

The Construction of Actor-Network in the Translation of Boy in The Twilight: Stories of the Hidden China

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Abstract: Renowned translator Allan H. Barr completed his translation of Yu Hua's *Boy in The Twilight: Stories of the Hidden China* in 2002, but it was not published until 2014. Among Yu Hua's novels, this is the first one Allan H. Barr translated. After years of capital accumulation, this short story was published successfully and received favorable reviews from well-known newspapers such as *The Economist*. This paper will mainly use Bruno Latour's actor-network theory (ANT) as the main theoretical model and explore the actor-network construction of the successful translation of the short story *Boy in The Twilight: Stories of the Hidden China* based on domestic and international literature, Amazon platform and online information.

Keywords: Actor-network, Allan H. Barr, *Boy in The Twilight: Stories of the Hidden China*.

1. Introduction

Boy in The Twilight was published by Writer's Publishing House in China in 2012. It contains twelve pieces, which are the closest to reality among short and medium-sized novels. Author Yu Hua is a famous contemporary Chinese writer with many long novels, short stories, essays and miscellaneous articles. His works have been translated into more than 40 languages and have won many awards. His long novels *To Live*, *Chronicle of a Blood Merchant* and *Brothers: A Novel* have won the Italian Premio GrinzaneCavour, 1998; the U.S. Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers Award, 2004 and Prix Courier International, 2008, respectively. However, the dissemination of his short stories overseas has been somewhat less successful, probably because "the market for short story collections in the United States is much less promising than that for full-length novels" (Gao and Yu, 2014). *Boy in The Twilight* was translated by Professor Allan H. Barr, who completed the translation in 2002 (Wang and Barr, 2021), yet the book was only published in 2014. During this period, the novel, the author, the translator, the editor, and the publisher were interconnected to contribute to the successful publication and distribution of the book. Yu Hua (2014) said, "Don't think that being published is a success, many books are published without a name, which is the same as not being published at all." This also reflects that the foreign translation of Chinese literary works is a process involving many parties and social factors. Wang Hongtao (2011) points out that translation as a social activity, its process constitutes a specific social relationship or social network between the translator and other people or other social organizations. Therefore, it is necessary to study the relationship between translation activities and socio-cultural environment and to analyze the study of translation from a social perspective. The Actor Network Theory (ANT), founded in the mid-1980s, "It will enable translation researchers to pay more attention to the translation production process and redefine translation actors to take various actors into account" Bogic (2010: 180). At the same time, it is an "unexpected allies" to compensate for the shortcomings of Pierre Bourdieu's social practice theory Buzelin (2005: 215).

Therefore, this paper uses the sociological theory of Actor-Network to sort out the construction of Actor-Network in the translation project of *Boy in The Twilight*, hoping to learn from its successful way to promote the overseas dissemination of Chinese literary works.

2. Actor-Network Theory

Social-translation studies began in the 1990s, exploring the social attributes of translation and deciphering the process of translation production and dissemination. By approaching from the perspective of sociological theory, it can reveal the "overall operation trajectory, rules and logic of translation activities from occurrence to development, from dissemination to reception" (Wang Hongtao, 2016). The most representative social translation theories include Niklas Luhmann's social systems theory, Pierre Bourdieu's social practice theory and Bruno Latour's actor-network theory. Compared with the first two, ANT-based translation research has developed more slowly. Actor network theory (ANT) was founded in the mid-1980s with Bruno Latour, Michel Callon and John Law as the main founders. ANT is at the heart of Latour's (2005) translation, with its core concepts of actor/actant/agency, translation, and network. First, the most important innovation of ANT for the concept of actor is to emphasize its heterogeneity, dynamism and indeterminacy (Wang Youlu, 2019). Latour (2005: 71) points out that ANT refers to actors as both human actors and non-human actors such as conceptual, technological, and biological actors, i.e., "For all the other members of society, it does make a difference under trials and so these implements, according to our definition, are actors, or more precisely, participants in the course of action waiting to be given a figuration." Latour suggests that researchers should "follow the actors" and describe how they construct social networks through their actions. Thus, the concept of "actor" is particularly important. Second, the term "translation" is not the same as "translation" in the discipline of translation. Specifically, Translation refers to "the methods by which an actor enrolls others". The way in which the various actors engaged in production/innovation processes (actors whose primary interests are not necessarily the same) interpret their own objectives into each other's

