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A Study of Cultural-Loaded Words Translation in *The Classic of Tea* from the Perspective of Translator Behavior Criticism

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Abstract

As the earliest surviving monograph on tea, *The Classic of Tea*, namely the encyclopedia of tea, has been translated into Japanese, English, French, German and etc. It had a profound impact on the study of tea in China and even in the world. This book contains interdisciplinary knowledge, systemically listing various aspects of tea studies, and accordingly there are a series of cultural-loaded words. Cultural-loaded word is an eternal topic in the translation of Chinese classic, and how translators appropriately deal with cultural-loaded words has become one of the vital factors affecting the effect of readers' reception and book promotion. Based on the truth-seeking-utility-attaining continuum mode of evaluation, this paper evaluates the translation of cultural-loaded words in *The Classic of Tea* from Library of Chinese Classic Series, and to explore the dynamic impact of the translator's behavior on the transmission of cultural connotations across languages. It is found that the translators are more inclined to utility side to reduce the reading barriers that cultural-loaded words bring to the readers.

Keywords

The Classic of Tea, translator behavior criticism, cultural-loaded word

1. An Introduction to *The Classic of Tea*

Lu Yu, also called "Tea Sage", written *The Classic of Tea* for the earliest surviving monograph on tea all over the world. Three volumes in this book systematically explains the origin, manufacturing, utensils, drinking and many other aspects of tea knowledge. Besides, It has laid a foundation for the formation of tea science and tea ceremony. Wang (2018) pointed out that both in terms of content and influence, *The Classic of Tea* is unrivaled in Chinese tea classics.

As the excellent Chinese classics gradually go to the world, *The Classic of Tea*, as a dazzling pearl among the Chinese tea classics, has also received the attention of many scholars in its translation. However, the differences between Chinese and Western cultures inevitably lead to the emergence of

cultural mismatch, which make the translation work difficult. This difference is reflected in cultural-loaded words. Cultural-loaded words refer to those words, phrases or idioms that are used to express something specific to a certain culture. It also known as lexical vacancies, referring to the fact that the cultural information contained in the source language vocabulary, but cannot be found in the translated language (Yu, 2016). At present, the domestic research on the English translation of *The Classic of Tea* is mainly carried out from the perspectives of translation strategy, functional linguistics, cultural imagery, etc., and mainly discusses specific issues such as aesthetic meaning, philosophical thought, writings and the foreign dissemination of tea culture in the English translation of *The Classic of Tea*. However, fewer scholars have conducted specific studies on the translation of many cultural-loaded words from the perspective of translator behavior. In this paper, we will evaluate the translation of cultural-loaded words in the Jiang's translation of *The Classic of Tea* from the perspective of translator behavioral criticism, and explore the dynamic impact of translator's behavioral changes across the continuum on the transmission of cultural connotations.

2. Translator Behavior Criticism and Truth-Seeking-Utility-Attaining Continuum Mode of Evaluation

At the end of the twentieth century, Bassnett and Lefevere proposed the cultural turn in translation, which provided a new understanding of translation criticism, and made translation studies no longer stay on the textual level of equivalence or non-equivalence (Zeng, 2006). This shift has led to a descriptive shift in translation studies, breaking away from the previous dilemma of focusing only on the textual level and placing translation studies in a broader social context.

Zhou proposes a descriptive, critical and framing theory named translator behavior criticism. This theory specifically takes the translator behavior as the entry point, takes the social perspective as the evaluation perspective, and aims at evaluating the bilateral relationship between the translator behavior and translation quality (Zhou, 2014). As a conscious body, translator has social aspect, and thus simultaneously possesses both linguistic and social attributes in carrying out actions, which is also called the translator's behavior in a broader sense. Under the perspective of translator behavior criticism, translators have both the identities of linguist and sociologist. Meanwhile, they are oriented to the original text and the society (Ma, 2013).

