

On Translating Na Hye-Seok's *Gyoeng-bui**

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1. Introduction

This paper is a case study, from a translator's point of view, of some unique characteristics which mark the process of translating the works of a feminist writer in Colonial Korea. Na Hye-seok is one of the first Koreans to graduate from a Japanese art college and is considered to be the most famous member of the first generation of the so-called New Women in Korea. Her short stories, essays and poems reveal her female consciousness, discussing how deeply she thinks about what it means to live as a woman in a deeply patriarchal society and how earnestly she strives to overcome the problems she has had to face as an educated women of the period. This study is the

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culmination of my desire to share the process of translating Na Hye-seok's work, introduce her fascinating autobiographical background, and consider the specific questions pertaining to feminist translation. And with this critical essay, I hope to provide a rationale for my translation of the text as well as describe my approach to the translation of the short story by Na Hye-seok.

Na Hye-seok's short story, *Gyeong-hui*, is the text I chose for translation and the strategies that I chose to adopt for this translation project will be detailed in the following. *Gyeong-hui* is a work that features autobiographical elements of the author's life. The protagonist's deep-seated anxiety is a reflection of the author's attempts to strip off the heavy burden imposed on women whose lives have been marginalized under their fathers' rules.

Before discussing the actual translation process, I will first describe the task of the literary translator and present some factors that need to be considered when translating texts by female writers based on recent developments in Feminist Translation Studies. I will then proceed to discuss the measures that were employed in capturing and translating the cultural elements and the uniquely feminine voice of the works of Na Hye-seok. The study will also discuss why the works and subsequently the translations of Na Hye-seok had been excluded from the literary canon. Translation can be said to be the most active form of reading and interpretation, and this paper aims to offer a viewpoint from a translator involved in translating a work by a minor Korean writer into English.

2. Literary Translation and Feminist Studies

2.1 The Task of the Literary Translator

Essentially speaking, translation is rendering the words of one language into another, but it must never be an automatic transfer process or a passive

rendering. The act of translation goes beyond not just converting the words and sentences of one language into another. The unit of translation must be the text itself. The words and the sentences are not the unit to be translated. The whole text and its context must be taken into consideration.

In the translation of texts as a unit, inter-communication between the two languages is the most important factor to be considered. In order to achieve smooth communication, the two languages must not only be organically interrelated, but the translator must always strive to overcome the 'cultural' obstacles that prevent real communication. If the background cultures of the two languages are very different, it may be virtually impossible to attain a perfect understanding and translation of the text. However, based on the common experience of man, the receptor of the text can grasp the contained knowledge and contextual features of the text.

The importance of the competence of literary translators can never be stressed enough. When there is a distinct dissimilarity in the cultural capacity and the background of the linguistic community involved in translation, it is up to the translator to manage to bridge the difference. The competent literary translator must control, divide and allot the given information so as to transmit the critical meaning of the text and to highlight the literary and stylistic features of the text.

The level of enjoyment derived from a text can be raised or downgraded by the ability of the translator. In literary translation, the translator must achieve certain fidelity not only to the phrases and sentences in the text but must achieve an understanding of the total contextual aspect of the text. The fidelity towards the target reader is also a factor that must never be ignored. To achieve the maximum effect, it is important for the translator to understand the embedded meanings of the texts and have an understanding of the cultural background which influenced the formation of the text. Furthermore, cultural barriers must be overcome in order to render the contents into the linguistically dissimilar target text. Equivalence between two cultures must be achieved in

order to establish a viable translated text. The most important thing is not just to transfer the meaning of the text but to highlight the originality of the literary work while attempting to preserve its form and the style.

The literary translator must be in command of the complex contextual features that exists between the culture, way of thinking and the emotion of the two languages. Being a bilingual does not automatically qualify a person for becoming a translator. Literary translation goes beyond rewriting the source text. Translation is negotiating the context of the text into the target culture and writing the target text along with the source language author.

