

Study on Tune C-E Translation from the Perspective of Translation Aesthetics: Taking Ascendant Peace in the Four Seas, A Religious Play in Zhejiang and Anhui Province as an Example

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Abstract: Translation aesthetics provides a new approach to translation studies on Opera. From the perspective of translation aesthetics, this paper studies the translation strategies in the process of C-E translation taking as an example the eight tunes in manuscripts of Ascendant Peace in the Four Seas, a well-known religious play of Kun Opera of Zhejiang and Anhui province, maintaining that tunes translation mainly adopts foreignization, supplemented by domestication.

Keywords: Translation aesthetics; Religious play of “Ascendant Peace in the Four Seas”; Tune; Domestication and foreignization

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1. Introduction

Translation is a mysterious but elegant cross-cultural activity, as once it begins, the translator must ponder how to achieve the transformation between the source language and the target language ^[1]. In 1735, the Father of Aesthetics, Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, proposed the concept of aesthetics while the Chinese translation of aesthetics was recorded long before AD 2100. Whether in the West or the East, the integration of translation and aesthetics has its strengths and complements each other. As a gem of traditional Chinese culture, the opera must first be “translated out” to “go global” ^[2]. With the efforts of scholars, relevant translations and study outcomes have been reviewed. Domestic scholars Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang have made fruitful translations of Chinese operas such as “The Peony Pavilion”. Cao has explored the concept and practice of opera translation ^[3]. Foreign scholars have also made significant achievements, such as American scholar Birch, who proposed a scheme for

the English translation of Chinese opera performance texts ^[4]. British scholar Susan Bassnett proposed a cultural translation perspective ^[5]. However, despite the achievements in the study of opera translation, little attention has been paid to the study of opera translation. It is not known that tune, like the titles of novels, can greatly affect readers' interest and appreciation through the precision of their translation. Therefore, strengthening the study of tune translation is beneficial and necessary.

2. Exploration on eight tunes of Ascendant Peace in the Four Seas

The Kunqu opera performed for the gods in the Zhejiang-Anhui region is a folk social activity aimed at welcoming blessings and seeking auspiciousness, representing a shared enjoyment between humans and deities, and possessing practical utility. The Huizhou manuscript of the opera performed for the gods “Ascendant Peace in the Four Seas” was one of the must-perform plays in the Ming and Qing dynasties’ courts and among the public ^[6] (Figure 1).

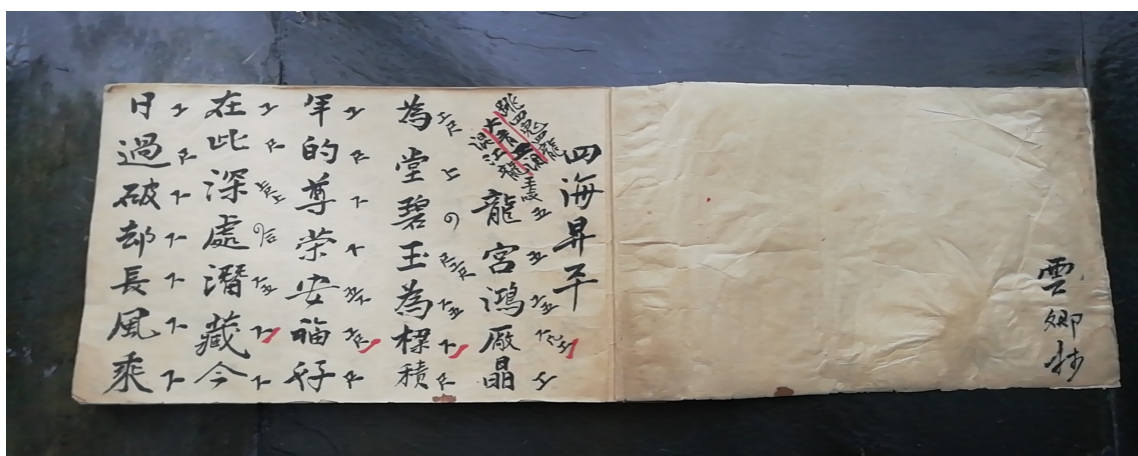


Figure 1. The manuscript “Ascendant Peace in the Four Seas.”

