

The Transmission of Peking Opera Culture in the English Subtitle Translation of *Farewell, My Concubine*

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ABSTRACT. *This paper starts from the overview of Farewell, My Concubine, a classic Chinese film that contains many professional terms of Peking Opera. Now people don't watch it so much, but its out-datedness as a film does not mean that as a research material it's out-dated, too. As a matter of fact, there has been no film received better in the English world that has a richer Peking Opera cultural repertory since its release. Therefore, based on Farewell, my concubine, this paper aims to address the issue of the translation of Peking Opera terms of culture so that overseas audiences can understand and accept them better.*

KEYWORDS: *Farewell, My concubine, Peking opera culture, Subtitle translation*

1. Introduction

With the growth of globalization, China's economic and political discourse power is increasing, and cultural soft power has become an important field for China to participate in the world competition. Among that, Peking Opera plays an essential role for the global dissemination of Chinese culture. *Farewell, My Concubine*, directed by Chen Kaige, is a classic Chinese film of the past century and a model of cross-cultural communication between China and foreign countries. The script adds the simple storyline of the original novel to the unique cultural characteristics of Peking Opera, and the dialogue in Peking Opera dialect runs through the whole work. Existing studies show that cultural differences make it difficult for foreigners to understand the connotation of Peking Opera. Language is the biggest obstacle for Peking Opera to go abroad. Therefore, the translation is particularly important. However, how to successfully convey the same aesthetic effect with the source language through subtitle translation has always been a big problem in the field of translation. Therefore, the paper tends to, on one hand, facilitate the understanding of the film and on the other hand to exhibit and deliver the specialty of Chinese culture. The realization of the first purpose demands the employment of domestication and the realization of the second one requires the application of foreignization. [1]

2. Names Of Characters

The stories of Peking Opera repertoires mostly stemmed from historical events, literary works, love legends, and folklores, some of whom even bear specified cultural meaning, such as Xi Shi and Hong Niang. In dealing with those person names, the name itself, of course, is translated into Pinyin. But how to convey the hidden meaning behind those pinyin names and transmit the cultural images of them to foreign addressees is not all easy job. For example,

这 武二郎 碰上 西门庆, 不打, 不打能成吗?

You know the old story about Pan Jinlian's husband meeting the man who screwed her? Did he have any choice but to fight?

This is an old story about Pan Jinlian and his husband in ancient China. And the translator can be unlikely to produce a proper translated text without good knowledge of historical and literary sources. When performing translation, a translator needs to have a better and comprehensive expression of the original meaning. Names of characters, “武二郎”, “西门庆”, translated by domestication, is typically traditional Chinese cultural element, the translated text can't be formed without relative culture knowledge.

Another example is shown as follows.

赶紧着, 不然, 刘邦 可就要杀进城来了.

Talk to each other already. The Han King is about to enter the city!

This example typically shows that translated texts must serve for the aim of expressing

communicational meanings. Actually, “刘邦” is a proper name of persons here and it is translated into “The Han King” by the adoption of domestication rather than just transliterate it as “Liu Bang”, which is the most suitable choice and expresses the central meaning directly and precisely.

3. Social Addressing Words

The social addressing words can directly indicate both the social system and interpersonal relationship. As every nation has its own system of forms of address, it bears particular characteristics. There are a lot of conspicuous differences between Chinese forms of address and western address terms since Chinese western society values individuality, while traditional culture thinks highly human relations. Hence, Chinese address terms contain quite number of self-depreciating address terms, modest addresses. [2] For example,

别介! 都是下九流, 谁嫌弃谁啊?

他 祖师爷 不肯赏饭吃, 谁也没辙.

Prostitutes and actors are equally despised by society.

But I have no place for him. What can I do?

“祖师爷”, similar to “forefathers” to some extent in China's history, foreign audiences won't understand its exact meaning without knowledge of the specific historical period. Perhaps we can understand it as “destiny”, “fate” or “god” of western culture, there are still cultural differences between them. From the plots in the film, we know that Mater does not want to accept Little Bean as his disciple, so he explains that Little Bean is not destined to be an actor. From this perspective, “destiny” is the most ideal choice to express the original meaning. Considering all these factors, the strategy of “free translation” is used to put it as “I have no place for him”, and meanwhile, to avoid leading to a cultural misunderstanding.

