A Re-reading of Sacrifice to Detect Lao She's Irony

Karen Chung-chien Chang*
National Taipei University

Lao She was a humorist and a prolific writer in China. Many of his early works are characterized by light-hearted humor. However, when China encountered all the chaos at the end of the Qing Dynasty, this writer turned to irony and satire. Sacrifice, a short story, was published in 1935 and translated into English by George Kao in 1975. When this story was translated, the last few pages were left out and the story ending changed. Although all translation works involve certain degrees of rewriting, Kao's change of the story ending from tragic to happy is totally inadequate in showing Lao She's use of irony. Through reviewing Lefevere's rewriting theory, Kao's translation thought and style from his major works, and the various ironies built up in this work, this analysis argues that a re-translation in which the ending is preserved can better help English readers to appreciate this short story.

Keywords : Lao She, humor, irony, rewriting, literature translation

1. Introduction

Translation, an act of rendering a text from one language to another, requires a translator not only to be equipped with a high level of linguistic competence but also a good understanding of the culture, history and development of the source language. In translation studies, the adherence to literal translation or liberal translation has aroused much debate. The proponents of the former believe that literal translation preserves what a piece of literary work wants to convey to its readers, whereas the supporters of the latter assert that some elements simply cannot be translated. Those people who support liberal translation emphasize when a piece of literary work is translated and introduced into the target culture, it should not be read like a piece of translation. Instead, it

* The author would like to thank the anonymous reviewers of *T&I Review* for their constructive comments to help improve earlier versions of this paper. The author's sincere gratitude also goes to Ms. Naomi Simonds for her continuous support throughout this project.

should be able to create a resonance within readers. To reach this aim, different translation strategies have to be employed. Among the strategies, rewriting is viewed as a common practice. Lefevere (1992: vii) has pointed out that translation is "a rewriting of an original text," and several factors influence a translator's decision to employ rewriting as a strategy.

The first two decades of the twentieth century are regarded as an era of much Sino-Western exchange and communication. Although the practice of introducing Western ideas into China through translated books can be traced back to the late sixteenth century, the trend continued in the early twentieth century thanks to many famous translators, such as Yan Fu (1854-1921), Liang Shiqiu (1903-1987), and Lin Shu (1852-1924).

This study examines *Sacrifice*, a short story translated into English by George Kao in 1975. The reason for selecting this piece is that when Kao translated this short story, he left out the last few pages of the story and modified the ending to be a happy one instead of the tragic ending built by Lao She, the author. To lend support to the argument that the original ending should be preserved and translated, this study will review the major principles of the rewriting theory by Lefevere (1992) and the translation thought as well as style of Kao, followed by the key features of ironies presented by Lao She in *Sacrifice*. Various types of ironies employed in this work will shed light on what this writer intends to convey through the tragic life of Dr. Mao, the leading character.

2. Literature Review

This literature reviews consists of two parts: the principles of the rewriting theory and the translation thought and style of Kao. The first part helps readers understand what elements may lead a translator to *rewrite* a piece of translated work. The second part sheds light on Kao's stance in translating a piece of literary work.

2.1. Lefevere's Rewriting Theory

Rewriting, as a strategy, is often found not only in translation but also in anthologization, historiography, criticism, and editing. In particular, when a piece of literary work is translated into another language, its content can be manipulated to various degrees. Some have argued that from one language to another, a certain level of

untranslatability often presents itself as a challenge to literal translation. However, Lefevere (1992: vii) has pointed out, "all rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way." Moreover, rewriting is an act with both positive and negative influences. On the positive side, rewriting can "help the evolution of a literature and a society" by introducing new concepts, genres and devices (Lefevere 1992: vii). Thanks to rewriting, the history of translation can be regarded as the history of literary innovation. It is through rewriting that one culture imposes its power upon another. Yet, on the negative side, rewriting may repress innovation or even prohibit people from developing the awareness about the world in which they live.

In both the past and the present, rewriters have "created images of a writer, a work, a period, a genre, sometimes, even a whole literature" (Lefevere 1992: 5). This scholar has highlighted translation as the most recognizable and influential type of rewriting because translation has the power to "project the image of an author and/or a (series of) works(s) in another culture" (1992: 9). That is, translation can lift that author and/or the work(s) "beyond the boundaries of their culture of origin" (1992: 9). In Lefevere's view, two control factors exist to ensure that the literary system does not depart too much from the other subsystems that make up the society. The first factor lies within the literary system whereas the second factor functions from outside of the system. The former is called the professionals, including critics, reviewers, teachers, and translators, who may at times repress certain works of literature deemed as too blatantly opposed to the dominant concept of what literature should be (the poetics) and what society should be (the ideology). With the concerns of poetics and ideology, these professionals would rewrite the literary works until the works were viewed as acceptable.

The second factor is called "patronage," referring to the persons or institutions that may exert power to promote or hinder the reading, writing, and rewriting of a piece of literature (Lefevere 1992). These persons or institutions usually are more interested in the ideology of literature instead of its poetics. Three elements constitute patronage: the ideological element, the economic element, and the element of status. The ideological element acts as "a constraint on the choice and development of both form and subject matter" (Lefevere 1992: 16). The economic component then dictates that patrons have to make sure the translators/writers are able to make a living. Last, the "acceptance of patronage implies integration into a certain support group and its lifestyle" (Lefevere 1992: 16). What can be concluded about translators is that they are classified as the professionals who are concerned with ideology and poetics, but how they translate literary works is heavily influenced by patronage, very often the mainstream ideology concerning the types of translated works, some sort of stable income, as well as a sense

of belonging to a translation community or group, in today's terms.

When the elements that may impact a piece of translated work are reviewed and applied to the first translation of *Sacrifice,* the only reasons to rewrite the story ending should be related to either the internal factor of what Kao believed such a story meant to convey or the external factor of possible forces from patronage. In *Chinese Wit & Humor*, a book edited by Kao, the rationale of modifying the story ending was not provided. One possible explanation may be that this book centered on the theme of "humor," and Kao might have wanted to present Lao She as a humorist, and the story with a happy ending may suit this theme better. However, it is not certain with which criteria or concerns this decision was reached. Commenting on the possible reason for Kao's decision to change the story ending, Towery (1999: 114) has stated, "Kao evidently thought the story was long enough for English readers and ended it." Since such speculation can hardly serve as a justification for this decision, it is necessary to understand more about Kao as a translator.

