



Exploring Back Translation  
in the Chinese Version of

*The Woman Warrior*

# 《女勇士》

中译本回译问题探索

华满元 著



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## 序 言



华裔美国文学作品的显著特点之一就是讲述中国人在不同时空里的故事，这些故事具有浓厚的中华文化色彩。华裔美国作家汤亭亭的英语文学名作《女勇士》就是其中的优秀代表。这部小说以讲故事的口吻、奇特的情节和丰富的中华文化元素娓娓道出了五个新颖的故事：“无名女子”、“白虎山学道”、“乡村医生”、“西宫门外”和“羌笛野曲”。这些故事中有许多内容均是作者将汉语翻译成英语的结果，因此汉译者将该英语小说翻译成汉语时就面临着如何处理好那些从汉语翻译成英语的内容，也就避不开回译问题了。

就翻译研究的内容而言，回译问题似一直未能引起翻译学界人士足够的注意。按俄裔美国语言学家罗曼·雅各布逊所区分的三类翻译，即语内翻译(intralingual translation)、语际翻译(interlingual translation)和符际翻译(intersemiotic translation)，回译应属语际翻译的范畴。不过我们研究语际翻译通常是将注意力聚焦于顺译(即把语言 A 翻译成语言 B)这一问题，而对于回译(即把语言 A 译成语言 B 后又回译到语言 A)这种广泛存在于

翻译实践中的现象倒是研究甚少。在过去数年中，国内外译界出现了一些关于回译的文章，介绍和探讨这一语际翻译现象，研究成果尽管数量不多，但其深度和广度还是有目共睹的，必须给予充分肯定。华满元博士的《〈女勇士〉中译本回译问题探索》就是其中的佼佼者。

华博士作品的第一个特点是理论视角选择好，且与实践结合佳。鉴于《女勇士》英文原作是华裔作家汤婷婷书写自己中国家族的故事，将之翻译成汉语时必须充分考虑到中国读者的接受度。华博士选择西方学者倡导的互文性理论和接受美学来作为其理论视角，用前者来深入剖析原作的互文性特点，用后者来阐释中译本被中国读者接受的情况。这一选择可以说是既恰当又切合实际。一方面这两种理论能充分发挥其指导作用，堪称“会当凌绝顶，一览众山小”；另一方面这两种理论的可行性又能在论述中得到佐证。就前者而言，《女勇士》可解读为其他文本的一面镜子，是对其他文本的吸收与转化；它与其他文本相互参照，彼此牵连，形成一个潜力无限的开放网络，并以此构成文本的过去、现在和将来的巨大开放体系。就后者而论，《女勇士》中译本中回译问题的成功处理并得到读者的认可又佐证了接受美学理论用于评估译本质量的可行性。西汉学者戴圣所言“无征不信”的道理在这儿得到了印证。墨子在《墨子·修身》中说过，“士虽有学，而行为本焉”。华博士将理论结合于实际的做法与墨夫子所言堪称吻合，可喜可贺！

华博士作品的第二个特点是选例典型，佐证有力，言之有理。作者从《女勇士》中译本中精选典型回译例句，将之划分为中国习语、民俗风情词语、纪年及礼仪、典故及称谓系统、引文等类别，仔细分析其汉语回译的手法，并在互文性理论和接

受美学的指导下以二值取向的观察法去剖析中译本处理回译问题的成功之道和不足之处。在此基础上，作者指出：中译本《女勇士》在回译中华文化元素方面尽管存在一些不足，但在理论上基本是科学的，在实践上基本是成功的。因此，中译本《女勇士》在处理回译问题上的做法对我国翻译界在应对类似问题时具有参考价值和借鉴作用。作者这种以实例佐证自己观点的思辨之论具有说服力，值得充分肯定和褒扬。

