

Academic Translation Should Follow the Standard of “Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance”: Discussion on a Chinese Version of *Public Opinion*

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Abstract: The translation standard “Xin Da Ya” (faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance) is a profound understanding and theoretical summary of Yan Fu’s academic translation practice, which coincides with the current Chinese academic translation requirements set by the state. Therefore, “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance” has an important theoretical basis and practical foundation as an academic translation standard and can be a reliable yardstick for measuring the quality of academic translation. This article first traces the historical origins and key interpretations of “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance”, and then from this perspective, discusses the issues of mistranslation, omission, and addition in the Chinese version entitled *Yu Lun* of Walter Lippmann’s classic work *Public Opinion*, and provides sample translations for reference. The aim is to distinguish truth from falsehood and promote the genuine exchange and healthy development of Chinese and Western academic thought.

Keywords: “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance”; standard of academic translation; Chinese version of *Public Opinion*; examples of translation errors

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1 Introduction

Walter Lippmann is a famous American journalist, political scientist, newspaper columnist, and one of the most esteemed scholars in the history of communication studies. He has published 31 works on philosophy, policy, diplomacy, and other topics, among which his 1922 book *Public Opinion* is recognized as a seminal

work in the field of journalism. Since its publication, the book has received high praise from the American and Western news and political science communities and has been translated into dozens of languages. Its influence remains enduring to this day. Huang Dan (2018) pointed out, “As far as communication research is concerned, it laid the foundation for the study of mass media, paving the way for research on propaganda analysis, public opinion surveys, gatekeepers, agenda-setting, reception effects, and so on. Just as some scholars have said, most of the research on mass communication is nothing but a footnote to Lippmann’s *Public Opinion*.”

The earliest Chinese translation of *Public Opinion* can be traced back to the late 1980s. In 1989, Lin Shan’s translation entitled *Yulun Xue* was officially published by Huaxia Publishing House, which was the first Chinese translation of *Public Opinion*. So far, six Chinese translations have been published successively, providing important references and guidance for the construction and academic development of disciplines such as journalism and political science in China, and becoming a must-read for learners and researchers in relevant fields. Among these translations, the most notable one is the Chinese translation *Yu Lun* published by Peking University Press in 2018. As one of the “Weiming Social Science - Media and Society Series” (translated edition) published by Peking University Press, the book *Yu Lun* was reprinted four times within seven months of its publication (from April 2018 to January 2019), demonstrating its significant impact. However, unfortunately, there are too many errors in this Chinese version, mainly involving mistranslations, omissions, additions, and other aspects. Luo Weidong (2005: 41) believes that “Given the translation orientation of the Chinese academic community, the negative academic impact of an erroneous translation is so obvious that it requires the efforts of several generations to eliminate it. Our translators should be cautious all the time.” It is necessary to analyze and correct this academically translated book to avoid further misunderstandings or even misguidance for Chinese readers. As early as 1898, Yan Fu, a pioneer in the translation of social science works in China, proposed the “Xin Da Ya (faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance) standard for academic translation. This article attempts to trace the historical origins of this standard and provide a key interpretation, using it as a perspective to analyze the translation of *Public Opinion*.

2 The Original Intention of Yan Fu’s “Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance”

The three characters “Xin Da Ya” were first mentioned by Yan Fu in his article “Preface to the Translation” written for his book *Tian Yan Lun* (the Chinese version of Thomas Henry Huxley’s *Evolution and Ethics, and other Essays*):

“Translation is fraught with three difficulties: conveying the meaning faithfully (Xin), expressing it fluently (Da), and rendering it gracefully (Ya). While it is already very difficult to pursue fidelity to the original text in translation, a translation that is only faithful to the original but not sufficiently expressive is not a good translation. Therefore, it is also necessary to strive for full expression in the translated text. ... *The Book of Changes* says: ‘Writing should show the true intentions of the author.’ Confucius said: ‘It is enough if words can express the meaning.’ And ‘Words without elegance will not go far.’ These three elements are the

correct path for writing, and also the model for translation. Therefore, in addition to being faithful and expressive, elegance is also important.” (Yan Fu, 1986: 1321–1322)