2.2. Kao's Translation Thought and Style

How a translator renders a piece of literary work into the target language is greatly influenced by his/her translation thought and style. This section focuses on reviewing Kao as a translator, with a special emphasis on his positioning as a translator when compared with other contemporary translators and his ways of treating a to-be-translated text, including humor.

George Kao is a well-known writer, translator, editor, and journalist. He received his master's degree in Journalism and International Relations and worked as a journalist as well as an editor at the Voice of America. In the translation circle, he is known for having translated American classics, such as *The Great Gatsby, Look Homeward, Angel,* and *Long Day's Journey into Night.* After 1972, Kao was appointed visiting senior fellow at the Chinese University of Hong Kong where he founded *Renditions*, a journal dedicated to translating classical and contemporary Chinese literature into English. He also served as the first editor and editor-in-chief for this publication.

Because of his reputation in translating several well-read English classics, Kao's translated works have become topics of much research. Most of the studies have focused on either the comparisons between his translated works and the translated versions from other translators or the analyses of his translation styles and characteristics. However, compared to other translators of his time, such as Lin Yutang (1895-1976), Chao Yuanren (1892-1982), Chen Xiying (1896-1970) , or Liang Shiqiu, the research on Kao

and his translation started late (Wang 2012: 5). It is in the early 21st century that Kao's translated works mentioned above became the topics of academic discussions as well as theses/dissertations.

Nevertheless, one feature to be pointed out about the studies conducted in the past decades on Kao as a translator and his translated works is that these works are mostly from the source language of English to the target language of Chinese. Since this current analysis focuses on Sacrifice, a short story Kao translated from Chinese to English, it is more important to understand what Kao felt and believed as a translator. In one interview, Kao revealed that,

> *I am not a creative writer. That is why I translate, to introduce the original stories to others, just like reporting news, and I can get some relief and consolation from the process.* (Jin 2000: 50, translated by Wang 2012)

Moreover, influenced by journalism, Kao (1981) regarded translation as news coverage; the main purpose is to faithfully present the form, content and spirit of the original work to readers who do not understand English well.

In addition, in his book on the bilingual work between Chinese and English languages, Yi Yan Nan Jin (One language is never enough to express all), Kao (2000) stated that he was never interested in translation theories. Such a stance explains why Kao was more interested in the practice of translation. For the same reason, his discussions about the orientation and approaches in conducting translations can only be found in his articles and interviews (Hu 1979; Kao 1981, 1983, 2000). In addition, from how Kao agreed with and was opposed to other contemporary translators, a better picture of Kao's translation thought can be put together. For instance, Yu Guangzhong (1999: 132), one of Kao's contemporary translators indicated that, "translating is an inevitable evil, an unsatisfactory substitute." Yu believed that since readers had no knowledge of the original language, they naturally turned to translators for help. Kao (1981: 309) shared such a view and thought of translation as "at best an echo, in nature a second best thing." Furthermore, Kao (1981: 309) sided with Chao Yuanren in emphasizing the fact that there was no definite translation, and "translation is something 'inexhaustible.'" In his own words, Kao elaborated

> *Anyway, I always think that literary translations depend on translators' different views as long as they have similar level of language proficiency. Every translator has his own understanding and he can only try to understand the original author as well as he can.* (Kao 2000: 144, translated by Wang)

Regarding the three translation principles, fidelity, fluency, and elegance, proposed by Yan Fu, the personal views expressed by many later translators also shed light on what Kao thought of these three elements. Lin Yutang (1984) extended Yan Fu's ideas by putting forth three layers of standards, including the standards of being faithful, fluent, and beautiful. In this aspect, Chao Yuenren (1984) pointed out that fidelity is a matter of extent, covering the dimensions of frequency, linguistic field, styles and tones. Chen Xiying (1984), on the contrary, believed that fluency and elegance were not necessary requirements. For Chen, fidelity was the single, most important standard in literary translation. The original and the translated versions should share similarity in form, meaning and spirit. Among these criteria, Kao believed that a piece of translation should retain the original style and manner and faithfully reflect the original content. Kao (1983) also claimed that, in the translating process, a translator should not only understand the original but also put himself in the position of the author or the speaker. Only through this approach, can the translator reproduce the author's intention, tone, and rhetoric as close as possible to those in the original work.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the biggest debate in the Chinese translation circle was that about literal translation and free translation. Lu Xun (1881-1936) was a strong supporter of literal translation, while Liang Shiqiu regarded such translation as meaningless. Liang (1978) stated that a translator's duty was to make sure that the translation conveyed the original meaning, but at the same time, the translation should be in fluent Chinese. Between these two standpoints, Kao's (1981) views were closer to Liang's, and he stressed that when readers did not feel what they were reading was a piece of translation, the translation was good. On the contrary, if a reader began reading a piece, immediately detected it as a translated work, and found it hard to continue reading, the piece became a total failure on the part of the translator no matter what other values the piece had. Yet, it should be noted that Kao (2000: 173) did not take the extreme stance of free translation even though he believed that a translator should not stick to every point in the original too strictly.

Last, when Hu (1979) interviewed Kao and asked him about his translation process from English to Chinese, he described the working process as follows.

> *My personal habit of translating is to translate paragraph by paragraph. I first try to understand the original and grasp the meaning of every word. Then I consider how to put it into Chinese with the most appropriate words or expressions.* (translated by Wang 2012: 4)

Such an approach in translating a piece of work echoed what Kao (1995: 393) wrote

on the topic of translating humor. Kao believed, "the translation of humor is like translating other types of literary writing, only more so." Working with a humorous text, a translator needs to be equipped with a firm grasp of the two languages at hand and be familiar with the cultures reflected in both languages. Most importantly, translating humor "calls for a special talent, a kind of knack, for inducing mirth in the reader with a certain felicitous arrangement of words" (Kao 1995: 393), and "unless perfect equivalence can be achieved, it is a higher order of literary translation to be faithful to the spirit rather than the letter of the lore. This is more true when that 'slithy' thing called humor is involved" (Kao 1995: 400).

