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On the English Translation of Chinese Film Titles From the Perspective of *Skopostheorie*

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Abstract

In the present age of globalization, film is an important form in cross-cultural communication. By watching foreign films, a certain degree of understanding of another culture can be gained. With Chinese films getting more and more attention, Chinese films are introduced into the outside world, therefore, the translation of Chinese film titles is of great importance. Excellent translated film titles can surmount the cultural obstacles, playing a better role in publicizing the film and spreading the Chinese culture. In order to obtain appreciations from audiences in different countries, the study of translation strategy of Chinese film titles has become a trend, which is a grand mission entrusted by the time.

The translation of film titles is a kind of language transformation and also a commercial activity, with a purpose of pursuing market efficiency and commercial profits. Its ultimate aim is to attract the audiences' eye-balls, touching the chords of potential audiences and buying the tickets to watch the movies. The advantage of translating movie titles under *Skopostheorie* is to have a thorough understanding of the essence of *Skopos* and to make clear of its translation intention for the translator. The translator is able to take cultural differences between target language countries and source language countries into account, choosing the translation strategy flexibly.

The present thesis tries to make a further study on the translation of Chinese film titles from the perspective of *Skopostheorie*. *Skopostheorie* defines translation as a purposeful activity as well as an intercultural communication, thus bringing more valuable insights into translation studies and giving a new perspective to the study of film title translation. First, *Skopostheorie* is proposed and some important viewpoints are elaborated. Then, film genres and basic knowledge of film titles are introduced including the differences between English film titles and Chinese film titles. From the perspective of the core theory of German Functionalist, *Skopostheorie*, this thesis pays great emphasis on how to use the translation strategies of domestication and

foreignization, coming to a conclusion that domestication should be given priority to with foreignization a supplement. The reason is that the primary purpose of film titles is to achieve commercial benefits, but the effect of foreignization shouldn't be ignored for it can spread the culture. The analysis of Chinese movie titles aims to offer evidence in support of when to use the domestication and when to use the foreignization.

Key Words: Chinese film titles; *Skopostheorie*; Domestication; Foreignization; Translation

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摘要

在当今这个全球化的时代，电影已成为跨文化交际的一个重要形式。通过观看外国电影，可以迅速地对另一种文化产生一定程度的了解。随着中国电影越来越引起世界的关注，中国电影开始走出国门，走向世界，因此中国电影片名的翻译就变得十分重要了，优秀的译名能跨越文化障碍，更好地宣传影片，促进中华文化的传播和交流。要想使中国电影得到不同文化范围内观众的欣赏，研究中文电影片名英译的翻译策略已成为一种必然，这是时代赋予我们的责任。

电影片名翻译是一种语言转换，也是一种商业行为，其目的在于追求市场效益和商业利润，尽最大可能争取吸引眼球，打动潜在观众，促成其观赏行动。以目的论来指导电影片名翻译，其优势在于能够更加深入地理解电影片名翻译的目的性本质，明确翻译意图，使译者能够综合考虑目的语国家与源语国家的文化差异，灵活地选择翻译策略。

本文尝试从功能翻译理论中的目的论的角度对中文电影片名翻译进行进一步的研究。目的论突破了传统翻译理论，提出了翻译行为并不是单纯的语际转换，而是一种有目的的行为活动，并且还是一种有目的的跨文化的交际活动，从而进一步丰富了翻译理论，并为影视翻译实践开辟了一个新视角。从德国功能主义的核心理论——目的论出发，着重探讨如何合理地使用两种主要的翻译策略——归化和异化，继而得出电影片名的翻译应以归化为主，异化为辅，原因在于电影片名翻译的首要目的是实现商业效益。但是异化的作用也不可忽视，异化可以起到传播文化的作用。将中文影片片名的翻译作为例子进行分析，旨在印证在目的论指导下何时选择归化策略，何时选择异化的翻译策略。

关键词：中文电影片名；目的论；归化；异化；翻译

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Since the first film appeared in France in the year 1895, it has been over a century. Films have become one of the most influential mass media and achieved its place as one of the most popular arts. Films have magic power over the audiences from teenagers to adults, from the old to the young. The title to a film is just like the title to a book. Some are charming, while some are boring. However, what differentiates a film from a book is that readers may read the content of a book before they decide whether to buy it or not, but audiences cannot see the details before they buy a ticket, although they may first check on the internet for a rough idea of the film. Therefore, a film title, with only a few words, becomes a key connection between audiences and the content itself.

With China's opening up and reform policy, more and more foreign films are welcomed to Chinese market, as a result, the translation of movie titles attracts more attention than ever before, especially title translation, because the title is the first sight of a film, conveying messages such as culture, aesthetics and commerce. A lot of western movies are imported into China, thus Chinese people have been more and more familiar with western culture. At the same time, we have the duty to spread Chinese culture, like promoting the status of our Chinese films in the whole world. China has produced many excellent films which should be introduced to foreign countries. Many scholars have done researches on the translation of English movie titles, however, there are few relative researches on the translation of Chinese movie titles. It is necessary to do this kind of research because introducing Chinese movies to the world without eye-catching titles is impossible. This thesis mainly deals with the translation of film titles from Chinese to English.

A good movie title can not only provide information about movie content and genre to the audience but also arouse audiences' imagination and curiosity towards the movie. A perfect combination of a good movie title with rich content weighs

much on the success of a movie.

For decades, when translating literature, Chinese translators believe in the theory of “Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance” provided by Yan Fu. And indeed this theory has made great contributions to literary translation. However, unlike literary translation, in the field of non-literary translation, such as film title translation, it is important to seek a guiding theory for the translation.

The theory of this thesis is based on Hans J. Vermeer’s *Skopostheorie* which holds the idea that the end justifies the means. According to functional approach theories, translation is an intentional, communicative, interpersonal and intercultural action, so film title translation also has the same characteristics as other translation activities. Functionalism can effectively guide the film title translation activities. The author of this thesis focuses on two translation strategies of domestication and foreignization under *Skopostheorie*. The situations when to adopt domestication and when to adopt foreignization are analyzed in this thesis.

1.1 Brief Review of Relevant Research of the Translation of Film Titles in China

The functionalist approach started in the 1970s in Germany and was introduced into China in the 1990s by Zhang Nanfeng (张南峰, 1995) and Chen Xiaowei (陈小慰, 1995). However, it was not widely accepted until the republication of two books entitled *Translation as A Purposeful Activity: Functional Approaches* (Nord, 2001) and *Translation Criticism: The Potentials & Limitations* (Reiss, 2004).

From then on, some Chinese translators have done many researches in this field. There are four representatives: He Ning (何宁, 1998), He Ying (贺莺, 2001), Mao Fasheng (毛发生, 2002) and Li Qun (李群, 2001). They have discussed the translation of movie titles and subtitles. He Ning makes a systematic study of the factors that should be taken into account, such as the original title, the relevance of content and title, the acceptability of the audiences in the target culture and cultural differences. He Ying makes a breakthrough by introducing concepts of functional

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