

Study of the Translation Strategies for the Chinese Culture-loaded Words in Chinese Classic Dance under Functional Equivalence Theory

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Abstract: In the past century, Chinese classic dance has entered the spotlight of the international stage. Translation activities and researches on Chinese dance have been increasingly rising. The interdisciplinary study of the translation in Chinese dance field has practical significance and theoretical value for the expansion of the connotation of Chinese translation studies and the development of Chinese dance in the world. One of the features Chinese dance carried is that it involves abundant culture-loaded words. As a consequence, under the direction of functional equivalence theory proposed by Eugene Nida, this study is focused on the analysis of Chinese classic dance terminologies and cultural-loaded words, and the translation strategies of them. Afterwards, the study discovers that, first and foremost, when utilizing the functional equivalence theory, the target text's quality is better; second, translators will use several translation techniques for various categories of cultural-loaded terms in Chinese classical dance; third, several typical approaches that are used in this study with cultural connotations from Chinese classical dance are as follows: literal translation, free translation, annotation and substitution, among which literal translation and annotation are the most popular.

Keywords: functional equivalence theory, culture-loaded words, Chinese classic dance translation

1. Introduction

Chinese scholars have read and translated many western books on the natural sciences, philosophy and sociology since the turn of the century, following the trends of “the eastward transmission of western science”, and have gained a wealth of academic knowledge, including theories of dance art. Chinese dance hasn't been frequently brought to the West, although numerous western dance books that have been translated into Chinese have had a significant impact in China over the years. The translation of Chinese dance has grown in scope and achieved some success thanks to the perseverance and hard work of translators with solid dance understanding, showing its own characteristics and constructing a special “translation field [1]”. The interdisciplinary study of the translation in Chinese dance field has practical significance and theoretical value for the expansion of the connotation of Chinese translation studies and the development of Chinese dance in the world.

Although it appears to be a language-level activity in its outward aspect, translation is really an activity about cross-cultural communication. It's said that translation is born out of the need for human beings to communicate with each other. As a result, translation plays a role in facilitating the exchanges of ideas and promote cultural transmission. At the same time, translation, as an intermediary for intercultural communication, plays an important role in the cultural soft power of a nation and a country, which not only helps to enhance cultural soft power but also reflects and demonstrates it. Since translation is a kind of intercultural communication activity, the principle of equality in intercultural communication also determines that we should also follow the principle of equality in the translation process. However, with the development of "postcolonial translation theory [2]", translation is seen as a new tool of cultural imperialism for global expansion. As mentioned earlier, Chinese culture is still at a disadvantage compared to Western culture in international exchanges. As a result, how to inherit and promote our national culture is a question that all translators need to think and deal with.

This thesis is based on a case study of the cultural-loaded words extracted from *Dance with Hands* and *The Terminology Dictionary of Chinese Classical Dance* [3]. The need for exchange between Chinese and foreign dance teaching work is necessary, and it is the cultural differences between home and abroad that should reflect the need for cultural interchange. In the case of dance translation, the research on dance translation is not yet complete, but with the increasingly significant culture clash between Chinese and foreign dance exchanges, the status and necessity of dance translation have thus been significantly increased, and the professionalism and maturity faced in dance translation is precisely the mission of dance translators. This thesis aims to provide applied value to the practice of dance translation and to offer new ideas for interdisciplinary development in the field of art and translation. It draws attention of those working in dance translation to its field and thus better guides the relevant studies.

2. Functional Equivalence Theory

Functional equivalence theory explains the essence of translation and is one of the fundamental theories of translation studies. In *Toward a Science of Translating*, Eugene Nida first introduced "formal equivalence" and "dynamic equivalence" in translation [5]. Nida proposed the concept of "functional equivalence", which emphasizes the communicative function of translation and focuses on the reaction of the recipient of the communication, hoping that the reader of the translation will have the same reception effect as the reader of the original [6]. In the 1990s, in *Language, Culture and Translating*, Nida divided this theory into two different perspectives, based on cognitive and empirical factors [6]. The minimum criterion for this theory is that the target reader can understand how the original reader appreciates and understands the text, and the maximum criterion is that the target reader can appreciate and understand the text as well as the original reader.

