

Research on Translation Methods of Traditional Chinese Medicine Stories from the Perspective of Thick Translation

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Abstract: The interpretation of culture in Traditional Chinese Medicine translation plays a vital role in the cross-cultural communication of TCM. Since TCM stories are rich in TCM culture and Chinese culture, their cultural connotation should be conveyed as much as possible in translation. This paper intends to study the applicable translation methods through the discussion of typical TCM story translation, from the perspective of Thick Translation, to help readers better understand the connotation of TCM stories and thus promote the spread of Chinese culture.

1. Introduction

With the development of economic globalization, the trend of diversified development of world culture becomes more apparent. China is also actively integrating into this general trend and trying to make its own voice. As an outstanding representative of Chinese culture, Traditional Chinese Medicine (hereafter referred to as TCM) is gaining more and more attention around the world. Therefore, the cross-cultural communication of TCM is of great significance to the spread of Chinese culture. Since translation is the media in cross-cultural communication of Chinese medicine culture, it plays a vital role in the process. However, for a long time, due to the complexity of TCM itself and other historical and political reasons, there are many mistranslations and missing translations in Chinese medicine translation, especially the cultural default. Therefore, How to convey the profound culture contained in TCM and how to convey Chinese medicine to western readers completely and accurately is always a major problem that plagues the Chinese medical translation community. In view of this, the study uses Thick Translation as a theoretical guide to explore the translation methods and skills of TCM stories.

2. Thick Translation

In the 1990s, American translation theorist Kwame Anthony Appiah put forward the concept of "Thick Translation" based on "Thick description" proposed by the cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz. Also known as "thick contextualization", it refers to the addition of various annotations, commentaries, and long prefaces to the translated text, placing the translated text in a rich cultural and linguistic environment to facilitate the integration of what is being obscured by text with the translator's intention ^[1]. Theo Hermans, a British translation theorist, introduces "Thick Description" and "Thick translation" in his article "Intercultural Translation Studies as Thick Translation." He believes that cross-cultural understanding is a complex and endless process of interpretation. Understanding and translation are closely related, actually, understanding is translation. Historical or anthropological methods can provide new ideas for cross-cultural translation. Thick translation is

an effective way to reduce translation difficulty and cross-cultural misunderstanding. For instance, Yan Fu, a translator in China in the late Qing Dynasty, is a typical example of using Thick translation methods. He uses a large number of words, notes, commentaries, etc. in the translation, in order to discuss the historical background of the original work, the historical position of the author's academic viewpoint, similar theories in Chinese traditional culture, and the author's point of view. Apia believes that "thick translation" is to put text in a rich cultural and linguistic environment through annotations, commentary and other methods, so that the characteristics of the source language culture can be preserved, with the aim of promoting the target language culture to the other culture, giving a fuller understanding and deeper respect (Appiah, 2000: 427). The academic community generally believes that this translation method is particularly suitable for cultural books, academic works and a few literary works rich in cultural information. The recipients are mostly foreign readers and researchers interested in the original text and the culture behind it ^[2]. It also provides a theoretical basis for cultural equality and the spread of national culture. In the Chinese translation community, domestic scholars have gradually recognized the advantages of Thick translation. Ding Nianqing and other scholars believe that Thick Translation make it possible to respect the special features of Chinese medicine culture, and preserve the difference between Chinese medicine culture and Western medicine culture as a cultural reality in the translated text, through preface, footnote, endnote, intertextual interpretation, and extraterritorial Interpretative texts such as explanations, affixed words, attached vocabulary, and vocabulary providing background information, so that the target readers have the opportunity to understand the Chinese medicine culture, and therefore stimulate the target readers to explore the interest of the source language culture contained in the Chinese medicine text, and would in turn help the target readers to comprehend the Chinese medicine text.

3. The Language, Text Features and English Translation Status quo of TCM Stories

There is currently no unified definition of TCM stories. It generally includes stories, historical celebrities, legends, medical affairs, medical words, medical treatments, prescriptions, and interesting cases, such as the stories on the Forums of *the Ancient Chinese Medicine in the Hundreds of years*; the stories of traditional Chinese medicine treatments, for instance, *Worshipping Buddha to Treat Diseases*, etc.; the stories of the magical effects of traditional Chinese medicine, such as *Angelica, Yinchen*. In addition, some well-known idioms also contain TCM stories, such as *Beigongsheying*; medical history allusions, such as *Xinglinchunnuan*.

TCM stories contain rich historical, geographical, astronomical, folk and other cultural factors. It is a highly condensed Chinese medicine culture and traditional culture. Through narrative, the Traditional Chinese medical philosophy and the cultural essence of the Chinese nation are integrated into interesting stories. Compared with TCM terms, stories are more easily accepted by the general public and are therefore inherently transmissible. For example, *Shennong tasting herbs*, reflects the culture of fishing and hunting before the farming era, the tribal culture headed by Shennong, and the important concept of Chinese medicine—the Homology of medicine and food, as well as the humanistic spirit of the great doctor.

