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## The Application of Translation Variation Techniques in Martial Arts Fiction: Taking *The Book & The Sword* as an Example

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### Abstract

Distinguishing itself from normal novels by being endowed with Chinese unique chivalrous spirits, Chinese martial arts fiction is the epitome of Chinese culture since it shares a wide range from martial arts styles, heroes' nicknames, national conflicts, love and hate between schools and heroes, and poems to human's body structure. Together with the destitute of martial culture in western world, the complicated plots of martial arts fictions make it extremely difficult for translators to do the work if he adopted complete translation strategy. According to the author's observation, quite a number of translation variation techniques including large scale of addition (added explanations), deletion, etc. have been applied in English-translated Chinese martial arts novels. Therefore, the author intends to take this opportunity to testify the reasonability and practicality of the application of translation variation strategy and techniques in translating martial arts fictions by analyzing Chinese famous kung fu novel *The Book & The Sword* translated by English writer Enshaw.

**Key words:** Translated Martial Arts Fictions; Translation Variation Strategy; Translation Variation Techniques; Reasonability; Practicality

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### INTRODUCTION

*The Book & The Sword* is the first full-length novel written by Jin Yong who was known for his marvelous and incredible martial arts fictions both at home and abroad. The story was about Chen Jialuo and Emperor Qian Long who were actually brothers sharing the same blood. However, Chen was the great helmsman of the Red Flower Society which aimed at recovering the rule of Han nationality by toppling Manchu people's rule, namely Qing Dynasty, while Qian Long was the emperor of Qing Dynasty. Blended with history and legends, the book is a great combination of fancy and reality where heroes' images are vividly described. For instance, people's appearances, complexions, and martial skills they used, martial schools they belonged to, etc. were all delineated and portrayed delicately. Complex martial arts skills such as fists, palms, moves and various weapons including different skills in swords, knives, whips, and clubs make the translation work all the more difficult to accomplish. However, that is where the charm of translated martial arts novels lies.

Primarily put online, the English version of *The Book & The Sword* soon got prevalence in the 1980s and later published in 2005 by Oxford University Press. The book was translated by Graham Earnshaw, an English writer who worked in China for years, and was carefully checked and revised by Rachel May and John Minford. It is found through the author's studies that there are plenty of scholars and researchers studying the translated version of the book, most of them being from the perspective of ideology or complete translation, few eyeing on translation variation which was, as a matter of fact, frequently utilized in the translated book. Hence, this paper is trying to testify that translation variation strategy and techniques are operable in translating kung fu novels.

## 1. THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

Originally put forward by Professor Huang Zhonglian in the late twentieth century, the translation variation enjoys a history of almost twenty years. However, the translation variation applications have long existed even could be traced back to ancient Buddhist sutra translation. According to his studies and researches, Professor Huang Zhonglian finds that translation falls into two categories: complete translation and translation variation. Traditionally, complete translation is more common in most translation cases and it can be recognized easily. As well as complete translation, translation variation is also widely utilized, but it has been paid inadequate heed to in the translation study circles and is sometimes even taken for complete translation. Technically, translation consists of complete translation and translation variation in which the former predominates while the latter is used under some circumstances when complete translation is inappropriate.

Complete translation, as its termination demands, is to seek for full similarities between the original and the translated, especially in literature translation which calls for more compliance with the original in form and flavor from the part of the translation. In other words, complete translation's superiority is given to the forms and flavors of the original, and hence it allows little changes or adaptation. However, translation variation demands that translators put in the shoes of the authors and the target readers, which means that translators are empowered with rights to choose and select the most significant information that the original author prepared for readers as well as target readers' real interests. To be more accurate, in contrast with complete translation, superiority is given to the target readers in translation variation, and translators can have more rights in translating processes other than just follow the suit of the original works. In a word, translation variation asks for changes and efficiencies and the core of it is adaptation.

After years' researches and studies, Professor Huang Zhonglian concluded that there are eight adaptation techniques including addition, deletion, edition, narration, condensation, amalgamation, adaptation and imitation. What needs to be mentioned is that both addition and deletion are commonly seen techniques in complete translation where addition and deletion enjoy a smaller scale than translation variation. To be more accurate, addition and deletion in translation variation are more obvious and macro. In the light of those eight adaptation techniques, they breed twelve translation variation methods including selected translation, edited translation, narrated translation, condensed translation, summarized translation, summarized translation plus comment, translation plus comment, translation plus writing, translation plus explanation, translation plus rewriting, translation plus quotation, and translation plus imitation.

