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A Comparative Study of Two Chinese Versions of *The Moon and Sixpence*: A Narratological Perspective

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Abstract

Narrative strategies and discourse features correlate strongly with the characterization, thematic significance as well as rhetorical effect in narrative fictions. This paper will conduct a comparative study of Fu Weici's and Li Jihong's Chinese version of *The Moon and Sixpence* with particular reference to five examples from two narratological aspects, namely unreliable narration and narrative tense. Attention will be focused on to what extent and how relevant stylistic markers of these narrative features have been recreated in the target text. It is suggested that translators should always be sensitive enough to detect any stylistic markers of unique narrative features, identify their association with characterization, thematic and artistic value and reproduce them in the target text so as to ensure an optimal transference of their embedded rhetorical effect.

Keywords: Comparative study; *The moon and sixpence*; Narratological perspective.

1. Introduction

The Moon and Sixpence was written by the renowned British novelist William Somerset Maugham (1874-1965) and published in 1919, right after the First World War. Inspired by the life of the French impressionist painter Paul Gauguin (1848-1903), the novel portrays the life of a British painter called Charles Strickland, originally a conventional stockbroker, who abandons his wife and children for Paris and Tahiti to pursue his dream of painting. The story is narrated by the first-person homodiegetic narrator "I", a biographer, who records the protagonist's life via recalling his only a few encounters with him as well as interviewing the persons who once came into contact with him, in an attempt to determine his real nature and unveil his ultimate motivation of the painter dream.

In this novel, Maugham touches upon the theme of inexplicable human nature and soul searching, an epitome of the postwar social instability as well as the uncertainty of human cognition. Additionally, he calls for the respect to the individuality and idiosyncrasy of the genius. In order to effectively interweave these themes with the story plot and characterization, the author ingeniously adopts two distinctive narrative techniques, namely, unreliable narration and a flexible use of narrative tense. Both topics have been heatedly discussed within the framework of narratology by a host of scholars. For instance, Booth (1961), Phelan (2005), Shen (2006), Shen (2009), Tan (2005), Tan (2009), Zhao (1998), have studied unreliable narration while Genette (1983), Rimmon-Kenan (2002), Fang (2016), Shen and Wang (2010), Tan (2014) have researched on narrative tense. At the discourse level, can these two narrative techniques be successfully reproduced in the translated texts? This is precisely the question that triggered the author of this article to conduct the current study, which sets out to investigate to what extent and how these two discourse features have been reconstructed in the two selected Chinese versions of the novel as well as the consequent influence on characterization, thematic significance and rhetorical effect.

A search on the internet shows that there are currently 55 different Chinese versions of the novel available (Liu, 2017). Among them, Fu Weici's and Li Jihong's version have been selected to be the case study in this research on the ground of their respective merits. Fu's version was first published in 1996 and then reprinted several times in 2006, 2011 and 2017 respectively by Shanghai Translation Publishing House. Fu was one of the most distinguished literary translators in China and translated a wealth of the world's classic literary works including *Nineteen Eighty-Four, Animal Farm, The Heart of the Matter*, etc. His version is widely acclaimed as canon by the mass Chinese readers and enjoys long-standing popularity over the years. Meanwhile, Li Jihong's version has also drawn readers' attention in recent years. Li has come to be recognized by the public as an emerging young translator after he translated *The Kite Runner*, which was published in 2003. Later, he successively translated a wide range of classic works like *The Old Man and the Sea, The Great Gatsby* and *The Little Prince* (the only official Chinese version approved by the Foundation Saint-Exupéry of France in 2015), most of which seem to be positively embraced by the younger generation.

