



A Study of the Evolution of Zhuge Liang's Image in English Versions of *Sanguo Yanyi* from the Perspective of Retranslation Hypothesis

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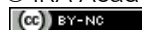
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ABSTRACT

Sanguo Yanyi, one of the renowned masterpieces in Chinese literature, has been translated into over twenty other languages, including three complete English translations produced separately in the 1920s, 1990s and 2010s. Throughout the historical process of these English translations, it has been observed that the character portrayals vary due to different social and cultural backgrounds. This research focuses specifically on the character of Zhuge Liang and aims to examine the evolution of his portrayal by comparing the strategies employed by translators in these three English translations. Adopting a diachronic perspective, the study collects descriptions of Zhuge Liang's image from each translation and explores the underlying reasons for the differences in his image construction. The findings not only shed light on the evolution of Zhuge Liang's image but also confirm the supplementarity nature of the retranslation hypothesis. By revealing how social and cultural factors influence character interpretation, this study enhances our understanding of the intricate relationship between translation and the construction of literary characters.

Keywords: *Sanguo Yanyi*, English translation, Zhuge Liang's image, Retranslation hypothesis, supplementarity

1. Introduction

Retranslation is a widely observed phenomenon in the field of translation studies. This research will utilize the Retranslation Hypothesis as a theoretical foundation, aiming to uncover the inherent "supplementarity" nature of the three English translations of *Sanguo Yanyi*.

1.1 Retranslation Hypothesis

The serious study of retranslation began with the launch of a special issue in *Retraduire* in 1990 titled "Palimpsestes", in which Antoine Berman and Paul Bensimon published their studies on retranslation (Susam-Sarajeva, 2006). According to Berman (1990), translation is an "incomplete action" argues that translation is an "incomplete action" and what is needed is an ongoing process of retranslation in which new translations continue to emerge, enhancing and complicating our understanding of the source text (Albachten & Gürçağlar, 2020). Therefore, retranslation plays an important role in cross-lingual and cross-cultural dissemination. Bensimon (1990) believes that the primary purpose of first translations is cultural naturalization and adaptation to the target audience (ibid). These translations domesticate the foreign text to make it more readily accepted in the receiving culture. Subsequent retranslations, on the other hand, tend to be more foreignizing. They strive to reproduce the cultural distinctiveness of the source text, adhering more closely to its linguistic and stylistic features.

The Retranslation Hypothesis was articulated explicitly by Gambier (1994) that "...first translation always tends to be more assimilating, tends to reduce the otherness in the name of cultural and editorial requirements...The translation, in this perspective, would mark a return to the source text" (Gambier, 1994, p.415). The Retranslation Hypothesis primarily refers to the tendency of initial translations to domesticate and of retranslations to foreignize by returning to the source text (Koskinen & Paloposki 2003), showing a stronger orientation toward the source language (Williams & Chesterman 2004). This will be defined as the Retranslation Hypothesis of Closeness (RHC) in this research. However, Koskinen and Paloposki (2003) also noticed the

“supplementarity” nature of retranslations in the sense that different translations targeted different audiences (Koskinen & Paloposki, 2003). This will be termed as the Retranslation Hypothesis of Supplementarity (RHS) in this research.

This research will start from the Retranslation Hypothesis and compare the three English translations of *Three Kingdoms (Sanguo Yanyi)* produced in different social contexts by examining the translation strategies employed by the translators in rendering the image of Zhuge Liang.

1.2 Research Purpose and Significance

This study aims to examine the translation strategies used in portraying Zhuge Liang’s image, as depicted in English translations of *Sanguo Yanyi* by Brewitt-Taylor (1925), Roberts (1991), and Sumei Yu (2014). The year in brackets denotes the initial publication year of the respective translation. The objective is to identify the evolution of Zhuge Liang’s image across different periods of English translation and to verify its adherence to the retranslation hypothesis of Closeness (RHC). Furthermore, the study analyzes how different translators interpret and reconstruct Zhuge Liang’s image, exploring the connection between image construction, historical background, and cultural factors. Ultimately, it corroborates the retranslation hypothesis of supplementarity (RHS) in the domain of English and Chinese classical translation, shedding light on the intricate relationship between translation and socio-cultural context.

2. Research Design

In this research, the initial step involves gathering descriptions of Zhuge Liang’s image from the Chinese Source Text of *Sanguo Yanyi*, as well as its three English complete translations. Subsequently, the translation strategies and methods employed in rendering these descriptions will be identified and marked according to Xiong Bing’s framework, with each strategy assigned a numerical value.

2.1 Translation Strategies and Methods

The classification of translation strategy, as a macroscopic principle and scheme, is closely intertwined with the participants of translation activities. These participants typically include the author of the original text, the initiator/client of the translation project, the translator, and the recipient of the translation. Among these participants, the “original author” and the “translation recipient” are at the two poles of the translation process.

