

Chapter One

Introduction

In 1820 the most popular Chinese novel *Sanguo yanyi* (shortened as SGYY hereafter, *Elaborations on the Chronicles of the Three Kingdoms* 《三国志演义》^①) was introduced for the first time to the English-speaking world. A British printer named P. P. Thoms published his translation under the title “The Death of the Celebrated Minister Tung-cho” in *The Asiatic Journal* in December. It was an excerpt translated from the eighth and ninth chapters of the novel. The translation was continued in the same journal in February 1821. This twenty-three-page translation also covered a rendering of Jin Shengtan’s (金圣叹) preface to the original work in the form of a footnote. Thoms (1820: 525) annotated:

The narrative in the text is extracted and translated into English from the San-kwo-che, a Chinese history of the most celebrated of their civil wars. This history is much esteemed by the Chinese, not only for its literary merit, but because it contains (as they imagine) a copious and accurate narrative of the wars and calamities of the period to which it relates.

① Despite the immense popularity of this work in China, there is no single standard title for extant editions of SGYY (for further information please refer to 2.1). It is simply known as *Sanguo yanyi* (《三国志演义》) to modern Chinese people, while in the West it is most familiar under the name *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, the influential translation by C. H. Brewitt-Taylor. As the nature of this book is to discuss translation issues, the author simply adopts SGYY to refer to the original work so as to avoid partiality for any extant translations.

The translation and the brief introduction marked the beginning of the dissemination of *SGYY* in the English-speaking world. For almost two hundred years thereafter, different kinds of translations of the novel—in verse or in prose, abridged or complete, adapted or unadapted—have come into being. At the same time, reviews and studies of the novel in various forms—book reviews, prefaces or postscripts to translations, monographs, literary histories, literary anthologies, dictionaries, encyclopedias, biographies, textbooks, and so on—have accompanied and propelled the translation's development in history. In many cases, especially in the early years when Chinese studies was still in its primeval stage, it is fairly difficult to draw a boundary line between the translation and review of the novel. The two processes are often interlaced, with one imbedded in the other. Even in the late twentieth century, translators and scholars of the novel always benefit from each other's work, and sometimes a person can have both identities.

The journey of a literary work from one language and culture into those of another is composed of the processes of translation, review and study, and reception. In the process of translation, it is shaped with a foreign language and culture; in the process of review and study, it is examined against the poetics of that foreign culture; in the process of reception, it is accepted or rejected, commented on or imitated upon. The three processes are mutually complementary and work together to promote the dissemination of the literary work. The latter two processes often intertwine. In fact, review and study can be viewed as a subclass of reception, because they always present scholarly reception of a literary work.

The present study takes the translation history of the novel *SGYY* in the English language as its research object, using review and study as supporting material to explain various translation issues. According to André Lefevere (1992: 4), rewriting can be “the translation, editing, and anthologization of texts, the compilation of literary histories and reference works, and the production of the kind of criticism...mostly in the guise of biographies and book reviews.” The present study agrees with Lefevere

in every other way except that it tries to rip apart translation with a more constrained sense from rewriting with a much broader sense. Based on the material to which I have been able to gain access, and drawing on the taxonomy of Lefevere, this research proposes that SGYY has been introduced into the English-speaking world in mainly two modes of transfer and representation: translation and review. In the category of translation will be found not only the kind of translation alluded to in Lefevere's definition of rewriting, but also editing and anthologization of texts. The compilation of literary histories and reference works, as well as the production of biographies and book reviews, will fall into the category of review.