The above review of Kao's thoughts and translation styles helps readers gain more insight about how this translator approaches a piece of to-be-translated work.

3. Brief Introduction of *Xi Sheng (Sacrifice)*

Sacrifice is an excellent example that shows how Lao She employs and builds irony in his writing to point out the attitude problems of some educated people in China during the early 20th century. Although known as a humorist, Lao She's writing style experienced a major change due to a series of events, including the Japanese invasion of China's northeast, Manchuria, the lack of response of his government and his countrymen, and the bombing of civilian neighborhoods in Shanghai (Rea 2015). *Cat Country* was written in 1932 as Lao She's attempt in composing a satirical novel castigating the apathy, factionalism, and incompetence exhibited by the Chinese government and the people. According to Rea (2015: 136), "a few years later, Lao She declared it an artistic failure and attributed its bitter tone to mentor despair over China's nightmare."

Rea (2015) pointed out that, after *Cat Country*, Lao She was inspired to change his course. In various short pieces, he brought back his previous ironic and familiar writing styles. *Sacrifice* was a work written in that period of time. In *Sacrifice*, Dr. Mao obtains his Ph. D. from the United States, but as a foreigner on a student visa, he cannot seek a position at any US university to stay in the US legally. Consequently, his only choice is to return to China, his own country. Unfortunately, as Dr. Mao values everything in the US more highly than things or people in China, he suffers *anomie,* a situation where a person exposed to a new culture develops a dislike towards his/her own culture (D. Nilsen, personal communication, November 11, 2009). Some people only experience anomie for a short period of time whereas some may struggle with it much longer.

In *Sacrifice*, Dr. Mao takes his sense of anomie back to China, resulting in his interpretation of returning to China as a sacrifice or a torture. Though Dr. Mao lives in China, he loathes everything there (except for Shanghai) and always reminisces about his life in the US. This trait has further led to his constant comparison of his present life and past life, making him an absolutely unhappy fellow. Even after he gets married, he treats his wife, a local Chinese woman, in the American way. For example, he insists on giving her a kiss before going to work every day because that is a common practice shown on television programs in the United States. Dr. Mao never realizes that the people around him cannot grasp his so-called American spirit. Only three months after their costly wedding, his wife runs away, leaving him lamenting even more on the monetary sacrifices he has made in marrying her. Dr. Mao's reluctance in returning to China, his dissatisfaction with the life in China, and his negative perception of every encounter echoes the Chinese title of the story: *Xi Sheng* (meaning "sacrifice"). The fact that Dr. Mao constantly reminiscences about his sacrifices puts him in the situation of being incapable of leading a regular and content life, further plunging him into a tragedy.

4. Irony Analysis in Sacrifice

Although this analysis argues for the re-translation of *Sacrifice*, it is not to cast doubt on the preciseness of Kao's first translation of this work. A careful reading of Kao's translation and Lao She's original work clearly leads to the only discrepancy: the ending of the story. Kao's (1975: 327) translated version changes the story ending to a happy one at the time when Dr. Mao plans for his wedding with the following wrap-up for Dr. Mao's future.

> *Lao Mei finally returned. I didn't have any occasion to call on him again before the winter vacation came around. After New Year's, he forwarded to me a wedding invitation, engraved in English. I felt rather delighted for Dr. Mao. He had reached his goal; perhaps from now on he could devote himself to some other life's pursuits…*

Nevertheless, in Lao She's original story, Dr. Mao's marriage does not bring him the happiness he has been looking for. The last few pages describe Dr. Mao's interaction with his newly-wed wife, her unexpected departure, his negligence of work and life details, and eventually his admission into a lunatic asylum. With the omission of the real ending of *Sacrifice*, readers will not have the opportunity to see the culmination of

dramatic irony between what Dr. Mao thinks he has found (a happy married life) and what Dr. Mao really has to face (a lonely life in a lunatic asylum).

This section is arranged with the detailed descriptions of different types of ironies and the examples taken from *Sacrifice*. When different examples are taken from *Sacrifice*, Chang's (2009) translation is used for the reason of consistency as Kao's version does not cover the original ending presented by Lao She.

Before specific types of ironies are introduced, the most conventional definition of this term is provided. The Oxford English Dictionary (1989: 744) gives two layers of definitions for irony. In the primary sense, irony is described as "a figure of speech in which the intended meaning is the opposite of that expressed by the words used" whereas the figurative sense illustrates irony as "a condition of affairs or events of a character opposite to what was, or might naturally be, expected; a contradictory outcome of events as if in mockery of the promise and fitness of things." Among other stock definitions of irony, the most popular formulation describes irony as a communicative act which expresses an opposite meaning of what is literally said (Knox 1961; Wilson and Sperber 2007). These definitions, though rough, do provide readers curious about irony a good place to start. For the purpose of detecting the varieties of irony presented in Sacrifice, three types of ironies are analyzed: verbal, situational and dramatic.

4.1. Verbal Irony

4.1.1. Theories and application

In situations where verbal irony is employed, ironists consciously and intentionally utter statements which bear opposite meanings to indicate a superior stance or exhibit an echoic feature (with or without interjections). Classical rhetoric has defined verbal irony as a trope which includes "utterances with figurative meanings relating to their literal meanings in one of several standard ways" (Wilson 2006: 1723). In other words, what creates irony here comes from the different meanings that an utterance has. Grice (1975) has considered an utterance ironic when it intentionally violates some conversational maxims, in particular, the maxim of quality.

However, not all verbal irony can be explained by the traditional approach. To solve this problem, Sperber and Wilson (1981) have proposed the Echoic Mention Theory. Traditionally, when interpreting an ironic statement, a hearer has to go through four stages: 1) rejecting "the literal meaning"; 2) trying out "alternative interpretations or explanations"; 3) making a decision about "the author's knowledge or beliefs" about the utterance; 4) choosing "a new meaning or cluster of meanings" with which the hearer

can rest secure (Booth 1974: 10-12). Questioning the multi-stage process for irony comprehension, Sperber and Wilson (1981: 303) have pointed out that "when the expression mentioned is a complete sentence, it does not have the illocutionary force it would standardly [sic] have in a context where it was used." Take the two following statements for example.

a) What a shame!
b) Don't just say "What a shame"; do something.