Finally, it is also worth noting that the text that the literary translator chooses to translate may sometimes reflect not only his or her personal taste but also his or her ideology. Lefevere (1988) has noted that ideological motivations are always present in the production of translations of literary works. He stated that translations "play a vital part in the evolution of literatures, not only by introducing new texts, authors and devices, but also by introducing them in a certain way, as part of a wider design to try to influence that evolution" (97). Álvarez & Vidal (1996) has also mentioned that behind a the translator's selections, as what to add, what to leave out, which words to choose and how to place them, "there is a voluntary act that reveals his history and the socio-political milieu that surrounds him; in other words, his own culture [and ideology]" (5). As a female translator working in Korea and deeply interested in the translation of Korean works of literature, it was inevitable that I would choose to translate Na Hye-seok's works as a close personal project.

2.2 Translation and Feminist Studies

It is now very evident that women's language has been marked by her social and sexual conditions. The translation of the works of women writers must also take into consideration the specific feminine style, discourse and

sensitivity inherent in the original works. Gender issues in translation began to receive attentions during the 1970s as feminist approaches to linguistics and literary criticism were actively starting to be explored. Feminist translation theorists have continued to trace the effects that the late 20th century focus on gender has had on translation.¹⁾

Feminist translation has been defined by Von Flotow (1991) as follows:

It is a phenomenon intimately connected to a specific writing practice in a specific ideological and cultural environment, the result of a specific social conjuncture. It is an approach to translation that has appropriated and adapted many of the techniques and theories that underlie the writing it translates. (74)

One of the basic tenets promulgated by Feminist Translation Studies is "the

1) Feminist translation developed and flowered in the Quebec province of Canada, where the minority French-speaking community tended to feel linguistically colonized by the major English-speaking community. Quebec women writers in the 1970s began to develop innovative ways of writing that challenged patriarchal society through the manipulation of language. The translators could not successfully communicate the message of these texts using conventional translation strategies, since these texts depended upon the manipulation of the French language as a gendered language as well as on a theoretical tradition which was unfamiliar to the English target reader.

It was against this background that the group of Canadian translators began to translate the works of Quebec feminist writers like Nicole Brossard. They call themselves 'feminist translators' not only because they translate feminist works (which occurs in other countries as well) but also because they wish to imitate the original authors' innovative writing processes as part of the translation process. In other words, where the Quebecois feminist writers use language as a metaphor for feminist struggle, feminist translators aim to use translation as a metaphor for struggle. In doing so, not only do they claim to utilize unusual translation strategies, but they also make claims which impinge upon certain conventional views on translation.

recovery of women's works 'lost' in patriarchy."It is a certain fact that the patriarchal canon has traditionally defined the literary value of writers and their works and that it has given a distinct privilege to work by male writers to the detriment of women writers. As a result, large amounts writing by women has been underrated and undervalued. Female writers of earlier periods in literary history need to be uncovered by literary historians and examined again by literary critics. As Wallace (2002) notes:

Indeed, from the beginning of organized feminism, one of the discipline's primary goals has been to recuperate and recover women's writing from the past which went virtually ignored. Feminists have historically sought to bring women translators and their contributions to the attention of the literary culture, expanding and questioning what is understood as the literary canon (largely dominated by male writers), as well as to create solidarities between women by exposing, through writing and translation, the realities of women in developing nations and emerging literary traditions. Women who historically had been denied access to the world of scholarship are slowly (and too often posthumously) finding their work published, albeit on a highly reduced scale as compared to their male counterparts. (67)

Translation has begun to play an important role in making available the knowledge, experiences and creative work of many of these earlier women writers. Numerous publications of such work have appeared in translation in recent years, often accompanied by academic essays contextualizing the source texts and discussing some of the issues these translations raise (Von Flowtow, 1997). Thus, this translation project can be said to be an ambitious undertaking on my part to make available the works of Na Hye-seok to foreign readers.

