

On the Subtitle Translation of *Mulan* from the Perspective of Three Beauties

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Abstract: Watching movies is an essential entertainment activity in daily life. With the development of globalization, cultural exchanges between countries have been further deepened. As a result, China began to introduce a large number of Western movies. To facilitate a better understanding of these foreign movies among domestic audiences, the translation of movie subtitles has gained increasing importance. From the perspective of Three Beauties, this paper mainly discusses the subtitle translation of the movie *Mulan*. Through the analysis of subtitle translation, it is revealed that subtitle translation plays a unique role in conveying the cultural connotation of the original work, shaping the image of the characters and creating the atmosphere of the film. The paper highlights that subtitle translation should not only accurately convey the semantic information of the original work, but also emphasize the transmission of aesthetic value to make the audience experience the communication and collision between different cultures while enjoying the film. Through a comprehensive analysis of the subtitle translation of *Mulan*, this paper aims to provide a useful reference for the future practice of subtitle translation.

Keywords: Translation Aesthetics; *Mulan*; Subtitle Translation; Three Beauties.

1. Introduction

Film is an important medium for people to understand the world and to spread the cultures of different countries. With globalization, China began to introduce a large number of Western film and television works. Due to the cultural differences between the East and the West, professional translation is needed when introducing these films. Therefore, good translation is the key to the audience's acceptance of the movie. Compared with traditional translation studies, subtitle translation studies are not mature enough and have not formed a systematic theoretical system. However, studying subtitles in film and television from the perspective of translation aesthetics is the tendency of the times. It is of great significance to successfully translate the subtitles of English film and television works under the guidance of Three Beauties, as audience can better understand the information and culture expressed in the film.

Xu Yuanhong, a leading figure in the field of translation in mainland China, has refined the concept of the "Three Beauties Theory" in the translation of Chinese classical poetry (1. Zhu&Zhang 2021). Three Beauties theory contain the standard, objective and nature of poetry translation (2. Xie 2012). It is another great innovation of translation aesthetics and it made great conslation of our country. The theory of "Three Beauties" indicates that translators should not only pursue the similarity of literal meanings, but also convey the temperament, format, and artistic conception of the original works (3. Zhu 2020).

Disney's film *Mulan* is based on the folk song "Mulan Poem" from the Northern Chinese Dynasties, and interprets the classic Chinese story from a Western perspective. The protagonist was born during the Northern and Southern Dynasties period in China. At that time, a group called the Xiongnu from the north invaded the south. In order to resist the enemy, the emperor summoned male civilians to join the army. However, due to *Mulan's* father's age and weakness, it was difficult for him to go on the expedition. Therefore, she hid from her family and took advantage of the night to

disguise herself as a man and serve in the army on behalf of her father. After undergoing rigorous training, she entered the battlefield to confront the enemy. However, during her recovery, her feminine physique was revealed, nearly resulting in her execution for deceiving the king. Seeing that she had performed admirably, the leader of the army merely ordered her expulsion from the barracks. When everyone thought that they had achieved a great victory, the leader of the Xiongnu held the emperor hostage. *Mulan* and her comrades took measures to rescue the emperor. Finally, they successfully rescued the emperor from the enemy and defeated the enemy troop. Since then, she had become famous, widely respected and loved by the people.

The film has achieved high ratings in China, in part due to the excellent subtitle translation. The language of the film is characterized by its brevity, making it easy to understand. Additionally, 'Mulan' holds a unique place in traditional Chinese culture. As it has evolved over time, various adaptations have emerged, reflecting cultural collisions between local Chinese narratives and foreign influences.

From the perspective of Three Beauties, this paper aims to analyze and study the beauty of subtitle translation in the movie *Mulan*, and demonstrates the feasibility of applying Three Beauties to subtitle translation in film and television.

This paper first introduces the meaning of Three Beauties, then analyzes the aesthetic embodiment of *Mulan* from the three aspects of sound, form and meaning to put forward more development directions subtitle translation.