The statement in (a) is uttered in (b) without actually being made. In (a), the statement is *used* whereas, in (b), the statement is *mentioned,* conveying an ironic connotation. In Sperber and Wilson's view, in the situation where irony is used, the mentioned ironic proposition either echoes or repeats another previously expressed idea. According to this theory, the speaker produces an utterance to echo what his/her interlocutor has previously said or done and expresses his/her own humorous or disparaging attitude (Sperber and Wilson 1981, 1986, 1992).

Based on the Echoic Mention Theory, "there is no nonliteral proposition that hearers must substitute for the literal proposition. Rather the listener is reminded echoically of some familiar proposition (whose truth value is irrelevant) and of the speaker's attitude toward it" (Gibbs and Colston 2007: 175). This theory has indicated that,

> *...although the speaker of an ironic utterance is expressing the literal meaning of that utterance, he or she is not using the utterance to convey his or her own thoughts. Rather, the speaker is mentioning the utterance as an object of contempt, ridicule, or disapproval.* (Williams 1984: 127)

In addition, Utsumi (2000) has proposed the Implicit Display Theory to examine verbal irony. Her theory has two major claims. First, ironic language presupposes an *ironic environment*, a situational setting present in the discourse context to motivate verbal irony. Second, verbal irony is regarded as an utterance or statement that implicitly indicates an ironic setting, enabling people to understand an ironic intention that is not explicitly expressed. In addition, the Fencing Game model put forth by Anolli, Ciceri and Infantino (2000) provides another framework to examine verbal irony. This theory stresses that, in the analysis of verbal irony, attention is focused not only on the linguistic level of irony but more especially on the irony situation. The irony situation is viewed as some interactive episodes in which an ironic comment is produced as the best local solution between those involved in the communication in the given contextual

constraints and opportunities. In this model, four steps are foreseen: the *assumptions* (the mutual relational background, such as interactive patterns), the *focal event* (the stirring up object of irony), the dialogic comment (the ironic utterance that the speaker expresses by alluding to the assumptions), and the *ironic effect (misunderstanding* [not grasped by the addressee], *denying* [addressee's pretending not to understand the ironic comment], and *touché* [admittance of the attack]), depending on the addressee's feedback (Anolli et al. 2001: 13-17).

Among these theories that have been proposed to understand the concept of verbal irony, one common thread is that an ironic situation often precedes the production of an ironic utterance, helping those involved to better grasp the situation.

4.1.2. Examples taken from Sacrifice

In this short story, Dr. Mao, a Harvard graduate, has a predictable speech pattern that allows others interacting with him to make echoically ironic statements (verbal irony) against him. In Dr. Mao's eyes, everything related to America is good and everything Chinese is bad. With much dissatisfaction about his life in China, this doctor keeps complaining about his life in a college city where the story takes place. One of his favorite expressions is "too much of a sacrifice!" For him, living in a northern city (possibly Beijing) with limited convenience and development is a sacrifice; coming back to teach in China is a sacrifice; not finding a girlfriend is a sacrifice, and having to endure "dirty" Chinese food or Chinese people is another sacrifice. Dr. Mao desires to have an American-style home complete with a box-spring bed, a sofa, a bathtub, a piano and carpets. Of course, his dream family life will not be complete without a woman. With these topics constantly appearing in Dr. Mao's conversation with Lao Mei (his colleague) and the narrator, Dr. Mao has set himself up to become a target of echoic verbal ironies.

Three instances are taken from the translation to show how Lao Mei pokes fun at Dr. Mao's rhetoric of sacrifice, Shanghai and women. The narrator first meets Dr. Mao at Lao Mei's place. As Dr. Mao's colleague, Lao Mei often hears the word *sacrifice* and knows what it meant to Dr. Mao. During their first encounter, when Dr. Mao suddenly says "Too much of a sacrifice," Lao Mei responds to that statement with "Indeed, what a torture for a Ph.D. from Harvard!" (Chang 2009: 2). The knowledge of the interaction patterns between these characters enables the narrator to know that Lao Mei intends to poke fun at Dr. Mao. In addition, in Dr. Mao's mind, no place can measure up to America. Even in China, the only city he would not mind visiting is Shanghai. Naturally, Dr. Mao's high regard of Shanghai sets him up for further ridicule. On another occasion, Lao Mei hears Dr. Mao say "But where else in China can you find a

place more civilized than Shanghai?" Knowing Dr. Mao's feelings for Shanghai and America, Lao Mei immediately answers, "However, Shanghai can never measure up to America" (Chang 2009: 3). Lao Mei's disapproval of Dr. Mao's longing for America is evident in this instance. Last, while in America, Dr. Mao somehow develops his own interpretation for a perfect American family. Consequently, after he returns to China, he longs for female companionship. He even turns down a male friend's invitation for a walk with the ridiculous comment of "What for? You are not a woman" (Chang 2009: 5). Naturally, this preference for female companionship subjects Dr. Mao to another mockery. One time, when the three men go out for dinner, Dr. Mao does not move his chopsticks but stares at the food. Both Lao Mei and the narrator know Dr. Mao is afraid of the "dirty" Chinese food. Instead of comforting Dr. Mao, Lao Mei chooses to say "Doc, this dinner would be much more enjoyable if there were two or three women around, right?" The irony embedded in this statement is an unquestionable attempt to poke fun at Dr. Mao's feelings about Chinese food and the company of women.

Moreover, all the above comments made by Lao Mei can be examined through the aforementioned theories on verbal irony. First, all of these utterances are not sincere, violating Grice's Maxim of Quality. Second, in Sperber and Wilson's term, Lao Mei's comments (the mentioned ironic propositions) echo Dr. Mao's previous utterances (previously expressed ideas). When examined with this theory, Lao Mei's comments are produced to echo what his/her interlocutor (Dr. Mao) has previously said or done and express his own humorous or disparaging attitude. In other words, with that echoic mentioning of *suffering/Harvard, Shanghai*, and *women*, the narrator (a friend of Lao Mei and Dr. Mao), as well as readers, is able to detect a sense of mockery in Lao Mei's comments.

