

Original Paper

An Analysis of the Translation of Chinese Culture-loaded Words in *Fortress Besieged* from the Perspective of Reception

Aesthetics

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Abstract

Culture-loaded words are phrases and idioms that reflect unique national cultural characteristics and can directly reflect the historical uniqueness of a country. This paper discusses the translation of culture-loaded words in *Fortress Besieged* from the perspective of reception aesthetics, and analyzes the translator's translation methods according to the similarities and differences between the source language culture and the target language culture. It also analyzes the feasibility of the translation of culture-loaded words under the guidance of reception aesthetics and the quality of the translation under the guidance of the two main theories of reception aesthetics (reader's horizon of expectation and the implied reader). The main findings of this study are as follows: Firstly, translators adopt some translation methods and selectively meet readers' directional and creative expectations. For different cultural transplanting phenomena, translators adopt different translation strategies to cater to readers' receptivity and needs. Secondly, the implied reader plays an intermediary role in literature, connecting the creator and the audience, so that the work can be interpreted and experienced in a variety of contexts.

Keywords

reception aesthetics, *Fortress Besieged*, culture-loaded words, reader's horizon of expectation

1. Introduction

1.1 Significance of the Study

Fortress Besieged is a long satirical novel written by Qian, which has a unique style in the history of modern Chinese literature. It mainly describes the group images of intellectuals in the early period of the Anti-Japanese War. As a work with a historical background, it inevitably contains many words and

sentences with Chinese cultural characteristics. With the continuous communication of Chinese and Western cultures, it is becoming more and more important to accurately translate the culture-loaded words in Chinese classic literature works, which not only helps to promote the cultural exchanges between Chinese and Western readers, but also helps to further promote Chinese literature to go out. From the perspective of reception aesthetics, this paper analyzes the culture-loaded words in *Fortress Besieged*, hoping to provide some references for the translation and processing of culture-loaded words in literary translation, and help to think about translation from the perspective of readers' receptivity.

1.2 Research Method

This paper mainly adopts the method of descriptive research and literature research. On the basis of consulting and collecting a large number of relevant literature, this paper interprets and analyzes the relevant research of Qian's *Fortress Besieged* and the theory of reception aesthetics, and finds out the points that can be further studied. After comparative reading of Chinese and English novels, this paper makes a theoretical analysis and research on the translation of typical culture-loaded words in novels by using the theory of reception aesthetics. This paper explores how translators deal with cultural translation, their attitudes towards readers, and the influence of reception aesthetics on translation activities.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Research on Aesthetics of Reception

The concept of "reception aesthetics" was put forward by Hans Robert Jauss, professor of literature and art at the University of Konstans in Germany, in the late 1960s, when the field of German literary studies was facing a paradigm shift. Traditional literary research focuses on the author and the work itself, while ignoring the role of the reader. With the deepening of literary theory research, people begin to realize the important role of readers in literary creation and interpretation. On this basis, reception aesthetics emerged. After the joint development of Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, it became an aesthetic school of reception aesthetics with far-reaching influence in the 1970s and 1980s.

Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser are the main creators of reception aesthetics, and their theoretical origins and research paths are also different. Jauss mainly studies the reception of literature from the perspective of literary history, while Iser studies the reception of literature from the perspective of reading appreciation. Phenomenology and hermeneutics are its theoretical basis. Some important conceptual categories used in Jauss' and Iser's theories, such as "horizon of expectation", "history of effect", "unfixed point", etc., are derived from Heidegger's "preexisting structure", "horizon of understanding", and Gadamer's "fusion of horizon" (Wang, 1998).

Jauss (1982) believes that any reader, before reading any specific work, is already in a state of understanding structure and knowledge framework, and this understanding is the "horizon of expectation" of literature. According to Jauss, "the reader is itself an active constituent of history." The historical life of literary works is inconceivable without the active participation of the recipients. For it

is only through the reader's process of reading that the work can enter into a continuously changing field of experience (Jauss, 1982, p. 43)."

