

Multimodality of the Translation of King Gesar

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Abstract: This paper draws on the experience of two translators' successful translation of the epic King Gesar overseas to explore, from an 'intersemiotic' perspective, how the translator applied the multimodal way to English translation in verbal or nonverbal way. This audio and visual employment in the translation is examined from the integrating perspectives from semiotics, translation, and the interdisciplinary studies including music, opera, and film. On the basis of development of translation studies, the trend of multilingual translation and multimodality are proposed and discussed after cultural and ideological turn in translation. To further understand the range and new directions from new media in terms of translational change, "transcreation" and "rewriting", which are used in the King Gesar are introduced and commented. A comparison between the results of two versions of translation seeks to identify their creative interpretation and translation in musical transcreation and rewriting aims to inspire new reflections on the creative translation in multimodal ways.

1. Introduction

Tibetan literature translation is gradually increasing as well as its corresponding study at a fast pace under the circumstance of cultural globalization. The past decades of translation studies updated a strand on 'cultural study' after the culture turn of translation, in which the theme of rewriting in multimodal text emerged as a strong common concern across diverse contributions on translation and other forms of 'transcreation' or localization. The translation of *King Gesar*, the Tibetan classic epic, is gradually and inevitably moving to multimodal translation as the new digital age moves. During discussions overseas diffusion of *King Gesar* afterwards, we became conscious that this traditional translation approach was kept interlingual translation at bay, however, the translation is defined in the broadest sense as the "intersemiotic translation" [1] which is one of categories presented by Jakobson in 1959, on the ground of Peirce's semiotics. [2] Semiotics is the study of signs, of which language is a sign as well, therefore, the trend of translation has zoomed in the multimodal way under the support of the new technologies, instead of remaining the realm of a language prescriptive, because the music, film like language is only the sign (non-verbal). This special issue aims to focus attention in the wide scope of translation studies on the linked concepts of "multimodal, audiovisual" and "localization and transcreation"; to present the importance of audience or customers' acceptance in TT, and to inspire the new reflection on the multimodal diffusion of *King Gesar* by giving theoretical analysis of the Peter Lieberon and Douglas J. Penick's version.

2. Interpreting of Multimodal Way in Translation Study

Translation studies drives its way to integrate perspectives from semiotics, linguistics, literature, philosophy, and sociology, etc. to create different schools of translation theories. After Snell-Hornby in 1990 put forward the "cultural transfer" [3] in her paper then used by Bassnett and Lefevere for "cultural transfer", the translation theories demonstrated the diversity and potentiality. Wider influence of semiotics can be found in different the stage of development of the translation theory. Jakobson defined the categories of translation based on semiotics: intralingual interlingual, and intersemiotic translation. He also called "intersemiotic" "transmutation", which is an interpretation of

verbal signs by means of signs of non-verbal sign systems. His definition of “intersemiotic” is drawn on the framework of Peirce's semiotics, the general science of communication through signs and sign systems, and language is but one, at which Cobley, Malmkjær mentioned in their books [4,5] and Munday commented on the term of 'semiotics' for verbal or non-verbal translation by presenting examples of music, film or painting, the different mode of translation. In the new millennium, with the development of translation studies at an ever-increasing pace, the process-oriented research, and translation practice which belongs to the 'applied' branch of translation studies in the light of the Holmes' map, have been revolutionized because of new technologies, including machine translation, audiovisual and multimodal translation, localization and corpus-based translation studies. [6]