Even though these comments made by Lao Mei may be interpreted as sarcasm, different scholars have presented their views on the distinctions between sarcasm and irony. Some views state that irony can be divided into *sarcastic irony*, through which the speaker blames his interlocutor by means of literally praising words (the *blame by praise* approach) and kind irony, which consists of praising others by means of literally critical or offensive utterances (the *praise by blame* approach). More specifically, Colston (2007) considers sarcasm a term commonly used to describe an expression of verbal irony; Gibbs (2007) believes that sarcasm, along with jocularity, hyperbole, rhetorical questions, and understatements, are types of irony; Attardo (2007) in turn considers sarcasm an overtly aggressive type of irony. Reyes et al. (2013: 214) come to the conclusion that states "textual examples of sarcasm lack the sharp tone of an aggressive speaker, so for textual purposes, it is convenient to treat irony and sarcasm as different facets of the same phenomenon."

In addition, Lao Mei's personal encounters with Dr. Mao constitute the *ironic environment* which the ironic language (his comments) presupposes. In Utsumi's term, the past verbal exchanges between Dr. Mao and Lao Mei builds up a situational setting to motivate verbal irony. Last, the verbal exchanges between Lao Mei and Dr. Mao meet the four conditions of the Fencing Game model: the interaction patterns between Lao Mei and Dr. Mao (the *assumptions*), and the topics of sacrifice, Shanghai and women (the *focal events*), Lao Mei's poking comments (the *dialogic comments*) and Dr. Mao's oblivious attitude (the *ironic effect* of *misunderstanding* [addressee's not grasping the irony]). With the help of these theoretical frameworks, the verbal irony produced by Lao Mei can be put into context.

4.2. Situational and Dramatic Irony

4.2.1. Theories and applications

Different from verbal irony which focuses on linguistic phenomena, situational and dramatic ironies deal with how irony is developed. Among all types of irony, situational irony can probably be dated the furthest back. Muecke (1969: 99) has pointed out that even before irony was classified, "men practiced irony and ironic situations were appreciated." However, the recognition, acceptance and naming of the "ironies of ironic situations" did not happen until the later eighteenth and nineteenth century (Muecke, 1969: 99). Different from verbal irony, situational irony is not created by an ironist but presents "a condition of affairs" or an "outcome of events" that is viewed or perceived as ironic (42). Situational irony mainly concerns what it is about a situation that leads people to describe it as ironic. For example, the scenario in which a pickpocket had his own pocket picked while he was busy picking others' pockets is perceived as situationally ironic. Moreover, this type of irony highlights an unexpected or incongruous quality in a situation or event (Lucariello 1994, 2007), such as a no-smoking sign in the lounge of a tobacco company, or a vegetarian having a heart attack outside a steak house.

Another classic work also serves as a great example to illustrate both situational and dramatic ironies. In O. Henry's *The Gift of the Magi,* a holiday is coming and a couple wants to purchase presents for each other. Yet, due to their poor financial status, the wife's only choice is to sell her beautiful hair to buy a watch chain for her husband. Meanwhile, the husband sells his watch to buy his wife a set of pretty combs. The situational irony takes place when the couple realizes what each other has done: the wife no longer has her long beautiful hair and the husband no longer needs a watch

chain. The irony in this story lies in the fact that neither knows the other has given up his/her valuables while the reader knows all along. Besides the situational irony shown through the unknowing sacrifice the couple has made for each other, this story leads to dramatic irony.

Often in novels, readers see a combined employment of situational and dramatic irony. The latter is described as "more striking when an observer already knows what the victim has yet to find out" (Muecke 1969: 104). Dramatic irony is "pre-eminently the irony of the theatre" because "the peculiar pleasure of the theatre···is the spectacle of a life in which···we [the audience] do not interfere but over which we exercise the control of knowledge" (Muecke 1969: 105; Sedgewick 1948: 32). In other words, "the audience knows things that the characters do not know" (Nilsen and Nilsen 2000: 169), and this type of irony emphasizes the superiority of the audience to the characters in a novel or play. One example of dramatic irony is presented in Shakespeare's *Othello* when Othello addresses Iago as "honest Iago" without knowing Iago is the person who deceives and tricks him into believing that Desdemona, Othello's wife, is unfaithful.

4.2.2. Examples taken from Sacrifice

Situational irony in *Sacrifice* predominantly lies in how this doctor interacts with others around him. He loathes the Chinese culture, has a high regard for American-style homes, and constantly makes references to the American spirit. All these behaviors highlight the fact that Dr. Mao has no clue about the situational irony in which he has placed himself. First, although Dr. Mao is born and raised in China, he holds very little regard for the Chinese both as a people and a culture. He cannot imagine the idea of going to a public bath house because it is "dangerous" to visit a Chinese bath house as the Chinese people are "filthy" (Chang 2009: 3). He will not watch Chinese war movies because his "foreign friends said the Chinese behave like barbarians in wars!" (Chang 2009: 3). Hearing such responses from a Chinese person who would rather believe in his "foreign friends" than his own people creates a sense of situational irony. Second, Dr. Mao's dream of building an American-style home in China puts himself in a very awkward situation. In his heart, he designs his home based on what he saw in America during his stay at Harvard. According to Dr. Mao,

> *There is a bathtub in every American home and every hotel room. When you want to take a bath, all you have to do is to turn on the water -- hua – you could have either hot or cold water as you like. If the water is dirty, let out the dirty water with a hua. Then you can have clean fresh water again with another hua.* (Chang 2009: 3)

The irony in this long description of a "bathtub" lies in how Dr. Mao ridiculously and naively builds his ideal home and his concept of Americanism simply on his observation of this household fixture. Later, even when Dr. Mao prepares for his wedding, he emphasizes the idea of decorating his future home with "some 'must have' items, such as a bed with box springs, a foreign-style bathtub, a sofa, a piano, and carpeting" (Chang 2009: 5). For him, a bathtub takes a higher priority than love, the most important factor for most people considering marriage.