3. The translation process of Na Hye-seok's *Gyeong-hui*

To translate literature, one must not focus solely on words and language, but also on the context of the literary text. As Lefevere (1992) states, "Potential translators need to proceed from the top down, that is, from the culture of the text to the structure of that text to paragraphs, lines, phrases and words, or if you prefer, from the macro to the micro level" (13). Before actually starting on the translation process itself, I have attempted to analyze the text from the macro level, with the cultural analysis of the text. This is followed by a brief textual analysis and then ending on the micro level, with presenting some passages that illustrate the various challenges that are encountered during the translation process.

3.1 Cultural Analysis

In order to proceed from the top down, one must call upon more than just linguistic skills when translating literature. Literary translation is an artistic process in which the cultural knowledge of the translator and target text reader becomes a crucial component. It is not an easy task to transmit textual contents which is steeped deeply in one culture into another. An element which is particularly challenging from the translator's point of view is the transfer of culturally specific references and items. Cultural references and connotations are intricately intertwined in the context and texture of a language. The translator's ability to identify and transfer them adequately is of crucial importance for the success of the translation.

The process of transferring the cultural elements is an extremely complicated and critical task. Culture includes the history, social structure, traditional customs and everyday life of a community and is a multifaceted collection of experiences which conditions daily life. Furthermore when translating a source culture text into a very different target text, a fundamental questions that must be asked is whether the translation will have a viable

readership in the target culture, as the specific reality being portrayed is not quite familiar to the reader.

One of the decisions which made me start the project of translating Gyeong-hui, was the work, which was published in 1918, touch on the universal themes in the lives of women which are still relevant to contemporary women. Although the readers of this English translation may be reading a text from a totally different culture and time-period, the universal themes of identity, questions of gender, custom and culture will certainly be appealing to them.

Moreover, translators need to have knowledge about "the conditions or constraints - ideological, poetological, sociocultural, linguistic - under which texts come into being" (Lefevere 13) and an understanding of the literary environment of the period is needed to achieve a cultural analysis of the text.

Korean women authors in 1920's were the major pioneers in the formulation of Korean literary history. Writers such as Kim Myong-sun, Kim Il-yop and Na Hye-seok wrote works in which characters fundamentally challenged the traditional system of marriage and morals. These works criticized loveless marriage and centered on the searching and self-awakening of those who adhered to the New Woman ideal (Hyun 97).

Na Hye-seok incessantly insisted that women should not be a subservient part of men but must strive to achieve equal position in society. Her thoughts and writings made quite a sensation in the conservative patriarchal Korean society of the 1920's. Her position as the wife of a wealthy diplomat gave her a unique point of view to explore and receive Western cultural influences. However, public criticism on her scandalous extra-marital love affair and subsequent divorce from her husband had such a repercussion in her professional career as an artist and writer that she never recovered from it.

In the past, the appraisals of her works were mainly focused on her life and scandalous reputation as a "fallen women" and had prejudiced the estimation of her artistic achievements. However, in recent years, her works

have received the critical appraisal and the validation that they rightly deserve.

Na Hye-seok's *Gyeong-hui*, named after the female protagonist, illustrates the urgent need for women's awakening. In contrast to the superficial portrayal of the New Woman by male authors such as Lee Gwang-su and Kim Dong-in, *Gyeong-hui* represents the views of many of the educated women of the time (Hyun, 2003). It is an important seminal text not only in feminine literary history but also in the formation of the Korean literature under the Japanese colonial rule.

3.2 Textual Analysis

Now that we have examined the cultural aspect of the text, we will now narrow the examining scope and look at the text itself. This step is helpful in the translation process because it allows one to learn about the foundation and the context of the book and thus understand the perspective from which the author wrote and how to proceed in the translation process.

3.2.1 Translation and Characterization

Character descriptions are usually not the most demanding aspects of translation. Observations about human nature and psychology tend to be largely based on criteria for good and evil that are less nuanced and intricate in relation to culture and society than language.