The terms of 'multilingual' and 'multimodal' are expressed and used in translation under the circumstance of technological and digital development. In the age of digitalization and informationization, the reader or the audience grasps what they like through the paper text, visual text and audio text, even hybrid multi-media text. Reiss borrowed the categorization of the three functions of language presented by Karl Bühler to put her corresponding “text types” [7], or communicative situations including informative, expressive, and operative, and later she added the fourth type, “audio-medial texts” or “multimodal texts”, which are based the visual images or audio channel. Mary Snell-Hornby in her “integrated” approach treated “film” translation as literary translation on basis of text types. [8] Technological developments in multilingual communication drove the scholars to start with the research of translatorial action, which focuses on producing a translation that is functionally communicative for the receiver and is guided the TT culture for the selection of content and form. Nevertheless, Reiss and Vermeer [9] point out a translational action is determined by its skopos, which means the purpose of a translation has something to do with the action of translating, and stresses the adaptation of the TT to meet the audience's needs. New media and technologies have potential influence on translation practice and caused the creation of the theory. Although the new translation study about audiovisual translation often focuses on the research of subtitling and dubbing of visual channel, virtually it is the “virgin area of research”, the new concept in translation, which including more further studies, and more new concepts which need to be discussed, such as “transadaptation”, and “multimodal transcription”. The term of “transadaptation” Gambier proposed, [10] can provide us a new perspective of multimodal of literature ST and Christopher Taylor's “multimodal transcription”, [11] which record and analyze a multimodal product in writing of film transcription, can help present the rewriting transcription in the film and musical opera based on the classics. And the sixth element of Taylor's transcription model: “Ideational, interpersonal, textual, and visual grammar “ is dated from Hallidayan linguistics [12] and Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar, [13] which draw on the different semiotic modalities of visual texts.

Tibetan myth of *King Gesar* is one of the world's great epics, as significant for Tibetans as the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* were for the ancient Greeks, therefore it is called “Chinese Homer's epic”. The research on the *King Gesar's* translation emerges from the minority translation projects which is state-supported in accordance with the Chinese people's curiosity of Tibetan myth as well as the people of the world. Translation of the *King Gesar's* epic has three approaches, from Tibetan to Chinese, Tibetan to other minority languages, and Tibetan to English (sometimes Chinese version to English), among which the first two are called intralingual, but some scholars prefer to the interlingual just like Tibetan/Chinese into English. To date, the bulk of the research has been carried out on the Chinese translation with brilliant achievements, [14,15,16] and the research of oversea translation makes a breakthrough in the first stage, which include the two interesting issues, namely, the study on the TT and overseas diffusion. [17,18] However, new technologies change the people's reading style into the multimedia, and the article will focus on the central proposition that the classic epic *King Gesar* is expected to be translated or diffused in different approaches, such as music play, opera, and movies, and the research about it should be discussed through an multimodal lens.

3. King Gesar's Translation and Diffusion

The epic, *King Gesar*, the national treasure of Tibet for more than a thousand years, and its diffusion sets up an important problem about the content, the form, and the way. As for the content, most versions follow the everlasting story framework which is differently demonstrated in the writing or translation. *King Gesar's* epic is full of mysterious myth and heroic legend, which is initially oral-recorded in Tibetan and Mongolian language and presented and translated into Chinese and other foreign languages such as Russian, Germany, French and English, etc. in written way. Around 1880s, the first English version translated from Germany originated from P.S Pallas' transcription out of Mongolian language, started the journey of King Gesar in the English Speaking Countries. Secondly, The early version normally transferred from other European languages, among which “*Lagran Eporeya del Tibet*” by French translator A.D.Neel had the potential influence on the English version, for example, Violet, Sydney's *The Superhuman Life of Gesar of Ling* and Douglas J. Penick's *The Warrior Song of King Gesar*. They told a heroic story of *King Gesar Ling* with fourteen chapters, and “the unbroken heritage of that warrior tradition presents the saga of Gesar's life, from the hardships of his youth through his great battles against the demonic enemies of the four directions to inspire people in diverse societies by showing that, despite failures, an unsparing spiritual journey is integral to a secular life and that, despite defeats, such a quest is inseparable from working toward true social harmony.” [19] Finally, another impressive and influential version is Howard Goldblatt' translation from Chinese Tibetan writer, Alai, which on the base of the framework of enormous corpus, is a translation of the beginning portion covering all the events from Gesar's divine conception to his human birth and mischievous childhood to his coronation as king of Ling. [20]