2. Organization of the Text

2.1. Introduction to Three Beauties

Three Beauties is a science. Translators have implemented translation theory across various field such as literature, classical aesthetics, and modern aesthetics, leading to the establishment of contemporary translation aesthetics. Translation aesthetics is to make the translated sentences aesthetically pleasing, otherwise they will appear monotonous. This requires the target language of translation

to be vivid. Lu Xun once proposed the theory of three beauties in translation, which was later utilized by the famous translation scholar Xu Yuanchong in translation of poetry. He applied this theory to the present day. The three theories are "beauty of sound", "beauty of form", and "beauty of sense". Three Beauties Principle also meets the contemporary demand for aesthetic translation of different works. This article will use the theory of Three Beauties to analyze the translation of subtitles in the movie *Mulan*.

2.2. The Principles of Three Beauties

2.2.1. Beauty of Sound

This is mainly about the rhythm of the translation, such as level and oblique tones. Sentences with a rich sense of rhyme are easy to read. Chinese writing pays special attention to the sense of rhyme, and in this respect, Chinese poetry is the most representative. Most ancient Chinese poems are transmitted by singing, precisely because these poems had a sense of rhythm. For example, famous poems such as "Pipa Xing" and "Shui Diao Ge Tou" have been adapted into songs, which not only do not make people feel uncomfortable, but also make them enjoyed. Because these poems themselves have beautiful rhymes and they are integrated with the songs, making people be willing to accept such works. As a foreign film, the subtitles of *Mulan* need to be translated into Chinese. This requires the translated language to satisfy the beauty of rhythm.

2.2.2. Beauty of Form

The beauty of form emphasizes the appropriateness of sentence structure, arrangement and rhetorical devices. The biggest difference between China and other countries in terms of vocabulary and sentence usage is its preference for using short sentences. Most of the sentences in Chinese translation are well aligned and often use parallelism, duality, and other techniques to make the sentence structure look neat and pleasing to the eye. Similarly, in the process of translating subtitles from foreign movies into Chinese, it is also necessary to integrate the structure well in order to give a good impression to audiences.

2.2.3. Beauty of sense

The translated poem should move the reader's heart as much as the original poem, which is beauty in sense (4. Huang&Li 2022). This requires the translated sentences and words to not only convey the content and meaning of the original text, but also retain the delicate emotional expression of the original text. Chinese people are skilled at using words to express artistic conception, allowing readers to imagine the emotions and scenes in the text solely based on words. Readers can feel the meaning and depth that the original text intends to express according to the translation.

2.3. The Embodiment of Three Beauties in *Mulan*

Aesthetic translation requires that the text be endowed with vitality. Three Beauties occupies an extremely important position in translation studies. To achieve aesthetic standards in subtitle translation, rhythm, words, and sentences are needed to be comprehensively considered. The subsequent sections will explore subtitle translation techniques in the movie *Mulan* from these three aspects.

2.3.1. The Beauty of Sound

The beauty of sound is an indispensable element in translation. Film subtitle translation, just like poetry

translation, should pay attention to the expression of rhythm. "Beauty in sound refers to retaining the musical sense of the original poetry including rhyme. This makes the translation smooth and the translation sound vivid." (5. Xu 1984). In film and television works, sound and picture are equally important, and a lot of story information is conveyed through sound. The translation of sound should be rhythmic and beautiful, but not deviate from the original text. It is necessary not only to make the translation accurately express the meaning of the source text, but also to let the audience feel the momentum and beauty of the translation. In the classic movie *Mulan*, the beauty of the translation is also particularly prominent. The following example is a typical case for this beauty.

Original: Tranquil as a forest, but on fire within.

Translation: 其徐如林, 侵略如火。

While this phrase can be literally translated as "要像树林一样平静, 但有时也要像火一样热烈。", the movie chose the translation "其徐如林, 侵略如火。" This translated version not only offers conciseness, but it also presents a rhythmic flow and fullness." The characters "林" and "火" form the pronunciations of level and oblique tones, conforming to the beauty of Chinese rhythm.