According to Iser, "the meaning of a work can only be produced in the process of reading, as a result of the interaction between the work and the reader (1978, p. 97)." He believes that literary works have two poles, one pole is artistic, that is, the text written by the author, and the other pole is aesthetic, that is, the embodiment or realization of the text by the reader. The text structure of a work already implies various interpretations that readers can realize, which is called "implied readers".

This theory emphasizes the openness and ambiguity of literary works and stimulates people's multiple interpretations of literary works. Ma (2000) spoke highly of the birth of reception aesthetics as an epoch-making event. Reception aesthetics has not only made great waves in the field of literary studies, but also aroused great repercussions in the field of translation, providing an excellent guide for translation studies to break new ground. The translation of culture-loaded words is a combination of cultural and literary translation. Therefore, reception aesthetics is of great significance to the translation of culture-loaded words.

2.2 Research on *Fortress Besieged* and Culture-loaded Words

Fortress Besieged is one of the most famous novels in the history of modern literature. Its English translation was jointly translated by American writer and translator Jeanne Kelly and American scholar Nathan K. Mao, and published by Indiana University Press in 1979. It has been warmly received in overseas sinology circles. "*Fortress Besieged* is the most delightful and carefully wrought novel in modern Chinese literature; it perhaps also his greatest novel (Hsia, 1961, p. 441)."

Due to the exquisite and witty language of *Fortress Besieged*, the study of its English translation mainly focuses on the unique language of the novel, such as translation of humor, translation of metaphors, translation of idioms, translation of culture-loaded words, translation of character dialogue, etc., from which, it can be concluded that domestication translation strategy, foreignization translation strategy, or both domestication and foreignization translation strategy. As Qian (1995, p. 69) himself put it, a good translation will "arouse some people's curiosity, provoke them to boundless longing for the original work, as if it gives them a taste, arouses their appetite, but does not satisfy their cravings", and the English translation of *Fortress Besieged* has achieved just such an effect. On this basis, a further study is carried out on the cultural reflection of the translation of *Fortress Besieged*, such as cultural intervention, cultural violence, intertextuality, etc. (Ge, 2013, p. 63). Here, regardless of whether the conclusions drawn by the researchers are fair or not, the research methods adopted in these research papers are generally to describe and analyze the specific translation problems of *Fortress Besieged* under the guidance of certain theories, and then to summarize.

As for the cultural factors contained in the language structure encountered in translation, the famous American translation theorist Nida (2001) divided them into five categories: "ecological culture", "material culture", "social culture", "religious culture", "linguistic culture". Culture-loaded words refer to a series of words in the language system that can reflect the cultural information carried by the

language and reflect the human social life. These words often have distinct national characteristics and cultural deposits, reflecting the history, culture, customs and aesthetic concepts of a particular nation. As a novel with Chinese culture as its background, *Fortress Besieged* contains many culture-loaded words, which sometimes hinder cultural communication and translation. Therefore, it is of great practical significance to explore these culture-loaded words and their translation.

3. Application of Reception Aesthetics to the Translation of Culture-loaded Words in *Fortress Besieged*

3.1 *Fortress Besieged* in View of Horizon of Expectation

3.1.1 Transliteration in the Horizon of Expectation

1) 这是七月下旬，合中国旧历的三伏，一年最热的时候 (Qian, 2003, p. 6)。

Translation: It was toward the end of July, equivalent to the “san-fu” period of the lunar calendar-the hottest days of the year (Kelly & Mao, 2003, p. 7).

In China, “三伏天”, which fall between Minor Heat and End Heat, is the hottest, humid and sultry time of the year. The three periods are divided into the first period, the middle period and the last period, and its date is determined by the combination of the 24 solar terms and the date of the dates designated by Heavenly Stems and Earthly Branches. After the “入伏”, many places in the country will enter a continuous high temperature mode, which appears every year from mid-July to mid-August in the Gregorian calendar. Its climate is characterized by high temperature, low pressure, high humidity and small wind speed. Therefore, as a typical culture-loaded word, “三伏” contains a lot of cultural information, which will naturally be hindered for readers who lack cultural background. However, there is no corresponding cultural information in English, which is different from the previous life experience and reading experience of the target language readers, and the problem of large aesthetic distance will be encountered in the process of reading. The translator adopts the transliteration method, which is beyond the readers’ expectation and vision, and the readers are often happy to think that it has improved their aesthetic level and enriched their aesthetic experience (Liu, 2005). At the same time, this translation method makes the unique Chinese meteorological classification culture spread smoothly.