Literature shows that these TCM stories have not been collected for a long time, but scattered in other books and history books, Monographs on which have not appeared until recent years. With the "going out" strategy of Chinese culture, Chinese medicine classics, stories and other works rich in Chinese traditional culture have received more and more attention. The theory and practice of spreading Chinese culture through TCM stories have started, however the study of TCM story translation and practice is still quite scarce. At present, only Professor Xu Jingsheng and a few other

scholars have been engaged in this field. In recent years, there have been popular versions of TCM story translations and picture books published successively, showing the achievement of TCM story translation. But most of them are just brief introduction of the TCM story, with main focus on the content of the story, neglecting Chinese culture latent in them. An overview of the relevant literature shows that translation and cross-cultural communication of TCM stories has been very insufficient thus leaving great research space.

4. The Application of Thick Translation Method in the Translation of TCM Stories

Traditional Chinese medicine is deeply rooted in Chinese traditional culture, and The story of Chinese medicine is a highly condensed form of Chinese medicine culture and Chinese traditional culture. This paper attempts to take the typical stories of traditional Chinese medicine as examples to explore the translation methods and techniques of traditional Chinese medicine methods and techniques to maximize the Chinese culture of Chinese medicine contained in the TCM story.

In the story of Chinese medicine, there are many culture-loaded words, which play a key role in the communication of the cultural connotation of the text. These words are often unique in China, and direct transliteration is a desirable translation. This also seems to be the consensus of scholars. However, in a specific discourse, in order to convey its cultural connotation more deeply and completely, it is necessary to add explanatory discourse either in the text or after the text.

Example 1:

回到家中，他查阅资料，反复琢磨，又加上了一味叫墨旱莲的中药来增强疗效，并将女贞子和墨旱莲做成药丸命名为二至丸。《白发转黑》^[5]

Fig.1 the story of white hair turning white

“Erzhiwan” (in figure1) is a pill made from the two herbs, namely, privet collected on winter solstice and Eclipta in the summer solstice. The efficacy of Chinese medicine is closely related to the collection time. Privet collected in the winter solstice and eclipta collected in the summer solstice are thought to have the best efficacy. Therefore, the prescription is named as Er (two) Zhi (solstice) Wan (pill). The prescriptions of traditional Chinese medicine do not have corresponding vocabulary in the West, since there is no such formula substitute for it in the west. Generally, in order to maintain the originality and nationality of Traditional Chinese Medicine prescriptions, there are two translation methods commonly used, namely, literal translation and transliteration. Accordingly “Erzhiwan” was translated as Two Solstice Pills or Er Zhi Wan. The former used the literal translation method, by which the concept of the summer solstice and the winter solstice is successfully conveyed. However it did not fully explain the specific relationship between the two solstices and the prescription. The latter is simply translated into Chinese Pinyin “Er Zhi Wan” by transliteration. Although the Chinese pronunciation is preserved, it still does not effectively convey the pharmacological knowledge of Traditional Chinese Medicine, that is, the close relationship between the collection time and curative effect of Traditional Chinese Medicine. Yet, if a note is added directly after transliteration in the text, the connotation cannot be clearly stated even though more than one long sentences are used, to make it even worse, the lengthiness of the sentence will be caused as to affect the readability of the translation. In this case, in order to thoroughly explain the origin of “Erzhiwan” and the culture of Chinese Medicine contained in it, Thick translation theory could be adopted to provide guidance for translation. As in the practice of the Confucius Institute, transliteration is used in the text, and the annotation part of the Chinese medicine formula is placed in the footnote part, at the bottom of the page or after the text, just as

follows:

In the text: Finally, he produced a pellet made of privet and eclipta (a herb used to strengthen the drug's effect), and named it "Er Zhi Wan"

annotation after the text:

The harvest season of Chinese medicines is critical for their quality. The medicine's efficacy and toxic side-effects differ during different periods. Thus, the collection of medicinal materials must be done in the appropriate season. The reason that this prescription's name is "Er Zhi Wan"(two solstice pills) is because the two chosen medicinal materials must be picked during different seasons for their medicinal efficacy. Privet is best picked during the days of Dong Zhi (winter solstice),and eclipta in Xia Zhi (summer solstice.) therefore, the prescription is called "Er Zhi Wan".

In this way, the Chinese medicine culture information contained in "Erzhiwan" is supplemented, and the reader has a better understanding of the relevant knowledge and culture of TCM Chinese medicine.