Under the theoretical framework of translator behavior criticism, Zhou creatively proposes truth-seeking-utility-attaining continuum mode of evaluation. Truth-seeking refers to the translator's behavior of seeking the truth of the meaning loaded in the original language. It achieves the goal of pragmatism for the readers and society. Utility-attaining means a kind of pragmatic attitude and method which is attained on the basis of seeking the truth of meaning loaded in the original language in a whole or in part (Zhou, 2010). This continuum mode breaks the traditional pattern of binary opposite in the past and puts truth-seeking and utility-attaining at the two ends of the continuum, with the translator behavior and the translation process presenting a dynamic process of change. When the translator

behavior is close to the original text or the author, the linguistic nature of the translator is reflected and the translator behavior is truth-seeking. On the contrary, when the translator behavior is close to the reader or the society, the social nature of the translator is reflected and the translator behavior is utility-attaining. Truth-seeking is the basis of utility-attaining, and the two can be transformed under certain conditions. Translators need to strive for their own ideal balance between truth-seeking and utility-attaining, which means to maintain the linguistic significance of the original text while preserving the social function of translation.

3. Cultural-loaded Words in *The Classic of Tea* from Truth-Seeking-Utility-Attaining Continuum Model of Evaluation

Cultural-loaded words refer to those words, phrases or idioms that are used to express things specific to a certain culture. Over the long period of time, people all over the world have formed their own language systems with their own cultural, religious, social and thinking characteristics. Generally, they appear in the form of cultural-loaded words at the vocabulary level. Since cultural-loaded words contain their own cultural connotations, it's extremely difficult to find alternatives in the target language that carry the same meaning when communicating with other cultures. Therefore, how to deal with these cultural-loaded words appropriately in translation is an vital issue that every translator needs to think about.

Referring to linguist Nida's way of dividing culture, cultural-loaded words can be divided into five categories: ecological cultural-loaded words, material cultural-loaded words, social cultural-loaded words, religious cultural-loaded words and linguistic cultural-loaded words (Nida, 1993). *The Classic of Tea* involves many aspects of tea knowledge and covers many different fields, such as Chinese history, social customs and traditional religions, etc. The existence of a large number of cultural-loaded words increases the challenge of foreign translation work. In the following section, we will criticize the translator behavior in the English translation of *The Classic of Tea* by Jiang from the perspective of cultural-loaded words.

3.1 Social Cultural-Loaded Words

As a major category of cultural-loaded words, social cultural-loaded words usually refer to words and expressions created by local people and influenced by the unique habits, customs and lifestyles of the local society. There are great differences between Chinese and foreign societies, so when traditional literature is translated, it is often impossible to find definitely appropriate word substitutes in the target society.

- 1) 簾，一曰“篮”，一曰“笼”，一曰“筥”。以竹织之，受五升，或一斗、二斗、三斗，茶人负以采茶之。

Ying, also called lan, long or ju, is also a basket-like container woven with thin bamboo stripes. The capacity of a ying varies from five liters to one, two or three decaliters.

The Classic of Tea contains a large number of measurement, including length, capacity, weight, etc. In Example 1, the translator translates “斗，升” into “liters, decaliters”. First of all, the translator simply equates the unit of “升” with “liter”, which obviously lacks accuracy. In ancient China, there are different standards for “升”. For instance, a liter was 600 ml in Sui and Tang, while a liter was 702 ml in Song, so it is difficult to use a fixed value to represent “liter”. “斗” is a traditional Chinese unit of volume, which doesn’t exist in Western societies. Therefore, there is no equivalent word in English. However, translator understands that “斗” is equal to ten liters in Chinese weights and measures, and that there is an English equivalent for “decaliters”.

The translator uses naturalized translation strategy to satisfy readability as much as possible, and utility-attaining is demonstrated here.

2) 阴山坡谷者，不堪采掇，性凝滞，结痼疾

Tea plants growing on a slope deprive of sunshine yield valueless leaves, whose sluggish nature could lead to side effects like stagnation of circulation, lumps or indigestion in the drinker.