The protagonist and the namesake of the story, Gyeong-hui, is a young girl living in colonial Korea who has just returned from studying overseas in Japan. There is a fairly clear sense of the "generation gap" in the story and the author displays a particular empathy for the protagonist that comes through in her descriptions of Gyung-heui. The patriarch follows society's norms and conventions and projects his frustrated ambitions onto his daughter, who balks at the constraints of his expectations. This conflict between father and daughter

is one that is universal and many readers, Korean or otherwise would feel empathy for the main character.

3.2.2 The Plot

The main plot of *Gyeong-hui* is as follows:

(1) On hearing the news that Gyeong-hui has returned home from studying overseas in Japan, the mother-in-law of Gyeong-hui's older sister comes to the house. The in-law lady (for want of a better term) urges Gyeong-hui to get married and settle down with a husband. However, when Gyeong-hui's mother mentions that a woman can earn a lot of money through gaining an education, she changes her mind and resolves to provide an education for her granddaughter.

(2) The rice-cake vendor who comes to Gyeong-hui's house attempts to criticize the laziness of the New Woman but give up when he sees Gyeong-hui efficiently doing the housework. A neighbor is also impressed with Gyeong-hui doing housework, regards her in a very favorable light and compares her with her daughter-in-law. See-wol, the maid of the house, is filled with gratitude because Gyeong-hui has bought more expensive toys for her children than for the children of the house.

(3) Gyeong-hui's father is urging Gyeong-hui to get married saying that education for women is a useless thing. He had allowed Gyeong-hui to go abroad to study on his son's urging but resolves to get Gyeong-hui married off to a good candidate.

(4) Gyeong-hui resists her father's orders to get married at first but has conflicting emotions on when she knows that a comfortable life will be guaranteed. However, she reaffirms her commitment to self-development and resolves to live her life as a "New Woman" who is not oppressed by social conventions.

3.2.3 The narrative style

The narrative style of *Gyeong-hui* speedily changes the point of view. Colloquial expressions and several points of view are embedded in one passage, making it difficult for the translator to classify them and give them deserving voice. The discourse time is longer than the story time, with descriptions in an inner voice taking up a large portion of the text. The period background and the out-of-date vernacular which provides a time background of the story is one of the elements of the story that must be transmitted. However, in the actual translation, much of the old-fashioned and antiquated colloquial voice has been lost due to the inevitable constraints in the translation process.

3.3 Language Analysis

Translating *Gyeong-hui* offered a gratifying but also at many times frustrating encounter with the ambivalent nature of translating. Culture-specific terms, metaphors and images that are meaningful and even elegant in one language often lack transferability, become awkward, even meaningless in the target language. The most fascinating and excruciating task is to recognize the gaps in meaning and equivalent linguistic forms, and then attempt to find the most succinct means of transferring the original meaning. Na Hye-seok uses cultural terms that are easily understood by the Korean readers, but do not translate easily in English. Their literal translation can become stilted, exaggerated, and unable to convey the appropriate meaning.

If there is a gap in shared cultural knowledge, it is imperative for the translator to interfere and find the least obtrusive way of bridging that gap. As a last resort, part of the original text may be obscured or even eliminated, but it may be a necessary sacrifice to better serve the whole text and the target audience.

3.3.1 Translation of cultural terms

The problems a translator encounters while translating culture-specific references and items the strategies that s/he may employ will be discussed in the following. Heylen (1993), in her examination on the French translated versions of Hamlet, identifies at least three kinds of translation and analyzes the ways in which the play was acculturated to meet the demands of the target audiences. She proposes a historical-relative, socio-cultural model of three kinds of translation which goes further than the foreignization/domestication as expounded by Venuti:

- 1) Translations that do not really attempt to acculturate the original work; the translator adheres to the cultural codes that inform the source culture: the translated original is perceived as "exotic" and "bizarre" and will most likely stay on the periphery of the receiving culture;
- 2) Translations that negotiate and introduce a cultural compromise; these translations confront the problem of communication by selecting and balancing characteristics common to both source and receiving culture: the translator has altered the codes of the receiving culture in such a way that those confronted with the alteration will at the same time recognize the alteration and the code; the translated original may attain a canonized position;
- 3) Translations that completely acculturate the original work; the translator adheres to the codes which inform the receiving culture. Translations that completely acculturate the original work could be expected to "modernize" and "naturalize" linguistic context, linguistic intertext and socio-cultural situation." (23-24)

Culture-specific items generally include "local institutions, streets, historical figures, place names, personal names, periodicals, works of art, etc." (Aixelà, 1996). Aixelà describes CSIs as being "textually actualized items whose function and connotations in a source text involve a translation problem in their transference to a target text, whenever this problem is a product of the nonexistence of the referred item or of its different intertextual status in the

cultural system of the readers of the target text" (58). The procedures for translating CSIs are divided into two broad directions: conservation, which includes procedures such as repetition, linguistic translation and glossing; and substitution, which includes procedures such as universalization, naturalization and deletion..

3.3.2 Difficulties faced in the translation cultural terms in Gyeong-hui

The following are some examples from the many culture-specific items in the text that have no equivalent in the target language. They posed a great problem for the translator. The following is some examples of how some of the CSIs were translated. The translation strategies have been explained using Aixelà's taxonomy.

sadon manim (a relative by marriage)
 beoseon (Korean style socks)
 sokjeoksam (an undershirt)
 gaepitteok (rice-cakes stuffed with sweet bean paste)
 ammaru (front porch)
 buttumak (a cooking fireplace)
 tteokjangsu (rice-cake vendor)
 palja (fate, destiny, or karma)
 binyeoro jjokjjida (put up one's hair with a pin, the cultural connotation is "to get married")

Source Text	Target Text	Translation strategy of the CSI
“아이구, 무슨 장마가 그렇게 심해요.” 하며 담배를 붙이는 풍똥한 마님은 오래간만에 오신 사돈 마님이다.	"Oh, why is it raining so much!" The portly lady lighting the cigarette pipe is the in-law lady who has come for a visit.	This may be said to be the strategy of linguistic translation, translating the linguistic meaning of the compound noun 사돈마님 into <i>in-law-lady</i> .
경희는 지금 시원한 뒷마루에서 오래간만에 만난 오라버니댁과 앉아서 오라버니댁은 버선을 깎고 경희는 앉은 재봉틀에 자기 오라버니 양복 속적삼을 하며	Gyeong-hui is sitting in the cool back porch having a welcome talk with her sister-in-law. Her brother's wife was darning socks, Gyeong-hui was making her brother's undershirt at the sewing machine.	뒷마루 has been naturalized into the English word <i>back porch</i> . However it loses some of the cultural connotation since 마루 is part of the interior of the house whereas porch is outside of the house.
“흰떡 다섯 냥어치하고 개피떡 두 냥 반어치만 내놓게.”	"Give us about a five nyang worth of white rice-cakes and about a two and a half nyang of rice-cakes stuffed with sweet bean paste"	The currency unit <i>nyang</i> is conserved in the sentence, but the CSI 흰떡 has been universalized into the word <i>rice-cakes</i> and intratextual glossing added in the case of 개피떡
"애, 나하고 하자. 부뚜막에 올라앉아서 풀 막대로 저으랴? 아궁이 앞에 앉아서 때랴"	"Girl, let's do it together. Shall I stir with the starch-paste with the stick on the kitchen range or should I tend the fire in front of the fireplace?"	The CSI 부뚜막 has been naturalized to the term <i>kitchen range</i> and 아궁이 into <i>fireplace</i> . and lose the specific cultural connotation.
경희는 이제까지 비녀 쪽진 부인들을 보면 매우 불쌍히 생각하였다.	Until now, Gyeong-hui felt a sense of pity towards the married women with their hair up.	Intratextual glossing has been added to present the full meaning of the cultural term.

