

# Appreciation of *Frog* from the Perspective of Domestication and Foreignization

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**Abstract:** Based on the translation strategies of domestication and foreignization, the author takes Howard Goldblatt's translation as the research object, and makes an appreciation of some idioms and culture-loaded words in *Frog*. According to different kinds of Chinese expressions, corresponding views are put forward. The author argues that domestication should be applied for some expressions that may cause cultural conflicts. For some expressions with Chinese characteristics, translators should adopt foreignization to build a bridge for the communication between different cultures.

**Keywords:** *Frog*; Domestication and Foreignization; Idioms; Culture-loaded words

## 1. Introduction

Written by Mo Yan, *Frog*, the winner of the 8th Mao Dun Literature Award, has a far-reaching influence in the literary field. It is a work that touches upon one-child policy and describes the conflict between the people and the government on fertility, reflecting the sensitive social issues and complicated advancement process in China. *Frog* is not an attack on a policy, but rather an analysis of humanity and self-redemption. There are many words and phrases with unique Chinese culture in *Frog*, which contain information about Chinese society, Chinese lifestyle and cognitive habits, etc., greatly enhancing the cultural flavor of this work. These culture-loaded words and phrases could reflect the differences between different local cultures. As far as translation is concerned, these characteristic expressions with high cultural value provide a good point for translation studies, which may give rise to new conclusions and views from this aspect.

This study selects Howard Goldblatt's translation as the research object. Howard Goldblatt, an American Sinologist, is the award-winning translator of numerous works of contemporary Chinese into English. In the process, Howard Goldblatt has formed his own translator's habitus of being Target Text-oriented and US readers-oriented, and valuing both faithfulness and creativity (Goldblatt,2004). With respect to the translation strategies of domestication and foreignization, this study argues that Howard Goldblatt's translation is more inclined to domestication on the basis of cultural customs, religious beliefs and receptivity of target readers. *Frog* is warmly applauded among the critics and the reading public, while some people have aired different voices as regard to its writing style and translation quality. Therefore, how to translate these idioms, and moreover, the culture-loaded words and sentences is a key to the success or failure of Howard Goldblatt's translation.

## 2. A brief introduction to domestication and foreignization

According to *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, Lawrence Venuti points out that domestication means that the original cultural concepts and language forms of the source language are deliberately translated into the target language cultural concepts and language forms, and make the translation as a whole to eliminate or weaken the foreign culture and language of the original body, thus achieve the connotation of the target language and culture (Venuti,1995). In the process of domestication, translator will try to reduce the foreign emphasis in the target language, so as to provide a natural and smooth translation version for the target language readers and not disturb the readers as much as possible.

With respect to foreignization, it aims to highlight the differences in the source text, which will show an "exotic flavor" and can only be preserved by breaking the existing cultural norms in the target language. Foreignizing translation usually deviates from local literary norms and makes readers feel a different reading experience (Venuti,1995). However, in some types of texts, such translation would make readers puzzled. Moreover, Venuti further points out that foreignization is conducive to the reconstruction

of national culture. Of course, at the same time, foreignizing translation will also destroy the national culture concept of the target language and challenge the national values.

### 3. Appreciation of the translation

This study employs the translation strategies of domestication and foreignization developed by Lawrence Venuti in *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* to analyze Howard Goldblatt's translation version. In more specific terms, it focuses on how this translator strikes a balance between faithfulness and creativity in translating idioms and culture-loaded words to make his work "readable, accessible and marketable" (Goldblatt, 2002).

#### 3.1. Analysis on the translation of idioms

(1) yé yé, bié fān lǎo huáng lì le.

Those days are over, Grandpa.

The Chinese expression "lǎo huáng lì" is a special calendar, used to predict good or bad luck every day. In the past, people would check this calendar before some important event such as getting married or going on a long trip away from home. As society progressed, people no longer check this calendar. But the Chinese phrase "bié fān lǎo huáng lì" evolved into an idiom meaning "don't judge the present by past experiences and rules; don't bring up the past." Howard Goldblatt translated this phrase as "those days are over", adopting the domestication translation strategy and following the language characteristics and norms of the target language, with high acceptability. However, this translation also ignores the cultural connotation of the original text, which is not sufficient.