language so as to ensure everyone's proper participation (or the dismissal of some actors if necessary), and the continuation of the project until fulfilment. (Buzelin, 2005). "Callon identifies four key stages of ANT translation: problematisation, intersement, enrolment, and mobilisation. Each stage represents "negotiation, conspiracy, calculation, persuasion or violence" between actors (Callon & Latour, 1981). Third, ANT is more concerned with the networks of relationships that actors associate with each other (Wang Baorong, 2014). The "network" here is not a social or technological network in the general sense. The basic logic of actor-network theory is that society is a network system formed through the interaction of various actors (Luo, 2020). Callon (1999: 182) points out that ANT emphasizes the importance of networks because no matter how strong an individual is, a single actor cannot accomplish an action alone, but needs energy from other actors in the network to accomplish the action together. The focus of actor network theory is "to use actor-network theory to look at how actors work the net that we are trying to describe" (Huang, 2006).

In foreign countries, Buzelin (2005) first introduced ANT into translation research, and since then, the main research on the application of ANT in translation studies include Andrew Chesterman (2006), Francis R. Jones (2009), Anna Bogic (2010), and so on. In China, Huang Dexian (2006), who first introduced the actor network to the domestic translation community, pointed out that "actor network theory provides a new research method for translation research, which is to follow the translator". After that, Wang Baorong (2014, 2017), Xu Shiyan (2016), Wang Cuilu (2017, 2019), Zhang Qifan (2019), Zhang Ying (2019), Luo Wenyan (2020) and other scholars have used actor-network theory to study the translation production process.

3. The Construction of Actor-network in the Foreign Translation of *Boy in The Twilight: Stories of the Hidden China*

3.1. Translation Project Initiation

Allan H. Barr received his B.A. in Oriental Studies from Cambridge University and his Ph.D. in Chinese Literature from Oxford University, and is currently a professor in the Department of Asian Languages and Literatures at Pomona College in California. Professor Barr has always been interested in the literature of late Ming and early Qing dynasties in 17th century China (Zhang Lili, 1995), and gradually began to work continuously on translations of contemporary Chinese literature. In early 2000, he read Yu Hua's *Boy in The Twilight : Stories of the Hidden China*, and was so captivated by it that he decided to translate it into English (Bai Yaren, *Confessions of an Amateur Translator* 31-32). This was also the first time he translated Yu Hua's work. On the one hand, he was moved by "the stories of the little people" in *Boy in The Twilight : Stories of the Hidden China* and had the idea of translating it (Zhao Hongjuan, 2020). On the other hand, translating contemporary Chinese literature "opened up a whole new field of activity" (Wang and Barr, 2021). The translation of *Boy in The Twilight* was initiated by Allan H. Barr as an "actor" with the help of the American sinologist Andrew F. Jones (translator of Yu Hua's *The Past and the Punishments: Eight Stories*). They met in Beijing in 2001, and their collaboration began over the years.

3.2. Actor-network Pathways 2002-2014

3.2.1. Translation and Post-translation

The translator Allan H. Barr has always respected the author and the original work in the process of translating *Boy in The Twilight*. He once mentioned in a seminar that he "disapproves of translators' unauthorized changes to Chinese writers' works" (Allan H. Barr, 2010). Therefore, during the translation process, he actively communicated with Yu Hua through emails or phone calls when he encountered problems. This is also in line with Yu Hua's statement that "respect for the original should be the bottom line of translation" (Gao and Yu, 2014). "Of course, this respect is living, not dead" (Gao and Yu, 2014), as there are great differences between Chinese and Western languages and societies and cultures, when translating, after discussing with the original authors, Barr sometimes needs to use various flexible translation methods. For example, in the chapter "Victory", the line "我们回家吧", which marks Lin Hong's crucial victory, is deleted, leaving a laughing but silent ending. Source text is "她的手从李汉林身上松开, 她的嘴也从李汉林嘴上移开, 然后它微笑地对李汉林说: "我们回家吧" Barr's translation version is "Her hands slipped off Li Hanlin's body, and her mouth disengaged from his. She turned to him with a smile". The previous sentence, "她的手从李汉林身上松开, 她的嘴也从李汉林嘴上移开" is already a good ending, "我们回家吧" can be deleted to leave more room for imagination. This is also reflected in Barr's (2014) comment that "the differences in language and form of the novel may pose a greater challenge to Western readers". He argues that the English translation of *Fortress Besieged* "relies too much on "telling" and not enough on "showing".

