



文言与白话： 现代英汉翻译个案研究

——以吴宓与穆旦为例

Classical and Modern Chinese: Case Studies of
English-Chinese Translation in Modern China
—In the examples of Wu Mi and Mu Dan

欧光安 著

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Introduction

The Babel Tower story narrated in Genesis 11: 1-9 goes like this: people in the whole world at that time spoke the same language and when they settled in the plain Shinar they decided to build themselves a city with a tower that can reach to the heavens. Their intention was to “make a name for themselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth” (NIV Bible: 16). When God saw this he was afraid that if people would achieve this they would do anything they wanted. Therefore he confused people’s language and people began to scatter over the face of the earth. This story can be seen as the beginning of discussion on the possibility of translation because naturally one would ask: how did people communicate with each other after the confusion and scattering? One could not help wondering and admiring the huge difficulty caused in the situation when people speaking two totally different languages first met.

Thirteen years ago, I was assigned to be the translator and interpreter of an internationally famous scholar when he came to give a speech in the university I am working in. One day I was confused by a certain phrase “theme park” and I was saved by another renowned scholar who came as a companion. I understood completely the literal meaning of these two words (“主题公园”) but I totally had no idea of the cultural significance behind these two words, whereas the topic of the speech this internationally famous scholar gave was closely linked to the cultural significance. Fortunately, the companion scholar interrupted my interpretation at once

and explained the connotation in brief but clear words, saving my face and giving me a solid lesson at the same time.

Figuratively, translation is the “bridge” between two different languages. Since my major for undergraduate study is English, I am naturally interested in two languages—English and Chinese. After years of study I found that whether in mastering such basic skills as listening, speaking, reading and writing or in mastering the essence of a certain language the thorough study of classics is an indispensable necessity. With this in mind recent years witnessed my focus on reading works by such famous scholars as Qian Zhongshu, Wu Mi and so on who are great masters of Chinese and of more than two foreign languages such as English, French, German etc. It is interesting to note that when I was reading literature review about these two scholars I found that not a few scholars were first attracted by Qian Zhongshu and then by Wu Mi, that is, they were curious about Wu when they were overwhelmed by Qian’s unparalleled knowledge. This is also the same for me. I started to write a short paper on Wu Mi’s poetry translation and concluded by saying that Wu Mi’s idea of translation can be said as “using new material to fit into old meter” (“新材料入旧格律”). With further reading I became more and more interested in Wu Mi and his works and I also realized the shortage in studying his translation theory and practice in domestic research field. Over ten years of reading and collecting related material enables me to own almost all the important research material in writing a chapter or a section in investigating Wu Mi and his translation. However, this interest was interrupted for some time when I was doing my master’s degree and that interest for Wu Mi had to be changed to another modern translator, Mu Dan.

The reason for choosing Mu Dan and his translation as the topic for the graduation thesis is both predestined and accidental. In the former case I was left without choice because there were only two research fields to be

chosen by us students—foreign linguistics and applied linguistics or translation theory and practice—with my long-term fear of treading in the first field. By saying “accidental” I mean although I was determined to write on translation I did not have a clear idea about which translator would be my choice in the first place. At that time I thought I did not possess enough material to write on Wu Mi, therefore I laid the idea in abeyance. Then the inspiration came when one day I suddenly found that I had bought two volumes of *Don Juan* in Chinese and the translator’s name was there—Mu Dan. Both my interest in George Gordon Byron and in the famous translation rendered me to decide on the topic on the spot. Later, “accidentally” I found that Mu Dan once worked and stayed for a quarter of a century in the next-door university—Nankai University—which is only several meters away from the dormitory I stayed in, but that realization came quite later after I finished writing the thesis and determined to start my doctorate journey at Nankai.

Time flew so fiercely and it is over ten years since I began to read Wu Mi and his translation and it is eight years since I finished the thesis on Mu Dan and his translation. When I decided it was time to write a detailed paper on Wu Mi’s translation I also “accidentally” became aware that Wu Mi and Mu Dan are two opposite cases in their translation conceptions and practice. Wu Mi translated in classical Chinese (文言文) while Mu Dan translated in modern Chinese (现代白话文). Wu Mi belonged to the so-called Cultural Conservatism School (文化保守主义) while Mu Dan was a modern poet (新诗人). Wu Mi thought that building a new culture should be based on the continuation of traditional culture while Mu Dan put the practice of writing poems in the new style after the May Fourth Movement into such a typical height. However, when we read biographies or autobiographies of these two we would be startled to find that they were actually teacher and student and friends, though their opinions on writing and on translation are quite opposite. Consciously or

unconsciously, the research on their translation theory and practice is worthwhile when there is such a shortage of that, while their value should not be underestimated.

Part One

On Wu Mi and His Translation

When I Was One-and-Twenty

(an excerpt)

(By A. E. Houseman)

When I was one-and-twenty
I heard a wise man say,
“Give crowns and pounds and guineas
But not your heart away;
Give pearls away and rubies
But keep your fancy free.”
But I was one-and-twenty,
No use to talk to me.