The presentation forms of *King Gesar* vary in different stage. The popular interlingual translation dominated the others. There are more than 20 English translational works and plenty of articles including mythological novels, long poems, popular proses in the past one hundred years around, but “intersemiotic” translation like music, opera, painting, movie, are occasionally presented, which is worth reflecting because *King Gesar* started with the oral literature by singing. Surprisingly, a great change quietly took place. In music and opera, Peter Lieberon¹, an American composer, composed for two-part series based on the Tibetan book *Leonard Cohen* the two operas *King Gesar*, *Ashoka's Dream* which produced by the National Film Board of Canada in 1997, in which *King Gesar*, the new pieces invoking various central Asian epic traditions of spiritual and cultural renewal premiered at the Munich Biennale (Sony CD) and *Ashoka's Dream* debuted at the Santa Fe Opera in [21]. Semiseriously, A documental musical film on the Tibetan epic legend of *King Gesar* was put on in Canada. Lieberon's style of music is influenced by Buddhist philosophy guided by Chogyam Trungpa², and the success made people be aware of Tibetan epic and its myth and culture in the north of America. Afterwards Yo-Yo Ma, with Chinese origin, remastered Lieberon's album and granted them the new life. Additionally, Douglas J. Penick², the writer of *The Warrior Song of King Gesar*, rewrote the story of *King Gesar* in different way, singing and performing, by which the Tibetan epic was transferred into the opera transcription that is conveniently used to perform or sing in the stage, and miraculously it is reproduced like the Tibetan oral origin in the foreign language and modern style. The Chinese scholars talk highly of its meaningful mode which creatively presents and diffuses the epic *King Gesar*. [22] Thangka⁴, a unique Tibetan painting, is one of important modes to present the Tibetan culture, many people think that the rise of painting appreciation strive for the promotion and understanding of Tibetan culture, for example, Zongthang, a Thangka of stories about the epic *King Cesar*. [23] The prosperity of Tibetan religion study in American is due to the Thangka, because painting is another popular way to interpret one kind of culture.

In summary, The rapid development of technology has had important effects on the translation approaches, and the translation practice employs the multimodal way including normal, audio, visual ones, which drive the translation studies to meet the new challenges in digital age.

4. Multimodal Analysis on the Approaches of Translation

At glance of *Gesar's* English translation, people are normally limited the translation to be interlingual, however, from the wider scope of translation, it is supposed to be 'intersemiotic', that is, sign to sign, or verbal script to verbal script (or verbal script to non-verbal script). A language is a sign, and the way of presentation of the operas, movies, and songs, even paintings would be sort of signs as well. The success of Peter Lieberon's performance and Douglas J. Penick's interpretation of the *King Gesar* from different aspects puts up an interesting hypothesis about the traditional translation of the classic epic that we could use the different approaches to translate and present them in order to diffuse properly, which the audience or customers prefer to accept and like. Translation is virtually interdisciplinary, and Peter Lieberon use the musical sign, the fashionable way to interpret the *King Gesar* the readers care for, which is a real creation. We may draw on the term of "trancreation" which is used to stress the creative and transformative nature of the process. Originally, "trancreation"[24] was employed for English translations of Sanskrit plays which cares about the target language readers, like the naturalizing or domesticating by Schleiermacher and Venuti. Later, it was applied to the creative adaptation of video and advertising expressed by some postcolonial theorists. The translation creation in forms and languages aims to produce a target version which keeps the 'look and feel' of the original, like the game localization. Due to the rapid development of technology, people get the information or obtain knowledge through the multimodal ways including paper, audial, and visual text or sources, which had the important knock-on effects for the translating practice as well as for translation studies. "Here, the creativity behind the new term 'trancreation' is combined with the description 'look and feel', which comes straight from the discourse of localization and translation." [25] This is true of all forms of diffusion of *King Gesar* overseas, although people argue that the different translation through an interdisciplinary lens may cause the loss and destruction of the origin, the new challenge and creation may bring the translation studies new opportunity.