Example 2:

朱熹接过莲子粥，又将它端到母亲面前，愧疚地说：“母亲，您每天从早到晚操劳，还是您先喝吧！”望着这懂事的孩子，母亲说：“孩儿，莲乃花中君子，它浑身都是宝，做人也该如此。”《桂圆莲子粥》

Fig.2 the story of lotus porridge

Most translators translate "Huazhongjunzi" (in figure 2) into "the gentleman among all flowers". Because gentleman in English is often used to correspond "Junzi", even in the translation of *The Analects* , "Junzi" have been translated into "gentleman" (Lu Zhang , 2017). This kind of translation is based on the principle of similarity, by adopting the domestication strategy, it is convenient for Western readers to understand the meaning of "Junzi" . Although there are similarities between the two, in fact, the cultural connotations of gentlemen in English culture and "Junzi" in Chinese culture are far apart. The former mainly refers to those who are educated, modest and courteous, while the ancient Chinese "Junzi" have two main meanings, one refers to the upper-level aristocratic men, and the second refers to the outstanding virtues. These two meanings may sometimes be distinguished in specific texts, but more often the two meanings are mixed. Therefore, simply using gentleman to correspond "Junzi" will inevitably wipe out the cultural connotation of the gentleman, and it will also cause misunderstandings to Western readers. Moreover, in this sentence, the mother used the lotus as a metaphor to refer to the gentleman's personality: high morality, goodness for others. If this is translated into gentleman, obviously it does not meet the mother's expectations for Zhu Xi. Therefore, to preserve the cultural connotation of "Junzi" , it is necessary to adopt Thick Translation method. It is advisable to transliterate "Junzi" into Junzi to retain the characteristics of his national cultural pronunciation. However, by pure transliteration, the purpose of cultural exchange still can not be fully achieved, instead, the readers get even more confused .So a comment should be added later to further explain its meaning, as the English translation of the " Junzi " specified in the *Chinese Ideological and Cultural Terminology Communication Project* is: Junzi (man of virtue)^[7]. In this way, cultural misreading is reduced, and readers' understanding of their cultural connotations is deepened. It is not too long in the text and does not affect the readability of sentences

Example 3: a Chinese Idiom-- Xuanhujishi

Doctors with kind heart and good skills save people from pains, suffering or death. They are

usually praised by people as “Xuanhujishi”. “Hu” is the gourd, because the ancient gourd is a utensil, doctors often store the medicine in the gourd, and A synonym for practicing medicine. “Gourd” is also a symbol of Taoist culture. The story of “Xuanhujishi” comes from *Post Han script, Fangshu, Fei Changfang Biography*. Currently There are two version of English translations of this story: Professor Xu Jingsheng translated it as “the hanging pot”^[4]; and in *Series of Painting of TCM Culture* it was translated as “Xuan Hu Ji Shi”^[6]. The former extracted the key information in the title, literally translated as “the hanging pot”. Although it has a good hint for the content of the story, but the cultural image it conveys is not accurate. While the latter treats it as a cultural term in China, a four-character idiom. Because of its uniqueness and irreplaceability, it uses transliteration, but readers cannot receive any information from the title. From the perspective of Thick Translation, both of the two translations have inadequacies in conveying Chinese medicine culture. It is better to combine the two. The title is translated into Xuan Hu Ji Shi (the hanging guard) by the combination of transliteration and literal translation, so that the Chinese idiom is preserved, that is, the attributes of its national culture are preserved, meantime, a note hanging guard is added after it to help readers with the story content. At the end of the story, a note (note or tip) can be added to explain the meaning of “hanging the pot”.

After-text note:

During the Eastern Han Dynasty, the pharmaceutical industry was not yet separated. Doctors used their own self-made medicines. If they go out to perform treatment, they use the gourd to carry the medicine for treatment. Like a small pharmacy that flows, the gourd is therefore regarded as a symbol of Chinese medicine. The idiom “Xuanhujishi” now indicates that doctors have magic arts in relieving the pain or suffering of those who are sick. It also becomes a doctor’s mission to offer medical help to the sick people.

5. Conclusion

Thick Translation has opened up a new perspective for cross-cultural communication of Chinese medicine and broadened the boundaries of translation. By increasing the cultural context of the text, the reader is placed in the cultural context of the original language, which helps to reproduce the original language culture and reflects the respect for the original language culture and cultural equality. In the translation of TCM stories, through the preface, footnotes, endnotes, in-text interpretations, after-text explanations, notes, postscript, vocabulary list, etc., increase their cultural thickness, and make them interested in culture. The reader better understands the Chinese medicine culture hidden behind the language and deepens the understanding of Chinese medicine. How to use Thick Translation in Chinese medicine texts should also be considered in combination with other factors such as translation purpose, text characteristics, audience psychology and so on.

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