2) “你！苏东坡的妹妹，才女！” (Qian, 2003, p. 5)

Translation: “You! Su Tung-p’o’s little sister, *the girl genius!” (Kelly & Mao, 2003, p. 7)

Annotation: Su Tung-p’o (1037—1101): a celebrated Chinese poet, essayist, painter, and calligrapher. His sister, Su Hsiao-mei, probably a legendary figure, is reputed to have been equally talented.

Su Tung-p’o was a famous writer, calligrapher and painter. His younger sister, “Little sister Su”, read poetry and literature from childhood and was proficient in classics. The use of names of historical figures to describe characters in the original text has a special pragmatic effect, but it brings difficulties to English readers. The translator considered that “Su Tung-p’o” and “Su Hsiao-mei” occupy an

important position in the source culture, and hoped to reduce the English audience. Therefore, the method of transliteration is chosen here.

Cultural differences are most prominent at the lexical level and involve a wide range of aspects. There is no unified translation method and formula for the translation of culture-loaded words. Translators should deeply understand the spirit of the original text and correctly infer the intention of the author on the basis of proficiency in the two languages and cultures, while taking into account the thoughts and receptive ability of the target language recipient, and correctly absorb the nutrients of the source language culture within the framework of the target language culture. In order to properly convey the cultural factors in the culture-loaded vocabulary of the source language.

3.1.2 Literal Translation in the Horizon of Expectation

3) 那男孩子的母亲已有三十开外，穿件半旧的黑纱旗袍，满面劳碌困倦，加上天生的倒挂眉毛，愈觉得愁苦可怜 (Qian, 2003, p. 4)。

Translation: The toddler's mother, already in her thirties, was wearing an old black chiffon *Chinese dress, a face marked by toil and weariness, her slanting down ward eyebrows made her look even more miserable (Kelly & Mao, 2003, p. 7).

Annotation: The Chinese dress refers to ch'i-p'ao, which has a high collar that usually fits close to the neck.

Before the translation of *Fortress Besieged*, the translators Nathan K. Mao and Jenny Kelly had their own experience in translating Chinese literary works, which helped them to adopt appropriate translation strategies to reproduce the beauty of *Fortress Besieged* to Western readers (Zhang, 2012). “旗袍”, a traditional robe for Chinese women, is a typical Chinese cultural word. This kind of vocabulary contains rich Chinese cultural connotation, there is no corresponding vocabulary in English, which leads to the phenomenon of vocabulary vacancy. For the target readers, this is inconsistent with their own vision of expectation, and readers need to exert their own initiative to create a sexual imagination of this image. Jauss (1982) proposed that the historical essence of the text, that is, the existence of the text and the literary vision, exists in the continuous alternating evolution of the vision in the time series. The reader's expectation vision will also change with the connotation of the text. Only when the reader's expectation vision is integrated with the text vision, can we talk about acceptance and understanding. The translator adopts the literal translation method, which not only facilitates the readers of the target language to imagine the image of the cheongsam, but also enables the integration of the two perspectives and preserves the cultural color of the source language.

3.1.3 Free Translation of the Horizon of Expectation

Free translation refers to the translation according to the general idea of the original text, not a word-for-word translation (different from literal translation). It is often used in the translation of sentences, phrases, or larger groups of meanings, mainly in cases where the source language and the target language reflect significant cultural differences. From the perspective of cross-cultural language communication and cultural exchange, free translation emphasizes the relative independence of the

cultural system of the target language and the cultural system of the source language. In the English translation of *Fortress Besieged*, Nathan K. Mao and Jenny Kelly used free translation to deal with culture-loaded words, preserving the Chinese cultural connotation, which is also conducive to the spread of Chinese culture.

4) “她们有什么东西陪过来，对你吹牛！” (Qian, 2003, p. 307)

Translation: “What sort of trousseau did they bring?” They were giving you a lot of bull (Kelly & Mao, 2003, p. 324)!