In one word, translation variation consists of eight techniques and twelve methods.

## 2. THE APPLICATION OF TRANSLATION VARIATION IN THE TRANSLATION

### 2.1 Edition

Edition refers to editing which allows the translators to rearrange or reorganize the plots or storylines of the original works by selection, amalgamation, rearrangement and addition, just name a few of it. Taking readers' reading habits and logical thinking into consideration, edition guarantees the translated works more readable and acceptable. Many instances of edition can be found in the translation of *The Book & The Sword* but only two will be presented here on account of space limitation.

Firstly, the whole book's original structure has been completely rearranged by the translator. In the original novel, there were twenty chapters altogether each with a pair of antithetic titles characterized with fourteen characters indicating the chapter's main plots. However, the translated work was edited into nine parts without a title, and each part was consisted of smaller parts like 1, 2, 3 and more. For instance, the first two chapters of the Chinese novel have been amalgamated into one part namely Part 1 which was formed from eight sub-sections in the translated book. The same rule was applied in other chapters. Such edition aims to cater to the target readers' reading habits as well as their logical thinking patterns so that the plots could be comprehended more easily.

Secondly, some of the story lines' sequences have been rearranged by the translator to some degree. For instance, Lu Feiqing, one of the greatest heroes in martial community but a fugitive of the court for he had violated the rules of the court fighting for justice. To escape from the chase of the court, he changed his name and disguised himself as a private tutor of a little girl in the house of Li, who was a military commander of Qing Dynasty. Out of coincidence, his student- the only child of commander Li, Li Yuanzhi found him a good master of martial arts and asked him to teach her kung fu. For fear of being recognized, Lu fled away in the late night without telling Yuanzhi. However, he was hunted by Jiao Wenqi together with Jiao's two companions who wanted Lu's head in exchange of money and position from the court. Jiao was also a good martial master known as one of the Six Guandong Devils. After a hard battle, Lu managed a narrow escape by killing all of the three fighters and he himself was severely wounded. Since he had nowhere to hide and heal his wounds, he had to return to Li's house. Lu asked Yuanzhi not to tell anyone else that he was badly wounded in case of any unnecessary troubles. Yuanzhi agreed and took good care of him. In the translation, the translator didn't follow the time sequence of the original.

Instead, he saved the story as a suspense why Lu showed anxiety when he encountered with other members of Six Guandong Devils after years. To be more accurate, the translator changed the sequence of the reason and the result of the original work in the translated work for the sake of different logical thinking between westerners and easterners. In contrast with Chinese's preference of cause-effect sequence, westerners prefer the reversed sequence.

## 2.2 Addition

Under some circumstances, due to readers' lack of the source cultural backgrounds, especially when there are cultures only exclusive in it, they may feel perplexed and confused if the translator fails in telling them the meaning of those cultural elements. For the sake of readers, the cultural default calls for addition of something in the translation works. Addition generally includes explanation (explaining to the readers the meanings, quotation and history information underlying the language), comment (translators' comment such as views, critics on the translated content to help the readers comprehend easily) and writing (adding some more information related to the word to the translated work). The intention of addition is to help readers comprehend the hidden meanings.

The initial sentence of the story goes like this “清乾隆十八年六月，陕西扶风...” If the translator followed the form of the original sentence by utilizing complete translation, it would be translated like this: “It was the eighteenth year of the reign of Emperor Qian Long in June.” If the readers were Chinese there would be no obstruction in understanding the expression since most Chinese know about Emperor Qian Long in Qing Dynasty, but it's not the case with western readers. What's more, here June must be counted as in the Chinese traditional lunar calendar, equivalent to solar calendar July, implying the hottest days of the year which was hidden information to which the target readers would be blind without any addition in the translation. Therefore, taking these two factors into account, the translator translated the sentence into “It was a hot summer's day in June, 1754, the eighteenth year of the reign of Emperor Qian Long.” We can see that the translator added the exact year before the eighteenth year of reign of Emperor Qian Long, also, he made it clear that the weather was hot. Such addition guarantees the revelation of the hidden information to the target readers.

Secondly, the word “穴道” is frequently seen in martial arts fictions since Xuedao kung fu is one of the basic skills that most kung fu masters utilized in duels which can prevent opponents from moving. Also, it is a term used very often in traditional Chinese medicine. The translator transferred the word into Xuedao point and explanations were given after the word in brackets “(Xuedao points are nerve centers on the body which, when struck, can cause paralysis or even death. The same points are used for different purpose in acupuncture).” If

the translator didn't explain to the readers, they would certainly have no idea what is Xuedao point since it is a word that derived from mandarin. So, the addition here is to help readers grasp the meaning of Chinese traditional culture.

