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On the Cultural Compensation Strategies in *The Deer and the Cauldron*

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Abstract

The translation of martial arts novels has always been a difficulty in the translation field in that they involve so many Chinese traditional elements and complicated technical terms that translators are often overwhelmed by a variety of movements and characters of the martial arts. *The Deer and the Cauldron*, a world-famous martial arts novel, was a masterpiece written by Louis Cha and translated by John Minford. If the translator hadn't compensated for the cultural vacancies, the novel would certainly become unintelligible to the target readers. By analyzing the solutions of the translation of cultural vacancies in the English version of *The Deer and the Cauldron*, the study concludes the applicable compensation strategies to the translation of martial arts novels, including annotation, contextual amplification, and adaptation, aiming to provide some reference for the translation and introduction of the martial arts novels as it is a literary category with Chinese characteristics and hence bringing Chinese Martial arts culture to the world.

Key words: Cultural vacancy; *The Deer and the Cauldron*; Martial arts novels; Compensation strategies

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INTRODUCTION

Martial Arts culture which is welcomed by the Chinese people worldwide is a classic mass culture of the Chinese nation. It is widely disseminated through various arts forms like literary works and even has influence on countries such as Britain, America, Japan and South Korea. Cultural products like television, film and video games with the theme of martial arts stories have enjoyed tremendous popularity in the world. The translation of martial arts novels is a new research field in translation studies and a hot spot in the cultural exchanges between China and the west. Martial arts novels contain rich Chinese martial arts culture, among which there are many Chinese culture-bound words that are specific expressions of Chinese cultural characteristics. Some words such as geographical names, historical figures and festivals are exclusive for China. They lack corresponding signified things and signifier symbols in English, which makes the translation of martial arts novels difficult. Louis Cha is one of the most well-known Chinese martial arts writers. He has written 15 martial arts novels, and only four have been published in English. It is a big project to translate this popular Chinese literature into something that can be understood by foreigners so that readers of different cultural backgrounds can appreciate the connotation of Chinese martial arts. Due to the unique cultural characteristics of the martial arts novels which include ancient Chinese medicine, Buddhism, Taoism, disguise surgery and various mysteries, etc., it requires the compensation of cultural information so that foreign readers can understand it. Therefore, the translation compensation theory is applicable to the study of the English translation of martial arts novels. Through appropriate compensation strategies, we can convey the meaning and cultural connotation of Chinese culture-

bound words as much as possible to reduce loss of information for the purpose that English readers can taste the flavor of Chinese martial arts culture.

In 1997, the famous British sinologist John Minford first translated Louis Cha's *The Deer and the Cauldron* into English and published it abroad. In the following years, the complete works was published in three translations, which caused a great repercussion abroad. This paper takes the English translation of *The Deer and the Cauldron* as the linguistic data to conduct a comprehensive and detailed investigation into its translation compensation methods and analyze its cultural losses and compensation so as to summarize the applicable compensation strategies for the translation of martial arts novels, improving the quality of the translation and expanding the development space of the translation and introduction of martial arts novels. In addition, martial arts novels are a little different from the novels in the general sense. To a certain extent, the application of translation compensation theory to the study of translation of martial arts novels extends the application range of the theory. Summarizing a set of translation compensation strategies applicable to the translation of martial arts novels enriches the literature translation research that takes text as the research center.

1. CULTURAL COMPENSATION

With the increasingly closer cultural exchanges between countries, foreigners are growing more and more interested in Chinese culture. Chinese Kungfu movies have been a hit in foreign countries and Chinese martial arts novels have also set off a boom. Cultural communication between different countries must cross language and cultural barriers through translation which is the best medium because the process of translation is the process of cultural communication as well as language transformation. But obstacles in the process of translation are inevitable because no two peoples have both the same language and culture. Different countries have their own features and elements, so loss or distortion will inevitably occur in the course of communication. It's safe to say that it is almost impossible to be completely consistent between the source language and target language on referential meaning, pragmatic meaning and linguistic meaning, especially what related to cultural factors, many of which are difficult to translate and even untranslatable as some referents of the original language can't find equivalent in the target language culture. The loss of translation is unavoidable. In order to achieve the maximum equivalence between the target text and the original text, compensation measures are indispensable. Otherwise, the content and cultural information of the original text cannot be fully displayed to the target readers, which is irresponsible for both the original author