Within the category of translation, however, one may find that this activity is conducted in different ways. This study uses five terms to describe the nature of translation: the extracted (or excerpted) translation, the adapted translation or adaptation, the summarized translation, the full translation and the abridged translation. An extracted translation only covers one specific part of the original, but it basically leaves nothing in that part untranslated. An adapted translation involves omission or addition of information, or the transposition of mode of expression. Transformations caused by adaptation can be global or specific. For example, an adaptation may restate the dialogues in the original in an indirect manner; or, it may leave some details of the specific part of the original untranslated. The summarized translation only keeps the basic plot of the original, and the linguistic and stylistic attributes of the original are not accorded consideration. A full translation is the one most faithful to the original in terms of the completeness of the content, and is thus considered most beneficial to the study of the literary work in the target culture by serious and professional readers, whose representatives are literary scholars and critics. An abridged translation is one abridged from a full translation. Representing the essence of the original, an abridged translation provides a short-cut for readers who want access to a voluminous work but are nonetheless daunted by its sheer size.

As for why this research restricts its scope to the translation of SGYY

in the English language rather than in any other languages, it is largely based on the considerations of the status of the language in the world. Modern English, sometimes described as the first global lingua franca, is the dominant international language in cultural communication. The novel boasts a much longer translation history in English than in any other Western languages. Accordingly, it has more versions and scholarly studies in English. One may argue that the impact of this novel in the English-speaking world is no match for that in other Asian countries, such as Japan, Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam. This is true, but the popularity of the novel in Asia has its basis in the common cultural heritage which is lacking in its journey to the Western world. Despite the cultural barriers, *SGYY* has been continually translated into English, and compared with other languages, the English language as a vehicle has carried the novel to more countries and broader audiences. How are these versions transmitted and what do they encounter in the new cultural context? And why is it so? These are issues worth exploring. The whole process of its dissemination in the English-speaking world involves many factors that can shed light on the dissemination of Chinese works in the world in general.

It should be noted that the English-speaking world in this research mainly refers to the United Kingdom and the United States, because, with many distinguished translators and sinologists, both countries have contributed the most to the translation and review of *SGYY*.

It is also worth mentioning that English communities in China which existed from the late Qing to the founding of the People's Republic of China should also be considered as part of the English-speaking world in this research. These communities were mainly composed of missionaries, diplomats, and businessmen from countries with English as their mother tongue. These expatriate groups ran their own English journals and clubs where they exchanged ideas on Chinese issues. Their perspectives were largely shaped by their English cultural background. Due to their geographical advantage, they were more sensitive to Chinese culture and had more empathy with Chinese people than their countrymen back at

home. They were the main force in the translation and introduction of *SGYY* in English in the early years. Many of them, such as Herbert Allen Giles and Samuel Wells Williams, became distinguished sinologists and professors after returning to their own countries.

The English translations and reviews of the novel are mainly produced in the English-speaking world, and initiated by English communities in China or sinologists in the United Kingdom or the United States. But there are also translations and studies produced by the Chinese and published in mainland China or Hong Kong. These two kinds of translation present different characteristics and should be treated separately. The latter often appears as a response to the former and in this sense should also be included in this research. For example, Cheung Yik-man claimed that he created a new version only because C. H. Brewitt-Taylor's widespread version contained too many mistakes.

The background of the study has thus been presented and the following part will describe the purpose of this book.

1.1 Purpose of the book

This book intends to make a systematic and thorough study of the English translation and dissemination of *SGYY* against the historical and social context in which various versions were produced and perused. Through a close examination of the renderings and the relevant agents who have actively participated in the creation, publication and reading of them, the research aims to reveal the historical and social values of the translations in different ages. I will not be satisfied with a description of how the novel was translated, but will go one step further to investigate why it was translated that way. Through this comprehensive historical study of the English translation of the novel, I will ultimately attempt to discover the tendencies pertinent to its translation in the English-speaking world. I hope that the current study will prove a reliable source for future studies on the English translation of the novel.