Besides, most heroes from fighting community, especially those against Manchu's reign extremely hated and despised people who ran errands for the Manchu's court. So they called those people “鹰爪”. It is a slang that shows heroes' anger and defiance. The translator used literal translation and changed the word into Eagles Claws; also, taking readers' receptivity into consideration, he added the explanation after the word “Eagles claw was their slang for thugs employed by the Imperial court.” Without explanation like this, there would be difficulty in reading.

In one word, addition is to append necessary information or make explanations to the readers to make them comprehend the concealed information or the characteristic culture elements.

## 2.3 Deletion

Without doubt, the original work contains abundant information, some of which are of significance, others not. To draw an analogy, the original work is like a huge tree with wide spreading branches and luxuriant foliage which conceal the trunk. The main idea is the trunk while subordinate information is part of the branches and foliage. In other words, the main information the author wants to convey to the readers may be concealed within the related information or the side issues. Therefore, the translator shoulders the responsibility to trim off the excess foliage or branches, namely less important ideas, to highlight the most important thoughts, which conforms to the function of deletion technique in translation variation. The aim of deletion is to delete the unnecessary information or redundant message so that the major information could be emphasized and effectively delivered to the readers.

One of the distinctive features of Jin Yong's novels is delicate description in many aspects including the changes of characters' mental processes, facial expressions, body movements in duel. Most of the details were all described exquisitely. Consequently, every hero in the novel was stereoscopic. What's more, the emperor Qian Long was also known as one of the most prolific poets in the history which has been presented in the novel very often by singing poems. Besides, there were scholars who enjoyed reciting poetries. Therefore, the novel embodied respectable literary quotations and intricate poems. If the translator adhered to the original novel's forms and styles strictly and adopted complete translation, it would be a tough job for the translator at one hand, and at another hand, it may possibly become an obstruction for the readers with overloaded information. Because too much information would make the reading process a painful one which is against the readers' initial intentions to have

relaxation by reading the novels of the kind. To make things even worse, it might result in the misunderstanding towards Chinese novels at large on the part of the western readers and such misunderstanding would be impenetrable obstructions in the way of Chinese culture spreading. Hence, the translator has deleted most of excess information to make the main plots clearer to the target readers.

For instance, in the original Chinese version of the book, the story goes like this: after Yuanzhi found her literal teacher was in fact a great master of martial arts, she asked Lu to teach her the real kung fu and her teacher agreed, but later she found she was deceived because she only found a letter left to her written by her teacher. At that time, her teacher was gone. Just as the girl finished reading the letter, she found her teacher come back again seriously wounded. Then the author described the following information: why Lu chose to reject the requirement and fled away, the reason he got hunted by Jiao Wenqi and how they became enemies, how he managed a narrow escape from the three ferocious and cunning fighters and how he killed all of them and destroy the evidence that he had killed them, and how he ran back to Yuanzhi's house and eventually accepted her as his martial arts student. All of that information was described exquisitely and carefully, especially the battle. However, in the translated version, this story was deleted.

What's need to be mentioned is that, here the translator not only utilized deletion, but also adaptation. Adaptation allows the form or the content of the original work to be altered or adapted. In this passage, the translator not only deleted the story but also changed the plot. In the translated work, the story was presented in the way that Yuanzhi was accepted after a few tests which was contradictory to the original work. However, the original work wrote this short story was to tantalize readers' appetite to see how the story will go and it was pretty common in Chinese novels. Consequently, such bait should be a success from the perspective of Chinese readers. Yet, if the translator followed the original work and copied the story to the readers it would be superfluous for the western readers. Besides, such an adaptation should be more acceptable for westerners than literal translation of the story.

Apart from that, Yu Yutong, the fourteenth brother in Red Flower Society was a great fighter nicknamed Golden Flute Scholar. Guided by a great master of martial arts from Wudang School, Yu was also an excellent fighter always using a golden flute as his weapon. Unlike most of other fighters who looked strong and ferocious, Yu was quite a handsome and slender guy and looked like a tender scholar without kung fu due to the fact that he was once a scholar before joining the Society. That was why he was nicknamed as Golden Flute Scholar. The first time he was introduced in the book, Yu was besieged by the enemies. When questioned if he was Golden Flute

Scholar, the scholar answered "yes" and said like this: As a true man will never change his surname or his name, I am indeed Golden Flute Scholar Yu Yutong, and told them meticulously how to write the characters of his name with the purpose to tease the others. The original author wrote this with intention to distinguish Yu from normal kung fu masters at one hand, at another hand to show his despise towards those running dogs who were employed by the court and held the candle to the devil. However, the translator had his own intention which was to trim off superfluous words or sentences in order to clear the way for the readers to access the main information.