There is another example shown as follows.

四爷,您梨园大拿呀.

Master Yuan, you are a master of the theater arts.

In the West, people directly call the name of their siblings, instead of using “sister” or “brother” for addressing. What is more, “四爷” is a commonly used term to address a nun, But China, well known for its rites and etiquette, thinks highly of social relations. It will be considered extremely rude to directly call an elder person by his or her name. So, in this situation, in order to maintain the social ideology of China, the author suggests translating the addressing as “Master Yuan”.

4. Specific Cultural Images

The cultural image is a kind of cultural cognitive schema, in which certain images carry certain connotations in the same cultural community. Cultural imagery must be the common idea, concept or associated meaning which is created by the language words in a culture or a nation because of the cultural features and the national features. For example,

揪出伸进艺术界的 黑手!

Seize the Black Hands that have infiltrated the cultural world!

革命无罪,造反有理!

Revolution is no crime, rebellion is justified!

“Black hands” is translated from “黑手”. If they really want to understand these terms they have to look elsewhere for help, for example they have to read books on Chinese history and politics concerning the Cultural Revolution period. The film subtitle here is not obliged to explain the historical and political backgrounds within limited time and space. It is possible for two cultures to have something in common, but political and historical development of each country is stamped with a strong political color. When dealing with terms and expressions which are heavily loaded

with politics or histories, in most cases translator tend to keep the original meaning intact. Extra efforts from reader's part are required if they feel necessary to move themselves closer to the original. Political and historical terms are too sensitive to be rewritten in either way, and it is almost impossible to find an equivalent to them. Besides, the political connotation needs to be reserved. These translations not only let the foreign audience understand the Chinese history in a direct way, but also leave a cultural concept in their mind to arise their interest to dig more. Moreover, through the translation of the film, the foreign audiences get a deeper understanding of Chinese culture which is very helpful to improve the communication between Chinese culture and the western culture.

Though foreignization is far from adequate to help audiences understand the Cultural Revolution, the poly-semiotic dimension of film enables the viewer to supplement the semiotic content of the subtitles with information from other audio-visual channels-notably image, and typical features in the dialogue. Image acts as an important information source compensating for what is lost through subtitles. The fighting scenes, the burning flames, and the frantic congregations, all of these make up of an integrate picture to depict the fever and craze of that period. If audiences can not get a direct help from subtitles, they could at least find a clue from those images.

5. Conclusion

In summary, film is one of the important means of culture exchange, which is inevitably related to a cross-cultural study. Translation concerning cultures may be divided into two strategies: one is source language culture-oriented and the other is target language culture-oriented and they are defined as foreignization and domestication. It is not accurate to think that film subtitles have to only adopt one translation strategy but not the other one. As a type of mass media, a whole film involves a variety of language and cultural forms. Because of this, using one strategy to deal with all the language and cultural forms is not right and rational. Thus, in the film subtitle translation the two basic translation strategies: domestication of both the strategies is the best way to deal with the cultural information in film subtitles.

It is also difficult for the translator both to stand on the point of the target audience and to ensure them to be capable to appreciate the foreignness of the foreign film. Whether to choose domestication or foreignization, the film subtitles translator ought to take the consideration of the audience's reading capability and requirements, which should be regarded as a necessary factor to choose the different translation strategies. Films enact a diversity of social situations or communicative events that no text book could cover. Good film subtitle translation can not only make the audience appreciate the excellent foreign films without any obstacles but also even become the communication bridge of the two countries or two cultures.

All in all, in film subtitle translation practices, there is no domestication translation without some degree of foreignization translation. By the same token,

there is no foreignization translation without some degree of domestication translation. The two translation strategies co-exist and are complementary to each other in the translation of film subtitles. The most wanted of a subtitled film translation is a translated film where the audience is not aware of the translated nature of the film itself while appreciating the original film and reading the translated subtitles at the bottom of the screen, but is fully immersed in the world of the film.

References

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