

Exploration on Images Translating of Chinese Classical Literature

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Abstract: Recently, as Chinese culture draws growing attention from international academia, the translation of cultural images of Chinese to English has become a hot spot on translators and scholars. The translation of cultural images plays an important role in promoting Chinese culture at home and abroad. The academic interest in cultural image have risen from the Cultural Turn in translation studies and risen from the fact that image is believed to be a carrier of cultural connotations, so to study strategies of translating cultural images is meaningful for literary translation as well as for inheriting and promoting Chinese cultural heritage. However, due to the obviously national and regional differences of cultural images and their different forms of classifications and manifestation, there are still many difficulties for translating practitioners, and the existing translation strategies and methods are still at issue, as they could not fully meet the requirement for translating Chinese cultural images. Based on traditional cultural image translation theories, this thesis starts from the study of culture turn and then it introduces the definitions of images and cultural images. Since cultural image is of great significance, some examples of Chinese cultural images that appeared in Chinese classical works and their translations are illustrated.

Keywords: Chinese culture; images; English translation; classical literature; translation strategies

1. Introduction

As we know that image plays an important role in literary translation. So does cultural image. The translation of cultural images definitely plays an important role in promoting Chinese culture at home and abroad. It is well-known that literature is usually related to culture. This thesis has been written to illustrate the cultural images translation to find out proper ways of translating cultural images.

2. Image and Culture

Image is defined in Encyclopedia (1993): the source of message from of the objective things in the mind of the cognitive subject and formed a processing image of the space of thinking, which is relevant to cognitive object, living in the mind the relationship of the physical memory traces and the overall structure. The memory trace lies in temporary connections between feeling source information and the new agent information.

In the west, image of literature is seen as the soul of works and the highest realm of beauty. It is treated as one with the unique characteristics of poetic language, which is usually used to express images of poetic metaphor and it is used to symbol words through images. Langacker has illustrated image with the perspectives of profiling, specificity, prominence, and perspective^[1]

Image is a term of literature theory, and it was firstly proposed by Liu Xie. He defined it as painting one's imagination with ink by those who know the real essence of life^[2]. Then, the connotation of of China has been constantly enriched and developed by most literary theorists.

Cultural image has become the study focus among more and more scholars. The essence of the cultural image is how to solve the contradiction of the wide range of information capacity of the inter-lingua communication process and the narrow information expression channel. The concept of cultural image was firstly put forward by Xie Tianzhen. He reviews that cultural image is a kind of culture symbol that condenses the national wisdom and historical culture^[3].

The German translator Albrecht Neubert thought that if "summer" is used to be compared to a it should not be translated if it doesn't share the same meaning with the original^[4]. While another

British translator Newmark thought that “summer” should be retained here because the target readers could imagine the beautiful summer scenery of England in summer. It is well-known that translation is a kind of cross-cultural communication. Just as what Bassnett said “translation is not a simple communication only through language, but is deeply rooted in culture”.^[4]

In our country, Mao Dun has talked about this analogy between his literary translation theory, and he viewed that literary translation is to use another language which conveys the original artistic conception to make readers be inspired, be moved and enjoy the aesthetics while they are reading the translation of the texts ^[5]. He also remarks that “the relation between vocabulary and intonation in an article is to the relation between the point and line positions and colours in a picture”^[5]. Xu Jun published a similar view: “Translation is not only in the original model, but is written as a realistic model the same to the original”.^[6]

When one mentions cultural images translation, two translation theories--domestication and foreignization could not be neglected. The first person that put forward to the two translation theories is the famous scholar Lawrence Venuti^[7]. The discussions about the two theories have never come to its end. Susan Bassnett basically possesses the method of domestication when she discussed translation^[4]. The great translation theorist Eugene A. Nida has greatly advocated domestication. He thinks that the aim at dynamic equivalence in translation is to retain completely natural expressions and to relate the receptors to behavior modes that are relevant to the context of his own culture^[8].

From the above, we easily infer that when one mentions cultural images translation, two translation theories— domestication and foreignization could not be neglected. No matter how to choose the translation theory, it is closely related to the issue of culture reflection of the source text and the target text.

3. Translating of Cultural Turn

In Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary (2003), culture is defined as the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations. Culture is also a social legacy shared by the whole nation and it is also a reflection of man’s real-life experience. Culture is a characteristic term that is embodied in various forms and culture is a comprehensive conception of unique folk, legends, myths, and proverbs, etc.

