Cultural Translation in *Moment in Peking* From the Perspective of Relevance Theory[*]

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Moment in Peking is a great work with many cultural translation elements. Due to Lin Yutang's bilingual cultural background and exquisite language skills, the work has achieved the success in the textual communicative function as well as in spreading Chinese culture to the world. The paper analyses three cultural elements, such as character appellation culture, social customs, and religious culture from the perspective of Relevance Theory. Meanwhile, discussions are also combined with translation strategies to dig out the guidance of "Best Relevance" towards cultural translation.

Keywords: Relevance Theory, cultural translation, *Moment in Peking*

Introduction

According to Relevance Theory, language communication is a process of cognition and inference and the understanding of utterance is a cognitive activity. Relevance Theory is not a translation theory, but it can effectively explain translation activities (Zhao, 1999). Lin Yutang's *Moment in Peking* is a successful translation in Chinese-to-English cultural transformation. There are various factors for its success, certainly, including Mr. Lin Yutang's efforts in translating cultural elements. From the perspective of Relevance Theory, the process of translation is actually the process of constructing a cultural context and promoting the reader's cognitive reasoning to achieve the communicative purpose. From that perspective, this paper will explore the translation of cultural elements in *Moment in Peking* and think about the use of domestication and foreignization strategies in this process.

Overview of Relevance Theory and Optimal Relevance

Overview of Relevance Theory

Relevance Theory, proposed by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson (2001), is a theory of cognitive pragmatics and language communication. They point out that "communication is an obvious inferential process involving information meaning and communicative intention" (p. 45). Then, their student Ernst August Gutt (1991) combined it with translation studies and puts forward relevance translation theory. He points out that translation is a process of reasoning. His research is pointed to the mechanism of human brain. The context of

utterance is the premise to explain all utterances (Gutt, 1991). It is worth noting that the context here emphasizes the psychological ability to solve the discourse rather than the external environment of the participants (Wang, 2012). In other words, context does not refer to the external language environment, but refers to the "cognitive environment" constructed by the speaker to the listener. Lin Kenan, a domestic scholar, summarized Relevance Theory. He points out that the best relation is not the greatest relation, but the appropriate one. Therefore, what the listener needs is not the maximum relevance, but the minimum processing effort to get the maximum contextual effect. More importantly, the reader does not have to make unnecessary efforts to achieve the purpose of communication (Lin, 1994). Combined with specific text translation, a successful translation should be the one that the translator constructs a reasonable cognitive context for the target readers, with the target readers spend less reasoning or cognitive efforts, so as to achieve the purpose of communication and realize the understanding of the target text.

Optimal Relevance

"Optimal Relevance" is a basic concept in Relevance Theory. The strength of relevance depends on two factors: processing effort and contextual effect (Lin, 1994). Therefore, generally speaking, the smaller the reader's effort, or the better the contextual effect, the stronger the relevance. But the fact is not that simple. Gutt (1991) once pointed out that the main point of Relevance Theory is that the key to human communication is to create an expectation of optimal relevance. That is to say, the listener expects his cognition to produce enough contextual effects with the lowest processing cost (Gutt, 1991). In short, Relevance Theory holds that successful communication comes from the realization of Optimal Relevance. In other words, the listener hopes that he can obtain sufficient contextual effect without too much effort and it is worth his reasoning and cognition. The Best Relevance is not the maximum relevance, but the appropriate relevance. Therefore, what the listener needs is not the maximum relevance, that is, the maximum contextual effect with the minimum processing effort, but the optimal relevance. In this way, the reader does not have to make unnecessary efforts to achieve the communicative purpose. When it comes to translation, it means that the translator takes efforts to make the target readers realize the inference of the target text with the help of appropriate context in the process of cognition, or to achieve "optimal relevance", so as to understand the connotation of the original text

A Brief Introduction to *Moment in Peking*

Moment in Peking, once nominated for the Nobel Prize, has won great honor for modern Chinese literature. Although it is a work created in English, it is full of Chinese customs. The reason why Mr. Lin Yutang presented such a work is highly related to the background of the times. Mr. Lin Yutang is well versed both in Chinese and English. He has visited many European and American countries. He observes that the European and American people know little about China's culture, including history and tradition. Therefore, from the standpoint of Chinese culture, Lin Yutang views Chinese culture objectively and chooses to create cross-cultural works in English in order to spread Chinese culture to the west. He exports Chinese culture to the west through stories and showed the real "image of China" (Guo & Du, 2019, p. 76). Lin Yutang also expressed the humanistic spirit and life wisdom of Chinese brilliant traditional culture through this book.

