

**CSCCanada****Studies in Literature and Language**

Vol. 21, No. 1, 2020, pp. 29-33

DOI:10.3968/11481

ISSN 1923-1555[Print]

ISSN 1923-1563[Online]

[www.cscanada.net](http://www.cscanada.net)[www.cscanada.org](http://www.cscanada.org)

# A Study on Two Chinese Versions of *Pride and Prejudice* From the Perspective of Feminist Translation Theory

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Received 11 June 2020; accepted 18 July 2020;

Published online 31 August 2020

## Abstract

Since the 1990s, the combination of translation theory research and feminism has formed feminist translation theory, which has brought a new perspective to translation research and practice, and become an important trend in the development of literature today. The focus of feminist translation is feminist consciousness. This thesis will focus on a comparative analysis of *pride and prejudice* from the perspective of feminist translation theory by adopting two Chinese versions of female translator Lei Limei and male translator Sun Zhili, hoping to promote the development of feminist translation theory research and practice in China.

**Key words:** Feminist perspective; Comparison of translation; Feminist translation theory

Zhong, J., & Yang, L. H. (2020). A Study on Two Chinese Versions of *Pride and Prejudice* From the Perspective of Feminist Translation Theory. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 21(1), 29-33. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/11481>  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/11481>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In 1960s and 1970s, the feminist movement in the West inspired the trend of feminist literary criticism in the 1970s and 1980s, with the rising of gender equality awareness and subject consciousness of discourse rose, and the prevalence of modern deconstruction theories

including post-structuralism, post-colonialism and power discourse, female translators' consciousness of "gender", "identity", "subject" and "discourse" awakened, resulting in the appearance of Sherry Simon, Luise von Flotow, Barbara Godard, Susanne de Lotbiniere-Harwood, Lori Chamberlain Suzanne Jill Levine and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and other leading figures in feminist translation studies, and their core works have far-reaching influence on the researches afterwards. (Levine, 1992) This theory, a rebellion and revolution to traditional translation theory, has absorbed and drawn on the essence of many theories such as constructivism, new historicism and reader response theory, subverted the traditional translation view under the framework of constructivism, creating the rise of Western Feminist Translation Theory in the 1990s.

## 2. A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TWO CHINESE VERSIONS OF *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* FROM FEMINIST TRANSLATION THEORY

### 2.1 Translation Strategies

#### 2.1.1 Preface

Translators usually show readers the intention of the original text by writing a preface, or present their translation strategies. There is no preface in the original text *Pride and Prejudice* (Austen, 1990), but both translators Sun Zhili and Lei Limei have prefaces in their translations.

According to statistics, the preface in Sun's translation has 3333 words, and the Lei's translation has 3870 words. In terms of length, Lei's preface is longer than Sun's. In terms of content, Sun mainly introduces the book from two aspects: One is to introduce the life of Jane Austen and the creative process of *Pride and Prejudice*, and the other is the main content and theme of the book. In

the five-page preface, Sun Zhili writes a lot of texts to introduce the plot of the book. However, when it comes to the author and the influence of this work, Sun Zhili quotes others' words to evaluate, and in this respect he doesn't highlight the translator's subjectivity. In addition, he adopts author's feelings and opinions to evaluate the work, which is also a way to hide the identity of the translator and highlight the author's intention. So we can find that Sun Zhili's preface is more like a literary text analysis than a comment or criticism with emotion.

As a female translator, Lei Limei's preface has a strong sense of feminism. The preface uses few words to introduce the background of the novel, the life and creative experience of the author. Two-thirds of content is her opinion and evaluation on the work. The full preface can be divided into three parts: In the first part, Lei Limei briefly introduced her impressions of this novel. She believes that this novel is not only a simple novel about love, but also a work reflecting social reality at that time. The author, Jane Austen, shows the typical delicate brushwork of female writers, but also has a deep insight to British society with her witty satire and humor. She showed readers three different types of marriage in humorous and vivid language: a marriage between Charlotte Lucas and Mr. Collins as an economic contract, and a sexual relationship between Lydia and Wickham. Marriage, and a love-based marriage between Elizabeth Bernat and Darcy. At the same time, she warned readers like a moralist: love is the most important foundation of marriage. The novel expresses the author's feminist thought of pursuing independence and equality, and reflects the rise of female consciousness.

In the second part, Lei Limei pointed out the success of the novel in terms of material selection and character description. Elizabeth is an irreplaceable female character in English literature. Jane Austen fully expressed her lifelong ideals through Elizabeth's rational attitude towards love and marriage, her choice of husband, and the happy ending of marriage; in the end, Lei Limei criticized several objections on Austin in terms of creative themes, artistic forms, and language expressions, and puts forward her own opinions. From here we can see that Lei Limei's preface shows the translator's mission is not only to translate, but also to create with translator's subjectivity. All these reflect the intervention of female translators in the translation, and fully show the "prominent status" of translators at present instead of "invisible state" in the past.