Based on the translator’s different attitudes towards these two aspects of translation activities, translation strategies can be divided into two categories: foreignization and domestication (Xiong, 2014). Xiong Bing (2014) provides a summary of the translation methods embodied in different translation strategies (Figure 1). The foreignization includes four translation methods: zero translation, transliteration, word-by-word translation and literal translation. On the other hand, the domestication strategy encompasses four methods: paraphrasing, imitation, reinterpretation and transcreation. When these eight translation methods are placed on a continuum, the degree of foreignization increases from left to right. For this study, we will adopt Xiong Bing’s classification to identify and analyze Zhuge Liang’s image translation strategy.



Figure 1: Foreignization Continuum of Translation Strategies and Methods

2.2 Data Collection and Marking

This study utilizes the three English versions of *Sanguo Yanyi* as a research corpus, focusing on the portrayal of Zhuge Liang's image. Specifically, it examines his depiction in terms of appearance, personality, military ability and evaluations from other characters. A regular sampling method is employed, selecting descriptions of Zhuge Liang in one every ten chapters to establish a comparative corpus. The collected corpus is then systematically marked and subjected to statistical analysis.

Following Xiong Bing's (2014) classification, the four translation methods of zero translation (Z), transliteration (T), word-by-word translation (W) and literal translation (L) are labelled as Foreignization (FR), assigned a value of 1. Conversely, the translation methods of free translation (F), imitation (I), variation translation (V), and recreation (R) are labelled as domestication (DM), assigned a value of 0. The labelling methods are presented in Table 1.

After the marking process is completed, the sum of values for each translation is calculated. A higher number indicates a greater degree of foreignization and a closer adherence to the source text. The table below (Table 1) provides a demonstration of the marking process.

Table 1: Translation Strategies and Methods Marking Example

Source Text	主公且宽心	Method	Strategy	Value
Brewitt-Taylor's	K'ung-ming bade his master take heart.	F	DM	0
Roberts'	"Put your mind at ease," Kongming said.	L	FR	1
Yu's	Zhuge Liang urged his master to take heart.	F	DM	0

The sentence“主公且宽心” in the source text is classified as direct speech. It is evident that Roberts' translation faithfully preserves both the content and form of the source text, resulting in a literal translation. Therefore, Roberts' translation is marked as “L” for the translation method and “FR” for the translation strategy. A value of “1” is assigned to indicate its foreignization. In contrast, Brewitt-Taylor's translation and Yu's translation maintain the original content but alter the original form. They change the direct speech to indirect speech, and thus they are marked as “F” and “DM” with a value of “0”.

3. Results and Discussion

After the marking in the section above, the total sum of values of each translation will be used to predict its degree of foreignization or closeness to the source text. Furthermore, the

motivation behind retranslation is multifaceted, necessitating a thorough exploration of the various factors influencing translation choices within specific cultural contexts (Zhao & Sun, 2022).

3.1 A Quantitative Testing of RHC

The table below (Table 2) presents the sum of values for each translation. The findings indicate that Roberts' translation has the highest level of foreignization, with a sum of "118". On the other hand, Brewitt-Taylor's translation is the most domesticated, with a sum of only "48". Yu's translation falls in between with a sum of "79".

Table 2: Degree of Foreignization of English Translations of *Sanguo Yanyi*

Versions	Personality	Character	Military Competence	Comments of others	Total
Brewitt-Taylor's	0	5	35	8	48
Roberts'	2	8	99	9	118
Yu's	0	7	62	10	79

Hence, the characters developed in Moss Roberts' translation bear a stronger resemblance to the source text. As a result, Roberts' portrayal of the characters closely mirrors that of the original text. This implies that the translation of Zhuge Liang's image in *Sanguo Yanyi* does not strictly adhere to a rigid domestication-to-foreignization rule, as outlined by the RHC. A qualitative analysis of two representative examples in constructing Zhuge Liang's image will be conducted in the following section.

3.2 A Qualitative Analysis of Image Construction

In the Battle of *Huarong Pass*, Zhuge Liang sent Guan Yu to intercept Cao Cao. However, out of gratitude towards Cao Cao, Guan Yu decided to rescue him and set him free from danger. After Guan Yu returned, Zhuge Liang announced the following punishment.

