

# On the Translation of *Iconography of the Decorated Writing-Paper of the Ten Bamboo Studio* Based on the Theory of Translational Action\*

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Based on the theory of translational action of the functionalism, this paper selects three aspects, translation as an inter-cultural and communicative action, a purposeful text-processing action and an inter-personal action, to analyze the important issues as well as the translation strategies, methods and techniques adopted in the translation of Chinese allusions. The study shows that the theory of translational action is important for the translation of allusions and that it helps to modify the target text. The translator, also the author of this paper, hopes that this study will be useful for the translation of allusions and the publicity of traditional Chinese culture across the world.

*Keywords:* the theory of translational action, the English translation of Chinese classics, inter-cultural communication, *Iconography of the Decorated Writing-Paper of the Ten Bamboo Studio*

## Introduction

Among the various kinds of decorated writing-paper books, *The Decorated Writing-Paper of the Ten Bamboo Studio* was the most famous one. It was produced in 1644 by Hu Zhengyan (1584-1674) and was divided into four volumes, containing nearly 300 writing-papers. Its publisher, Hu Zhengyan, was born in Xiuning county in Anhui province. As a typical literatus in ancient China, he had been a government officer for a short time. However, he was soon tired of the political chicanery and calculation and chose to lead a seclusive life near Mountain Jilong in Nanjing. He planted 10 bamboos in front of his house and thus this house was named the “Ten Bamboo Studio (十竹齋, shi zhu zhai)” (Bao & Liu, 2019).

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In recent years, an increasing number of institutions and scholars realized the artistic value of this 17<sup>th</sup> century book. In 2008, the woodblock printing technique used in *The Decorated Writing-Paper of the Ten Bamboo Studio* was listed as one of China's intangible cultural heritages (Gu, 2014). In 2016, the *Painting Academy of the Ten Bamboo Studio*, a studio in Nanjing that deals with auction of painting and calligraphy, officially started the reproduction project, aiming at spreading the culture of the writing-papers of the *Ten Bamboo Studio*. It took about four years to finish the re-engraving work of the book based on the version that Zheng Zhenduo donated to the National Library of China. The output was named as *Iconography of the Decorated Writing-Paper of the Ten Bamboo Studio*. There were altogether 130 or so writing-papers and each writing-paper had an introduction that described the story behind, which was translated into English. This action gave rise to the Chinese-English translation project that the author participated in.

### Translation as an Inter-cultural and Communicative Action

According to Fang and Guo (2020), translation is not only the exchange of two languages, but also an important means of inter-cultural communication. The traditional decorated writing-paper is a significant part of Chinese cultures and the translation of the stories in the decorated writing-papers is an inter-cultural action. Nord (2007, p. 25) claims that “a translator should focus on the differences between cultures that may cause conflicts or misunderstanding” as translating is a form of inter-cultural action. In this translation project, the biggest difference comes from the cultural-loaded words. Guided by the principle of inter-cultural communication, the translator adopts the following translation methods so that the target text will be easier to understand for readers.

#### Liberal Translation

Liberal translation does not strictly obey the form or the word order of the source text, which differs from literal translation. Jerome claimed that literal translation could produce an absurd translation by strictly adhering to the original form, while liberal translation made the meaning or the content of the original text delivered clearly (Munday, 2016). This is true especially when it comes to the translation of some cultural-loaded words. According to Xiong (2014), liberal translation could be further decomposed into paraphrase and idiomatic translation. For the translation of cultural-loaded words in this project, the method of idiomatic translation is most frequently used.

##### Example (1)

ST: 这本书是兵法奇书《太公兵法》。这位老人就是黄石公。

TT: Zhang Liang opened the book at dawn and found that the book was *Tai Gong's Art of War*, a famous military strategy book. This old man turned out to be Huangshi Gong.

##### Example (2)

ST: 刘秀曾诏他到洛阳，并授为谏议大夫 (see Figure 1)。

TT: As a friend of Liu Xiu, the Emperor Guangwu, he was summoned by the emperor to be the counsellor in Luoyang.