(2) tiān guīhuā, bié shuǎ sǐ gǒu le.

Tian Guihua, stop the phoney act.

The Chinese expression "shuǎ sǐ gǒu" means "act in a slick way". This sentence aims to tell Tian not to be deliberately dishonest. This idiom can largely be regarded as a local dialect. Without explanation, Chinese in other regions may not understand this sentence either. This study believes that translators should pay more attention to representative and distinctive Chinese culture to promote its dissemination. For these relatively minority dialect expressions, they can be considered after completing the above task. There are also different cognitions on "dog", in Chinese "gǒu". The English word "dog" are often associated with positive meanings in target-language cultures, but in source-language cultures, "gǒu" in Chinese is often used to describe negative phenomena. Based on this, Goldblatt applied the strategy of domestication, which not only makes the translation more readable and acceptable, but also avoids some unnecessary cultural conflicts.

This study here analyzes two idioms, which are under the guidance of domestication translation strategy. However, the author holds different attitudes towards the two translations. First of all, the author argues that the translator could adopt foreignizing translation strategy for the expression "lǎo huáng lì". The whole sentence can be translated as "Don't mention that Lao Huang li, Grandpa." There are mainly two reasons: a. the Chinese expression "lǎo huáng lì" is not a regional dialect, but an expression that most Chinese people understand and use in their daily lives. "lǎo huáng lì" has existed in China for a long time, and the related phrase "huáng dào jí rì", a lucky day, is also a common saying. This is actually a very striking example of Chinese unique culture; and b. since there is no similar expression in foreign countries, it means that relevant fields are in a cultural vacuum, which is conducive to spreading Chinese culture and promoting communication. All points considered, transliteration plus annotation might be a good choice. Some people will certainly argue that annotation will disturb readers' reading process. However, in the author's opinion, the purpose of translating a Chinese work must be to transmit Chinese culture. Then, a certain number of annotations would promote the target language readers' understanding of Chinese culture to a certain extent, and the positive impact is far greater than the negative side. In the 21st century, foreignization is the focus of literary translation, and translators need to explore how to better apply this strategy in translation. With respect to Example (2), as mentioned above, domestication is the best choice to avoid comprehending deviation and culture conflict from the perspective of frequency of word usage and cultural cognition.

### 3.2. Analysis on the translation of culture-loaded words

(3) qiáng hòu jiù shì tǔ kàng.

The sleeping platform, the kàng, was behind that low wall.

“kàng, a Chinese expression that often appears in literary works, is a cultural image that cannot be ignored. Goldblatt adopted the method of combining the two translation strategies, first explaining the term through domestication, and then preserving the cultural image through transliteration under the guidance of foreignization strategy. Compared with transliteration plus annotation, this method is more concise, which not only helps target language readers experience cultural diversity, but also ensures their reading coherence. On the other hand, the strangeness of “kàng” will give readers a sense of novelty and arouses their interest into the content. However, this kind of explanation also has its own limitations, which can only outline a framework, but not fully show the characteristics of a certain thing.

(4) qiá bǐng

wheat cakes

“qiá bǐng”, a staple food, is a representative of Shandong food. The food can be eaten on its own or with vegetables, shallots and bean paste. According to the context, the second way is preferred here. The expression “qiá bǐng” was translated as “wheat cake”, which according to Webster’s Dictionary refers to a kind of pancake made from flour, which is a dessert that can be eaten alone or with jam. It can be seen that Goldblatt’s translation has erased the cultural connotation, resulting in a cultural dislocation and low adequacy. But the translation basically conforms to the cultural norms of the target language, so it has a high acceptability. However, the author still advocates the method of transliteration plus annotation in order to fully display the representative Chinese culture.

(5) fēi xíng yuán, shì rén zhōng lóng fèng.

An airman is a dragon among men.

(6) luò shì dé fèng huáng bù rú jī.

A fallen phoenix is not the equal of a common chicken.