Since Yan Fu proposed “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance”, it has been regarded as a guiding principle in the field of translation for more than a century and has had a profound impact on later generations. “The development history of modern Chinese translation theory is based on Yan Fu’s advocacy of ‘faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance’” (Liu Junping, 2015: 74). However, the original meaning of “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance” has gradually been lost in the continuous interpretation and debate by later generations. Nowadays, people often regard “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance” as a standard for literary translation, which is actually far from Yan Fu’s original intention. In fact, “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance” is based on Yan’s profound understanding of *Tian Yan Lun* and is a theoretical refinement and summary of his practical activities.

If one reads “Preface to the Translation” carefully, it is not difficult to find that Yan Fu’s main discussion is centered around the academic work *Tian Yan Lun*. In “Preface to the Translation”, Yan Fu pointed out that translating Huxley’s *Evolution and Ethics, and other Essays* faces many difficulties: first, the original book is a recent work. “What the original book discusses is the new learning gained by Westerners in the past fifty years, and also a book written by the author in his later years.” (Yan Fu, 1986: 1321) Second, the grammar is different. “In Western sentences, a noun follows another noun, and then explains it. ... Therefore, Western sentence structure may consist of a few words, and may have tens or hundreds of words.” (Ibid) Third, the theory is profound. “The original text’s terminology is profound and is difficult to convey in common language.” (Ibid) Fourth, there are many technical terms, and it is difficult to find suitable translations. “New theories have emerged, and the terminology is complex. Searching for appropriate Chinese terms is difficult, and even when found, they are often inconsistent.” (Yan Fu, 1986: 1322)

In response to these translation difficulties, Yan Fu proposed his own solutions one by one. Yan Fu believed that although *Evolution and Ethics, and other Essays* was the latest research achievement in the West at that time and was published by Huxley in his later years, he attempted to “translate the text to convey its deep meaning, and sometimes made some additions to the words and sentences to enhance the meaning, without being too strict with the order of words and sentences, but not distorting the original text”. (Yan Fu, 1986: 1321) Regarding the differences between Western sentence structures and Chinese, Yan Fu opposed mechanically translating the original text or deleting difficult-to-translate parts of the original text. He believed that as long as the translator fully grasped the ideas in the original text, achieved a comprehensive understanding, and had the text at the tip of their tongue, they could naturally make the translation accurate and fluent. “If one imitates this method of translation, it may not be possible to communicate effectively, and if one takes shortcuts by deleting parts of the text, the meaning may be lost. The translator must first fully understand the spiritual essence of the entire text, and then, when writing, the words will come naturally and complement each other.” (Yan Fu, 1986: 1321) In order to solve the problem of difficult-to-understand content for readers, Yan Fu suggested that translators should make more references and contrasts to clarify the meaning of the original text. All of this is for the sake of achieving the goal of being expressive and faithful to the original text. “Translation should be done with the

context in mind, so that the meaning can be expressed fully, and thus being faithful to the original text. (Yan Fu, 1986: 1321) Regarding the issue of numerous technical terms that are difficult to translate, Yan Fu believed that translators must rely on their own level and understanding, and determine the Chinese translation based on the meaning of the new term. “When encountering this, the translator must rely on his own judgment and determine the name based on the meaning.” (Yan Fu, 1986: 1323) He then went on to describe the process of determining the Chinese translation of the term “Introduction” in the preface of the first volume of *Evolution and Ethics, and other Essays*.