According to the theory of functional equivalence, the translation should be centered on the target reader, emphasizing the response and reading experience of the target reader, and the equivalence in meaning is greater than the equivalence in form. Nida suggested transferring meaning from source language text to the target language text on a simple structure and to produce an equivalent expression on the style and semantics in the target language. The source text should be condensed to its simplest structure and most exact expression. Nida's translation theory has had a significant influence on both domestic and international translation communities. It has also given translators strategic direction and a way to think about their work.

3. Culture-loaded Words

According to Nida, language is the most distinctive product of culture, which can be described simply as the sum of a society's beliefs and practices. "Culture-loaded words" embody the relationship between culture and language and have a special place in translation. Therefore, with a change in translation studies in the late 1990s, scholars have placed special emphasis on the study of the phenomenon of translation of culturally loaded words. In fact, culturally loaded words are not a new term that has only recently emerged. Similar terms are frequently used by scholars. Mona Baker argues that source language text can express concepts that are totally unknown in the target culture [7]. These concepts are often referred to as culture-specific concepts. In China, Xu Guozhang first introduced culture-loaded words in *Culturally Loaded Words and English Teaching*, which attracted the attention of Chinese scholars [8]. Chinese scholar Sun Zhili also argues that "translations should take direct translations to the maximum extent possible, try to show the exoticism of the original and import new expressions as far as possible [9]." In short, culturally loaded words emphasize the cultural factors implied in the words. As different countries and regions or even the same country or region have different cultures, people from one culture may not be very familiar with another, and words from one culture may not have a corresponding expression in another. Therefore, the importance of analyzing the cultural factors implied in them becomes an important issue in translation.

4. A Case Study on the Translation of Culture-loaded Words in Chinese Classic Dance

Based on the three chapters above, this chapter uses Chinese classic dance terminologies as research text, analyses the characteristics of cultural-loaded words in the field of dance, translation strategies and translation difficulties, and supports this study with cases in detail.

4.1. Features of Culture-loaded Words in Chinese Classic Dance

4.1.1. Culture-loaded Words with Imagery in Chinese Classic Dance

One of the most distinctive features of Chinese classic dance terminology is that it contains words that represent imagery. According to Langacker, an American linguist who is best known as one of the founders of the cognitive linguistics movement, imagery is the ability to use different images in different ways to make sense of a conceptual scene for the purpose of thought or expression [10]. Imagery is the cognitive ability to construct and make sense of conceptual content. The American linguist E·Sapir said, "There is something behind language. Language cannot exist without culture, which means the sum of habits and beliefs inherited from society. It determines the composition of our life." Language and culture are very closely related. Language is a part of culture, a carrier of culture and a reflection of culture; there is no culture without language, and cultural factors are deeply embedded in the languages of all peoples. Considering the geographical location, productive work and cultural traditions of each people are different from each other, each has developed cultural imagery with unique connotations [11]. In 1999, Tianzhen Zhen first proposed the concept of "cultural imagery" in translation, and pointed out that "the translator is required to convey not only the basic message of the original work, but also the unique national cultural imagery of the original work [12]". Much of the cultural imagery stems from the wisdom and history of various ethnicities, and a large number of them are closely related to the legends of various ethnic groups and the totem worship of various ethnic groups during their first days. They continue to appear in people's languages and in several generations of literary works, including oral works by folkloric artists and written works by literati, and they are slowly being formed into a cultural symbol with a relatively fixed and unique cultural meaning, some of which also bear a rich and far reaching association.

The retention of imagery in the English translation of Chinese classical dance terms can better disseminate Chinese culture, improve cultural confidence and reflect the beauty of Chinese classic dance more intuitively. In this thesis, we have examples like Orchid Palm (兰花掌), which contains the imagery of orchids; Wind-and-Fire Wheels (风火轮), which is one of Chinese melee weapons; Kicking the Swallow (踹燕), which contains the imagery of “swallow”; the Swallow Flies through the Woods (燕子穿林), containing the imagery “swallow” and “woods”; the Dragon Stretching the Paws (青龙探爪), containing the imagery “dragon”. Take orchid as an instance, orchid is a traditional Chinese flower with deep cultural connotations and external aesthetic characteristics. Not only does the orchid have a beautiful appearance, but as a gentleman among flowers it also represents many wonderful qualities, such as nobility, elegance and patriotism.