2. Literature Review
2.1. Unreliable Narration

Unreliable narration is claimed to be "a hot issue in narratology" (Fludernik, 2001) and "a central issue in contemporary narrative theory" (Nünning, 2005). The concept was first proposed by Booth (1961) in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*: "I have called a narrator *reliable* when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms), *unreliable* when he does not" (1961: 158-159, original italics). He further classifies unreliable narration into four types along two axes: misreporting and underreporting along the axis

of "facts/events" as well as misregarding and underregarding along the axis of "ethics/evaluation". Later, Booth's student Phelan, while sticking to Booth's rhetorical approach, expands his theory on several counts. Firstly, Phelan redefines Booth's original definition of unreliable narration and claims that "a character narrator is 'unreliable' when he or she offers an account of some event, person, thought, thing, or other object in the narrative world that deviates from the account the implied author would offer" (2005:49). Additionally, Phelan expands Booth's classification of unreliable narration by adding misreading and underreading along the axis of "knowledge/perception" (2005:66-97). Misreporting involves the narrator's unreliability "on the axis of characters, facts and events", possibly due to his or her lack of knowledge or mistaken values, whereas misregarding and misreading usually involves unreliability on the axis of ethics and evaluation as well as knowledge and perception respectively (2005:51). Phelan also makes a distinction among underreporting, underregarding and underreading. While underreporting means the narrator tells less than he or she actually knows, it is not always easy to distinguish underregarding from underreading: the former occurs "when a narrator's ethical judgement is moving along the right track but simply does not go far enough" whilst the latter occurs "when the narrator's lack of knowledge, perceptiveness, or sophistication yields an insufficient interpretation or an event, character, or situation" (2005: 52).

2.2. Narrative Tense

The word "tense" is derived from the ancient French word *tens*, or the modern French word *temps* (Fang, 2016). In narratology, "tense" has two meanings: firstly, it is referred by some narratologists to the verb form that shows the time, as its meaning in grammar (Rimmon-Kenan, 2002), qtd. in Fang (2016); secondly, it is one of the three categories (tense, aspect, mood) of narrative "in which the relationship between the time of the story and the time of the discourse is expressed", including order, duration and frequency (Genette, 1983). Naturally, the second meaning is closely associated with the first meaning in that it also involves the use of different verb forms. As an essential feature of narrative discourse, the issue of tense should be properly dealt with when translators are to translate narrative texts, such as fictions (Fang, 2016). In other words, whether and how narrative tense can be transferred from the source text to the target text should be critically factored into the translation process, which bears much on the rhetorical effect of fictions.

3. Methodology and Research Questions

The current study will compare and contrast Fu Weici's and Li Jihong's Chinese version of *The Moon and Sixpence* by employing relevant theories and methodology from unreliable narration and narrative tense in the discipline of narratology. Three examples regarding "underreading" of the narrator's unreliability and two examples regarding the flexible use of narrative tense will be selected and examined from these two aspects in detail, guided by two research questions:

(1) At the discourse level, to what extent are the stylistic markers of the two narrative techniques reproduced in the two translated versions?

(2) What effect does the successful or failed transference of these discourse features have on characterization, thematic significance and rhetorical effect?

4. Results and Discussion
4.1. Unreliable Narration

In *The Moon and Sixpence*, the narrator's unreliability is embodied along all three axes. Specifically, he is underreporting Strickland's life and mentality owing to the fragmentariness of facts at his disposal, his limited point of view as a homodiegetic narrator, as well as Strickland's unarticulated disposition. This leads to his misregarding/underregarding of Strickland and his wife's personality and behaviors. Furthermore, the narrator's most manifest unreliability lies in his misreading/underreading of Strickland's ultimate motivation of leaving his family for Paris and Tahiti. From the very beginning till the end of the story, the narrator makes unremitting effort to reveal the protagonist's real nature but ends up in pain, if not in vain, due to his lack of knowledge, perceptiveness and sophistication at a young age. His underreading perfectly echoes the theme of inexplicable human nature and soul searching, as is mentioned above. The stylistic markers of underreading are prevalent throughout the novel and the successful reproduction of them plays an integral role in reshaping the narrator's personality as well as transferring the thematic significance and rhetorical effect in the translated texts. One of the examples is shown below:

(1) To pursue his secret has something of the fascination of a detective story. It is a riddle which shares with the universe the merit of having no answer. (2017:2)

Fu's version:

探索一个艺术家的秘密颇有些阅读侦探小说的迷人劲儿。这个奥秘同大自然极相似，其妙处在于无法找到答案。(Exploring the secrets of an artist is quite a bit of the glamour of reading detective stories. This mystery is very similar to nature, the beauty of which is that the answer cannot be found.) (2011:1)