吾年二十一

(吴宓译)

吾年二十一，曾闻贤者言。
近前不足惜，心魂守当愜。
珠玉可赠人，意绪毋牵缠。
吾年二十一，请君勿复谈。

Chapter I

Brief Introduction to Wu Mi

Wu Mi (吴宓), the classical poet, editor, educator and translator, was born in 1894 in Anwu Bu, Jingyang County, Shaanxi Province (陕西省泾阳县安吴堡). He was the eldest grandson in his family and because his uncle Wu Zhongqi (吴仲旗) was sonless he was transferred at four years old by the early-widowed and biased Dowager Grandma Yang to the uncle, which made Wu Mi's birth father Wu Zhijing (吴芷敬) quite unhappy for some time. In his childhood Wu Mi mostly lived with his grandmother, economically supported by his uncle (nominal father) but usually educated by his birth father. Wu Mi's family was one of the biggest and oldest families in the township and in the end of the 19th century his family had accumulated much wealth and became a famous merchant family in nearby area.

In ancient China, after the first few generations accumulated wealth the merchant family normally would be eager to change their status either by claiming an official title after giving quite a lot of money to the government (捐纳入仕) or by urging their children or grandchildren to take part in the official examinations and to become intelligentsia or scholars (Wang Rongzu, 2017: 16). This is also true for the Wu family. Wu Mi's nominal father, birth father, both of whom had passed the imperial examination at the county level, and uncle Chen Bolan (陈伯澜) were educated under the renowned Confucian scholar Liu Guyu (刘古愚) in the nearby Sanyuan County (三原县) and Wu Mi was also influenced

by him (Xu Baogeng, 1998: 352). Interestingly, Wu Mi began to read Chinese characters when he was six by the occasional instruction of accountants in his family and those accommodators who stayed in the family's private school and was praised by them as smart and clever (Wu Mi, 1995: 30). In 1901 Wu Mi's nominal father began to teach him to read characters formally and his nominal mother also played a similar role in the education. In 1904 Wu Mi studied in another private school and finished reading *The Four Classics* (《四书》). He also began to read such classical works as *The Spring and Autumn Annals* (《春秋》) and *Historical Records by Zuo Qiuming* (《左传》) and articles from such magazines and newspapers as *New Novel* (Fu Hongxing, 2008: 364). To some extent, it was the reading of such classical works and new articles that formed Wu Mi's lifelong interest and enthusiasm in literature.

It was in the year of 1906 that Wu Mi passed the examination for preparatory school in Hongdao Higher Education School (宏道高等学堂预科) and began his four years of preparatory study in it. Although the school was called higher education school, it was more like a middle school (including junior and senior) in modern sense. And although the school had such natural science courses as Chemistry and Natural Sciences, there were also quite a few traditional courses as Chinese, History and Geography. With his previous reading in childhood and nature in character (Wu Mi was tender and compassionate for other creatures including animals and his sympathy for mules was shown in great detail in his autobiography, see Wu Mi, 1995: 80-81, 88-89, 94), Wu Mi was naturally more interested in the latter courses. Besides studying in school, Wu Mi also wrote dramas, novels and poems in traditional style. It was interesting to note that Wu Mi got the first place in the final examination of the first term in his class "for excellence in English and Mathematics" and got the third place in the whole school (Wu Mi, 1995: 65-66, 92). In his autobiography Wu Mi did not specifically point out when and where

he started to learn English, but it could be argued that the time would not be later than 1906 and it is probably through the influence of his nominal father, who was also an activist in learning foreign affairs including foreign languages like some of the pioneers by the end of the 19th century, that Wu Mi began to learn English. The interest in both traditional Chinese culture, especially traditional Chinese literature and history, and English laid the foundation for Wu Mi's future career and the excellent performance in both languages is the very reason that he was later accepted by Tsinghua School (also known as Tsinghua Preparatory School for Studying in America, 清华留美预备学校).

Wu Mi was one of the six students who were accepted by Tsinghua School from Shaanxi Province and he obtained the second place in the final round of examinations. Wu Mi started his study in Tsinghua in April, 1911 and was assigned to the fourth grade in the Junior Class (中等科). Soon after the school opening ceremony, Wu Mi was elected as the student delegate, representing Shaanxi, to function as similar to student union member. In his later life Wu Mi did not seek any government official title, but his ability, either in scholarly studies or in representing, enabled him to hold various representative roles in his young and middle life, mostly in schools and universities. It was in Tsinghua that Wu Mi got to know two classmates who later became close friends—Zhu Junyi (朱君毅) and Tang Yongtong (汤用彤). It was also at this time that Wu Mi started to copy those poems that he wrote in traditional style since he left Shaanxi and this habit lasted for almost his lifetime. Wu Mi was careful in preserving what he had written and when he was afraid that people would not understand the meaning of his poem he would annotate the poem by himself. That is a habit that started in Tsinghua School and lasted for Wu Mi's lifetime and that is the very reason that much of his writing, including poems, essays, criticism and diaries, could be preserved later. Unfortunately, after only one semester, Wu Mi's study in Tsinghua School

was interrupted by the happening of Wuchang Uprising in October, 1911, which was also called Xinhai Revolution. The uprising also influenced the situation in Beijing and Wu Mi had to flee to Shanghai and enrolled in preparatory class in St. John's University in the spring of 1912. Classes in St. John's University did not impress Wu Mi much and fortunately he could return to Tsinghua School in that summer. To some extent Wu Mi thought great political changes were unnecessary because he appreciated the traditional Chinese culture more and in his mind to stay in the original situation would be the best choice. This could be seen as one of the conceptive reasons that later he disagreed with the idea of changing traditional culture in rapid and radical ways.