王国维在《人间词话》中说：“古今之成大事业大学问者，必经过三种之境界。‘昨夜西风凋碧树，独上高楼，望尽天涯路’，此第一境也。‘衣带渐宽终不悔，为伊消得人憔悴’，此第二境也。‘众里寻他千百度，回头蓦见，那人正在灯火阑珊处’，此第三境也。”所谓第一境，就是说做学问者，首先要高瞻远瞩，认清前人所走的路，即总结和学习前人的经验是做学问的起点。所谓第二境就是指做学问者，应深思熟虑，就像热恋中的情人那样热切、不惜一切地追求自己的目标。而第三境界则是说做学问者没有千百度的上下求索，不会有瞬间的顿悟和理解；只有在学习和苦苦钻研的基础上，才能够功到自然成。一朝顿悟，发前人所未发之秘，辟前人所未辟之境。作为一个青年学者，华满元博士勤奋好学，甘于寂寞，寒窗之时就出成果，显然已经踏入第二境，正朝着第三境界迈进，定将攀上学术新高度。古人“锲而不舍，金石可镂”之言在她身上得到了体现。我和其他前辈学者同样怀着期待之情，盼望她未来发扬这一孜孜治学之精神，拿出更多佳作！

郭著章

2014年9月

## 前 言



自 20 世纪 50 年代以来，华裔美国文学在北美大地异军突起。这些文学作品赢得了广大英语读者的认可，奠定了华裔作家在北美文学领域的应有地位，书写了华裔作家文学成就的光辉篇章。在这些声名远播的作品中，《女勇士》就是一颗璀璨的明珠。《女勇士》是美国著名华裔作家汤婷婷的成名作。该作品以讲故事的口吻、奇特的故事情节、丰富的中华文化元素道出了五个新颖的故事。将该作品翻译成汉语势必涉及大量的回译问题。可以说：如何处理好回译问题在很大程度上是决定该英文作品汉译是否成功的重要因素。自李剑波、陆承毅二人将该英文作品翻译成汉语以来，这一中文译作在国内得到了广大读者的认同。如何对该中文译作，特别是其中的回译现象做出合理的评价？这就需要从理论的高度去观察，从实践的广度去检验，以期得出令人信服的结论。

《女勇士》之所以在北美大地能够获得成功，其中最主要的因素是将个人生活经历融入中华文化传奇故事，采用独特的“口头故事”体裁呈现给广大的英语读者。因此本书显现出中西文化



的杂合特征也就不足为奇了。诚如法国学者朱丽娅·克里斯蒂娃所认为的那样，每一个文本都是其他文本的镜子，每一文本都是对其他文本的吸收与转化，它们相互参照、彼此牵连，形成一个潜力无限的开放网络，以此构成文本过去、现在、将来的巨大开放体系和文学符号学的演变过程。有鉴于此，解读《女勇士》的英文原作时就有必要借用西方学者倡导的互文性理论。而要论证其中译本为何可以得到中国读者认同时，采用西方学者所提倡的接受美学来评判它更不失为是一个最佳的理论视角。这是因为接受美学强调读者在文学欣赏中的地位和作用，重视读者的接受与反应，从社会意识交往的角度考察文学的创作和接受。基于这一思路，本书在研究《女勇士》的中文译本的回译问题时，不仅借用了互文性理论来解读英文文本与中国文化之间的互文特点，同时还分析了英文文本与译文之间的互文性。而评论中文译本则采用了接受美学这一理论视角。评述的基点放在原作和译作中那些最能体现中华文化元素的互文成分上。它们包括中国习语、民俗风情词语、纪年及礼仪、典故及称谓系统、引文等。通过深入细致的分析，本书认为：中译本《女勇士》在回译中华文化元素方面尽管存在一些不足，但在理论上基本是科学的，在实践上基本是成功的。因此，中译本《女勇士》在处理回译问题上的做法对我们处理类似翻译问题具有参考价值和借鉴作用。

华满元

2014年10月



## Preface



Over the past decades, the North American literary circle has witnessed a rapid and sustained growth of Chinese American literature, which has won recognition from the American public. This body of fine literature has attained a prominent position in the American literature, writing a glorious chapter in the history of Chinese American literary attainment. Of all the Chinese American literary works, *The Woman Warrior* is a glittering pearl, a fame-rewarding writing by Maxine Hong Kingston. This book, made up in a tone of story telling and with grotesque plots and rich Chinese cultural elements, consists of five chapters. The Chinese translation of these chapters cannot go without the appropriate use of back translation. In a certain sense, back translation is a very important factor upon which the successful rendering of the story depends. And this can be seen in the Chinese translation of *The Woman Warrior* by Li Jianbo and Lu Chengyi, a version well accepted by the large Chinese audience. How to assess this Chinese version, particularly the back translation used

in it, requires us to answer the question from a better theoretical perspective and to test it by taking into account the receptors' reception and response so as to draw a convincing conclusion.