Li's version:

探索这种艺术家的秘密是很有乐趣的，跟阅读侦探小说差不多。他的作品就像无言的宇宙，充满着有待发现的奥秘。(It's fun to explore the secrets of this artist, about the same as reading detective stories. His work is like a silent universe, full of mysteries to be discovered.) (2016:4)

Right at the start of the story, the narrator makes an analogy between pursuing an artist's secret and exploring the truth of the universe: they are both riddles with no definite answers. In *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary*

English, "riddle" is defined as "a mystery; something one cannot understand" (1998:1298). As a matter of fact, this word carries the connotation that the narrator might not be able to solve the mystery of Strickland, which is underpinned by the phrase of "having no answer". Apparently, these two sentences foreshadow the upcoming events and the enormous difficulties met by the narrator when he incessantly endeavors to "read" Strickland's mind. Therefore, "riddle" and "having no answer" can be regarded as the preview of the forthcoming unreliable narration, signaling the narrator's underreading of Strickland's behavior, mentality and emotions throughout the story.

A careful comparison of the two versions shows that Fu's version is more satisfactory than that of Li's. In Fu's version, "riddle" and "having no answer" are literally translated as "奥秘" (mystery) and "无法找到答案" (the answer cannot be found), the best possible solution to transfer the underlying meaning of elusive human nature. In this way, the signpost words of underreading can be rightly recreated in the target text, offering the target language readers a clue to figure out the embedded thematic significance. By contrast, Li's version fails to reproduce the stylistic markers of unreliable narration. On the one hand, the phrase "无言的" (the silent), which is intended by the translator to equate "having no answer", is somehow obscure: its literal meaning is "silent" instead of "having no answer". Therefore, it is not a direct equivalence to the source text. On the other hand, "充满着有待发现的奥秘" (full of mysteries to be discovered) has shifted the emphasis of "riddle" away from its incomprehensible spirit to the eagerness of exploring the truth. Consequently, the clues of the narrator's unreliability are lost in translation, hence the loss of thematic value in the target text.

As the story unfolds, the inexplicability of Strickland's real nature is repeatedly displayed. When Strickland confessed to "me" for the first time that he wanted to paint, "I" was completely shocked: "I did not understand. I thought he was mad" (2017: 58-59). For quite a long time, "I" had not been unable to sufficiently interpret Strickland's mind, which was exemplified by "my" repetitive self-statement, almost a cliché: "I could not understand". Another notable stylistic marker of the narrator's underreading is the single word "some"/"something", which is skillfully used by the narrator to convey his uncertainty of determining Strickland's nature, as is shown in the following example:

(2) I seemed to feel in him *some* vehement power that was struggling within him; it gave me the sensation of *something* very strong, overmastering, that held him, as it were, against his will. (2017:2, my emphasis)

Fu's version:

我好像感觉到*一种*猛烈的力量正在他身体里面奋力挣扎；我觉得*这种*力量非常强大，压倒一切，仿佛违拗着他自己的意志，并把他紧紧抓在手中。(I felt as if a violent force was struggling in his body; I felt it was so powerful and overwhelming, as if it disobeyed his own will and grasped him firmly.) (2011:54-55, my emphasis)

Li's version:

我似乎感觉到*某种*猛烈的力量正在他体内挣扎，我觉得这种力量非常强大，压倒了他的意志，牢牢地控制住他。(I seemed to feel some kind of violent force struggling inside him, and I felt it was so powerful that it overpowered his will and held him firmly in control.) (2016:55, my emphasis)

There are four entries of the word "some" in Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English: English-Chinese Edition (1998). Likewise, "something" means "some unstated or unknown thing" (1998:1460). As can be seen, these two words both refer to one thing that is "unknown", "uncertain" or "unclear", which defies description or understanding. They are used several times in the source text, indicating the narrator's incapability of fully interpreting Strickland's mentality. Other examples include: "… there was *something* in his personality which prevented him from being dull" (2017:63), "He was aiming at *something*" (2017:101), "I fancy that Strickland saw vaguely *some* spiritual meaning in material things…" (2017:199).