By comparing the prefaces of Sun Zhili and Lei Limei, we can find that the reasons why the two translators chose to translate this work are different. Lei Limei chose this work not only because she is a woman like the author, but also because she and the author share a feminist consciousness; While Sun Zhili chose this novel for translation because of exquisite language and witty tone.

It can be seen that compared with Sun Zhili, Lei Limei has more feminist awareness and can better reflect the translator's subjectivity.

### 2.1.2 Footnote

Example:

Original text: "When the ladies returned to the drawing-room, there was a little to be done but to hear lady Catherine talk....." (Austen, 2012, p.146)

Sun: "女士们回到客厅之后, 只是听凯瑟琳夫人谈话....." (Sun, 2010, p.152)

Lei: "女士们回到客厅, 除了聆听凯瑟琳夫人说话, 就没有别的..."。

按当时习俗, 宴会结束后, 女宾先退席, 男宾则留下, 边饮酒边谈些有女宾在场时不便谈的话题。(Lei, 2013, p.133)

It is difficult for ordinary readers to find the special meaning implied by the original sentence. Since the novel was written in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Britain at that time was a country with a distinct hierarchy and patriarchal supremacy. Under such a social background, inequality between men and women was widespread in social customs. Men could do business, join the army or be pastor to gain economic rights and social status, while women may only have a way out if she is married or being a tutor. Unlike Sun Zhili, Lei Limei takes into account of the social background of the time keenly and carefully, and adopts footnote to give a simple explanation of the current status of women's low status, explaining to readers the unequal treatment to women and the serious gender discrimination at that time, thus helping readers better understand the original text and triggering readers to think more about the theme of the novel.

### 2.1.3 Supplement

Example:

Original text: "The dinner too, in its turn, was highly admired; and he begged to know to which of his cousins, the excellence of its cookery was owing. But here he was set right by Mrs. Bennet, who assured him with some asperity that they were very well able to keep a good cook, and that her daughters had nothing to do in the kitchen." (Austen, 2012, p.62)

Sun: "柯林斯先生还对晚餐赞赏不已, 请求主人告诉他, 究竟是哪位表妹烧得这一手好菜。这时, 贝内特太太纠正了他的错误, 声色严厉地对他说: 他们家还雇得起一个像样的厨子, 女儿们根本不沾手厨房里的。" (Sun, 2010, p.55)

Lei: "接着, 他对晚餐也称赞不已, 他请求他们告诉他, 是哪位漂亮的表妹有这样高超的烹调手艺。贝内特太太听了这话, 纠正他的说法, 并粗声粗气地对他说, 他们完全有能力请得起很好的厨师, 她的女儿是从不下厨的。" (Lei, 2013, p.50)

When Mr. Collins and Bennett had dinner, he asked Mrs. Bennett who made these delicious dishes. In the original text, the author did not use adjectives to describe "cousin", but Sun followed the principle of fidelity and

translated it into “which cousin” to make the translation more fluent; While Lei adds an adjective “pretty” to describe the cousin by adopting supplementary translation method. Here Lei’s own understanding is added here, leaving “traces of the translator”. When describing how Mrs. Bennett responded to Collins’ stupid question, the author used the word “asperity”, which Sun translated into “声严色厉”, a word which means impatient, is usually used to describe the expression of anger when speaking to people. From the definition, it can be seen that the word has a negative emotional color. Mr. Collins only asked a question, and did not express the maliciousness to others, Mrs. Bennett would not answer in anger, so Sun’s words were excessively used and did not fit Mrs. Bennett’s emotions at the time; While Lei translated it into “粗声粗气地”, which vividly describes Mrs. Bennett’s image.

## 2.2 Language Expression

### Example 1:

Original text: Mrs. Hurst: “I have an excessive regard for Jane Bennet, she is really a very sweet girl, and I wish with all my heart she were well settled. But with such a father and mother, and such low connections, I am afraid there is no chance of it.” (Austen, 2012, p.32)

Sun: “我特看得起简·贝内特, 真是个挺可爱的姑娘, 我衷心希望她能嫁个好人家。只可惜遇到那样的父母, 又有那么低贱的亲戚, 恐怕没有什么指望了。” (Sun, 2010, p.31)

Lei: “我非常喜欢简·贝内特, 她真是一个非常漂亮可爱的女孩儿, 我全心全意地希望, 她会嫁户好人家。但是, 有这样的父母, 加上地位低微的亲戚, 恐怕是没指望了。” (Lei, 2013, p.27)

This is a conversation between Mrs. Hurst and Mr. Darcy. Elizabeth walked three or four miles in dirty clothes to reach Nirvana Gardens, Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst began to laugh at Elizabeth. They consider Elizabeth to be a yokel, and her mannerisms will prevent Jane from marrying to the rich. Sun translated “have an excessive regard for” into “特看得起”, which reflects the notion of hierarchy in a patriarchal society, that is, the rich are more noble than the poor, and men are more noble than women, especially rich men; While Lei translated it into “非常喜欢”, which fully took into account the dignity of female image of Elizabeth, it also indirectly shows the pursuit of gender and class equality. When referring to the word “low”, Sun translated it into “低贱的”, which apparently didn’t take into account the dignity of women; Lei looked at the problem from the perspective of women, translating it into “地位低微的”, it aims at safeguarding the status and dignity of women.