Also, the experience of studying and living in America turns Dr. Mao into a believer of his so-called American spirit. Dr. Mao is never interested in any topic unrelated to America. He always tells the narrator "You have to do things and see things the American way" (Chang 2009: 6). While being asked to explain what the American spirit means, however, this doctor fails to provide a good explanation. Instead, he gives tons of examples as an attempt to paint a picture of this concept. He describes that, for example,

> *...each American house must have a bathtub. When people go out, they must drive. Movie theatres are found everywhere. Every man has a girlfriend. The average indoor temperature during winter is above 70 degrees. Women are all good-looking. Each living room is thickly carpeted.* (Chang 2009: 6)

In this example, Dr. Mao seems to believe that once he has gathered all these items, he will have a perfect home because American homes are all like that. More outrageously, Dr. Mao insists on inviting a pastor to witness his wedding ceremony because "Marriage is serious. All high-class Americans are married by pastors. Indeed, that's necessary" (Chang 2009: 12). The irony here comes from his total negligence of the reality. He is in China, a country where wedding ceremonies are witnessed by the parents of the groom and the bride. In 1935 when this story was written, it was not a common practice to invite a pastor to a Chinese wedding, not to mention the fact that he obviously has forgotten that a wedding involves two people. Never once in his wedding planning does he take his future wife's likes or dislikes into consideration. Dr. Mao always desires to build a family, but what he actually does is to form a home, in his mind, with items that remind him of America.

More than once, Dr. Mao has indicated his preference of American culture over the Chinese one. However, his preference is easily changed to suit the situations he faces. When Dr. Mao is offered the position by the university, he insists on signing a three-year contract to increase his job security. Later, when he realizes Lao Mei, his colleague without a Ph.D. degree, receives the same amount of salary, Dr. Mao feels the

situation is unfair. To him, a doctorate degree, especially one from the US, should bring him a higher status and salary. Realizing that others (with lower qualifications) receive the same salary as he does, Dr. Mao approaches the school board and threatens to quit unless he gets a raise. Several contradictions exist in this incident. First, the three-year contract is signed to protect his job and the contract has binding power over both parties: Dr. Mao and the university. Therefore, Dr. Mao's threat to quit teaching is essentially a violation of his own contract. The double irony here is that when Dr. Mao signs the contract, he wants the negotiation to go the American way. Later, when he wants to break the contract, the doctor rationalizes his action by saying that Chinese people rarely honor their contracts. If Dr. Mao truly loathes how Chinese people conduct their daily routine, he should not behave like a Chinese person when breaking the contract. Although Dr. Mao despises everything Chinese people do, he himself unwittingly follows the same path: breaking the contract to receive a raise.

5. Examining Xi Sheng and Kao's Modification of Story Ending

The purpose of focusing this analysis on the different types of irony is to illustrate that irony can be exemplified in many forms. Verbal irony is shown in the dialogues or communication styles (how Dr. Mao communicates with other people around him). Situational irony is expressed through stance and context (how Dr. Mao leads a *misfit* life style in China), while dramatic irony is expressed through the development of plot (how Dr. Mao could have had a seemingly happy life but ends up spending his later years in an insane asylum). What needs to be emphasized in the translation of this story is not how irony *itself* is translated through *words*, but how the multiples layers of irony are *captured* and *re-presented* in the target language, English. Only when attention is paid to all these three aspects, can optimal translation of irony be attempted. Based on such reasoning, this researcher has tried to elaborate why *Sacrifice* is a piece of irony rather than just light-hearted humor.

To supplement the above analysis on irony, efforts have been made to shed light on why Kao chose to modify the story ending of *Xi Sheng (Sacrifice)*. As suggested by Lefevere (1992), two main factors, including a translator him/herself (a professional) and publishing institute (the patronage), bear influence on the decision of employing rewriting as a strategy. A closer examination of how and why *Sacrifice* was chosen to be part of *Chinese Wit and Humor* has revealed both these factors may explain Kao's modification of the story ending. First, concluded from other studies of Kao's translated works (Hsu

2011; Li 2008; Sun 2010; Tan 2007; Wang 2012), one shared observation about Kao as a translator shows "information concerning Kao's life is scattered and found mainly in his writings, and criticism and research on Kao as a translator and his translation is inadequate and unsystematic" (Wang 2012: 6). In China, much research on Kao's translation has focused on his English to Chinese works, including Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby,* O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night,* and Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel*. In contrast, his translated works from Chinese into English can only be described as scarce, making a systematic analysis of his translation style very difficult. What is known to most readers is that Kao had a very good command of both the Chinese and English languages (Lu 2004). A conclusion drawn from this observation is that modifying the story ending of *Sacrifice* should have been a conscientious decision rather than difficulties in translation associated with factors like the issue of untranslatability. Therefore, further attention was directed to the compilation of this anthology.

In Editor's Note and Editor's Preface to *Chinese Wit and Humor,* Kao (1975: xvii) furnished further information on this anthology. In his words, "during the late unlamented war more than once I was confronted with the American editor who wanted something on Chinese humor." To provide some background information of this anthology, Kao (1975: xv) complimented Ling Yutang's works on Chinese humor by saying "if he [Lin] had not made the Chinese reading public humor-conscious in the prewar days, there would hardly have been any sample of modern Chinese humorous writing to include in this book [*Chinese Wit and Humor*]." From these comments, this anthology was clearly regarded as a book on humor. Consequently, most pieces collected should share this feature, a sense of humor. More importantly, Kao's following thoughts might have provided today's readers some hints regarding why Sacrifice was modified.

> *...as my title indicates, the barbed point of wit seems more in evidence than the soothing tonic of humor. However, I do share with my fellow anthologists a subjective point of view and include only things that I have liked. It is, in a way, an impressionistic rather than comprehensive collection. My fond hope is that it should be at least entertaining.* (Kao 1975: xxvii)

Clearly, these details lend support to why light-hearted humor suits this anthology better than irony.