In Li's version, all of them are consistently translated as "某种" (some). According to the online Xinhua Dictionary, "某" (some) is referred to "the person, place, incident, object, etc. that is unclearly stated", hence the perfect equivalence to "some"/ "something". In Fu's version, however, most of them are rendered as "一种" (a) in the target text, with only one or two exceptions, as in "我猜想，思特兰克兰德在有形的事物上模模糊糊地看到*某种*精神意义" (I suspect that Strickland has vaguely identified *some* spiritual meanings in tangible things.) (2016:182). It should be pointed out that "一种" (one) is more definite than "某种" (some), since the Chinese character "某" (some) itself harbors the implication of obscurity. It is thus safe to say that Li's version is superior to Fu's version, since it successfully reconstructs the fullest extent of unreliability in the target text, contributing to the better transference of thematic significance and rhetorical effect.

The narrator's underreading is also demonstrated by his attributing Strickland's deviant behavior to some supernatural forces, as in this example:

(3a) He seemed really *to be possessed of a devil*, and I felt that it might suddenly turn and rend him. (2017:60, my emphasis)

(3b) … and I got again more strongly the impression of a man *possessed*. (2017:101, my emphasis)

(3c) I had again the feeling that he *was possessed of a devil*…… (2017:129, my emphasis)

Fu's version:

(3a) 他似乎真的让*魔鬼附体*了，我觉得他可能一下子被那东西撕得粉碎。(He really seems to have been possessed by the devil, and I think he might have been torn to pieces by that thing all at once.) (2011:55, my emphasis)

(3b) 过去我有过的那种印象这一次变得更加强烈了：他像是一个被什么*迷住*了的人。(The kind of impression I've had in the past has become even stronger this time: he's like someone who's been fascinated by something.) (2011:91, my emphasis)

(3c) 我的心里又产生了一种他被*魔鬼附体*的感觉…… (There was another feeling in my heart that he was possessed by the devil……) (2011:118, my emphasis)

Li's version:

(3a) 他好像真的被*魔鬼附体*了，我觉得那魔鬼很可能突然反过来把他撕成碎片。(He seemed to be really possessed by the devil, and I felt that the devil was likely to suddenly tear him to shreds in turn.) (2016:55, my emphasis)

(3b) 我再次强烈地感觉到他是被*邪魅缠身*了。(Once again, I felt strongly that he was haunted by demons.) (2016:91, my emphasis)

(3c) 我再次觉得他是被*魔鬼附体*了……(Once again, I feel like he's been possessed by the devil……) (2016:118, my emphasis)

The word "possessed" appears at least three times in the story, since the narrator, for some time, believes that Strickland is controlled or governed by some strange or dark forces such as a devil. Strickland is so obsessed with painting - regardless of other people's attitudes towards him or the hostile environment he lives in - that being "possessed" by a devil seems to be the only justification the narrator can resort to. Of course, Strickland is not possessed by a devil to be exact; instead, he is driven by the keen desire to "put the whole expression of himself" and to say "all that he knew of life and all that he divined" by painting (2017:278), which is only uncovered by the narrator at the end of the story. Thus, this word serves as a typical stylistic marker of unreliable narration, highlighting the narrator's inability of sufficiently interpreting Strickland's mentality as well as portraying Strickland's idiosyncrasy. Therefore, it should be translated consistently to emphasize the narrator's firm belief in this explanation as well as reinforce characterization.

"魔鬼附体" (possessed by devils) and "邪魅缠身" (entangled by demons) are both proper Chinese counterparts of "possessed by a devil", and yet the problem resides in the fact that they are used consistently in neither of the two versions. In Example (3b), Fu uses "迷住" (be fascinated) while Li uses "邪魅缠身" (entangled by demons) instead of "魔鬼附体" (possessed by devils). Fu does not use "魔鬼附体" (possessed by devils), probably because there is not a "devil" in this example whereas Li might want to avoid repetition. However, the word "again" shows that this impression is the same as the one the narrator previously got, so it is justly reasonable to fill the gap of the omission of "a devil"; meanwhile, it is not necessary to diversify the language use in this context, since "possessed" is repeatedly used in the source text. Therefore, it is advisable to translate this word consistently in these examples so as to imitate the repetition in the target text.