The period from 1996 to 2003 was a very important one for Yu Hua. In 2003, *To Live* and *Chronicle of a Blood Merchant* were published by Random House which was founded in 1927 and headquartered in New York is the world's largest international publisher of English-language business. Knopf Doubleday, one of its nine major publishing brands, including six publishing houses (e.g. Pantheon Books, Vintage Books, Anchor Books, etc.), which mainly publish literary works and books of political importance. It has a strong capital strength and market appeal in the English-speaking world and even globally. These two books could not have been published without Yu Hua's agent, Joanne Wang. She sent the translations to many publishers, and Chinese-American author Harkin helped recommend them until the rights were bought by LuAnn Walther, editor of Random House. LuAnn Walther is the vice president of Knopf, the publishing group of Random House, and the editor of Harkin. It was also on the basis of the actor-network that had already been formed for *To Live* and *Chronicle of a Blood Merchant* that Barr was able to further the project of *Boy in The Twilight*, which the translator completed in 2002 and "took on the job of an agent" (Gao and Yu, 2014). He reached out to LuAnn Walther and kept in touch by email and phone. The editor and publisher were successfully enrolled. Once editors and publishers were enrolled by the translator and Yu Hua and agreed to publish *Boy in The Twilight*, they became stakeholders in the actor-network and promoted the publication of the novel in various ways and actively marketed it. In order to get better sales and reviews for the short story, editor LuAnn Walther suggested waiting until Yu Hua was better known in the United States before arranging for publication. This was certainly the right and far-sighted decision.

3.2.2. Capital Accumulation of Author and Translator

According to Bourdieu, capital also refers to immaterial forms of non-economic capital, including cultural capital, social capital and symbolic capital. Cultural capital refers to the education, occupations, and cultural resources (e.g., writings, translations) that individuals receive in social space; social capital refers to the various interpersonal relationships and social obligations that individuals have in social space; symbolic capital refers to "any form of capital that is understood symbolically". Between the completion of Barr's translation of *Boy in The Twilight* in 2002 and its publication in 2014, both the author and the translator continued to possess considerable cultural, social and symbolic capital.

For author Yu Hua, firstly, his relationships with editors and publishers have gradually stabilized. The publications of *To Live* and *Chronicle of a Blood Merchant* in 2003 were well received. English versions of Yu Hua's novels often appear later, such as *Cries in the Drizzle*, which was published in Italy in 1998. But as the author's capital grew, Random House quickly published Yu Hua's *Cries in the Drizzle* in 2007, *Brothers: A Novel* in 2009, and *China in Ten Words* in 2011. Of course, this achievement would not have been possible without editor LuAnn Walther. Barr (2021) mentioned that the name "Lu Xun" did not fit well with the English cover design. But Yu Hua said he wanted to keep the chapter, and LuAnn respected his choice and did not mention the change again. The stable and continuous cooperation between Yu Hua and his editor has been very helpful to the overseas translation of his novels. Secondly, Yu Hua gradually has a large readership. For example, on Amazon.com, James O'Neill said: "I have read almost all of his books." Thirdly, he has won many awards and has gained high credibility and popularity in the world. The novel *To Live* was awarded the Premio GrinzaneCavour literary prize, the highest prize in Italian literature (1998), and the James Joyce Award from the Literary and Historical Society of the University of Dublin, Ireland (2002, the first Chinese writer to win this award); *Chronicle of a Blood Merchant* was shortlisted for the Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers Award (2004), and *Brothers: A Novel* won the first Prix Courier International (2008) in France. For translator Allan H. Barr, *Boy in The Twilight* was a translation project he initiated, and he used Andrew F. Jones' social capital to reach Yu Hua. But after that, the translation projects were initiated by Yu Hua, who invited him to do so. With the publication of these translations, especially *China in Ten Words*, which received widespread attention and acclaim, Barr established his reputation in the translation field. In 2010, 2012 and 2014, he was invited to participate in the "International Symposium on Literary Translation by Sinologists" organized by the Chinese Writers' Association for three consecutive years.