and the target readers. Le Jinsheng (1999, p. 13) proposed in his paper *Under-loaded Translation and Cultural Compensation* that "Compensation refers to the making up for the loss of original meaning caused by literal translation. In other words, it is cultural compensation since the loss of meaning is actually the loss caused by cultural differences".

There are a lot of researches on cultural compensation which has been a hot spot for scholars in China. For example, Tu Guoyuan (1996) analyzed the compensation strategies in the transmission of cultural information in translation practice, and he summarized the compensation methods as "the interconvert between the specific and the abstract, amplification and annotation complementing". Wen Shan and Yang Shoukang (1997) discussed the cultural difference and compensation in translation, believing that the annotation is applicable to the compensation of cultural information, but in the meantime it may cause unnecessary translation. The two scholars paid attention to the negative effects of compensation methods, which is conducive to the correct understanding of compensation methods. Le Jinsheng (1999) also focused on the problem of cultural loss and compensation, and proposed four means of cultural compensation: transliteration and literal translation with annotation, contextual amplification, paraphrase and adaption. Wang Dali (2007) used the translation compensation strategy to solve the "cultural default" phenomenon, including adding footnotes, paraphrase and adaption. Since then, many scholars have studied the translation compensation strategy for the cultural default.

This paper takes *The Deer and the Cauldron* as the corpus whose background was set in the late Ming and early Qing Dynasty. It described political and rights struggle in the Chinese feudal society, the struggle of the chivalrous among the martial arts field to overthrow the Qing Dynasty. There are numerous culture-loaded words, allusions, allegorical sayings, idioms everywhere. Through the analysis of the translator's cultural compensation strategies which are common cultural compensation means, including annotation, contextual amplification, and adaption, the study aims to provide some reference to the translation of martial arts novels so that translators can choose correct compensation methods to solve cultural loss. As a result, foreign readers can appreciate the Chinese martial arts style and make the chivalrous spirit of Chinese martial arts go abroad.

2. CASE ANALYSIS IN THE DEER AND THE CAULDRON

2.1 Annotation

Annotation can be divided into transliteration with annotation and literal translation with annotation. It

can also be divided into annotation within the text and annotation outside the text. In this paper only in-text annotation is discussed. “Annotation refers to the information that is indispensable to the understanding of the original text added by the translator after the literal translation of the original words, which is often expressed with obvious punctuations such as brackets and dashes”(Xia, 2006, p. 203). In this way, readers of the translated text can acquire the relevant knowledge of the original language culture and improve their comprehension of the original text.

Example 1:

ST: 又看清兵入关之后，书中于乙酉年书作“隆武元年”、丁亥年书作“永历元年”，那隆武、永历，乃明朝唐王、桂王的年号，作书之人明明白白是仍奉明朝正朔，不将清朝放在眼里。

TT: 1645 was called ‘the first year of Long Wu’, and 1647 ‘the first year of Yong Li’. (*‘Long Wu’ and ‘Yong Li’ were the reign-titles of Prince Tang and Prince Gui, Ming Princes who set up short lived regimes in the South after the Manchus had established themselves in Peking.*) It was patently obvious that the author of the book had followed Ming Court practice throughout for his dates, totally disregarding the existence of the Manchus.