In Example (5), Goldblatt applied the translation strategy of foreignization and the translation skill of omission, keeping the image of “lóng” and leaving out the image of “fèng huáng”. This choice gives prominence to the key points and makes it easy for target language readers to understand. With respect to Example (6), under the guidance of foreignization translation strategy, Goldblatt adopted the technique of addition on the basis of word for word translation. From the perspective of Chinese readers, these two translations restore the meaning of the original text to a large extent. However, it is worth observing at this point that the images of “lóng” and “fèng huáng” in Chinese culture are different from those of “dragon” and “phoenix” in western cultures. First of all, the Chinese “lóng” and western “dragon” are different in origins, image characteristics and cultural connotations, especially the last one. The Chinese image “lóng” is endowed with positive connotations. However, in western cultures, “dragon” is rarely a symbol of angels and wisdom, but mostly the incarnation of demons. *The Bible* sees Dragon Killer as the embodiment of justice. In addition, the Chinese “fèng huáng” is also very different from “phoenix”. In Chinese culture, “fèng huáng” includes both male and female legendary birds, which are noble and auspicious symbols; “phoenix” refers to a legendary Arabian bird said to truly burn itself to death and emerge from the ashes as a new one, so the key point is “a long-lived bird”. Therefore, the emotions represented by the images of “lóng” and “fèng huáng” are different from those of “dragon” and “phoenix”. The equivalence of these images would convey wrong cultural concepts. The author holds the opinion that annotations could be added in the footer to emphasize the original meaning, which is also conducive to shaping the Chinese culture. Besides, under the guidance of domestication translation strategy, the idioms that have the same meaning in the target language could also be used to avoid the misunderstanding of special cultural images.

(7) xiàn zài zǎo yǐ huà wéi ní tǔ, ē mí tuō fō.

By now, thankfully, this torchbearer for the obstructionists is feeding worms.

(8) wǒ shì hù ó pú s à wǒ shì sòng zǐ niáng niáng.

I was a living Buddha back then, the local stork.

Christianity, Islam and Buddhism are known as the world's three major religions. The conflict

between different religions is a sensitive topic. The Chinese expression “ē mí tuō fo”, a phrase spoken by Buddhist believers to express prayer, was introduced into China by other cultures. The meaning is the same as “thankfully”, so the domestication translation strategy is sufficient, and there's no need to reinterpret the more in-depth religious terms. It can also avoid unnecessary culture conflicts. The referred object “pú sà” in Example (8) is different from “Buddha” in the translation. The Chinese “pú sà” is also a religious term in Buddhism. Its popularity is not as high as “Buddha”, but they are both positive and righteous symbols. However, since there is no similar cultural image in the target language, Goldblatt skillfully translated it as “Buddha”, which is helpful for the target language readers to understand the content. On the other hand, “sòng zǐ niáng niáng” is a kind of Chinese folk religious belief that is responsible for female fertility. It bears some resemblance to a local stork in western legend that would carry children to people's roofs. Based on this, Goldblatt domesticated it as “a local stork”, which is easier to build a bridge between the original text and the target language readers. To sum up, in the author's opinion, translators should avoid directly conveying some in-depth religious images, and try to select expressions with similar meanings in the target language. But some well-known religious images could be directly translated, such as “Buddha” and “Jesus”.

#### 4. Conclusion

Under the guidance of domestication and foreignization, this study has appreciated the translation of some idioms and culture-loaded words in *Frog*. Although Goldblatt's translation has been fully affirmed by target readers, Mo Yan and translation researchers, there are still some points to be discussed after careful consideration. For some translation versions, the author holds different views from Goldblatt and puts forward some opinions. Taking the examples selected in this study, Goldblatt is more inclined to apply domestication translation strategy. On the contrary, the author stands for foreignization strategy, especially in the translation of some culture-loaded words with specific Chinese characteristics (except those words that will cause cultural conflicts). The author advocates the translation method of transliteration plus annotation to better help Chinese culture go global.

But on the whole, Goldblatt's translation focuses on the presentation of the original text and Chinese culture. The translation of idioms and culture-loaded words show great respect for the original text, and at the same time he also pays attention to the cultural characteristics of the target language to achieve recreation in the translation. The author believes that the translation not only reflects Goldblatt's precise grasp of Chinese language and culture, but also his in-depth understanding of Mo Yan's feelings and subjective intentions. Howard Goldblatt has employed language as the lens to realize the combination of original work and the translation version, forming the bedrock for Mo Yan's novel to go abroad and promoting the communication between China and the whole world.

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