The following five years witnessed Wu Mi's undertaking various roles at that time—writer, critic, poet, editor and the most neglected role, translator. He continued to write traditional Chinese poems, he served as the editor for *Tsinghua School Journal* and he even started to write traditional novels with his close friend Tang Yongtong. It was also at this time that he started to introduce foreign works to Chinese readers and the style and form he used was the traditional one. In the fall semester of 1913 Wu Mi finished his study in the Junior Class and became a member in the Senior Class (高等科). Similar to Hongdao, courses in Tsinghua were also comprehensive, including courses of natural sciences as Physics and Chemistry and courses of liberal arts as Chinese, English, History and Painting etc. Following his natural traits in previous years, Wu Mi seemed to like the latter courses much more than the former ones, according to his autobiography. Since major part of courses in Tsinghua was taught in English, Wu Mi became more and more proficient in the language, though he never stopped writing classical Chinese poems. In Tsinghua School Wu Mi was involuntarily involved into two movements: the students on-strike movement in October, 1912 that resulted in the school's dismissal of one of Wu Mi's best friends Wu Fangji (吴芳吉) and the salvation movement

that ended in Wu Mi's nominal father being sent out of jail after eight months of imprisonment. The process of these movements showed that Wu Mi was quite capable of social communication. Because of failure in passing the final Physical Education tests, Wu Mi was delayed for a year in being sent to study in American universities and it was in the fall of 1918 that Wu Mi arrived at University of Virginia to start his study in America.

For his persistent interest in literature Wu Mi chose Literature as his major in University of Virginia and after one year of study there transferred to Comparative Literature in Harvard University. The year in University of Virginia was the most "peaceful" period when he was almost totally occupied in reading and learning and the following three years in Harvard University were the most "critical" period because Wu Mi obtained the most important guidance idea for the rest of his life—New Humanism. The latter feat should be attributed to the influence of Wu Mi's tutor Professor Irving Babbitt and another professor in Harvard, Paul Elmer More. The New Humanism advocated by Irving Babbitt and his followers is a rather complex system. To generally sum up, it propagates the idea of applying the moral self in human beings in defeating the primitive self, making the reaching of "human benevolence" (仁) as the ultimate spiritual development. It can be considered as a combination of Confucianism and Western Humanistic tradition (Liu Shuling, 2016: 62). In the 1920s and 1930s in China, Wu Mi was often considered as a New Humanist and because he held almost opposite ideas to those of New Culture Movement celebrities as Hu Shi (胡适) he was also called a stout supporter of Cultural Conservatism. Generally people would say that Wu Mi got his lifetime idea from Irving Babbitt and his followers or the time in Harvard University witnessed the greatest change in Wu Mi's thoughts and ideas. I would argue that as early as his study in Hongdao or in even earlier time Wu Mi had already formed similar ideas,

at least in a general sense. The time in Harvard or his communication with Irving Babbitt is only a critical moment when he consolidated what he had thought earlier and when his earlier ideas became more systematic and complete. In Harvard Wu Mi made several friends, among whom Mei Guangdi (梅光迪), Hu Xianxiao (胡先啸) and especially Chen Yinke (陈寅恪) became close ones in Wu's future career and life. It was also in the years of Harvard that Wu Mi began to directly express his opinions about traditional Chinese culture and western culture.

In June, 1921 Wu Mi was accredited with Master Degree of Literature and in August he accepted the offer from Mei Guangdi to work as the head of English Department in Southeast University, Nanjing. In October Wu Mi and some friends including Mei Guangdi and Liu Boming (刘伯明) founded a scholarly journal *The Critical Review* (《学衡》) to function as a platform to express different opinions from such figures as Hu Shi on contemporary cultural changes. The general aim of the journal was to confirm the value of traditional Chinese culture, to preserve such culture and to introduce foreign culture at the same time. Because of the rapid changes happened at that time, this school of ideas was considered as conservative, backward or even "feudalistic". Although there were dozens of founders in the beginning, because of difference in specific ideas and personnel movements Wu Mi was actually the only backbone of the running of the journal after the first several issues. In August, 1924 Wu Mi transferred to Northeast University and one semester later he was appointed by his Alma Mater Tsinghua University as the head of Research Institute. With enormous effort Wu Mi invited four great masters to be the tutors in the institute: Liang Qichao (梁启超), Wang Guowei (王国维), Chen Yinke and Zhao Yuanren (赵元任). The institute was hailed as the summit of scholarly research at that time and dozens of distinguished students were cultivated under their guidance and training. Besides continuing the editing of *The Critical Review*, in 1928 Wu Mi also worked