4.1.2. The Terminologies with Similar Signified in Target Language

The external manifestation of cultures are diverse, but it is possible to make exchanges between these cultures. The art is boundless and there are many similarities between Chinese classic dance and ballet. The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure supposed the theory of “signifier” and “signified” in *A Course in General Linguistics* in 1916, which are mostly used in semiotics [13]. The signifier is the something that can be heard and felt, while the signified is the mental concept associated with it. In this thesis, different names for a same movement could be seen as the signifier and that movement could be seen as the signified. In the field of dance, both Chinese classic dance and ballet are major genres that have a high status and are highly specific. Both dance styles have similarities in form, rhythm and body line. When carrying out basic training activities, these two genres can be combined together, drawing on each other and achieving inclusiveness, which will help to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of basic training in Chinese classical dance and ballet [14]. This method could also be applied in translation studies. In this thesis, some of the examples will be given, which used existing terminologies from ballet to introduce Chinese classic dance, such as relevé (花梆步), grand jeté (凌空跃), battement tendu (擦地) and sideward salto (蛮子), which is well-known in home and abroad.

4.1.3. The Cultural-loaded Words with Semantic Lacuna in Target Language

Whatever the focus of dance studies, all have cultures and phenomena specific to China. In particular, articles on Chinese folk dance and Chinese classical dance are mostly translated into English with no internationally recognized and common expressions, because they focus on different dynasties, multiple ethnicities, and diverse cultures in China. This inevitably leads to differing views on how to translate and how to determine recognition of translation. For example, in the modern English system, there is no equivalent of the Chinese classic dancing technique of “Yun-men-da-quan (云门大卷)”.

The American linguist Hockett C. F introduced the term “lacuna” in the 1950s, which means “not equivalent” [15]. This disparity is known as a lexical gap in semantic terminology and was later introduced into the field of translation. The form and meaning expressed in the source language are not equivalent or do not exist in the target language, which can make translation difficult. Some scholars have suggested that direct phonetic translation of foreign words can be made with reference to the common phenomenon of the invasion of linguistic elements [16]. It is thus clear that translation is, in a way, actually an exchange between different cultures. Chinese dance is nurtured by the profound and long-standing Chinese culture. How to retain the Chinese cultural connotations in a limited word count abstract while enabling English readers to quickly understand the message is a test of the translator’s familiarity with Chinese and English culture and whether he or she has fully considered the extent to which readers will understand the translated text given the cultural

differences between China and English. In this thesis, examples like hu-kou-zhang (虎口掌), shan-bang (山膀), she-yan (射雁), bai-kou-bu (摆扣步) and yun-men-da-juan (云门大卷) are given.

4.2. Translation Strategies of Culture-loaded Words in Chinese Classic Dance

4.2.1. Literal Translation

Literal translation is a method that not only maintains the content of the source language, but also maintains the form of it. According to the culture-loaded words, the source text is translated into the target text.

Example 1:

ST: 兰花掌

TT: orchid palm

The orchid palm is taken from orchid. As orchids are elegant and noble in nature, the ancients used their hands to imitate the posture of orchids. As a result, it has a unique traditional aesthetics and the cultural psychological tendency of the Chinese people. Choosing literal translation and keeping the imagery could not only do it allow the receptors to quickly associate the term with the movement and accurately convey the meaning of the source text, making it better understood and accepted by foreign readers, but also spreads Chinese culture and achieves a high level of functional equivalence.

Example 2:

ST: 风火轮

TT: wind-and-fire wheels

The wind-and-fire wheel is a household name in Chinese mythology and legend. It's one of Nezha's magic weapons, with two wheels that conceal the power of wind and fire and can be stepped on as a means of transport, flying as fast as the wind. As a Chinese classic dance technique, it is a movement that uses arms to draw circles quickly, which is an imitation of Nezha's wheels. Although the movement couldn't be told from the translation alone, it enables foreign students to quickly grasp the gist of the action in a teaching scenario and also spreads Chinese mythology, promoting cultural exchanges and achieving functional equivalence.