(1) Source text: “此是云长想曹操昔日之恩，故意放了。但既有军令状在此，不得不按军法。”遂叱武士推出斩之。(Chapter 50:468)

Brewitt-Taylor: “Then you remembered the old kindness of Ts'ao Ts'ao and so allowed him to escape. But your acceptance of the task with its conditions is here. You will have to suffer the penalty.” He called in the lictors and told them to take away Kuan Yu and put him to death. (Chapter 50:625)

Roberts: “that you purposely released him, mindful of his past generosity. Nonetheless, since you made a formal commitment, we have no choice but to enforce it under martial law.” Kongming shouted for the guards to execute him. (Chapter 50:603)

Yu: “In that case you must have intentionally allowed him to escape for his past kindness to you,” said Zhuge Liang. “But since you have signed a written pledge you will have to suffer the penalty.” Then he called in the guards to take Guan Yu out. (Chapter 50:1046)

In terms of the translation of this sentence, there exist slight differences among the three

versions. For instance, Roberts' translation renders “不得不” as “have no choice but to,” effectively capturing both Zhuge Liang's sense of being compelled and his sentiment of having no alternative but to punish Guan Yu. Consequently, it vividly depicts Zhuge Liang's character, presenting him as exceptionally vivid and three-dimensional. Conversely, Brewitt-Taylor's and Yu's translations both translate “不得不” as “have to,” lacking the full reflection of Zhuge Liang's inner struggles in this situation.

Moving on to the subsequent sentence, Brewitt-Taylor's translation employs the verb phrase “called in the lictors and told them to take away,” thereby emphasizing Zhuge Liang's commanding order to execute Guan Yu. Roberts' translation uses the verb “shouted” to highlight Zhuge Liang's authoritative tone and determination. On the other hand, Yu's translation uses the phrase “called in the guards,” which indirectly describes Zhuge Liang's command attitude, resulting in a relatively calmer depiction.

Yet another example could further highlight discrepancies in translation. In the eighth year of the Jianxing era, Zhuge Liang ordered Wei Yan, Zhang Yi, Du Qiong, and Chen Shi to advance through Jigu; Ma Dai, Wang Ping, Zhang Yi, and Ma Zhong to advance through Xiegu, and then rendezvous at Qishan. During the war, Chen Shi and Wei Yan disregarded the advice and orders, recklessly launching an attack and suffering a disastrous defeat. Although they both violated Zhuge Liang's command, Zhuge Liang chose to spare Wei Yan's life and executed Chen Shi.

(2) Source text 2: 此时孔明不杀魏延，欲留之以为后用也。(Chapter 100:896)

Brewitt-Taylor: Wei Yen was spared as there was yet work for him to accomplish. (Chapter 100: 1165)

Roberts: Rather than kill Wei Yan, however, Kongming spared him so he could use him later. (Chapter 100: 1200)

Yu: Wei Yan was spared as there was yet work for him to accomplish. (Chapter 100:2052)

Brewitt-Taylor's translation portrays Zhuge Liang as a practical strategist who spared Wei Yan because there were still tasks for him to accomplish. This depiction emphasizes Zhuge Liang's pragmatic approach and his ability to assess the value of individuals based on their contributions. However, it may appear somewhat detached from Zhuge Liang's personal intentions and long-term plans.

Roberts' translation adds depth to Zhuge Liang's character by highlighting his decision-making process. It portrays him as someone who consciously spares Wei Yan, with the intention of utilizing him in the future. This portrayal presents Zhuge Liang as a calculated and strategic thinker who carefully considers the potential of his subordinates. It fills in the gaps left by Brewitt-Taylor's translation and provides insight into Zhuge Liang's future-oriented mindset.

Yu's translation complements both Brewitt-Taylor and Roberts by emphasizing the practical aspect of Zhuge Liang's decision. It underlines the notion that Wei Yan was spared due to the work he could still contribute. While it may not delve into Zhuge Liang's inner thoughts or specific plans, this translation adds to the overall portrayal of Zhuge Liang as a leader who assesses the value of his subordinates based on their capabilities.

In the given examples, Roberts' translation presents a more elaborate description of Zhuge Liang. However, when considering all three translations together, a more comprehensive portrayal of Zhuge Liang's character emerges.

In Example (1), Brewitt-Taylor emphasizes gratitude, Roberts showcases a combination of personal and strategic considerations, and Yu highlights principled decision-making. Through the integration of all three translations, readers can develop a more nuanced understanding of Zhuge Liang as a leader who harmonizes personal connections, strategic thinking, and moral principles.

In Example (2), Brewitt-Taylor underlines Zhuge Liang's practicality, Roberts exemplifies his strategic thinking, and Yu emphasizes his regard for others' contributions. By examining all three translations, readers can obtain a more nuanced comprehension of Zhuge Liang's nature as a leader.

Translation and retranslation are nuanced and intricate social practices that cannot be simplified as linear progress from one extreme to another. Instead, they complement each other as a whole, enabling a more comprehensive interpretation of the source text and source culture.

3.3 Contextualization of Translations

The varied interpretations of Zhuge Liang's image in the aforementioned examples are intricately linked to translators' particular social contexts and the diverse readerships they cater to.