Tune, a structural unit formed by the combination of textual (prosody and set) and musical (temperament, rhythm, mode, and string, wind and percussion) elements in traditional Chinese opera, represents a stylized expression of the creative thinking in traditional Chinese operatic music ^[7]. Eight tunes of Ascendant Peace in the Four Sea are as follows:

(1) 混江龙

It belongs to the Xian Lu Gong (a tune name) of Beiqu (Northern Opera). In terms of its fixed patterns of words and sentences, the “Grand Anthology of Musical Notation for Southern and Northern Tunes in Nine Modes” is categorized into two styles: the original and the modern style. The original style consists of ten lines arranged in the pattern of four, seven, four, four, seven, seven, three, three, four, and four. The modern style features the seventh and eighth sentences as seven-character phrases, with the first four characters representing the upper half and the last three characters representing the lower half. From the sixth sentence onwards, the use of four or six-character sentence is flexible, with no restrictions on their length, and may be freely augmented or reduced, but generally, two sentences constitute a couplet.

(2) 天下乐

Both Nanqu and Beiqu (Northern and Southern Operas) are included, all belonging to the Xian Lu Gong. The word count of Beiqu is fixed at seven, two, three, eight, three, four, five (seven sentences), with the second

sentence being able to include the two “Chen Zi” (word inserted in a line of verse for balance or euphony), namely “ye bu” or “ye me.” These are used in tune set, specifically in the Northern Xian Lu Gong set, following the “You Hulu” and preceding the “Nezha Ling.” The Nanqu is also known as “Harmony in Society,” with the word count fixed at four, seven, seven, six, seven, five, five, five, three, four, five (eleven sentences), used as “Guoqu” (the main part of the opera).

(3) 哪吒令

A significant musical accompaniment utilized in traditional operas. Performed on the suona horn, it exudes a majestic grandeur. It may be employed for the attracting audiences (see opening gongs and drums), as dance accompaniment, or for formations, processions, banquets, welcoming guests, and other occasions.

(4) 踏鹊枝

Both the Northern Opera Xianlu Temple and the Southern Opera Shangdiao have same tune with differing word counts from the poetic tunes. The Northern Opera is commonly employed following the “Nezha Order” tune in divertimento settings. The Southern Opera, also known as “Manyuanchun,” is utilized as a transitional tune.

(5) 寄生草

A title in the Northern tune, it belongs to the Xianlu Temple and is also incorporated into the Shang Tune. It consists of seven lines with five rhymes, structured as three, three, seven, seven, seven, seven, seven. The first, second, and sixth lines are antithetical, while the third, fourth, and fifth lines form a tripartite parallel structure. This style is used in both sets and short lyrics, with examples of sets following “Magpie on the Branch.”

(6) 粉蝶儿

Both Northern and Southern Operas are categorized under the Zhonglu Temple, with the former frequently employing it as the opening piece of the Zhonglu suite. In genres like Peking Opera, it is predominantly used in martial scenes. Along with “Dianjiangchun,” it belongs to the Sanban tune, serving as an introduction for character entrances, though its usage is not particularly widespread. It can be sung solo or in duets, similar to the contemporary “Dianjiangchun.” The melody is majestic and impassioned, accompanied by the suona horn or flute.

(7) 石榴花

Both Northern and Southern Operas are associated with the Zhonglu Temple. Within Southern Opera, this tune is categorized into two types: one is the delicate tune with additional boards, and the other is the robust tune sung by the clown with a one-board, one-eye rhythm. This tune is frequently employed in Northern Opera. The standard pattern consists of nine lines in the order of seven, five, seven, four, four, seven, seven, seven, and five. In dramatic Opera, this pattern is often used in quiet scenes, with a three-eye board, predominantly utilizing the Xiaogong or Chi tunes.

(8) 尾声

The final section in the Northern Opera suite signifies the culmination and conclusion of the narrative.