“吹牛”, also known as blowing a cow’s skin or blowing a law snail in China, refers to lying or speaking without facts, exaggerating or exaggerating the content of the words. General bragging is to describe no strength, but also like to pretend that they are very powerful people, such people generally no one is willing to communicate with them. As a farming culture in China, cattle is a very important labor tool, and cattle is a symbol of farming civilization, so cattle is often mentioned in China. “吹牛” means boasting, and the actual cow is not the same thing, just borrow the cow to describe a person has no strength, but also like to pretend. However, in Western culture, readers have no cultural understanding of the image of the cow in their past life experience. The translator’s free translation of it as “giving you a lot of bull” can not only make readers have a positive association, achieve the degree consistent with the cultural connotation of this article, but also stimulate readers’ interest in reading. Literary translation aesthetics is connected with Chinese and Western cultures, and provides a profound cultural background for translation aesthetics. This not only broadens the research horizon, but also changes the thought mechanism of the research, and thus changes the research method (Xi, 2000). By using the theory of reception aesthetics, translators can also provide useful theoretical reference for dealing with the translation of culture-loaded words, and better spread Chinese culture to foreign countries.

3.2 *The Fortress Besieged in View of The Implied Reader*

For the reading of individual texts, Iser (1978) first proposed the so-called “blank” theory, that is, the unwritten part of a literary work which is constantly implied to the reader. The production of the blank is related to language, that is, “the expression of words”, and at the same time, it is related to the picture fragments presented by the work and some constraints of cultural norms at the level of ideological value. Because of the blank space of the text, some so-called calling structure will be formed to guide the reader to read in a certain way. Because of the summoning structure, there is the so-called implied reader---the reader who understands the work according to the summoning structure. This is the ideal audience of a potential author, the object of the author’s implied expression.

5) 他的国文曾得到老子的教授，在中学会考中考过第二，所以这信写得文绉绉，没有把之乎者也弄错 (Qian, 2003, p. 7)。

Translation: Since he had received his father’s guidance in literary composition and achieved second place in the high school general examination, his letter was couched in an elegant style without incorrect using of any various particles of literary Chinese (Kelly & Mao, 2003, p. 8).

“There are so-called “cultural symbols” almost everywhere in the language, which are left for translators to “decode (Liu, 1995, p. 316).” There is a big gap between Chinese and English, so the translator should decode the words with Chinese cultural connotation in the process of translation. “文绉绉”, means that speaking is not colloquial, literary education and self-cultivation, and describes the way people speak and act gracefully. The translator uses free translation to translate this word, using this word “elegant” can lead the reader to imagine the true meaning of this word. Although the author comes from a different country and cultural background, he still reflects the consideration of ideal readers in the translation process, and the word “elegant” provides convenience for the implied readers to understand the work, and further eliminates the dyslexia.

The original meaning of “之乎者也” is the four auxiliary words commonly used in classical Chinese, so it also refers to the basic ability that scholars should have, and then it is used to ridicule the scholars only know how to talk about literature, but can not solve practical problems; It is a culture-loaded word with rich cultural connotation, and it is not easy to translate it completely in translation. The existence of implied readers can not only help the author to clarify the goal of writing and choose the appropriate language style, but also influence the author’s creative thinking and expression. Kelly and Mao translated the word as “literary Chinese” can not only help to arouse readers’ thinking, but also increase the reading value and influence of the work.

4. Conclusion

Culture-loaded words play an important role in literary translation, and the success or failure of literary translation and the communication of literary works between English and Chinese depends largely on the treatment of culture-loaded words. This paper analyzes typical examples of culture-loaded words in novels from the perspective of reception aesthetics, and finds that translators fully consider readers’ expectations in the process of English translation, and flexibly reproduce the meaning of culture-loaded words by using literal translation, free translation and transliteration. At the same time, translators make assumptions and presets according to their own experience, hobbies and understanding of potential readers, and reflect their consideration of implied readers in their creative ideas and expression methods. In general, implied readers play a kind of intermediary role in literature, connecting creators and audiences, so that works can be interpreted and experienced in various contexts.

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