It can be seen from the above that Yan Fu’s “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance” was focused on translating the academic work *Evolution and Ethics, and other Essays*, and therefore should be regarded as a translation standard for academic works. Ye Junjian noticed this fact very early on. He believed that Yan Fu’s “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance” translation standard for social sciences was quite different from the general literary translation standard. (Ye Junjian, 1997: 30) Yan Fu translated a total of 11 works in his lifetime, among which his translation of the so-called “Eight Great Books” was the most famous. The “Eight Great Books” include T. H. Huxley’s *Evolution and Ethics*, A. Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations*, H. Spencer’s *Study of Sociology*, J. S. Mill’s *On Liberty and System of Logic*, E. Jenks’s *A History of Politics*, Montesquieu’s *The Spirit of Law*, W. S. Jevons’s *Elementary Lessons in Logic*. These works cover the fields of philosophy, economics, political science, law, logic, and other disciplines. They were all academic achievements in the field of social sciences. Yan Fu carefully selected the Western social science books that China needed most based on China’s social priorities, and each selection had a profound intention. In evaluating Yan Fu’s translation motives and achievements, Ye Junjian believed that “in the process of historical development, some advanced members among the educated in China began to understand that neither science nor technology alone could serve as a panacea. These things must also be coordinated with political and social system reforms that are related to them - and these reforms must be leading. Yan Fu deeply felt this and some of his translation work can serve as vivid illustrations.” (Ye Junjian, 1992: 14) This may explain why throughout his nearly 20-year translation career, Yan Fu never ventured into literary translation. In fact, “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance” is not only a theoretical summary based on his first translated work *Tian Yan Lun*, but also a standard he adhered to in translating the other seven social science works.

3 Academic Translation Standards: “Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance”

Regarding the standard for academic translation, on January 29, 2015, the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television issued and implemented the “Academic Publishing Standards: Chinese Translations” (Standard No. CY/T123 – 2015), which in Section 5, Article 1, clearly stipulated that “the translation should be faithful to the original and accurately express it, in accordance with the norms of modern Chinese usage”. This is the latest industry-standard developed in China for Chinese academic translations. This standard is consistent with Yan Fu’s “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance”. “To be faithful to the original” corresponds to Yan’s “faithfulness”, “accurately express it” corresponds to Yan’s “expressiveness”, and “in

accordance with the norms of modern Chinese usage” corresponds to Yan’s “elegance”. It can be said that the current Chinese academic translation standards in China are still based on the foundation of “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance”, indicating that in the new era context, “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance” as an evaluation standard still has strong operability in academic translation practice.

With the deepening of translation studies and further standardization of translation practices, translation standards have also kept pace with the times. “Faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance” can still serve as a standard for guiding academic translation practices and evaluating the quality of academic translations, even after being modernly interpreted. Some scholars have pointed out that in practice, the “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance” standard seems to have surpassed the long-standing theoretical disputes in the field of translation studies and is regarded as a kind of standard in many fields both inside and outside the translation industry, playing an undeniable role. Its deep influence and wide coverage far exceed our imagination. It can be said that the “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance” standard has not become obsolete or replaced in the context of continuous progress in translation research today but continues to emit strong vitality. (Liu Yunhong and Xu Jun, 2010: 17) For current academic translation, “faithfulness” means that the translation should be faithful to the original text, without deviation, omission, or arbitrary addition or deletion of the original text content; “expressiveness” means not to be confined to the original text form, and to ensure that the translation is accurate and fluent; “elegance” means that the selection of translated words should be appropriate and comply with the language norms of the target language.

As an academic translation standard, “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance” requires the three elements to complement each other, and none can be neglected. Before the translator starts translating, they need to deeply understand the ideas in the original text and consult relevant background knowledge, especially professional vocabulary, terminology, and concepts related to the book being translated. This is the basis and prerequisite for achieving faithfulness.

During the translation process, the translator not only needs to “faithfully convey the knowledge content of the original work, but also fully aware of the language and discourse structural characteristics of the original work that conveys knowledge, so as to maximize the retention of the deep logical semantic relationships of the original text, faithfully reproduce the author’s perspective and ideological perspective hidden behind the written knowledge, and convey the author’s social and political intentions”. (Guo Qingmin, 2017: 116)

In terms of word choice and sentence structure, the language used by the translator should be formal, rigorous, and comply with academic language norms while also reflecting the language style of the original author as much as possible. Hatim and Mason (2001: 86–89) pointed out that our language choices inevitably reflect our perception of reality. Translators in two different social and linguistic structures should be fully aware of the places in the original text that conform to or deviate from social norms and language norms and try to faithfully reproduce the language choices of the original text, avoiding arbitrary changes in the target language.