It can be seen that translators with feminist consciousness usually translate from the perspective of feminism and show sympathy for female characters, and maintain their dignity and status. The choice of words by different translators is more or less accompanied by their own different gender consciousness. Female translators

try to express the existence of self-consciousness through language. Due to gender discrimination, male translators may intentionally or unintentionally devalue women in translating certain words, while female translators tend to use words to indicate women’s status and defend their dignity.

### Example 2:

Original text: Jane: “I was very much flattered by his asking me to dance a second time. I did not expect such a compliment.”

Elizabeth: “Did not you? I did for you. But that is one great difference between us. Compliments always take you by surprise, and me never……” (Austen, 2012, p.12)

Sun: “他第二次请我跳舞的时候, 我高兴坏了。我没想到他会这样抬举我。” “你没想到? 我可替你想到了。不过, 这正是你我之间大不相同的地方。你一受抬举总是受宠若惊, 我可不这样……” (Sun, 2010, p. 13)

Lei: “他第二次邀请我跳舞时, 我感到非常荣幸, 真没想到他会对我这样客气。” “是吗? 我倒是替你想到了。不过, 这正是我们俩大不相同的地方。人家对你恭维客气, 你总是觉得意外, 我可从来不得意外。……” (Lei, 2013, p.10)

After a banquet, Jane thought it was a great honor to dance with Mr. Bentley twice, but Elizabeth didn’t think so. First of all, to express Jane’s happy mood, the author uses the word “flatter”, which means someone feels happy because others show you that they like or admire you. Sun’s translation “高兴” lacks the meaning of “being respected”; Lei’s translation “感到非常荣幸”, which is closer to the meaning of the original text.

Secondly, the author also uses “compliment” to describe Jane’s surprise mood. In English, “compliment” is a neutral word and does not express gender discrimination. Sun used the word “抬举” to mean that people with low status were respected by rich or privileged people, apparently looking at Jane in a low position; While Lei translated it into “客气”, this neutral word reflects Lei’s respect for the female character Jane, highlighting the translator’s female consciousness and her subjectivity. By comparison, the word “客气” in Lei’s translation is more appropriate.

Furthermore, the author uses “surprise” to express the excited mood of Jane because of dancing with Mr. Bentley. Sun translated it into “受宠若惊”, it means unexpected favors, still reflecting the lower social status of women in a patriarchal society, which is improper with the context; While Lei used the neutral word “意外” to fully consider the status of women, reflecting the respect for women. In terms of language expression based on an understanding of the original text, Lei exerted her subjectivity and reflected feminist consciousness. Therefore, in the translation process, female translators tend to choose an expression that reflects women’s self-awareness and fight for women’s right of discourse.



## 2.3 Aesthetic Standards

Example 1:

Original text: “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.” (Austen, 2012, p.1)

Sun: “有钱的单身汉总要娶位太太, 这是一条举世公认的真理。” (Sun, 2010, p.3)

Lei: “一个家财万贯的单身汉, 必定需要一位年轻貌美的妻子, 这是一条举世公认的真理。” (Lei, 2013, p.1)

The versions of the word “wife” in this sentence can reflect how female consciousness affects translation. Sun translated it into “太太”, which reflects a polite term for married women in modern society, and the reality that women have become more respected and gained higher status after marriage; Lei translated it into “妻子”, which makes readers unconsciously think of the image of married women in traditional society, closing to the background of the original, and the adjective “年轻貌美的” was added to Lei’s translation, this detail reflects the aesthetic standards of men in traditional society.

In addition, as the first sentence of the novel, this “famous saying” has always been praised. I think it is necessary to explain the sentence. This sentence makes full use of anti-climax rhetorical device, that is, the discourse or writing jumping from important and exciting content to a plain or ridiculous one. First, the author used “It is a truth universally acknowledged” as the beginning of novel, which helps to attract reader’s attention, then this effect was reinforced by the emphasis on the sentence pattern “it is ... that ...”, finally, the author revealed a true but crude fact—“a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife”, this kind of humorous opening achieved a powerful ironic effect, setting the tone for the full text, that is, the author’s performance on the subject will be mocked and ironic.