4.2. Narrative Tense

In *The Moon and Sixpence*, the narrator generally adopts the first-person retrospective narration where there are two diegetic levels: at the first level, the narrator as the narrating self is describing what he is thinking and doing at the immediate moment; at the second level, the story about Strickland unfolded, with the narrator - as the experiencing self - demonstrating what he did, felt and thought in the past. Obviously, there are two time zones involved: the present time at the first level and the past time at the second level, hence a shift of verb forms between past tenses and present tenses. Under most circumstances, there is only one tense within one sentence; however, the author sometimes mixes two or more tenses in one sentence, to achieve some special rhetorical effect, as in the following example:

(4) But because I have learnt that man is incalculable, I should not at this time of the day be so surprised by the news that reached me when in the early autumn I returned to London. (2017:31)

Fu's version:

只不过有一点会和*当年*不一样：在我了解到人是多么玄妙莫测之后，我*今天*决不会像*那年*初秋我刚刚回到伦敦时那样，在听到那个消息以后会那样*大吃一惊*了。(Only one thing would be different: after I learned how inscrutable people are, I would never be so surprised to hear that news today, as I did when I first returned to London in the early autumn of that year.) (2011:27, my emphasis)

Li's version:

可是因为我早已知道人心难测，*如今*的我应该*不会像当年*初秋回到伦敦时那样，因为获悉那道消息而惊诧*万分*了。(But because I already know that the human heart is unfathomable, I should not be as surprised to learn the news as I did when I returned to London in the early autumn of that year.) (2016:28, my emphasis)

There are three tenses in this sentence: the present perfect tense ("have learnt"), the simple present tense ("is incalculable", "should not be surprised") indicating the present time as well as the simple past tense ("reached me", "returned") indicating the past time. What the author intends to stress here is the sharp distinction between the narrator's experiencing self in the past and the narrating self at the moment. When "I" returned to London, "I" was totally stunned by the news that Strickland had left his family for Paris without telling anyone. At that time, "I" was young, naïve, and ignorant of the incalculable human nature. After all these years, "I" have become sophisticated and accustomed to the unpredictability of life. As can be seen, the flexible use of narrative tense contributes to achieving the special rhetorical effect of emphasizing the narrator's growth in maturity and revealing the thematic significance of explicable human nature. However, since Chinese verbs do not change the form to indicate different time zones, difficulties may arise in the translation process. A viable solution is to add temporal deixis to compensate for the loss of verb form changes.

Generally speaking, the two versions properly recreate the flexible use of narrative tense by adding such temporal deixis as "当年" (that year), "那年" (that year), "如今" (today) and "今天" (today). Nevertheless, Fu's

version is still more preferable than Li's version in that the translator brilliantly adds one clause "只不过有一点会和当年不一样" (Only one thing would be different) with a colon, which makes all the difference. It should be pointed out that there is no such a clause in the source text, but the meaning is embedded within the lines, underpinned by the shift of narrative tense. By this means, the distinction between the narrator's "two selves" is highlighted. It is also worth noting that in Li's version, "早已知道" (already knew) is a bit confusing. Although it is a literal translation of the present perfect tense of "have learnt", Chinese readers may be misguided by the illusion that the narrator had already known human nature in the past. A possible suggestion is to replace it by "现在知道" (know now) or "后来知道" (know later) to clear up the illusion and clarify the time shift.

Similarly, the author also adopts flexible narrative tense in the following example:

(5a) I had not yet learnt how contradictory human nature is; I did not know how much pose there is in the sincere, how much baseness in the noble, or how much goodness in the reprobate. (2017:48)

(5b) I did not realize how motley are the qualities that go to make up a human being. (2017:77)

Fu's version:

(5a) 我*那时还*不了解人性多么矛盾，我不知道真挚中含有多少做作，高尚中蕴藏着多少卑鄙，或者，即使在邪恶里也找得着美德。(I did not understand how contradictory human nature is at that time, and I did not know how much pretentiousness there is in sincerity, how much despicableness there is in nobility, or, even in evil, the virtues are found.) (2011:43, my emphasis)