4 Analysis of the Translation of *Public Opinion*

Based on the “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance” standard, some examples in the first chapter “The

World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads” are selected as a case study.

Example 1:

They started for the Indies and found America. They diagnosed evil and hanged old women. They thought they could grow rich by always selling and never buying. A caliph, obeying what he conceived to be the Will of Allah, burned the library at Alexandria. (Lippmann, 1922: 5)

Chinese translation:

比如,他們本想航海去印度,卻意外地發現了美洲新大陸;他們想要進行旨在除惡揚善的審判,卻又對老婦施以絞刑;他們認為只售賣不購買就能發大財;一位哈裏發甚至宣稱自己服從真主安拉的旨意,卻讓亞歷山大港的圖書館付之一炬。(Chang Jiang and Xiao Han, 2018: 4)

Analysis: In terms of “faithfulness”, translating “diagnosed evil” as “進行旨在除惡揚善的審判” (judging with the aim of eliminating evil and promoting good) is a mistranslation that abandons “faithfulness” for “elegance”. “Diagnose” means “to identify, or recognize”, and “evil” means “devil”, so why “hanged old women”? To correctly understand the logic behind this sentence, one must rely on the context. The previous sentence mentioned that the world people imagine is often very different from the real world, and then gave the example of Columbus, who wanted to sail to the East but accidentally discovered America. According to relevant information, this is related to the witch-hunting movement in medieval Europe. In the eyes of witches at that time, women’s bodies were more fragile, and because some women were lewd and evil, they were easily tempted by the devil, and the devil controlled the witches to achieve their goal of harming humanity. In 1484, Pope Innocent VIII issued a command to massacre all women believed to be witches, sparking a 300-year-long witch-hunting movement in Europe. Because the identification of witches at that time relied entirely on the subjective speculation of religious personnel, a large number of innocent women were persecuted and killed. Therefore, “diagnose evil” means “to identify devils”. The mistranslation in this paragraph also includes “亞歷山大港” for “the library at Alexandria”, and “印度” for “Indies”. In terms of “elegance”, compared with the original text, the translation is not concise and clear enough. In addition, the phrase “what he conceived to be” is completely omitted in the translation. Below is the reference translation provided by the author of this article:

他們啟程去尋找印度群島卻發現了美洲,他們甄別女巫卻絞死了老婦人,他們認為只賣不買就可以發家致富,一位哈裏發為了遵從他臆想中的真主意誌,焚燒了亞歷山大裏亞圖書館。

Example 2:

And that, therefore, like Hamlet, it will stab Polonius behind the rustling curtain, thinking him the king, and perhaps like Hamlet add:

“Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell!

I took thee for thy better; take thy fortune.” (Lippmann, 1922: 7)



Chinese translation:

因此,就像哈姆雷特(Hamlet)用劍擊殺帷幕後的波洛尼厄斯(Polonius)並誤以為自己刺殺了國王一樣,人們對於頭腦中的圖景與真實世界的混淆也會產生悲劇的結果,或如哈姆雷特的臺詞所言:

別了,你這可憐、魯莽、多管閑事的傻瓜!我還以為你能過得更好;這都怪你命運不濟。(Chang Jiang and Xiao Han, 2018: 6)