The novel is set in China at the beginning of the last century, starting from the Boxer Movement of 1899 and ending in the July 7th incident of 1937. The story revolves around the Yao family, Zeng family, and Niu family in Beijing, showing the social style and vicissitudes of that era. In this story carefully compiled by Lin

Yutang, it is not difficult to understand its profound intention of showing Chinese history and Chinese cultural allusions. In the novel, many historical events are involved, such as the Boxer Movement, Yuan Shikai's seizure of power, the May 4 movement, the March 18 massacre, the outbreak of World War II, etc. Besides, the name of the heroine is taken from the ancient Chinese heroine Mulan. The heroine's sister "Mo Chou", which means "don't worry", comes from the name of a lady from a rich family. The heroine's cousin "Hongyu" is talented and unfortunate. In view of her name, it is not difficult to think of Lin Daiyu in *A Dream in Red Mansions*, one of the ancient Chinese masterpieces. All in all, Lin Yutang's efforts to embody the connotation and details of Chinese culture can be seen everywhere in his works.

The Application of Relevance Theory in the Cultural Translation of *Moment in Peking*

Although the emergence of Relevance Theory is later than that of *Moment in Peking*, in fact, it has infiltrated into the Relevance Theory in translation activities. However, when Relevance Theory came into being, translation activities had a scientific basis and guiding ideology. The embodiment of Relevance Theory in translation is that the translator tries to make the text get the Best Relevance and show the intention of the original text by building a bridge. In the process of cognitive translation, the reader realizes the understanding of the original text by acquiring the context. The interpretation of cultural elements is involved in *Moment in Peking*. Culture is a profound concept. Taylor defined it as "culture or civilization is a complex whole, which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, ethics, customs and any other abilities and habits acquired by people as members of society through learning" (Guo, 2002, p. 115). The elements of culture, such as beliefs, customs, habits, and so on, can be found everywhere. From the perspective of Relevance Theory, the author believes that the novel fully considers the cultural relevance in readers' cognition, such as the relationship between Chinese and western characters' appellations, social customs, and religious culture. In this process, some strategies are adopted. Among them, domestication and foreignization are active members. Domestication and foreignization are flexibly exerted to achieve the effective transmission of cultural elements.

Cultural Relevance of Character Appellation

The appellation of characters is a common translation element in literary works, and there is no lack of such translation in *Moment in Peking*. Here are some specific examples.

Example 1: Her name of address in the household had been kueichieh or "sister case" before she was raised from maid to concubine (p. 39).

This is an introduction of Guijie's identity and appellation when she first appears. It is worth noting that Lin Yutang adopts the strategy of domestication and foreignization in the translation of Guijie's appellation. "Kueichieh" is translated according to Wechsler's Pinyin, retaining the characteristics of appellation expression in Chinese; "sister Cassia" is a typical free translation, sister means sister in English, "Cassia" is osmanthus and the combination of both translation strategies is "sister GUI". This expression conforms to the cognition of Western readers and is convenient for western readers to understand their identity. From the perspective of Relevance Theory, Lin Yutang combines the original meaning of "sister GUI" with "kueichieh" and "sister" by virtue of domestication and foreignization. "Cassia" is the best way for western readers to understand the expression of Chinese appellation, which not only reflects the expression characteristics of Chinese character appellation, but also enables Western readers to find relevant information in the existing cognition of appellation, so as to realize the effective transmission and dissemination of Chinese appellation culture.

Example 2: Mulan was called by others—Erh Hsiaochieh (the second daughter), and Mochow was called San Hsiaochieh (the third daughter) in the household.

In the beginning part of the book, there are many introductions to the appellation of characters, and the above example is one of them. Here is the description of the title of Mulan and her sister Mochou. Lin Yutang does not use "the second daughter" and "the third daughter" directly when he translates them from Chinese. Instead, he adopted the strategy of foreignization and translated them in the way of transliteration and annotation. It is obvious that he holds the intention to show the cultural characteristics of Chinese appellation. In addition, similar to Example 1, through such expression, Mr. Lin Yutang established an effective context in the Western readers' understanding of Chinese appellation culture, so that they can infer and understand the characteristic expression of Chinese appellation through the existing appellation cognition. There is no lack of wonderful description of the names of the characters in the book.

Example 3: Mulan (Magnolia) was the name of a Chinese Joan arc, cellular in a well-known poem, who took her father's place as a general in an army campaign for 12 years without being recognized… (p. 13)

The above example is the introduction of Mulan's name at the beginning of the article. The expression of "Mulan (Magnolia)" is similar to that in Examples 1 and 2, which will not be repeated here. Let us focus on the expression "Chinese Joan arc". First of all, from the perspective of Relevance Theory, the principles of domestication and foreignization are both means to achieve communicative purposes. In order to achieve the best contextual effect, in other words, to achieve the Best Relevance, the choice of domestication and foreignization is flexible. Different from the above example, the Chinese Joan "Arc" is obviously a domesticated translation. In order to strengthen the Western readers' understanding of the connotation and deep meaning of the heroine's name, Lin Yutang uses Joan of arc, which is well-known in the West, to make them have an effective association and reasoning with the character, so as to understand the character's character and realize the female character "Mulan" in Chinese history hero. Lin Yutang's intention of using this name to convey typical characters in ancient China is also realized.

Cultural Relevance in Social Customs

There are many descriptions of social customs in Beijing, such as tomb sweeping, Chongxi, concubine, and so on. Here are some specific examples to analyze.