Brewitt-Taylor, Moss Roberts, and Yu Sumei were translators of *Sanguo Yanyi* in different periods, resulting in variations in their translations. Brewitt-Taylor, born in the mid-19th century, personally witnessed the tumultuous social changes during the late Qing and early Republic of China eras. In 1925, his translation of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* was first published by Kelly & Walsh in Shanghai, a purely commercial publishing house, driven primarily by profit motives. In the preface to the translation, Brewitt-Taylor expressed his intention to satisfy the curiosity and spiritual pleasure of Western readers by bringing this captivating oriental novel to them (Brewitt-Taylor, 1925). Therefore, Brewitt-Taylor's translation targeted the Western readership residing in China at the time, aiming to cater to their interests and expectations by recreating the evocative storyline of *Sanguo Yanyi*.

Moss Roberts, born in 1937, is a professor at the East Asian Institute of New York University (Lin, 2023). He specializes in teaching the Chinese language, and Chinese classical literature, and has an extensive understanding of Chinese culture. His translation focuses on rigorous academic research and places a strong emphasis on faithfully reproducing the original work, while also providing readers with comprehensive cultural information through detailed annotations. In the 1980s, as China carried on its reform and opening-up policy, it not only made significant progress in politics, economics, and military strength but also started to prioritize cultural development. China was eager to share its traditional culture with the world through translation, aiming to enhance global understanding. It was during this time that the Foreign Language Press took the initiative to organize experts to translate a vast array of Chinese literary works, including *Sanguo Yanyi*. Roberts' academic background perfectly aligned with the translation goals of the Foreign Language Press, and they jointly created an academic translation that faithfully represents the original work and the original culture.

Yu Sumei, born in 1940 in Zhejiang, China, began her career as an English teacher and translator at East China Normal University. Later, she received an invitation from American economist Iverson to retranslate *Sanguo Yanyi*. In 2014, Yu Sumi's translation was first published by Tuttle Publishing Company in Singapore, with Iverson serving as the editor and sponsor. As a contemporary scholar, Yu Sumei's translation was published in the 21st century and adopted a more modern Chinese expression style. Her translation took into account the reading preferences of modern audiences by consciously simplifying the story plot and characters. Iverson believes that *Sanguo Yanyi* is the essence of excellent Chinese culture in the Authors' Introduction. Thus, Yu Sumei's translation seems to aim at spreading the essence of Chinese culture to modern Western readers, conveying its philosophical, political, and military concepts to benefit Western readers, particularly businessmen and politicians. With a relatively comprehensive translation theory system in China (Wang & Wang, 2017), Yu Sumei is able to handle many nuanced details in a concise and clear manner, drawing from her previous experience in translation.

Produced in different eras with purpose, and target audience, Brewitt-Taylor, Moss Roberts and Yu Sumei conveyed different images of Zhuge Liang. Brewitt-Taylor tends to employ a domestication translation strategy, catering to the aesthetic and value orientation of Western readers. This approach aims to make the character more familiar and relatable to the Western audience. On the other hand, Moss Roberts stays more faithful to the original work, striving to create an image of Zhuge Liang that closely aligns with the original description. Roberts aims to preserve the essence of the character as perceived by Chinese readers. In contrast, Yu Sumei's translation strikes a more moderate balance between domestication and fidelity to the original, taking into account the preferences and expectations of modern readership.

4. Conclusion

RHC believes that the process of translation is a gradual process from domestication to foreignization. However, through the study of the translation of Zhuge Liang's image, it is found that the choices in the process of translation are diversified and complex. This indicates that retranslation does not necessarily follow linear rules, but seeks balance in different contexts and purposes.

The three translations of *Sanguo Yanyi* not only provide complementary descriptions of Zhuge Liang's images but also cater to distinct readerships. Each translator adds their own unique perspective and appeals to various audiences. Brewitt-Taylor's translation targets the Western readership in China, aiming to satisfy their curiosity and spiritual pleasure. Moss Roberts, on the other hand, brings a scholarly approach to his translation, appealing to readers interested in academic analyses. Meanwhile, Yu Sumei's rendition may target a more contemporary readership, incorporating modern language and cultural elements. Together, these translations offer a comprehensive exploration of Zhuge Liang's portrayal, catering to the diverse tastes and interests of readers.

These three translations complement each other, weaving a magnificent tapestry of the oriental novel for English-speaking readers. Despite belonging to different time periods and catering to diverse target readers and social contexts, they collectively offer a vivid portrayal of the epic tale of ancient China found in the classical masterpiece *Sanguo Yanyi*. Capturing the imaginations of readers across the English-speaking world, these translators are united in

their dedication to the translation and dissemination of this Chinese literary masterpiece.

The tendency of retranslation is not revealed accurately by RHC but is, on the contrary, exemplified by the stronger explanatory power of RHS.

Conflicts of Interest

The author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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