3. Analysis of eight tunes C-E translation of Ascendant Peace In The Four Seas

Translation involves the transformation of at least two languages and the fusion of two cultures. In the practical process, translators bear the responsibility of conveying both the “content” and the “flavor” of the original work ^[8]. Currently, the primary methods for dealing with cultural differences in translation are foreignization and domestication, a concept initially proposed by the American translator Lawrence Venuti ^[9].

Generally speaking, foreignization focuses on the foreignness of the source language, primarily employed in the translation at the “cultural level,” which can endow the translated text with a greater sense of “exoticism.” Domestication, on the other hand, focuses on the normativity of the target language, primarily utilized in the translation at the “pure linguistic level,” serving as a “compromise” method to address linguistic barriers. When it comes to the translation of traditional Chinese opera tunes, the author suggests adopting a translation strategy that primarily utilizes foreignization, with domestication as a supplement. An analysis of eight tunes from *Ascendant Peace in the Four Seas* is now provided as an illustrative example.

3.1. 踏鹊枝 Tune: Magpie on the Branch

Traditional Chinese opera utilizes song and dance to narrate stories. Consequently, a high-quality translation of an opera should possess readability, singability, and appreciability. As a component of opera, the tune, due to its complex origins, sometimes defies translation based solely on literal comprehension. Translators must trace their sources or meanings to produce a translation that is both culturally authentic and evocative. That is to say, when the tune carries special historical origins and background, translators need to adopt a method that combines foreignization with other translation techniques.

For instance, in translating “踏鹊枝,” Xu Yuanchong prefixed the term ‘Tune’ to ‘Magpie on the Branch.’ The English noun “tune” denotes “melody, harmony, or musical cadence.” Evidently, Xu Yuanchong employed “Tune” as an annotation for the target language readers, indicating that “Magpie on the Branch” is a type of melody in ancient Chinese music, and subsequently translated the connotation of “踏鹊枝” as “Magpie on the Branch.” This approach precisely positions a cultural reference for the target readers, namely “a melody known as Magpie on the Branch.”

3.2. 石榴花 Tune: Pomegranate Flower, 混江龙 Tune: Underwater Dragon and 天下乐 Tune: Harmony in Society

Similarly, when dealing with “石榴花,” the author suggests referring to the method employed by Xu Yuanchong, translating it as “Tune: Pomegranate Flowers” or “Tune: Pomegranate Flowers for Fortune Turns.” For “混江龙,” translating it as “Underwater Dragon” might lead foreign readers to mistakenly believe that the tune represents a living dragon, thereby causing confusion. The author proposes combining foreignization and amplification techniques, translating it as “Tune: Underwater Dragon”, which maximizes the preservation of the exotic nature of the translation while also ensuring readability and appreciability. “Tune: Harmony in Society” is suggested for “天下乐,” conveying the meaning of “social well-being” in English. Such an approach effectively communicates the literal meaning of “天下乐” to readers, particularly when translating the character “乐,” the word “Harmony” in English, which implies “harmony and peace,” accentuates the poetic atmosphere of joy and tranquility. It is evident that the advantage of foreignization lies in the translator’s profound rhetorical competence in both Chinese and English, conveying the poetic essence of Chinese language to readers to the greatest extent possible.

3.3. 哪吒令 Nezha Order and 粉蝶儿 Fendie’er

In the process of translation, numerous opera tunes are unique and cannot find corresponding terms in English. Given the insurmountable cultural divide, it is advisable to employ the domestication method.

For instance, we translate the tune names “哪吒令” and “粉蝶儿” into Nezha Order and Fendie’er respectively. Such translations retain the original sounds of the Chinese names “哪吒令” and “粉蝶儿,” but

they also present a significant drawback. There are two major difficulties that arise for foreign readers of the text: Firstly, foreign readers cannot understand the significance of Nezha Order and Fendie'er. Even if the tune names may not align with the main meaning of the piece, readers cannot interpret the functional significance of these tune names within the context of the entire piece based on these translations. Secondly, the purpose of translating with Nezha Order and Fendie'er is to convey to readers that the aforementioned tune names are typically a stylistic convention, rather than serving any practical purpose.