3.3. Final Construction of the Actor-network

3.3.1. Design of *Boy in The Twilight: Stories of the Hidden China*

First of all, for translated literary works, the paratext is rationally designed to be able to provide a guide in the field of exotic literature to attract readers of the target language to read. On the title, the English translation of 《黄昏里的男孩》 has added a subtitle (*Stories of Hidden China*). Most Western readers want to understand the current situation of China through Chinese literature, so this mystery is in line with their prying mind. In the cover design, the main title and subtitle are placed in two circles to cover the boy's eyes. The mystery

of the entire novel cover can attract more readers. Secondly, *Boy in The Twilight: Stories of the Hidden China* is available on Amazon.com in three sales formats: Kindle eBook US\$12.99, hardcover US\$14.95, paperback US\$11.37. The publisher of *Boy in The Twilight*, Random House, has a good reputation and a strong marketing network, so it can guarantee the success of the English translation of Yu Hua's work. Its Pantheon Books specializes in hardcover books, and Anchor Books has published paperbacks of many top authors' works. Hardcover books attract more attention from critics, while lower-priced paperbacks sell more than hardcovers. This distribution model ensures success in both directions, in terms of reviews and sales.

3.3.2. Dissemination of *Boy in The Twilight: Stories of the Hidden China*

After the publication of the translation, reviews of the work by mainstream media and authorities are very important. The *New Yorker* published one of the pieces of *Boy in The Twilight* and introduced the novel on August 26, 2013. The editor of the review section of the *New York Times* also sent congratulations (Gao and Yu, 2014). The *Economist* rated it as "Compelling. Precise, elegant prose." The *Boston Globe*, *The Huffington Post*, *Boston Review*, *The New York Journal of Books*, and others have also published high praise. On Amazon, the rating of *Boy in The Twilight* is 46% out of 5 stars and 17% out of 4 stars, which also shows that readers approve of the book. Bradley W. Bleck said: "if you are looking to get a sense of life in recent China, Hua's stories provide an engaging insight that is a pleasure to read." The publicity and reviews will help the translation spread overseas.

4. Reflections and Insights

First, in the process of foreign dissemination of Chinese literary works, authors, translators, agents, editors, and publishers are all indispensable, and they all work together to promote the construction of a network of translation projects. Second, the marketing of translated works is the last step of network construction that cannot be ignored. For example, the overseas marketing of *Wolf Totem* is very successful, which is inseparable from the publisher's big promotion strategy. In order to tie in with the release of the English version of *Wolf Totem*, Penguin Publishing Group has held a series of promotion activities worldwide. Because of the author's limited ability to access foreign language materials, the research on the promotion of the translated book in this paper can only be conducted through the Amazon book sales platform, which is the shortcoming of this paper. Third, Yu Hua's works have many different translations in many countries, and their popularity varies in different countries. For example, the translation of *Chronicle of a Blood Merchant* is more successful in Korea, whether it indicates or not that besides social factors, the actor-network of translations in different countries also has some influence on the dissemination of the works. This requires a joint study by multilingual scholars. The section headings are in boldface capital and lowercase letters. Second level headings are typed as part of the succeeding paragraph (like the subsection heading of this paragraph). All manuscripts must be in English, also the table and figure texts, otherwise we cannot publish your paper. Please keep a second copy of your manuscript in your office. When receiving the paper, we assume that the corresponding authors grant us the copyright to use the paper for the book or journal in question. When

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5. Summary

This paper composes the process of building the actor-network of *Boy in The Twilight*: Stories of the Hidden China, and the successful translation of Yu Hua's novel provides a reference for the foreign translation of Chinese literary works. Yu Hua has talked about how Western society is surprised that his books are not banned in China, and that Western society's understanding of China is lagging behind. Therefore, it is more important for Chinese literary works to strengthen overseas communication and continuously improve their influence overseas. In addition, it is meaningful to study the translation process from a sociological perspective, not only for literary works, but also for gongfu stories, science fictions, etc. It is also worthwhile to dig deeper.

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