Example 3:

ST: 青龙探爪

TT: the dragon stretching the paws

Qinglong (青龙) is one of the Four Gods of China. He is a holy Dragon and represents spring, his element is wood, and his color is blue. He is just, benevolent, and the bringer of wealth and good fortune. The dragon stretching the paws movement vividly imitates the dragon. Although the dragon is a symbol of evil in the West, which lead many translators to change the dragon in source text into lions or other positive imagery in target text, keeping the dragon in the target text can make cultural-loaded words play a better role.

4.2.2. Free Translation

The free translation method is a continuation and expansion of the source text without detracting from it. It is used when it is difficult to find an equivalent for certain cultural-loaded words or when a literal translation is not sufficient to convey the cultural meaning.

Example 4:

ST: 凌空跃

TT: grand jet é

Ling-kong (凌空) means to rise high into the sky and to the tower in the air. Yue (跃) means to jump and leap. Grand jet é is a movement borrowed from ballet meanwhile with elements of Chinese

classic dance. So using ballet terminology can have a better communicative effect. In addition, grand jet é is more of a literary text and the terminology should be short and concise, so a detailed translation is not appropriate here and the use of ballet terminology can better achieve functional equivalence.

Example 5:

ST: 花梆步

TT: relev é

The name of hua-bang-bu (花梆步) comes from the Chinese folk dance, Hua Bang, which is characterized by a strong sense of rhythm. Because the movement of hua-bang-bu is basically the same as the relev é in ballet, this ballet terminology was chosen to achieve a better communicative effect. Considering Hua Bang is not very famous as a traditional Chinese culture and is not even known by most Chinese people, it may be more difficult for foreign receptors to understand if a translation with Chinese characteristics is chosen. Therefore, the choice to use ballet terminology can better achieve functional equivalence.

Example 6:

ST: 横飞燕

TT: straddle jump

Heng-fei-yan (横飞燕) refers to a swallow flying high in the sky and fei-yan (飞燕) is a word that could be found more often in ancient Chinese. The straddle jump is more like a movement that could be found all over the world and it's hard to tell the origin. So in this source text, translators are better not to make a new cultural-loaded word. The existing phrase can be well-used amid communication.

4.2.3. Transliteration

Transliteration is the earliest translation method to which we are all exposed, and it is a type of translation based on the pronunciation of the source language. Generally speaking, if there is a lexical gap between the source language and the target language, transliteration is the first choice.

Example 7:

ST: 山膀

TT: shan-bang

In a word for word translation, shan-bang refers to “mountain shoulders”, which will cause confusion for target language receptors. Shan-bang is a conventional movement formed in the history of Chinese classic dance, so the name itself is a cultural symbol of dance culture. Transliteration can avoid cultural losses or semantic incompleteness caused by inappropriate translations or direct translations, and develop cultural-loaded words to the fullest.

Example 8:

ST: 云门大卷

TT: yun-men-da-juan

Yun-men-da-juan is one of the traditional dances of ancient China and is one of the earliest ceremonial music and dances, produced during the time of the Yellow Emperor. It's the origin of Chinese classic dance. It now has evolved into the name of a technique in Chinese classic dance. But given its importance and rich cultural connotations, preserving the exoticism of the source text is the best way to balance the culture-loaded words and follow the functional equivalence.

5. Conclusions

Eugene Nida has pointed out that the activity of translation is to reproduce the message of the source text in the most appropriate and natural equivalents in the target text, the first at the level of meaning, the second at the level of style, and it is impossible to achieve absolute equivalence in translation; the translator's job is to strive for functional equivalence, not totally the same [17]. This thesis shows

that literal translation, free translation and transliteration can achieve functional equivalence in the translation of cultural-loaded words. Although many interdisciplinary translators have emerged in China, translation in the field of dance still presents many difficulties. Taking the use of ballet terminologies in this thesis as an example, although using ballet terms can be very effective in achieving communicative effects, the cultural connotations are missing. How to better balance communicative and cultural purposes is still one of the biggest difficulties at this stage. In addition, apart from the study of Chinese classic dance terminologies, the introduction of Chinese classic dance repertoire and the cultural communication of Chinese folk dance are currently vacant, and the research space remains huge. There won't be a significant revitalization of the China without a high level of cultural confidence and affluence. The new generation of professional dance translators is facing more opportunities and challenges. Although the practice of dance translation is only a few strokes in the field of translation research, it should not be the empty page in the long volume of Chinese translation history.

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