3.4. 尾声 Concluding Strophe

In other words, when there are semantic differences between the source language of the traditional opera and the target language, and when translating the text, grammar, and semantics of the original text proves challenging, the adoption of the domestication can be employed, which renders the translated text more fluent and in line with the linguistic conventions of the target language. For instance, the tune name “尾声,” which essentially means the ending of an opera, can be directly translated as Concluding Strophe, a succinct and clear term that facilitates understanding for readers of the target language.

3.5. 寄生草 Tune: Grass for Reposing Feelings (Feeling: passionate)

Tune names dictate the melodic patterns of the tunes, and later generations compose lyrics following the prescribed tonal patterns outlined in the tune names. Zhou Deqing, in his work “Zhongyuan Yinyun,” wrote: “The Xianlu Tune is fresh and intangible, the Nanlu Gong is characterized by sighs and sorrow, the Zhonglu Gong is rolling and flickering, and the Huangzhong Gong is associated with wealth and lingering emotions...”^[10]. Although his summary of the “sound and emotion” of the Gong Tunes is not exhaustive, it can at least provide a framework for translating tune names. This involves annotating the emotions expressed in the tune based on the content of the tune, thereby facilitating understanding of the tune's message by readers of the target language. This translation strategy is conducive to the translator's subjectivity but demands a high level of proficiency. The translator must first have an understanding of the emotions expressed in the tune to accurately capture its sentiment with appropriate terminology.

In addressing the translation of the term “寄生草,” the author consulted various materials and discovered that it is commonly translated as “Parasitic Grass.” However, when this translation is applied to the context of traditional opera, it can be perplexing for foreign readers, failing to convey the intended message of the opera. In *Ascendant Peace in the Four Seas*, a religious play in Zhejiang and Anhui province, the chapter of the tune “寄生草” primarily serves to express aspirations through objects. Therefore, in alignment with the thematic and content requirements of the opera, the author proposes a modified translation: “Tune: Grass for Reposing Feelings (Feeling: passionate),” which means “a tune representing grass used to embody emotions.” This approach, which combines domestication with foreignization, maintains the integrity and ethnic characteristics of traditional opera while providing the readers of the target language with a more direct understanding of the tune's rhythmic patterns and the ideological and emotional messages conveyed. Consequently, it enables the appreciation of its rich cultural connotations and aesthetic beauty.

In summary, the translation of traditional operas possesses three fundamental characteristics: perceptual immediacy, pursuing feature, and performative quality. The success of translation hinges on whether the reader can resonate with it, provoke deep reflection, and accurately reproduce the storyline and cultural elements of the original opera^[11]. When translating opera tune names, from the perspective of translation aesthetics, employing both foreignization and domestication methods not only enhances the aesthetic appeal of the translation but also

allows those unfamiliar with foreign languages to understand another culture through reading the translation, thereby promoting cultural exchange.

4. Conclusion

Translation of traditional operas represents a comprehensive art pertaining to aesthetics, necessitating translators with solid bilingual proficiency and extensive knowledge of traditional operas. In the process, translators must maintain the integrity and ethnic characteristics of the opera itself, while considering the appreciation level and comprehension of the readers, and also take into account the overall effect of the performance, thereby ensuring that the translation is acceptable to the audience. Regarding the manuscript of *Ascendant Peace in the Four Seas*, a religious play in Zhejiang and Anhui province, from an aesthetic perspective and considering the purpose of translation, the translation of its tune names differs from text translation. It should strive for simplicity, clarity, and comprehensibility while balancing literary and musical qualities^[12]. Therefore, in translating traditional opera tune names, a translation strategy primarily focused on foreignization, with domestication as a supplement, can be employed to convey the imagery, form, and rhythm of the opera, restoring the original appearance, setting, and sentiment of the piece, enhancing the understanding for readers of the target language, generating humanistic resonance, and thereby improving the quality and effectiveness of the external dissemination of traditional Chinese opera. At the same time, we must deeply reflect on and strengthen the cultivation of professional talents in traditional opera translation, promoting the deepening of the “going global” strategy of Chinese culture.

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