## 2.4 Condensation

Condensation gives the translator the rights to condense the original work's content after his observation and selection. It is mainly adopted in the situation when the original work is overloaded with perplexing content which involves too much extra knowledge. Such knowledge would cost extra passages to explain and affect the readability of the translation which would be an unwanted burden for the readers. Therefore, the translator shoulders the duty to use terse and simple words to contain the original content. Consequently, the condensed work would be much shorter than the original one and embody less information. That is one of the characters of condensation.

For instance, in the first chapter of the book, Yuanzhi discovered accidentally that her teacher was a great master when she tried to learn more about the story of the three kingdoms at the noon. At that morning, she had a history class and learned some stories about Zhou Yu and Zhu Geliang, two greatest masterminds in the three kingdoms from *History as a Mirror*. So she decided to come to her teacher in the hope of learning more stories at the noon. Since it was a hot summer's day at the noon, in case that her teacher should be having a noon nap, she wetted one of her finger tips to make a small hole at the window paper and peered into the room only to find that her teacher was using some golden needles to pin dozens of flies at the wall. Knowing kung fu from the book, she understood instantly that only a master was capable of conducting such a good skill. And that was how she found her literal teacher was indeed a master of kung fu.

Without telling the western readers about *History as a Mirror*, the translator presented the story about Zhou Yu and Zhu Geliang, either. Instead, he condensed the whole background information into one sentence: "a fourteen-year-old girl skipped towards her teacher's study, eager for a history lesson." To be more accurate, the original information was condensed into a history lesson, with only three simple words. As is mentioned above, if the translator introduced *History as a Mirror* and told the readers the identities of Zhu Geliang and Zhou Yu, then he would have to spend more space to explain to the readers. But condensation gives the translator a chance to save time and passage without missing the main information.



Therefore, condensation should be the best technique under such circumstances.

One more information needs to be mentioned here which is that, the translator of *The Book & The Sword* is an English writer who has a totally different ideology with Chinese since he is from UK. Consequently, there must be some changes or adaptation in the translated book under the influence of the ideology. For instance, the translator called a master of kung fu a “knight” who were fair-minded and always warmhearted in helping or saving others when seeing the weak was in danger. However, we know that the Chinese “大侠” is quite different from the word “knight” since it refers to an honorary title granted by a monarch or other political leader. And a knight serves for the political purposes while the word “大侠” does not since they only do justice out of their own consciousness without any political intentions. And this is also one of the evidence showing translation variation to some degree.

It should also be mentioned at the end of the discussion that apart from addition, the other translation variation techniques including condensation, edition, and adaptation embody some degree of deletion. Also, edition and adaptation contain a certain degree of addition under some specific situations. That means all of those translation variation may be interdependent on each other, and there exists no definite addition or deletion. What needs to be mentioned hereby is that the English version of *The Book & The Sword* contains massive translation variation techniques of which this paper could not have made a full list.

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## CONCLUSION

It's generally held in the translation circle that literature translation should be fully or completely translated, especially in regards of the original work's form, content and style. Many translators or translation researchers permit no changes or adaptations in literature translation. Translation variation is allowed only in the translation of information-oriented texts as news, science, technology, instruction and so on. However, as is seen, Chinese martial arts fiction is distinguishable from normal literature as it is more complicated with more Chinese Wushu terms and other culture-loaded elements. Hence, it should not be confined in the area of the complete translation.

The English version of *The Book & The Sword* was eventually published as a print book following its online popularity. As a matter of fact, the success comes from the translator's appropriate strategy in utilizing translation variation techniques including addition, deletion, edition, condensation and amalgamation, just name a few of it. If the translator failed in taking western readers' receptivity into consideration and adopted the complete translation strategy all the time, the translated version might be lengthy and tedious for western readers. In one word, only by taking into account the readers' interests and receptivity could a translation ensure the readability of the book and realize the literary value and charm of the original.

Under the call of the nation to propagate Chinese culture to the world, we translators should take on the responsibility to introduce more Chinese classical novels including martial arts fictions to the outside world. Such an ambition takes times to realize, and at the beginning of the course, changes and adaptation should be appropriate choices which supported by the translation variation. Therefore, given the success of the English version of *The Book & The Sword*, the application of translation variation techniques has its own reasonability as well as maneuverability.

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