Moreover, the nature of *humor* in this anthology is supported by the following details. In *Chinese Wit and Humor*, the section on Lao She's works includes two short stories: *Talking Pictures* and *Dr. Mao*. The former is humorous in nature, focusing on how a family that was fascinated by western motion pictures excitedly planned to watch a

western movie, tried to accommodate each family member's schedule, negotiated the details of leaving for the theater, but ended up missing out on the entire movie. The entire process of this family's attempt to *catch the movie* and the delay caused by their *unpunctuality* is filled with incongruity, an element that generates a sense of funniness. However, despite describing Lao She's writing as a "barbed pen targeting the elements in Chinese bourgeois society" (Kao 1975: 305), Kao modified the story and gave Xi Sheng a happy ending, steering the story to lean towards humor. This element of humor can also be seen in the translation of the story title. The original title, *Xi Sheng,* means *sacrifice*, but Kao changed it to *Dr. Mao*. With this change in title, the focus of the entire story became what happened to Dr. Mao rather than how Dr. Mao's view on different sacrifices he made led to *the* ultimate sacrifice: his entire life.

Kao once stated that the discussion on literary translation was not about right or wrong but about *poor, good*, and *better* translation (1981). This line of thought and the above background of *Chinese Wit and Humor* might help readers better understand Kao as a translator as well as the decision he made on this specific short story of Lao She.

6. Conclusions

The first translation of *Sacrifice* by Kao leaves out the last few pages of the story and modifies the ending composed by Lao She. With this modification, Kao paints a happy ending for Dr. Mao, for he finally meets a woman and starts preparing for his wedding.

A potential problem with this ending is that the omission of the last few pages can drastically reduce the force of the plot. Moreover, the culmination of dramatic irony is totally lost. Despite Dr. Mao's effort in trying to replicate a US lifestyle in Chinese society, he fails at the end. His newly-wed wife runs away from their home, leaving Dr. Mao neglecting his work entirely, spending all his time at home waiting for her return, and ending up being admitted into a lunatic asylum. Such a contrast exemplifies the building of dramatic irony; consequently, without this ending, the intended dramatic irony is drastically weakened.

In addition, the original story plot leads readers to understand that Dr. Mao has no one but himself to blame for the tragic ending of his life. Although born and raised as a Chinese person, Dr. Mao "detested everything Chinese, except Chinese carpets" (Chang, 2009: 8). He believes that "his personal greatest *sacrifice* was the fact that he was born in China, a fact that he could not change at all" (Chang 2009: 7). As Dr.

Mao loathes the Chinese people, he seeks his only comfort in building "an American-style home with all his might" (7). The saddest part of Dr. Mao's life is that he never makes any attempt to readjust himself to his country – China. The situational irony illustrated in Sacrifice is that had Dr. Mao not insisted on living his life the American way, building an American family, and making everyone around him buy into his American spirit, he would have made Chinese friends and led a common but normal life. To complicate matters, he even makes his young wife conform to his American way of living. The irony here is that the more Dr. Mao tries to make his life in China resemble what he remembers of an American life, the more terrible a fall he has staged for himself.

Although Kao's modified story ending may have left readers with the taste of situational irony (demonstrated through Dr. Mao's behaviors and life styles in China) and verbal irony (displayed through his communication with his colleagues), the intended dramatic irony, a tragedy carefully crafted out by Lao She, is totally lost. For instance, Kao's modified story ending can and may leave readers with two different interpretations of this story. First, for readers who do not know the original ending, their understanding of *Dr. Mao* might be that this funny character *finally gets to live happily ever after* with his sought-after wife. Or, according to the Superiority Theory, other readers who are familiar with the original ending may find Kao's modification ironic, for *they know* something that the character does not. That is, Kao's modified ending may enable readers to experience a sense of situational irony because they have a superior understanding of the original story and the translated text. Nevertheless, such a build-up of irony is created by the translator, rather than the author. The reason for advocating the re-translation of *Sacrifice* is not to discredit what Kao has done but to provide English readers a more complete picture of what Lao She has intended, the sharp contrast between the happy life this character, Dr. Mao, earnestly pursues and the lonely and tragic years he eventually faces.

With the nature of criticism, irony is more effective when it can be amplified to result in at least awareness, if not changes, among readers. From the mid-1920s to late-1930s, many Chinese students returned to China after receiving higher education overseas. When using irony as a literary device to arouse awareness, Lao She's focus is not just on Dr. Mao as a single person but on those Chinese students who have received education in the US, returned to China, but forgotten the merits of their homeland. If the story was only intended to feature Dr. Mao as an odd figure, the irony plotted would be too narrow and lose its effectiveness. Therefore, echoing the evaluation of *Dr. Mao* in *Chinese Wit and Humor*, this short story "is written definitely with malice toward one – perhaps some particular sorry individual whom he [Lao She] had

known. As a class, the returned students deserve better" (Kao 1975: 305). Clearly, for a better appreciation of Lao She's employment of ironies, *Sacrifice* should be re-translated with the original ending preserved, so readers can truly grasp what Lao She wants to convey through the tragic figure of Dr. Mao.

References

Anolli, L., Infantino, M. G., and Ciceri, R. (2001). "You're a real genius!": Irony as a miscommunication design. In Anolli, L., R. Ciceri and G. Riva (eds.), *Say not to Say: New Perspectives on Miscommunication*. Amsterdam: IOS Press,135-157.

Attardo, S. (2007). Irony as relevant inappropriateness. In Gibbs, R. W. and H. Colston (eds.), *Irony in Language and Thought*. London: Taylor and Francis Group, 135-174.

Booth, W. C. (1974). *A Rhetoric of Irony*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Chang, K. C. C. (2009). *Sacrifice*. Unpublished translation of *Xi Sheng* by Lao She. Tempe, Arizona State University.

Chao, Y. (1984). Latitude on faithfulness in translation. In Luo, H. (ed.), *Translation Anthology*. Beijing: Commercial Press, 726-741.

Chen, X. (1984). Lun fanyi (Comments on translation). In Luo, H. (ed.), *Translation Anthology*. Beijing: Commercial Press, 403.