Original: Your chi is strong, *Mulan*. But chi is for warriors.

Translation: 你内心的气很强大, 木兰。但是女儿家不需要气。.

The "气" here is unique to Chinese culture. The qi here refers to the power in the human body. It is a kind of substance that maintains the life activities of the human body, so its meaning is closer to the word "元气". However, instead of translating "Chi" as "元气" directly according to the traditional translation method, the translator chose to transliterate it directly as "气", the first reason probably is that the sound correspondence between "气" in the translated text and "chi" in the source language should be considered. The second is that the rhythm in Chinese emphasizes that words and phrases should be short, concise and clear. The translator used the method of deleting words to remove the character "元" and only keep the character "气". This conforms to the requirement. The character "气" is short and has a strong sense of rhythm, which can make the audience clearly feel the beauty of rhythm. At the same time, Chinese audiences can also understand the true meaning of "气" to "vitality" or "aura". In this way, the translation can be faithful to the source language and reflect the beauty of the sound. This kind of translation can make it easy for the audience to accept, and at the same time, it can accurately understand the meaning of the film and television work. Therefore, in this film, choosing this translation method can avoid causing difficulties for the audience to understand. Combining words with Chinese elements with sound is a very ingenious way of processing.

2.3.2. The Beauty of Form

The beauty of form is mainly reflected in the structure of sentences. English-Chinese translation requires that the translation should reflect the language habits of Chinese in order to make the structure of sentences neat and catchy when read. In the process of translation, the translator needs to deeply understand the essence of the original text, and at the same time use the authentic target language expression, then the translation is not only faithful to the original text, but also in line with the expression habits of the target language. The beauty of this translation is not only reflected in the accurate

grasp of the original text, but also in the fluency and naturalness of the translation. Excellent English-Chinese sentence translation can not only convey information, but also make sentences' structure neat, and the translation is more suitable for using the unique sentences, like comparison sentences and parallel sentences in Chinese to convey the true meaning of the source text. Thus, readers can enjoy the film and television works at the same time, but also feel the unique charm between different languages. The beauty of English-Chinese sentence translation is not only the embodiment of language arts, but also a bridge for cultural exchange. In the movie *Mulan*, when Mulan's father knew that she had gone to join the army for the sake of him, the following sentence was appear:

Original: I indulged her. She is innocent of the world, of men, and the evils of war. And now she's in great danger.

Translation: 我太纵容她了, 她涉世未深, 不知人心险恶, 不知战争残酷, 如今只身犯险。

In terms of sentence structure, there are more complex sentences in English. However, Chinese tends to use run-on sentences to show idea. Chinese is more flexible and diverse than English, and there are more choices of Chinese sentences for the same meaning. Therefore, in terms of subtitle translation of film and television works, in the movie *Mulan*, the translator needs to choose more short but beautiful sentences to express the meaning of the source language. The above sentence shows Mulan's father's worry and anger about her joining the army for him. At the same time, there is also a deep sense of self-remorse. Therefore, when translating the text, the translator chose the short sentence pattern that best reflects emotions in Chinese. Because in Chinese, people often use short sentences with strong emotion, which can not only make the article fluent and easy to read, but also reflect the beauty of the language. In the above example, we can see that the translator chooses short sentences commonly used in Chinese from the perspective of the reader, which is easy to understand and easy for the audience to understand on the screen. The source language corresponding to the short sentences "她不知人心险恶" and "她不知战争残酷" are not only equivalent in form but also in content, reflecting the beauty of the sentences used in the translation.

In addition, there is another movie line: I would change nothing about my life. This sentence has been translated as "今生如此, 我已知足". The translator did not translate it directly, but processed and recreated the sentence, which can not only impress the audience but also maintain the original meaning of the sentence. Recreation is an important element in beautiful translation (6. Kuang&He 2021). Both the front and back sentences of this sentence consist of four characters, making the text neatly antithetical. It has not many characters, being short and pithy.

