a musical masterpiece played on a violin.

Analyses: In accordance with the Skopos theory, the translation should be acceptable in a sense that it is coherent with the receivers' situation. In Zhu's translation, the sentence structure is almost the same to the source text. There are only two long sentences in his version. In David's translation, he cut two long sentences into three shorter ones, which are much more suitable to the English readers as they prefer to read shorter sentences. David's translation has put the receivers' situation into fuller consideration comparatively.

When it comes to the translation of “峭楞楞如鬼一般”, Zhu translated it into “like an army of ghosts”. However, David made an omission here by just deleting the sentence. According to the Skopos theory, a translation does not initiate an offer of information in a clearly reversible way. Though David deleted the metaphor in the source text, it does not influence the receivers to get the full information. Therefore, it's acceptable to make an omission here.

However, *He Tang Yue Se* is a Chinese prose. The scenes in the Chinese prose are usually used to express the emotion of the author. Although, by deleting the sentence “峭楞楞如鬼一般”, the translation is more concise, it lacks the expression of the author's emotion to some degree. The definition of ghost is the spirit of a dead person that a living person believes they can see or hear. The source text uses “鬼 (the ghost)” to emphasize the darkness of the shadows, which also means the darkness of the author's life or feeling. At the same time, Chinese people sometimes use “鬼 (the ghost)” to describe one's loneliness, such as “孤魂野鬼”. From the whole source text, it's clear that the author is thinking about his own hometown and feels lonely in other people's hometown. Therefore, it's better to keep the translation of “峭楞楞如鬼一般” so that the loneliness could be better embodied.

In the translation of “塘中的月色并不均匀；但光与影有着和谐的旋律，如梵婀玲上奏着的名曲”，both Zhu and David followed the sentence structure of the source text. In the Skopos theory, the Fidelity rule stresses inter-textual coherence. The source text and the translations all have three short sentences. And the logic of the source text and the translations are the same, which not only keeps the characteristic of the source text, but also describes a beautiful picture of moonlight for the receivers.

## 4. Conclusion

With the guidance of the Skopos theory, we could compare different translation versions in a more convincing and scientific way. The Skopos theory, including the Skopos rule, the Coherence rule and the Fidelity rule, could be applied to check the qualification of different translation versions. In this essay, the source text is a typical Chinese modern prose which is full of emotion. Therefore, the purpose of translation could be spreading Chinese culture, especially Chinese prose. Under the guidance of the Skopos theory, the translator also should take the receivers' cultural background and social circumstances into consideration so that the meaning of the original text could be conveyed to the receivers accurately. So it's necessary to translate cultural loaded words in an accurate way such as “《西洲曲》”. After comparing two different translation versions, we can find that there are so many translation methods that we can learn. With the guidance of a proper theory we can analyse the translations in a much deeper way.

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