Analysis: The two words “Long Wu” and “Yong Li” in the original text involve the historical and cultural background knowledge of the Ming and Qing Dynasties in China. Long Wu (1645-1646) was the reign title of the emperor Zhu Yujian in the Ming Dynasty and Yong Li (1646-1683) was the reign title of Zhu Youlang who was an emperor in the Southern Ming Dynasty. The imperial clan of Ming Dynasty established the Southern Ming Dynasty in the south of the Yangtze River after Chongzhen Emperor hanged himself in Beijing. After Hongguang Emperor was captured and killed by the troops of Qing Dynasty, Zheng Zhilong, Huang Daozhou and others supported Zhu Yujian to ascend the throne as the emperor in Fuzhou and changed the reign title into Long Wu who was later known as Longwu Emperor and was also called Prince Tang by the later generations. He was the second emperor of the Southern Ming Dynasty. When the army of Qing Dynasty entered Fujian Province in 1646, Longwu Emperor who was in office for only two years was forced into exile and starved to death in Ting Prefecture. In the same year, Zhu Youlang who was the last emperor of the Southern Ming Dynasty proclaimed accession to the throne and changed the reign title into Yong Li in the second year. He inherited the title “Prince Gui” of his father. The translator added a sentence with brackets to introduce to the readers that the two reign titles represented two emperors in succession in the Ming Dynasty, and the Ming Dynasty soon perished. It supplements the relevant cultural background knowledge so that the readers can better understand why mentioning the two reign titles is guilty of conspiring against the Qing state, and it is also favorable for the comprehension of the main storyline through the novel that is rebelling Qing

Dynasty and rebuilding Ming Dynasty.

Example 2:

ST: 前礼部侍郎李令晰为该书作序，凌迟处死，四子处斩。

TT: The former Vice-President of the Board of Rites Li Lingxi who had written the preface to the Epitome had been sentenced to execution by the Slow Process. (*The Slow Process meant that the condemned person’s body was slowly cut away, slice by slice, and only when he had endured every conceivable suffering did they finally cut off his head.*) Vice-President Li’s four sons had been beheaded.

Analysis: “Slow Process” means putting someone to death by dismembering the body which was a cruel death penalty in China’s feudal era, namely what folks call “A Thousand Cuts” which refers to cutting the body slice by slice when executed a person. It is a punishment of dismembering that contains body and limbs separation, after which the remains of the dead body are put into the cabinet while the head is publicly displayed for a certain period. In the early years of the Qing Dynasty, this kind of execution was widely carried out in order to suppress the ethnic resistance of the Han people, and its degree of cruelty far exceeded that of the Ming Dynasty. The annotation introduces to the readers the process of this torture in China’s feudal period. In this way, readers can feel incisively the brutality of the Qing Dynasty rulers to suppress opposition in order to consolidate the rule in the case of the Ming History regardless of the destruction and disintegration of families suffered by many innocent people. Readers can thus have an access to a deeper understanding of the original text, and get the same reading experience as the original readers.

2.2 Contextual Amplification

“Amplification, also known as contextual augmentation, refers to the appropriate addition of information that is taken for granted by the readers of the source language but is little understood by the readers of the target language” (Ke, 1991, p.24). This method is often used to compensate the cultural connotation of the original discourse so that readers can understand and know more about Chinese culture.

Example 3:

ST: 韦小宝闲居无聊之际，想起雅克萨城鹿鼎山下尚有巨大宝藏未曾发掘，自觉富甲天下，心满意足，只是念着康熙的交情，才不忍去断他龙脉。

TT: He had only one nagging regret. Somewhere deep beneath the hill behind Fort Albazin, at the spot on the secret map marked with those two strange signs depicting a Deer and a Cauldron, somewhere deep beneath Mount Luding, he knew there was still a fabulous buried treasure waiting to be dug up. But to dig it up would mean tampering with *the Dragon Line that nourished the destiny of the Manchu Imperial House*. And Kang Xi was still his friend.