Analysis: In the previous passage, the author Lippmann mentioned that almost every political party would construct an imaginary image of their opponent and firmly believe in it. This sentence further explains that what people regard as facts are actually imagined facts in their minds, not real ones, using the example of Hamlet mistakenly believing that he was killing the king. The quote in the original text comes from Act 3, Scene 4 of Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet*: Hamlet arranges a play similar to the death of his father in front of his uncle, who becomes angry and leaves. Hamlet then takes the opportunity to kill Polonius hiding behind a screen while talking to his mother. "I took thee for thy better" was mistakenly translated as "我還以為你能過得更好" (I thought you could have done better), but here, "take...for" means "mistake for", and "the better" refers to the king, Hamlet's uncle. "人們對於頭腦中的圖景與真實世界的混淆也會產生悲劇的結果" (The confusion between the image in people's minds and the real world can also have tragic consequences) is a pure invention by the translator. Additionally, the translator missed translating the word "rustling". Below is the reference translation provided by the author of this article:

它就像哈姆雷特一樣,揮劍刺向躲在窸窣作響的帷幕後的波洛尼厄斯,以為那就是國王;或許還會像哈姆雷特一樣,末了補上一句:

再見吧!你這可憐的、魯莽的、多管閑事的傻瓜!

我還以為是你主子;你自認倒黴吧!

Example 3:

We insist, because of our superior hindsight, that the world as they needed to know it, and the world as they did know it, were often two quite contradictory things. We can see, too, that while they governed and fought, traded and reformed in the world as they imagined it to be, they produced results, or failed to produce any, in the world as it was. (Lippmann, 1922: 4-5)

Chinese translation:

在這種「事後諸葛亮」的優越感的影響下,我們堅持認為「他們」需要了解的世界與「他們」已經了解的世界往往判若霄壤。我們也能看到,當「他們」對臆想中的世界進行治理,或於其中展開鬥爭、交易與變革時,「他們」的行為或許能對真實世界產生實質的影響,也可能只是鏡花水月。(Chang Jiang and Xiao Han, 2018: 4)

Analysis: The term "hindsight" refers to an understanding of a situation or event only after it has happened or developed (*New Oxford English-Chinese Dictionary*, 2007: 995). The translation "事後諸葛亮" of

“hindsight” is a sarcastic expression, mocking those who make judgments after the fact. Although it is similar to “hindsight”, the emotional color of the word has deviated and does not convey the intended meaning. Similarly, “判若霄壤” and “鏡花水月” are idioms with a strong literary flavor, which does not match the plain and straightforward language style of the original text, and may give the impression of overusing Chinese idioms. Based on the previous paragraph, it can be inferred that “they” refers to people who firmly believe that the world they perceive is the real world. However, repeating the word “他們” four times in the translation is not appropriate. Additionally, adding quotation marks to emphasize “需要” and “已經” is confusing and violates the norms of modern Chinese usage. Below is the reference translation provided by the author of this article:

基於這種後見之明,我們堅信,世人需要認知的世界與實際認知的世界往往大相徑庭。我們還發現,世人會根據自己想象的世界進行管理、爭鬥、貿易和改革,而在真實的世界裏,世人或許有所收穫,或許毫無結果。

Example 4:

For Cosmas, there was nothing in the least absurd about his map. Only by remembering his absolute conviction that this was the map of the universe can we begin to understand how he would have dreaded Magellan or Peary or the aviator who risked a collision with the angles and the vault of heaven by flying seven miles up in the air. (Lippmann, 1922: 7)

Chinese translation:

在科斯馬斯看來,他所繪製的世界地圖根本就是合情合理的。我們只有牢記科斯馬斯對自己宇宙觀的絕對自信,才能想象出他會對麥哲倫(Magellan)或皮裏(Robert Peary)這樣的地理探險家,以及那些躍入7英里高的天空而有可能與天使相撞,甚至把天穹撞個窟窿的飛行員懷有一種怎樣的恐懼心理。(Chang Jiang & Xiao Han, 2018: 6)