The reason why *The Woman Warrior* is successful in North America is that it is an archetype of a strong female in legend and literature, who presents to her English readers her stories by blending autobiography with old Chinese folktales in a tone of "talk story". As a result, the book boasts of a characteristic of hybridity. Such feature can be sketched out through the theory of intertextuality proposed by French scholar Julia Kristeva. According to her, every text is a mirror of other texts, constructed as an absorption and transformation of other texts. All of these texts, intertextually referential to each other and linked to each other, form an open network with indefinite potential, offering a text both a constructed open system involving past, present and future and a great evolution process of literary semiotics (Kristeva, 1980: 396). Based on this theory, this discussion will approach the source text as well as its Chinese version by expounding how each chapter of the book is shaped as an absorption and transformation of other texts. As for the assessment of why the Chinese version of *The Woman Warrior* is acceptable, it will adopt a perspective of aesthetics of reception by focusing on the use of back translation in it. This theoretical perspective is workable as its eye on the Chinese version, taking into account the reader's reception and response during the process of translating, highlights the TL reader's referential role and claims attention to the reception effects of the version upon him. Guided by these two theories, this book addresses

not only the question of intertextual relationship between the English text and the other Chinese texts but also the issue of why the Chinese translation is well received. Furthermore, it will, from these two perspectives, evaluate back translation used in the Chinese version of *The Woman Warrior*, pointing out both the strengths and the weaknesses in the employment of back translation. All the discussion covers the back translation of such Chinese cultural elements as Chinese idioms and expressions of folklore, Chinese calendar, rituals and patriarchy, Chinese names, allusions and kinship systems and Chinese citations and quotations. Through a careful analysis, this book comes to a conclusion: The use of back translation in the Chinese version of *The Woman Warrior* is scientific in theory and successful in practice though it is somewhat defective in some way. Therefore, this Chinese version can be praised as a good example with a great reference value for translators in handling the same topic.

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## Chapter One

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# Introduction

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Chinese American literature is a body of literature produced in the United States by writers of Chinese descent. It has flowered in North America with such authors as Sui Sin Far, Frank Chin, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Amy Tan over the past few decades and has secured the position of Chinese American writers in the American English literary history. As a very important part of Asian American literature, the Chinese American literary writings are varied in style, colorful in plot and attractive in content, dealing with various topics and themes which can be generally classified into two common types. One common topic is the challenges, both inner and outer, of assimilation in the mainstream, white American society by Chinese Americans. And the other common theme is that of interaction between generations, particularly older, Chinese-born and younger, American-born generations as well as questions of identity and gender. One of these literary writings is *The Woman Warrior*, a famous story by Maxine Hong Kingston which is actually the combination of both

themes.

This book experienced immediate success upon its publication in 1976, becoming an instant bestseller and securing a place in the top ten nonfiction books of the decade. Dealing with stories of growth in individuals and among generations in two different cultures, *The Woman Warrior* is used by teachers from various disciplines to supplement their instruction, discussing women's topics and encouraging and supporting dialogue regarding sociological, historical, literary, and ethnic issues. It is praised by critics for the author's ability to deal with the concerns of identity formation in Chinese women who have long been oppressed by Chinese male tradition. In addition, it wins recognition that the author's skill at story telling continues the Chinese art of "talk story" but advances the oral custom to a written treasure to be passed down through generations. Because the book blends autobiography with old Chinese folktales, it is indeed a kind of literary hybridity which requires much back translation when it is translated into Chinese. In a certain sense, back translation is a very important factor upon which the successful rendering of the story depends. And this can be seen in the Chinese translation of *The Woman Warrior* by Li Jianbo (李建波) and Lu Chengyi (陆承毅), a good version accepted by the large Chinese audience. However, how to assess the back translation in this Chinese version requires us to approach both the source text and the target text from good theoretical perspectives and to analyze what methods employed for back translation adopted in the Chinese version. Questions of this kind need to be resolved in an academic writing