There were also various phrases in Chinese characters in the text. Chinese phrases were commonly used in the written texts of the period. These expressions date the text and the antiquated feel of the phrases poses a distinct feeling in the text which is lost when it is transferred into modern English.

saengsampal (生三八) thread made with real silk
 susaek (愁色) worried expression
 gwiae (貴愛) give affection and love
 ilpyoem (一瓢飲) a small sip of water or wine
 nayeokjaegijung (樂亦在其中) there is enjoyment in itself

The strategy I adopted in translating *Gyeong-hui* can be said to follow the second method proposed by Heylen (1993). I attempted to negotiate and introduce a cultural compromise. The problems in translation were confronted by selecting and balancing characteristics common to both source and receiving cultures. Inadvertently, some subtle cultural connotations have been lost in the process.

4. CONCLUSION AND FURTHER REFLECTIONS

The translation of any text obviously involves a set of cultural features from the source context. The translator has to be responsible for "bridging the cultural gap between monolingual speakers of different languages"(Hervey and Higgins, 2002). The task of the translator not only consists in the transferring of meanings from one language to another, but s/he is also a mediator between two cultures. In translating the works of Na Hye-seok, I hope to make a small contribution towards sharing the experiences common to women around the world and become a mediator in opening up the storehouse of knowledge in her works. The translation of her works would show, among other points, how

women spoke subversively in different languages and in earlier eras. My hope is to present to the English-speaking world a feminist introduction to her works. Moreover, the case may be made that translations not only affect the target culture, but sometimes force re-readings of the source culture's literary tradition.

Although the works by many eminent Korean writers have received a lot of attention and has been translated into several languages, the works of Na Hye-seok has not been translated widely. In recent years, the translation of Korean literature has been one of the primary efforts promoted on the governmental level to for cultural exchanges. The Korea Literature Translation Institute(KLTI) and The Daesan Foundation, which are two of the most famous institution that support translation of Korean works of literature, usually put up an annual list of works for selected or promoted for translation. Na Hye-seok's works have never been included in those lists. Incidentally, in the on-line site of the KLTI, Na Hye-seok is described as being "not especially memorable" as a writer of fiction.

However, as a translator and also as an avid reader, my assertion is that the works of Na Hye-seok deserve to be made known more widely outside of Korea. Gyeong-hui's struggle to achieve the "New Women" ideals in colonial Korean society in the early 20th century is a long way off from modern readers. However, the inner conflicts of her emotions have resonance as a universal theme in the lives of contemporary women and will certainly appeal to female readers around the world.

Only a handful of Korean women writers have been previously translated to English. Other women writers of the 1920's and 1930's such as Kim Myung-sun, Kim Il-yup have not yet been widely introduced to the English-speaking audience. After translating Na Hye-seok, my long-term objective is to contribute engaging, vibrant translations of the works of early modern Korean females writers to the international literary scene, to add to Western understanding of and appreciation for Korean literature and culture.

Western readers have yet to discover the cultural, literary and linguistic differences and similarities with other female writers of the period. I believe that their works are translatable and can appeal to a larger foreign audience in that they capture much of the depth of language and imagery present in the original and describe the universal experience of being a woman.

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[Abstract]

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This study offers a case study, from a translator's point of view, of some unique characteristics which mark the process of translating the works of a feminist writer in colonial Korea. Na Hye-seok is one of the first Koreans to graduate from a Japanese art college and is considered to be the most famous member of the first generation of the so-called New Women in Korea. Her short stories, essays and poems reveal her female consciousness, discussing how deeply she thought about what it means to live as a woman in a deeply patriarchal society and how earnestly she strives to overcome the problems she has had to face as an educated women of the period. The study will attempt to show the measures that were employed in capturing and translating the cultural elements in the text and the uniquely feminine voice of Na Hye-seok. The study will also proceed to discuss, from a feminist point of view, why the works and translations of Na Hye-seok had been excluded from the literary canon.

▶ Key Words: literary translation, feminist translation theory, Korean literature in translation, translation of culture

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