English translations of Chinese literature are not considered part of the Chinese literature, at least not by specialists in that field, simply because the linguistic medium is no longer Chinese. At the same time the newly-born English translated literature is not vigorous enough to be regarded as part of the English literature, given the prevalent nationalist paradigms in literature studies in the West, even though in the long history of literature translation around the world we can still find several cases that translations from other languages into English are finally canonized and seen as an integral part of that literature. Among the examples are Edward Fitzgerald's translation of *Rubaiyat* by Omar Khayyam from Persian, and Ezra Pound's translation under the title *Cathay* from Chinese; the latter having ushered in the phase of imagist poetics in the West. But no matter how successful they are, they cannot represent the general fate of translated literature in the English-speaking world. The great majority of translated literature, with a very limited audience, remains obscure to the general public and falls into historical oblivion. In China the fate of Chinese translated literature is changing in recent years, thanks to the joint effort of several scholars;^① Chinese translated literature is included in a couple of anthologies of Chinese literature, including *A Treasury of Modern Chinese Literature* and *A Treasury of the Twenty-First-Century Chinese Literature*.^② In the West, however, the situation remains very much the same as years ago. English translated literature from Chinese is at most regarded as part of world literature and studied as such. Numerous translations are rejected and only a few lucky ones can win a position in the anthologies of world literature. In the West very few scholars of English literature take translated literature from Chinese as their research

① Xie Tianzhen (2007: 123–150) has discussed the nature and orientation of Chinese translated literature from a theoretical perspective.

② Shi, Z. C. (1990). *Zhongguo jindai wenxue daxi: Fanyi wenxue ji* [A treasury of modern Chinese literature: Translated literature]. Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore.
 Xie, T. Z. (2002–2007). *Ershiyi shiji zhongguo wenxue daxi: fanyi wenxue* [A treasury of the twenty-first-century Chinese literature: Translated literature]. Shenyang: Chunfeng wenyi chubanshe.

object; it remains largely the field of sinologists. Though their research has more or less plowed the ground of Chinese literature, it is mainly from the cultural and literary perspective, ignoring its specificity as translation.

Therefore, research on the translated literature from Chinese still has to be conducted by Chinese scholars of translation studies. We should not restrict our attention solely to Chinese translated literature to the neglect of translated literature from Chinese. It is necessary for us to know what has happened to the Chinese literature once introduced to the West. This is not only indispensable to the general development of translation studies, but is one of the urgent tasks for China at present. That China goes to the world means more than dialogues between China and other countries in the field of economy and politics, and the dissemination of Chinese literature around the world is also an issue to be put on the agenda.

The endeavor to translate Chinese literature into Western languages has lasted for nearly two centuries in modern era, involving a large number of individuals and institutions in China and abroad. In the nineteenth century sinology came into being as an independent discipline and since then the translation of Chinese works has always been an important task for sinologists. In this era of globalization Chinese scholars came to realize that for ages we have taken much more from the West than we have given them, and we Chinese know far more about the West than Westerners do about us. As a result, the enhancement of the spread of Chinese culture has become an issue on the agenda; the translation and dissemination of classical Chinese works is an indispensable project hereon. In recent years the Chinese government, publishers and translators have committed themselves to the promotion of Chinese literature and culture around the world, and the issue of the Library of Chinese Classics (大中华文库) is a peak of the project. What can this history of dissemination reveal to us? What kind of translation should we give to the world? How can translated literature from Chinese be better promoted around the world? These are questions that deserve the careful reflection of all scholars who are concerned about this cause. Of all the

translated literature from Chinese we should pay attention to those in English in the primary position given the dominant status of that language in the modern world.