Example 2:

Original text: “Miss Bennet’s lovely face confirmed his views, and established all his strictest notions of what was due to seniority;.....” (Austen, 2012, p.72)

Sun: “贝内特小姐那张妩媚的脸蛋, 更加坚定了他的想法, 也更加坚定了他那一切先尽老大的旧观念。” (Sun, 2010, p.59)

Lei: “贝内特小姐漂亮可爱的脸蛋使他的打算更加坚定不移。按照他最严格的长幼顺序观念, 也应先挑选大小姐简。” (Lei, 2013, p.54)

Mr. Collins fell in love with Miss Bennet at first sight. The author used “lovely” to describe the Jane’s beauty. Sun translated it into “妩媚的”, which means “attractive, charming”. However, in Chinese, “妩媚” is a derogatory term, which is inappropriate to describe Jane here; Lei’s translation of the word “漂亮可爱的”, on the one hand, it conveys Jane’s beauty and generosity, and on the other hand, it also conforms to the male aesthetics in traditional society. Such a statement can better reflect the feminist translator’s love and respect for Jane and the intention to show readers the unique advantages of women.

It can be seen from the words chosen to describe the characters that feminist translators and non-feminist translators have different attitudes towards aesthetic standards. In Chinese traditional culture, the perception of women is usually fixed and unified, and it is usually determined by male’s aesthetics. Feminist translators usually look at social culture and historical tradition in terms of translator’s subjectivity and feminist consciousness.

By comparison, we can find that Sun Zhili, as a male translator, is inadequate in understanding and reproducing the feminist intentions of the original text; While Lei Limei, as a female translator, has a non-negligible influence on translation, and she can better express characters and the artistic expression described by the author, convey the author’s feminist ideas. Furthermore, the translator Lei Limei explored the gender discrimination in the traditional translation field, and redefined the translation standards through translation practice, and improved the quality of translation and the status of translators. In addition, she also attacks gender discrimination in the field of translation and even of culture level by rewriting feminist translation and deconstructing traditional translation theories in order to highlight women’s right to speak and their social status. It can be seen that translator’s feminist consciousness will help the translator better understand and interpret feminist literary works, and reflect the intentions of the original in the translated works.

## 3. MY VIEW ON *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF FEMINISM

From a feminist perspective, *Pride and Prejudice* has certain practical significance and progressive spirits, but due to the influence of time background, social conditions and cultural factors, it also has some limitations.

On the one hand, Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* itself is a novel that focuses on women, expresses rebellious spirits of female and displays feminism. Therefore, the shaping and depiction of female images in this novel is very profound, especially Elizabeth, as the hero in the novel, has independent thinking, self-esteem, she bravely refuses the traditional money-based marriage, and pursues her own happiness. All of these reflect the awakening of the heroine’s female consciousness, which has certain progress significance at that time.

On the other hand, in the novel, Austen didn’t criticize the traditional marriage model severely. It was reflected in the heroine Elizabeth’s failure to prevent her friend Lucas from marrying to the vulgar and snobbish Collins. After marriage, their lives were not as bad as Elizabeth imagined before, which was reflected in that stupid Collins doesn’t always bother Lucas, as long as she stays alone, she can be happy. From here, the author Austen

seems to express an attitude that even in an inappropriate marriage, as long as women's patience is good enough, they can still achieve a certain level of happiness.

In addition, as for the uneducated and crude mother and younger sisters, the father Mr. Bennet turned a blind eye, and even Elizabeth, as an aggressive woman, didn't stand up to stop or to educate them, but endured them in silence, not to mention the attack on the tyranny of the patriarchal society. Thus it can be seen that this novel reflects a kind of obscure female consciousness, because women with complete female consciousness must not only pursue the right to love and independence of personality, but also actively pursue the equal right to participate in socio-political and economic activities. So it is the limitations of this novel.

From the perspective of female translation, more attention is paid to female subjectivity and feminist consciousness. As translators, in the process of translation, we must break the gender discrimination in the traditional translation field, highlight the subjective status of female translators, and safeguard the women's right to speak, thus hoping to bring some references for the research and practice of feminist translation theory.

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## CONCLUSION

Feminist translation is an unprecedented breakthrough in traditional translation, it emphasizes the translator's

subjectivity and creativity. Through a comparative analysis of the above two translations, we can find that feminist translators are no longer willing to "hide" behind the author, but are more actively involved in the process of meaning construction. The strength of feminist consciousness also affects the understanding of the original text, the choice of language, aesthetic standards and translation methods. Comparing these two translations, we find that as a female translator, Lei Limei makes the figures in the translation more vivid and artistic, and conveys certain feminist ideas, she also reshapes the relations between the original and translated works, the original author and translators, and injects fresh blood into contemporary translation studies. So we can see that the feminist consciousness of the translator has a certain influence on the translation process and translation results.

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