Most translation needs rewriting, when Bassnett and Lefevere explain how the culture impacts and constrains the translation, they gave the theoretical analysis of creative literature images in anthologies, commentaries, film adaptations and translations, and they posit that the translation as rewriting [26], including film rewrites in terms of the changing standards in translation. Later, Lefevere furtherly proposes "Translation is the most obviously recognizable type of rewriting, and . . . it is potentially the most influential because it is able to project the image of an author and/or those works beyond the boundaries of their culture of origin." [27], which means rewriting is necessary and useful when tackling the translation problems for the sake of cross-cultural communication. More than one rewriting transcriptions of *King Gesar* proves that cultural boundaries between the origin and target text is unavoidable, and even in the same language in different stage of time cultural boundaries will still be there. Douglas J. Penick opted for rewriting into the musical opera changed from the form and style to bridge the gap by rewriting in different context, and he expressed in the preface of his book as "maintains traditional Tibetan epic genres and conventions while simultaneously transforming them into a completely contemporary vehicle of expression".

Similarly, Peter Lieberon rewrites the *King Gesar* from the text mode into the music mode, which we can call intersemiotic translation, and he employed the classic music to make the audience feel the magnificent historic hero, King Gesar Ling, the aspiring and brave warrior in the great battles, in accordance with the origin, the music are divided into seven parts, with different melodies and tunes, for example, with the help of oral scripts, the rhythm is not fast and tune is solemn in *the Calling on the Power of Goodness in Our Hearts*, which will build the mysterious atmosphere when the vault of heaven called on the God, and the rhythm is a little fast and tune is light-footed in *The Birth of Gesar*, which indicates the happiness of the people because of the birth of the hero. Only the music and song scripts match harmoniously can readers feel the glamour of origin beyond words. Somehow, when the diffusion of *King Gesar* should be explored, the translators need to concern about its consumption by the general public.

5. Conclusion

It is worth repeating that what I presented was intended to give the translators the guidance and instruction based on the theoretical analysis of the former research, and to explore the approaches of translation of the Tibetan epic of *King Gesar* when meeting the new challenge of technologies. A general case made by Douglas J. Penick as well as Peter Lieberon, was a good example in terms of creation of translation through an interdisciplinary perspective. The theoretical and practice analysis and discussion of *King Gesar's* translation in the multimodal way make the people be aware of the changes and challenges in translating the classics, and be aware of the potential ways to diffuse the *Gesar* overseas, on the ground of translation theories of 'transcreation' and 'rewriting'. It is not denial that some successful English translated versions are accepted by the most of readers or audience. This traditional approach is not unviable, but the young readers cannot accept the normal translation in the new digital context. Multimodal way like audio, visual can be used to tackle the problems of target-text, and integrating perspectives from semiotics, music, opera translation, the article paves the way for the latter study of translation in minority language, especially, a view to advocating multimodal way to translate the classic epic. Certainly, this article is but an attempt to challenge other arguments and practices that commonly disagree with the intersemiotic translation, the wider room and further discussion should be expected.

6. Notes

1). Peter Lieberon, was an excellent American composer and the student of the Tibetan Buddhist master Chogyam Trungpa, and he wrote successful symphonic and chamber music, and an opera, in 1997.

2). Chogyam Trungpa, the first Tibetan poet overseas and Peter Lieberon's spiritual supervisor, was the first one to diffuse the Tibetan Buddhist's culture in north America. His important English poems include *Mudra*, *Timely Rain*, *First Thought Best Thought*, and he established the Naropa University and Shambala Training school in Colorado to preach and teach students.

3). Douglas J. Penick, an American writer and teacher, who studied and practiced Tibetan Buddhism for more than 35 years, has written and taught on Tibetan, Chinese, Japanese, and Indian religion, history, and culture. He wrote three books about *King Gesar*, *The Brilliance of Naked Mind: Secret, Visions of Gesar*, *King of Ling*, *Crossing on a Bridge of Light: The Songs and Deeds of Gesar*, *King of Ling* except *The Warrior Song of King Gesar*. And he also wrote the opera and film scripts for *Warrior Songs: King Gesar* produced by National Film Board of Canada together with Peter Lieberon.

4). Thangka, or 'Tangka', 'Thanka', means "A scroll of Buddha painting" in Tibetan and it is a popular religious art form widely seen in Tibetan area.

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