In the movie, there is a classic sentence: If you are too far from home, you will forget your hometown; Killing too many people will lead to forgetting oneself. The translators also perfectly translate it as: 离家太远, 就会忘记故乡; 杀人太多, 就会忘记自己。This translation also arranges the sentence structure very neatly, making it pleasing to the eye. In addition, this sentence also deeply reflects Mulan's character traits, allowing people to better understand her.

By the way, in Liu Yifei's version of *Mulan*, there was a line like this: Two rabbits running side by side. I think one was a male, one was a female. But you know, you can't really tell when they're running that fast. This sentence is translated

as "雄兔脚扑朔, 雌兔眼迷离, 双兔傍地走, 安能辨我是雌雄?" The original text is composed of multiple sentences of varying lengths, while the translation emphasizes the beauty of form and arranges the sentence in a dual manner, making the entire sentence very neat. Moreover, each word in the first two sentences corresponds to each other, making the sentences more pleasing.

2.3.3. The Beauty of Sense

This theory is mainly reflected in cultural expression in translation.

Example: The flower that blooms in adversity is the most rare and beautiful of all.

Translation: 梅花香自苦寒来。

The original text intends to express the meaning of growing up in adversity, or bravely moving forward when encountering difficulties, and finally achieving success. The translation adopts a sentence from ancient Chinese poetry, which is unique to Chinese culture, and cultural background can also express artistic conception. Those who do not understand culture will not be able to understand the emotions of the translation. This sentence can certainly be translated directly, but using poetry to translate can make the audience feel a strong emotional resonance. This translation makes the target language more beautiful, reflecting the Chinese culture at the same time.

Movies are multi-cultural. When the match-maker asked Mulan the following question: Recite the final admonition. The translator made the translation as "妇有四德指的是什么?". In fact, "admonition" means "to advise, to warn", and the scene here is Mulan in the "interview" of the matchmaker. In Chinese culture if she is qualified, she will have the opportunity to marry into a good family, and the translator translates it as "四德" to make the Chinese audience under the real meaning. In ancient times, women had to follow the "三从四德", and they immediately understood their implication.

In addition, there are also some translations, such as "Devotion to family is an essential virtue" being translated as "百善孝为先", and "Four ounces can move a thousand pounds" being translated as "四两拨千斤". These are all manifestations of cultural atmosphere. Of course, these two sentences in the original text are definitely not the literal meaning. They respectively express the meaning of filial piety and the correct use of power. The translated sentences conform to the deeper expression.

Subtitle paraphrasing of film and television works is an important method of Three Beauties, which advocates that the subtitle translation should adapt to the target audiences and focus on the cultural habits of the audiences. For the sake of the audience, consider the audience's language acceptance and pursuit of beautiful language, and avoid reducing the audience's willingness to watch film and television works because of the boring language, and at the same time reduce the audience's resistance to foreign movies or television works. Like the above example, the following several translated sentences also belong to those that have translated the true meaning that the original text intends to express, achieving the beauty of sense.

Original: You are a mighty warrior, rise up like a phoenix.

Translation: 你是一位勇猛的战士, 如凤凰般涅槃吧。.

"凤凰涅槃" refers to the phoenix burning in the fire, being born to die, being reborn after burning in the fire, and gaining eternal life. It is a metaphor for an indomitable and tenacious

spirit. It is from Mr. Guo Moruo's work of the same name "凤凰涅槃", and the myth that circulated. The word "凤凰涅槃" itself carries a grand imagery. Through this vocabulary, audience can imagine the grand scene of the phoenix being reborn in the bath fire, while also experiencing the strong will of Mulan. In translation aesthetics, the language in different cultures should not only emphasize the accuracy of translation, but also consider the language habits and expression habits of the target audience, so that the translated text can accurately express the meaning and reflect the characteristics of language beauty, which can enhance the momentum of film and television works and expand the influence of film and television works. Its purpose is to make the target receptor's response to the target text similar to the original receptor's response to the original text, reducing the audience's sense of strangeness and making it easy for the audience to understand the content of the film.