In 1990s, Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere first proposed the cultural turn of translation and then it has a great influence on cultural translation^[9]. Then they further illustrated the point view of culture turn which redefined the object of translation studies; what are studied in the text translation embodies in its network of cultural signs in source text and the target text and in this way, translation studies can utilize the linguistic approach and to move out beyond it^[9]. From then on, their ideas of cultural turn become influential in the field of translation and translators should not only pay attention to linguistic-oriented translation, but gradually turn to notice culture factors in translation.

4. Culture Images Translating

The cultural image itself bears the rich Chinese cultural information, which inspires in the Chinese readers infinite imagination and reveries. But, when they turn to read the English translation of these works, it is often a regret to find that the gleaming images of the original work are obscure or lost its presence in the translated work. The use of lines to describe the figures in the fictions embodies the images of accurate, continuous, soft and slow. Thus, the effect of literature is full of strong sense of rhythm, thus the image of a certain culture in translation is naturally formed.

The translation of cultural images in classical Chinese literature is obviously no doubt a great difficulty, and the cultural images translation itself is closely linked with many controversial bigger problems in the studies of translation. However, only limited to word for word translation or sentence for sentence translation, readers of different culture couldn’t truly understand the author’s mind on the background at that time when Chinese authors mention the cultural images of Chinese characteristic cultural images. Because of the cultural conflicts, foreign readers are hard to fully understand the true meaning contained in those images in Chinese culture. So the translation of cultural images should follow two principles: cultural equivalence principle and effective principle. Fusheng Liu Ji is a good example. In Fusheng Liu Ji, Shen Fu, the author of the book, used “十余丈”(“over a hundred feet above

the water level”by Tr. Lin Yutang) to show the height of an attic called “Fishing Terrace”.

The way used to express images in literature is a combining of the objectivity and subjectivity. Both of them are a form of media that is used to embody the authors’ inner feelings and emotions. Pan Tianshou said that the forms and colors used in painting works are from the nature but different from the nature; the way of expression is from the nature but different from the nature, because all of them are from the inner hearts of the painters^[10].

In 1936, Lin Yutang translated Fusheng Liu Ji into English in form of four articles, and it was serialized in the monthly magazine World.

The equivalence of the images in the original works and those in the translated works depends on the translator’s individual understanding and imagination towards the original images in the source text. Furthermore, some other factors that affect the effects of cultural image translation such as the social background, knowledge, aesthetic appreciation could influence the effect of the translators. For instance, “Yun, I think, is one of the loveliest women in the Chinese literature”^[11]; “I am translating her story just because, on the one hand, it is a story that should be told the world; and on the other hand, because I admire a couple of intimacy of childhood living in a simple life, their pursuit of beauty, their poor life and was not equally treated, at the same time, they lived a typical day of their idle life...”^[11]. In this English translation of Fusheng Liu Ji, Lin Yutang attempts to spread Chinese culture to the western world to enjoy the profound Chinese literature.

4.1 Copy of Cultural Image

The copy of cultural Images refers to copying the Chinese cultural images in the translated works to remain the original taste of Chinese culture. For example, “kongfu”, “fuwa”, “wushu”, etc. The most persuasive example is the translation of Milk Way translated by Xie Tianzhen.

In the classic sentence “巧媳妇做不出没米的粥来”in *Dream of Red Chamber*, “米”should be translated into “rice”, because “rice” is a staple food in China. It may make the western readers think that the ancient Chinese people ate bread in their daily lives.

4.2 Replacement of Cultural Images

Lacking culture connotation may be unable to make the target language readers really understand the true feelings of the original authors. So, some meanings would be lost and some defects may be produced. In this way, the method of supplement could complement the lack of meanings and make up for the defects.

4.3 Substitutability of Cultural Images

Owing to different cultural backgrounds, the meanings of culture cannot be completely equivalent to each other. If we use the domestic idioms or images to replace other culture images in translation, it should facilitate the readers’ understandings, it also should be conducive to the spread of cultural image, such as “遮羞布”in Chinese culture can be replaced with “fig- leaf” in order to reach the equivalence in meanings.

5. Conclusion

There exist some problems of cultural images translation such as misplacement, replacement, dislocation and so on. The definitions of image and cultural image further prove that it’s necessary to turn image translation to culture image translation. The theories of cultural turn are introduced to lead to the translation of cultural images. According to the current studies of the many scholars, some problems in translating cultural images still exist and it is hard to achieve agreement.

Many effective strategies and methods of cultural images translation are summed up in the thesis such as changes of images, juxtaposition of cultural images, choice of points of sight and composition of cultural images.

Due to the differences between the Chinese and western languages and culture, the translators’ rich imaginations could be deduced to a creation method in translation, which makes the original text appear to be more life- like and makes the original authors’ feelings be shown incisively and vividly. In

this way, the readers seem to be personally on the scene.

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