(5b) *那时*我*还*没认识到一个人的性格是极其复杂的。(At that time I had not realized that a person's character is extremely complex.) (2011:68, my emphasis)

Li's version:

(5a) *那时候*我*尚未*明白人性是多么的悖谬，我*还*不知道真挚诚恳底下也许埋藏着矫揉造作，高风亮节背后可能隐匿着卑鄙无耻，也不知道无赖恶棍心里或许存留着良善之意。(At that time I did not understand how paradoxical the human nature is; I did not know pretentiousness may be lurking in sincerity, despicableness may be hidden in nobility and villains may also harbor goodness.) (2016:43, my emphasis)

(5a) *那时候*……我*尚未*明白人性是多么错综复杂。(At that time......I did not yet understand how intricate human nature is.) (2016:69, my emphasis)

In both Example (5a) and (5b), the author mixes the use of past tenses (past perfect tense and simple past tense) as well as simple present tense for meaningful purposes: past tenses display the narrator's limited perception or knowledge in the past, contributing to characterization whereas simple present tense underlines the universal truth of human nature, almost like the governing laws of the universe, stressing the thematic significance. As is explained in Example (4), "I" had no idea of how "contradictory" or "motley" human nature could be due to the young age; however, this contradictoriness or inconsistency in human nature does exist, regardless of our perception or recognition. Therefore, the shift in narrative tense, especially the use of simple present tense embedded with profound implications should be appropriately dealt with in the translation process.

A careful comparison between the two versions reveals that, both Fu and Li have managed to retain the past tenses by supplementing temporal deixis and adverbs including "那时" (at that time), "那时候" (at that time), "尚未" (not yet) and "还" (yet) in the Chinese versions. However, both of them seem to have failed to recreate the simple present tense echoing the universality of human nature, due to the vast difference between English and Chinese in terms of tense and verb forms. A possible remedy might be to add the colon in the translated version to officially and emphatically state the opinion to simulate the objective tone created by the simple present tense in the source text. The translated version can be thus improved as follows (based on Fu's version):

(5a) 我那时还不了解：人性多么矛盾；我不知道：真挚中含有多少做作，高尚中蕴藏着多少卑鄙，或者，即使在邪恶里也找得着美德。(I did not understand: how contradictory human nature is at that time, and I did not know: how much pretentiousness there is in sincerity, how much despicableness there is in nobility, or, even in evil, the virtues are found.)

(5b) 那时我还没认识到：一个人的性格是极其复杂的。(At that time I had not realized: a person's character is extremely complex.)

In this way, the rhetorical effect of underpinning unpredictable human nature can be better transferred to the target text, hence a more dynamic equivalence in the translation process.

5. Findings and Conclusion

Narrative strategies and discourse features as essential components of the total significance of narrative fiction correlate strongly with characterization, thematic and artistic value as well as rhetorical effect. Consequently, they should be properly transferred to the target text together with story in the process of fiction translation. In *The Moon and Sixpence*, the author artistically applies the unreliable narration technique and flexibly makes use of the narrative tense to convey the theme of inexplicable human nature and soul searching as well as to characterize the narrator as an awakening figure who has undergone transformation from naivety and ignorance to perceptiveness and sophistication. The transference of such rhetorical effects hinges very much on the successful reproduction of the two narrative features in the translated version.

In the current study, a detailed comparative analysis of Fu Weici's and Li Jihong's version has shown that, on the whole, both versions have successfully reconstructed the stylistic markers of unreliable narration and narrative tense shift by various means in the target text in the five examples. Specifically, Fu's version excels in Example (1) and (4) whereas Li's version excels in Example (2). As for Example (3) and (5), both versions need improvements

and the suggested versions have been tentatively offered by the author. Undeniably, 100% equivalence might still be impossible to achieve, due to the vast differences between English and Chinese in terms of verb forms in Example (5), for instance. Nonetheless, translators should always be sensitive enough to detect any stylistic markers of unique narrative features, identify their association with characterization, thematic significance and reconstruct them in the target text in order to ensure an optimal transference of their embedded rhetorical effect.

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