Example 4: She had hoped the following spring pingya could return to Shantung on the pretext of "sweeping the grave" at Qingming Festival, at the beginning of the third moon, but his parents did not approve, because it was too long a journey and would interfere with studies.

This is the description of the tomb sweeping to pingya in Qingming Festival. In describing the Qingming Festival, Lin Yutang adopts the strategy of foreignization, showing the two cultural terms "Qingming Festival" and "Tomb Sweeping". Certainly, for Western readers, "Qingming Festival" is a strange concept. In order to take care of the reading experience of western readers, so that they can have a basic understanding of the time of the festival without searching background information. Lin Yutang carefully uses the expression "at the beginning of the third moon" to supplement, which is a domestication treatment. It can be seen that Lin Yutang fully considered the readers' cognitive basis in his translation of Qingming Festival. Through the combination of domestication and foreignization, he creates an appropriate context for the readers, so that the readers do not have to make unnecessary efforts to achieve the cognitive purpose. Naturally, it is also natural to achieve optimal correlation.

Example 5: Second, because she believed in tsunghsi, or conflicting an evil by a happy event, in short, having the wedding while the boy was ill.

The above example is the description of Mrs. Zeng's idea of letting her marry pingya. "Chong Xi" is a kind of feudal superstition in ancient China. Its content is to let a person, who has been ill for a long time, marry others, and use this "happy event" to "Chong" bad luck, so as to achieve the effect of treating diseases. In his translation of this custom, Lin Yutang did not translate it as "warding off wedding", but adopts the strategy of foreignization, which directly shows this characteristic culture of China. In order to enhance understanding, specific explanations are given later. Although there is no saying of "Chong Xi" in the West, the word "evil" is a very idiomatic English expression. It is very appropriate to correspond it with the bad luck and bad luck in the Chinese context. The use of this word, to some extent, is a kind of domestication. Therefore, we can further see that Lin Yutang's "integration of Chinese and Western" in his use of words, that is, he not only adopts the strategy of foreignization to reflect Chinese culture to the greatest extent, but also adopts the strategy of domestication to take into account the cognitive habits of the target language readers as much as possible, so that the Western readers can make effective cognition and reasoning, and then understand this custom in ancient China.

Example 6: Now, although as concubine she should be addressed by the children as yima or "aunt", some of the children still called her "Sister Cassia" and she did not mind.

Here describes the children of the Zeng family to the name of Guijie, Guijie in Zeng's family is the identity of concubine. It originally means "aunt" in Chinese, but Lin translates it as "yima" or "aunt". This is also a combination of domestication and foreignization. "Yima" is a typical transliteration of foreignization. "Aunt" refers to "the sister of my father and mother", which is in line with the western cognition and is an inherent thing. It is the translation of naturalization. In order to introduce the identity of concubines in ancient China, Mr. Lin Yutang uses the "Aunt" as a bridge to build a context to understand the identity and title of concubines. Language is the carrier of culture. This language expression not only shows the cultural differences, but also establishes the relevance between cultures invisibly.

Religious Relevance

The most intriguing aspect of *Moment in Pecking* is probably its philosophical and religious implications. Taoism culture is one of the powerful carriers. Tao is a cultural element with a long history in China. The theoretical system of Taoism belongs to the category of philosophy, while Taoism itself is the category of religion. In a sense, the ancient Chinese Taoism contains both philosophical and religious meanings. Lin Yutang is a Taoist scholar and thinks highly of Taoism. There are many examples in his works:

Example 7: Its cosmos was a cosmos of change and flux and interaction between conflicting forces, obeying the silent laws of an impersonal, nameless, speechless god which should not have been named at all, but which the Taoists were forced to call by the name of "Tao", while insisting that it was unnamed and unnamable.

This is the definition of "Tao". "Tao" itself is a very mysterious word. Mr. Lin Yutang focuses on the two main characteristics of "regularity" and "inexplicable" and organizes the language according to the structure of English writing. The word "god" is used to describe the law that governs the development and change of all things. As is known to all, the religious culture of the west is an important part of the western culture and "god" is known to everyone in the West as the supreme ruler of all things. In order to help readers understand, Mr. Lin

Yutang used the domestication method to compare "Tao", the law that all things follow, with "god", the master of all things, and found the common philosophical meaning of "god" and "Tao", thus establishing the correlation between religions. It also shows the extensive and profound Taoist culture of China through the realization of "optimal relevance".

Conclusion

Although there is Lin Yutang's *Moment in Peking* and then comes the Relevance Theory, the translation of Chinese culture in *Moment in Peking* all embodies the basic connotation of Relevance Theory. This paper mainly analyzes Lin Yutang's handling of cultural translation from the aspects of the connotation of Relevance Theory and its application in the cultural translation of *Moment in Peking*. The author believes that the cultural translation of *Moment in Peking* combines the cognitive psychology of Western readers, through the flexible using of domestication and foreignization strategies and achieves the best expression effect and plays the role of spreading Chinese culture. Meanwhile, it also shows that domestication and foreignization are not either-or in cultural translation; they complement each other and are both means to achieve the purpose of communication.

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