Analysis: The association of “dragon” in English is completely different from that of “dragon” in Chinese. As we all know, dragon is a typical representative of Chinese traditional culture. In feudal times, the dragon

was the symbol of imperial power while it represents demon and evil at the west. Therefore, it is necessary to compensate the cultural connotation. Otherwise the target readers will misinterpret the meaning of the original text. “Dragon Line” is a geomantic noun which points to the geographical position that looks like a gleamingly soaring dragon. Geomancy is a mysterious art of the Chinese nation with a long history. It is a philosophy to study the environment and the law of the universe whose core idea is to achieve the harmony between man and nature. One of the superstitions of the ancient people was that the Dragon Line was closely related to the consolidation of state power which was definitely important to the rulers. In the novel, the faction that rebelling Qing Dynasty and rebuilding Ming Dynasty believed that the Qing Dynasty could be destroyed by destroying the Dragon Line that nurtured the rule of the king. The translator used amplification and translated “Dragon Line” by adding an attributive clause to explain it, into “Dragon Line that nourished the destiny of the Manchu Imperial House”. The implied cultural connotation of the term is explicitly expressed, clearing the confusion for the target readers.

Example 4:

ST: 查伊璜见了吴六奇胸口刺字，更无怀疑，说道：“原来将军身在曹营心在汉，适才言语冒犯，多有得罪。”

TT: Zha now understood the significance of the tattooed characters. ‘I see,’ he said. ‘So you are “in the Cao camp, but your heart is with the Han”. I’m afraid I said some very offensive things to you just now. I hope you will forgive me.’ By ‘in the Cao camp’ he was referring to an episode in the famous historical novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* when the great warrior Guan Yu found himself similarly situated.

Analysis: “In the Cao camp, but your heart is with the Han” is an idiom story originating from *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, one of the four great classical novels in China. In the allusion, “Cao Camp” refers to the regime of Cao Cao during The Three Kingdoms Period. “Han” refers to the government of Liu Bei or the declining Eastern Han Dynasty. It means that though General Guan Yu was in the camp of Cao Cao, he remained loyal to Liu Bei or the Han Dynasty. The idiom aims to highlight the loyalty of Guan Yu. It is a metaphor for a person who feels involuntarily for being not in the place of his aspiration whose body is on the opposite side, but his mind still belongs to original side. The direct translation of the original text is clearly beyond the comprehension of foreign readers. The translator added the italic sentence to supplement the source of the allusion, which is conducive to the dissemination of Chinese culture. The word “great warrior” reflects incisively and vividly the praise of loyalty implied by the allusion which facilitates the reader’s understanding of the original story that although Wu Liuqi was an official in the Qing Dynasty, he was actually a firm supporter of the former Ming Dynasty. So he was a faithful person to the same faction that was against Qing Dynasty.

2.3 Adaptation

“The so-called ‘adaptation’ is to translate by using the native expressions of the translated language. In Chinese-English translation, it means to tell Chinese stories and publicize Chinese culture in a way that is in accordance with the language habits and thinking habits of English-speaking nations. It replaces the unique Chinese culture with the cultural traditions of the target language” (Chen, 2006, p.43). The advantage of adaptation is that the translated version can become more authentic and vivid, but some scholars believe that it should be used with caution, because it is unfavorable to the dissemination of the culture of the source language. Moreover, people’s ability to accept new things has greatly improved because of the cultural integration.

Example 5:

ST: “依我官职来说，本来是见不着皇上的，不过凭着咱们王爷的面子，说不定能陞见罢！朝廷里的大老们，对咱们‘西选’的官员总是另眼相看几分。”另一人道：“这个当然，当世除了皇上，就数咱们王爷为大了。”

TT: ‘Strictly speaking, I’m not really senior enough for an audience. But *His Majesty* will probably grant me one, out of consideration for *His Highness* Satrap Wu. They usually make a big fuss of you at Court, if you’re in the Satrap’s personal service.’ ‘That’s only natural,’ put in a third. ‘After all, he is the most powerful man in China, after the Emperor himself.’