Chinese people are accustomed to using four-character phrases. Translators should use these phrases as much as possible in the process of translation to cater to the audience's preferences. Idioms take on a vital position in the Chinese language. For example, idioms can be accurate and short, and rich content can be expressed with fewer words; It can strengthen the sensibility and inspire people's thoughts and feelings; meanwhile, the use of idioms is easy to make the language interesting and strike people with dynamic language. The translator of the movie named *Mulan* also uses numerous idioms, which can enhance the interest and beauty of the language.

Original: Scarier than the undertaker

Translation: 每个人心里都七上八下

In ancient China, it was a matter of pride for women to marry into a respectable family. As depicted in the movie, this was especially crucial for the Hua family as it was closely tied to their honor and reputation. Therefore, when Mulan went to see the matchmaker at the first time, every family member, especially her grandmother, was very nervous, and it was most appropriate to describe the mood of the family at that time with the idiom "七上八下". On the one hand, it can conform to the Chinese expression habits, which the audiences are easy to accept. On the other hand, it adds comedy and beauty to the film, reflecting the humor and beauty of the language.

When he learned that Mulan disguised herself as a man and went on the expedition for her father, the head of the Hua family, Liezong, was worried that if Mulan's identity was revealed, it would cause an uproar. He said the following sentence:

Original: Fa zhou will be forever shamed; dishonor will come to the family; traditional values will disintegrate.

Translation: 花家会一辈子抬不起头,花家祠堂会声望全无,千百年传统沦丧。

At this translation, words with Chinese characteristics are used, such as "抬不起头", "声望全无", and "传统沦丧", which well expresses the nervousness of the lords and sects. Although the Chinese characters are short, they are meaningful and beautiful in Chinese sense, naturally drawing the audience into the narrative of the movie.

It is also important to use more popular words. The popular words is the highlights of the subtitle translation of *Mulan* which can not only make the movie closely associated with the increasingly dynamic society, but also strengthen the fun, humor and beauty of the film. What's more, it also can shorten

the distance with the audience, making an increase of the box office of the film. The following examples can show what is mentioned above.

Original: The truth is we are both frauds.

Translation: 其实我们都是冒牌货。

Original: All cause Miss Man decides to take her little dog show on the road.

translation 都怪那男人婆女扮男装惹祸。

Original: your serpentine salvation is at hand.

Translation: 你的贴身护卫我来了。

In the translation above, "冒牌货", "男人婆", "贴身护卫" are all very popular words in Chinese language and culture. They are often used to show entertainment and pastime, in line with the public's taste, and the introduction to the movie undoubtedly enhances the beauty and interpretation of the film, allowing us to see a playful and lovely Mulan, and a funny and humorous Mushu.

3. Conclusion

From the perspective of *Three Beauties*, it is not difficult to find that the subtitle translation of *Mulan* not only accurately conveys the semantic information of the original text, but also shows a unique aesthetic value in cross-cultural communication. The subtitle translator skillfully combines the traditional Chinese story of *Mulan* with Western aesthetic concepts, which not only retains the essence of the original work, but also makes it easy for Western audiences to understand and accept. In this process, subtitle translation has not only become a bridge between the film and the audience, but also a link between the East and the West (7. Yu&Feng 2023).

Translation aesthetics is indispensable, which makes translation more vivid. It requires the translator to pay attention to the transmission of aesthetic value while accurately conveying the information, so that the subtitle translation becomes a part of the overall artistic effect of the film. This pursuit of translation aesthetics not only enhances the artistry of subtitle translation, but also enhances the appreciation and cultural connotation of the film.

Lin YuTnag stressed the beautifulness of art lies in the balance of form and substance (8. Zhang 2019). Therefore, it is important for subtitle translators to have a deep understanding and application of the principles of *Three Beauties*. Only in this way can they create excellent subtitle translations that are both faithful to the original and in line with the aesthetic habits of the target language, bringing a better movie-watching experience and cultural enjoyment to the audience.

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