Analysis: Some mistranslations that can be spotted at a glance include “宇宙觀”(the map of the universe), “想象”(understand), and “甚至把天穹撞個窟窿”(the vault of heaven by...). Mistranslations that require some research to identify include “世界地圖”(his map) and “那些躍入7英里高的天空而有可能與天使相撞,甚至把天穹撞個窟窿的飛行員”(the aviator...in the air). From the previous paragraph, it is easy to see that the “map” mentioned here refers to a Christian Topology written by Cosmas, so “世界地圖” is a mistranslation based on a literal interpretation. The original “the aviator” is a phrase with a definite article plus singular form, specifically referring to Orville Wright, who successfully flew the “Wright Flyer I” on December 17, 1903, becoming the first human in history to do so. Additionally, the grammar of the original sentence containing the conditional mood “would have dreaded” was not understood or conveyed correctly by the translators, and the meaning of the original sentence was completely reversed. Below is the reference translation provided by the author of this article:

科斯馬斯並不認為自己的地形誌有任何荒謬之處。他深信這就是宇宙的地圖,只有記住這一點,我們



才能逐漸明白,他怎麼可能會懼怕麥哲倫、皮裏以及冒著跟天使與蒼穹相撞的危險飛至7英里高空的飛行員奧維爾·萊特。

Example 5:

Finally, some hundreds of young girls, overcoming the timidity of their sex, asked for engagements, their families not to know about it; others wished only to serve him. (Lippmann, 1922: 10)

Chinese translation:

最後,還有成百上千的妙齡女子,克服了女性的羞赧天性,瞞著家裏人向霞飛求愛,還有一些女孩子幹脆願意做他的仆人。(Chang Jiang and Xiao Han, 2018: 10)

Analysis: Translating the independent gerund phrase “their families not to know about it” as “瞞著家裏人” does not accurately convey the original meaning. Additionally, the verb “serve” refers to “performing duties or providing services for another person or organization”, as defined in the *New Oxford English-Chinese Dictionary* (2007: 1943). Therefore, directly translating “serve him” as “做他的仆人” is a clear mistranslation. Below is the reference translation provided by the author of this article:

最後,還有幾百個年輕女孩,克服了女性的羞怯向將軍求婚,她們的家人對此渾然不知;另一些女孩則希望只要能服侍他就心滿意足了。

5 Conclusion

“Without academic translation, there would be no construction and inheritance of the human knowledge system; without academic translation, there would also be no communication and collision between Chinese and world academic studies.” (Shen Yan, 2012) Currently, many Chinese translations with questionable quality have had a negative impact on the healthy development of domestic academia, which is partly attributed to the lack of guidelines for academic translation. In the increasingly prosperous era of academic translation, Yan Fu’s “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance” is still a reference standard. Liu Yunhong and Xu Jun (2010: 17–18) pointed out that compared with other constructive translation standards such as “resemblance to the original”, “creation of a similar realm”, and “multiple complementarities”, “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance” are more profound, comprehensive, concise, practical, and operable. Based on this standard, this article has made a preliminary discussion of the first chapter of *Public Opinion*, but due to limitations of space, it is impossible to list and analyze all related translations. The lack of “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance” in the Chinese version *Yu Lun* will not only mislead domestic readers who rely on Chinese translations as reference sources, weaken its influence and dissemination in the target language culture, but also prompt us to think about another key issue closely related to academic translation standards: who is the ideal translator of academic works? On the one hand, academic translation requires translators to be familiar with the content of the original text and the related theoretical system; on the other hand, translators must have a fluent bilingual ability because this is

related to an accurate understanding of the original text and accurate expression of the translated text. At the same time, translators should also possess good professional ethics and a sense of responsibility.

According to Deng Zhenglai (2005), “Behind the translation of Western academic works lies the scholars’ sense of responsibility and true insights into Chinese society. These works also constitute an organic component of China’s academic development.” Despite the various problems with the Chinese translation of *Public Opinion*, we should also recognize the two translators’ sincere efforts: as a foundational work in journalism, the book has not only high academic value in itself, but also has important practical significance in promoting academic research and practical exploration in related fields in China. In addition, the translators provided corresponding graphic supplements for some historical figures and significant events mentioned in the book, and also translated the index of the entire book. This fully reflects the translators’ academic vision in selecting the book and their relentless efforts to overcome reading barriers for Chinese readers.

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