Colston, H. (2007). On necessary conditions for verbal irony comprehension. In Gibbs, R. W. and H. Colston (eds.), *Irony in Language and Thought*. London: Taylor and Francis Group, 97-134.

Gibbs, R. W. (2007). Irony in talk among friends. In Gibbs, R. W. and H. Colston (eds.), *Irony in Language and Thought*. London: Taylor and Francis Group, 339-360.

Gibbs, R. W. and Colston, H. L. (eds.) (c2007). *Irony in Language and Thought: A Cognitive Science Reader*. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In Peter, C. and J. L. Morgan (eds.) *Syntax and Semantics: Speech Acts*. Volume 3. New York: Academic, 41-58.

Hsu, H. (2011). *A Study on George Kao's Translation. Unpublished Master's thesis,* University of Technology.

Hu, Z. (1979). *Fanyii Yin Yuan (Translation and I)*. Taipei: Translation World.

Ip, C. Y. (2001). *Translating America: Cultural Interpreting in George Kao's Chinese Translations of Modern American Literature*. Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Hong Kong.

Jin, S. (2000). Flowers in May from a Winter Garden: Interview with George Kao. *Ming Monthly* 5: 50-53.

Kao, G. (1975). *Chinese Wit & Humor*. New York: Sterling Pub. Co.

Kao, G. (1981). *Tu Lou Ji (One's true feelings)*. Taipei: China Times Publishing Co.

Kao, G. (1983). *Ting Qi Yan Yei (Listening to others)*. Taipei: Pure Literature Publisher.

Kao, G. (1995). Humour translation: Translation of humorous writings. In Chan, S. and D. E. Pollard (eds.), *An Encyclopaedia of Translation: Chinese-English, English-Chinese*. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 393-400.

Kao, G. (2000). *Yiyannanjin: Wo de Shuangyu Shengya (It's Complicated: My Bilingual Career)*. Taipei: Unitas Publishing Co.

Kao, G. (2003). *Seems like Yesterday*. Hong Kong: Cosmos Books.

Knox, N. (1961). *The Word Irony and its Context, 1500-1755*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Lao, S. (1935). *Yin Hai Ji (Collection of Cherry Blossoming)*. Shanghai: People's Bookstore.

Lefevere, A. (1992). *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame.* London: Routledge.

Li, X. (2008). *On the Translation Style: A Case Study of Qiao Zhigao's Chinese Translation of* The Great Gatsby. Unpublished Master's thesis, Ocean University of China.

Liang, S. (1978). *Liang Shiqiu Lun Wenxue (Liang Shiqiu's Comments on Literature).* Taipei: China Times Publishing Co.

Lin, Y. (1984). Lun fanyi (Comments on translation). In Luo, H. (ed.), *Translation Anthology.* Beijing: Commercial Press, 417-432.

Lu, G. (2004). *Yu Mo Ji.* Shanghai: Fudan University Press.

Lucariello, J. (1994). Situational irony: A concept of events gone away. *Journal of Experimental Psychology. General 123*(2): 129-145.

Lucariello, J. (2007). Situational irony: A concept of events gone away. In Gibbs, R. W. and H. Colston (eds.), *Irony in Language and Thought.* London: Taylor and Francis Group, 467-489.

Muecke, D. C. (1969). *The Compass of Irony*. London: Methuen.

Nilsen, A. P. and D. L. F. Nilsen. (2000). *Encyclopedia of 20th-century American Humor.* Phoenix, Ariz.: Oryz Press.

O Henry (2001). *The Gift of the Magi.* Philadelphia, PA: Running Press Book Publishers.

Rea, C. (2015). *The Age of Irreverence: A New History of Laughter in China.* Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

Reyes, A., Rosso, P., and Veale, T. (2013). A multidimensional approach for detecting irony in Twitter. *Lang Resources & Evaluation* 47: 239-268.

Riverside Shakespeare (ed.) (1997). *Othello*. G. B. Evans. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

Sedgewick, G. G. (1948). *Of Irony: Especially in Drama.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Simpson, J. A. and Weiner, E. S. C. (Ed.). (1989). The Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sperber, D. and Wilson, D. (1981). Irony and the use-mention distinction. In Cole, P. (ed.), *Radical Pragmatics*. New York: Academic Press, 295-318. Reprinted in Steven Davis (ed.), (1991) Pragmatics: A Reader. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 550-563.

Sperber, D. and Wilson. D. (1986). *Relevance*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Sperber, D. and Wilson. D. (1992). On verbal irony. *Lingua* 87: 53

Sun, Y. (2010). *The Role of Ideology in the Retranslation of* The Great Gatsby. Unpublished Master's thesis, Jiangsu University.

Tan, X. (2007). *Descriptive Study on Literary Retranslation from the Perspective of Manipulation: A Case Study of* The Great Gatsby. Unpublished Master's thesis, Sangdong University.

Towery, B. (1999). *Lao She, China's Master Storyteller.* Waco, Texas: Tao Foundation.

Utsumi, A. (2000). Verbal irony as implicit display of ironic environment: Distinguishing ironic utterances from nonirony. *Journal of Pragmatics* 32: 1777-1806.

Wilson, D. (2006). The pragmatics of verbal irony: Echo or pretence? *Lingua* 116: 1722-43.

Wilson, D. and Sperber, D. (2007). On verbal irony. In Gibbs, R. W. and H. Colston (eds.), *Irony in Language and Thought.* London: Taylor and Francis Group, 35-36.

Williams, J. P. (1984). Does mention (or pretense) exhaust the concept of irony? *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 113(1): 127-9.

Wang, J. (2012). *A Study on George Kao as a Translator*. Unpublished Master's thesis, Yangtz University.

Yu, G. (1999). Translation and invention. In Yu, G. (ed.), *Fourth Collection of Yu Guangzhong*. Hefei: Anhui Educational Publisher, 125-142.

This paper was received on 22 February 2017; received in revised form on 17 May 2017; and accepted on 20 May 2017

Author's email address

changcc@mail.ntpu.edu.tw

About the author

Karen Chung-chien Chang is an assistant professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Applied Linguistics at National Taipei University. Her research interests include translation/interpretation studies, ESP course design and implementation, second language writing, discourse analysis, and rhetoric.