Despite the fact that the translation of classical Chinese works has been a remarkable event in the world translation history, research on this aspect remains lacking compared with the amount of translation done by Western sinologists and Chinese scholars. Research on the translation of classical Chinese novels is especially so. Comparatively speaking, among the four great novels, studies of the translation and dissemination of *Honglou meng* (*The Story of the Stone* 《红楼梦》) have been attracting more and more attention recently, forming the most outstanding subfield within scholarship on the translation of the classical Chinese novels. But the other three novels still remain largely neglected. Take *SGYY* for instance. Apart from a few papers scattered in various conference proceedings, around one hundred scholarly papers published between 1979 and 2015 on the translation of *SGYY* can be retrieved in the Net of Chinese Academic Journals. The status quo of this field stands in stark contrast to that of the *SGYY* research as a whole. According to Shen Bojun (2007: 153), in the short space of twenty years between 1980 and 2000, the Chinese mainland has published approximately one hundred books and monographs (including essay collections), as well as more than sixteen hundred scholarly articles, on the *SGYY* research. I have searched the Net of Chinese Academic Journals recently and found another fourteen hundred scholarly articles have been published between 2001 and 2015. Although the *SGYY* research in China is vigorous, a historical study of the foreign translation of the novel has never been done. In a word, the quantity of scholarly papers in this field is small, and the breadth and depth of the research are also very limited.

It is based on these considerations—the overall negligence of the research on English translated Chinese literature, especially classical novels—that this book proposes to study the translation and dissemination of *SGYY* down the ages, in the English-speaking world.

It might be asked why this study chooses *SGYY* rather than any

other literary works as its object. This is basically due to its long history of translation, its unique status among the numerous Chinese literary productions, and the prolonged negligence in the academic world as is mentioned before. The earliest translation of *SGYY* in a foreign language is its Japanese version published between 1689 and 1692, and English is the second foreign language it was translated into. At the same time, it was the first long Chinese novel to be translated into any European language (West, 1995: 157), P. P. Thoms's English translation of the eighth and ninth chapters coming out nearly two centuries ago. The status of the novel in the history of Chinese literature and its enormous influence will be expounded in the following chapter. In a word, a long history of translation with many versions lends paramount significance to the study of its dissemination in the English-speaking world.

1.2 Scope of the study of translation history

In *Method in Translation History*, Anthony Pym (1998: 5) subdivides translation history into three areas: translation archeology, historical criticism and explanation. A further definition of each area is given as follows:

Translation archeology is a set of discourses concerned with answering all or part of the complex question “who translated what, how, where, when, for whom and with what effect?”. It can include anything from the compiling of catalogues to the carrying out of biographical research on translators. The term “archeology” is not meant to be pejorative here, nor does it imply any particular Foucauldian revelations. It simply denotes a fascinating field that often involves complex detective work, great self-sacrifice and very real service to other areas of translation history.

Historical criticism would be the set of discourses that assess the way translations help or hinder progress. This is an

unfashionable and perilous exercise, not least because we would first have to say what progress looks like. In traditional terms historical criticism might broadly cover the philological part of historiography, if and when philology conjugates notions of progress as moral value (and the best of it used to). Yet the resulting criticism cannot apply contemporary values directly to past translations. Rather than decide whether a translation is progressive for us here and now, properly historical criticism must determine the value of a past translator's work in relation to the effects achieved in the past. This would be the difference between historical and non-historical criticism...

Explanation is the part of translation history that tries to say *why* archeological artifacts occurred when and where they did, and how they were related to change. Archeology and historical criticism are mostly concerned with individual facts and texts. Explanation must be concerned with the causation of such data, particularly the causation that passes through power relationships; this is the field where translators can be discovered as effective social actors....A history that ignored causation would perhaps be able to describe actions and effects, it might even have a one-dimensional idea of progress, but it would not recognize the properly human dimension of documents and actions as processes of change. (Pym, 1998: 5–6)

For any kind of translation history, translation archeology always lays the foundation. It basically involves document collection, information retrieval, reading and reviewing. Success in translation archeology can be a good start for the whole project.

In the aforementioned book, Pym elaborates on neither historical nor non-historical criticism because, as he states, “they both require degrees of ideological certitude for which I await revelation” (1998: 5). Indeed, “progressive moral values” is hard to define. But such concepts should not impede historical discussions of translations. Moreover, not