Analysis: The word “皇上” refers to ministers’ indirect address to the emperor in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. “王爷” refers to people who are honored the title of prince with good living conditions in the feudal times, which is equivalent to a big landlord who can collect land rent from their own land. According to Wikipedia, “Majesty” means supreme authority, used when talking to or about a king or queen, when calling in third person is “His Majesty”. The rank of “majesty” is higher than “highness” when used as an address; “Highness” means nobility and dignity, used to speak to or about a prince or princess or members of high rank in a reigning dynasty. When calling in second person is “Your Highness” and “His Highness” in third person. The two groups of words are consistent in the use objects and the implied hierarchical system in the two countries. The translator’s naturalized expression does not affect the readers’ understanding of the original text at all. On the contrary, the effect of adaption is even better, which makes the target readers acquire a sense of substitution for the characters in the text and a sense of friendliness to them.

Example 6:

ST: 浙江巡抚是汉人，将军则是满洲人，他生怕巡抚不肯兴此文学大狱，是以定要向满洲将军告发。

TT: The Provincial Governor of Zhejiang at this time was a Chinese civilian; the Military Governor was a Manchu. Wu was afraid that, as a Chinese, the Provincial Governor might be unwilling to start a *literary witch-hunt* in his area. That is why he was determined that the Military Governor should again be the one to receive his denunciation.

Analysis: “Literary Prison” refers to the prison where

the rulers persecuted the intellectuals. *The Encyclopedia of China* defines it as “the prison that was set up in the Qing Dynasty for the offence of characters or the removal of dissidents by the crime of writing.” The “Literary Prison” in the Qing Dynasty is the most brutal oppression in ancient times in which the emperor in Qing Dynasty implemented for the purpose to suppress Han people’s sense of national independence and resistance, build up the authority of the Qing Dynasty ruler and strengthen the centralization of authority. These repressive policies of culture caused social panic and cultural declining which resulted in the confinement of thoughts and devastation of talents. It was a serious impediment to the development and progress of Chinese society. In the novel, the Ming History case opened a bad beginning to demand bribes by a “rebellious book”. Some villains followed Wu’s example and nitpicked other people’s books to blackmail. “A witch-hunt” means literally hunting witches who were judged and executed innocently by the church in the medieval times in the Europe. It refers to political repression in the name of some made-up crimes simply because their opinions are different in the west. The translator translated it into “a literary witch-hunt” which is consistent with the connotation of the word “literary prison”, which indicates the cultural connotation that many innocent people were being punished by excuse of characters. It avoids the cultural loss by literal translation and the burdensome annotation.

CONCLUSION

Some culture-loaded words with Chinese characteristics in martial arts novels are not familiar even to Chinese readers, let alone the foreign readers. Therefore cultural compensation is an indispensable means to spread Chinese culture, or the target readers will be confused due to lack of corresponding cultural background. It is beneficial to the spread of the martial arts novels which is a popular literature in China. Through the analysis of the compensation methods of cultural factors in *The Deer and the Cauldron*, the conclusion can be reached that the

three compensation methods, annotation, amplification and adaptation are the most frequently employed compensation strategies for the translation of martial arts novels. By means of these compensation measures, foreign readers can understand some cultural factors in the original text, so as not to be ignorant of the story plots of the original text.

Nevertheless, each method has its own advantages and disadvantages. The annotation can let the readers know the cultural information of the original text in detail, but at the same time it may cause cumbersome translation and affect the readers’ reading efficiency and even reading interest. The same is true with contextual amplification. Adaptation can make the translation concise and convenient for the target readers to comprehend, but it is not conducive to the communication of Chinese culture. Without cultural exchanges, it is difficult for culture and language to have innovation. In a word, the translator should use the compensation methods flexibly according to the actual situation. They should take translation purpose, translated text and target readers into consideration. What matters is to convey the cultural connotation of the original text as much as possible, and to be responsible for both the original writer and the translation readers to achieve the best balance between the original text and the translated text.

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