In *Chinese Terms in Traditional Chinese Medicine and Pharmacy*, “性凝滞” refers to a traditional Chinese illness that cold causes qi and blood to run poorly and meridians not be able to get through, often manifested as a variety of pain symptoms. In *Za Bing Yuan Liu Xi Zhu*, it mentioned how “痼疾” appears. “痼疾” is caused by the inappropriate balance between cold and warm, and it is often seen under the umbilicus.

The Chinese medicines involved in this sentence is still difficult to understand for the local readers, but even more obscure for the western readers. The translator uses “lump” and “indigestion” to explain the TCM symptoms mentioned above, which makes up for the TCM cultural gap in the Western society. Translator behavior is closer to the society, and the translator’s social nature is reflected. In this example, translator behavior shows utility-attaining. However, since Western readers know little about the basic concepts of Chinese medicine, such as yinyang and qi, and is unfamiliar with the cause and effect between tea grown on the shady slopes and TCM diseases, it may lead to an incoherent logic when reading the text.

3.2 Material Cultural-Loaded Words

Due to the different lifestyles in different parts of the world, there are differences in clothing, food, housing, transportation, etc., and it is difficult to find equivalent expressions in the target language and culture, thus the term “material cultural-loaded words” emerges. There is a huge difference between Chinese and Western life, and a large number of unique Chinese items also appears in *The Classic of Tea*, which are highlighted in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

3) 瓢，一曰牺杓。剖瓠为之，或刊木为之。

The Tea Ladle: This kind of ladle is also known as a bail or a scoop. It can be made by cutting a gourd into two halves, or it can be carved from wood.

“瓢” is a traditional Chinese utensil which usually made from dried gourds. Ancient people split the dried gourd into two pieces, and they are used as daily container for scooping water and wine. Until

today, people in some Chinese area is still using this kind of container. In *The Classic of Tea*, it is a tea utensil used to ladle water and tea broth. The translator translates “瓢” into “The Tea Ladle”, where “ladle” refers to a long-handled spoon, and “tea” specifies the application of the ladle. Readers are able to understand this object as a ladle related to tea and find its counterpart in their own culture, which enhances the reading experience. Here the translator brings the translation closer to the reader, and the translator behavior represents utility-attaining.

4) 凡酌，置诸碗，令沫饽均。沫饽，汤之华也。

Floating on top of the tea is the tea marrow. The thick cream is called *bo*, and the thin spume of the marrow is called *mo*. Hua (literally meaning “flower”) refers to even finer froth.

“沫饽” is composed of “沫” and “饽”, which refers to a layer of foam floating on the surface of the tea broth, the thinner foam called “沫” and the thicker one named “饽”. Represented by British tea culture, the tea broth in Western tea culture is directly brewed by tea leaves after filtering the tea residue obtained. However, tea leaves need to be smashed into tea powder, and then boil out in the specific tea kettle in Chinese tea culture. During the process of boiling, bubbles would appear gradually over time. The ancients believed that these bubbles were the essence of the tea broth. The difference between the Chinese and Western ways of making tea broth makes it impossible to find a corresponding word for the cultural information contained in “沫饽” in the target language. The translator directly translates “沫饽” into the pinyin “*bo*” and “*mo*”. This translation preserves the form of the original text to the greatest extent and brings the reader closer to the original text. Translator behavior is expressed as truth-seeking.

4. Conclusion and Finding

With regard to the translation of the many cultural-loaded words in *The Classic of Tea*, the translators varied continuously between truth-seeking and utility-attaining. In order to be closer to the reading habits of English-speaking readers and to fill the cultural gap, the translators put pragmatism in a more important position, which is reflected by the fact that the translator behaviors in the continuum model of evaluation are biased towards the utility-attaining end. On the contrary, for the sake of preserving the traditional culture with Chinese characteristics, truthfulness is put in the first place, which is reflected by the translator behaviors in the continuum model of evaluation as favoring the truth-seeking end. In a word, Jiang’s translation tends to be more pragmatic. The translator strives to get closer to the target language readers and tries to fill in the gaps between Chinese and Western cultures, so as to further enhance the dissemination of *The Classic of Tea* and the Chinese tea culture.

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