##### Example (3)

ST: 三国时期蜀国丞相。

TT: He was the prime minister of Shu in the Three Kingdoms Periods.

In Example (1), the translation of “《太公兵法》” follows that of “《孙子兵法》”, which is translated to “*The Art of War*”. As is proposed by Nord (2007, p. 58), translation is an “inter-cultural action”, which is a common and long-standing phenomenon. Likewise, the interaction between China and the Western world has lasted for a long time and certain ideas have already been accepted by the Western readers, such as *The Art of War*. As the most important military treatise in Asia, its English version has been published by foreign press, including Amber books Ltd. Therefore, the translator converted “太公兵法” to “*Tai Gong’s Art of War*” so that the content and the function of the book could be delivered in the inter-cultural communication.



Figure 1. Ziling.

Example (2) and (3) are representatives of the translation of Chinese official positions. In traditional Chinese culture, “谏议大夫” is a government officer whose job is to give advice to the emperor in ancient China so that the emperor could avoid mistakes when making decisions, while in English, a counsellor is the person who can help people make decisions. Meanwhile, a prime minister’s main function is similar to that of “丞相” in ancient China. According to Nord (2007), communication cannot be completed without signs and a translator gives priorities to the target text readers. By using the words that the Western people are familiar with, the translator can avoid possible misunderstandings and smoothen the communication process, but the weakness is that the uniqueness of Chinese culture is lost.

### Transliteration Plus Annotation

Pinyin plus annotation is a combination of liberal translation and literal translation. As the alphabet of Chinese was put into practice in the 1950s and was widely accepted in the 1980s, English words based on pinyin, such as yin, yang, jiaozi, Kungpao chicken, have been gradually accepted in translation practices (Dong, 2020). However, some cultural-loaded words are not fully popularized in the Western world, so transliteration plus annotation is the idealist way to deal with those words. It can not only display the uniqueness of Chinese culture, but also avoid possible misunderstandings.

#### Example (4)

ST: 仁、知、义、礼、乐、忠、信、天、地、德，君子十德尽在其中。

TT: Involved in it are the ten virtues composed of ren (benevolence), zhi (wisdom), yi (friendship), li (rite), yue (music), zhong (fidelity), xin (good faith), tian (heaven), di (earth) and de (virtue).

The ten virtues in Example (4) are the ethical principles stressed in Confucianism and represent the Chinese people's thinking about the society and ethics. Many of these words have been included in published books, such as *The Analects*. For example, "it is no longer a matter of benevolence with such a man" (Confucius, 1979, p. 37). Here the word "benevolence" means "仁", which is an example of liberal translation, while in other cases, the Chinese word "仁" is converted to "ren", as an example of transliteration. For instance, there are sentences like "Ren means to restrain one's self and follow social norms" in the *Key Concepts in Chinese Thought and Culture* (2019, p. 52). And the words derived from pinyin, such as yi (friendship) and li (rite), have been used in many English materials. However, Nord (2007, p. 23) believes that if the translator takes signs directly from the source text, which could cause misinterpretation, "it is necessary to mark accordingly". And Zhang (2020) claimed that the annotations in the translation of Chinese classics could be the bridge among the translator, foreigners and the source text producer. Thus, the translator explained the meaning in the bracket so that the target text could not only reserve the uniqueness of Chinese culture, but also carry out the function of communication.

### Translation as a Purposeful Text-processing Action

According to Reiss and Vermeer (2014, p. 43), the function of the source text is to "offer information", but the translator can choose the information that he/she believes is important and useful according to certain purposes. English and Chinese are two different languages that own different features. Even though the genre of the source text and the target text can be the same, the forms of expression under different cultural background are not necessarily the same. Therefore, it is necessary to modify the target text to make it readable for the target readers. In this translation project, the translation techniques, including addition and shift, are adopted to make the target text conform to the habit of English.

#### Addition

As mentioned above, English and Chinese are different. Firstly, English is organized around the subject, but Chinese is organized around the topic in which a sentence without a subject is also acceptable. In the source text, there are many sentences without subjects. Secondly, Chinese is paratactic that is usually in sequential order without apparent conjunctive words, which makes the structure of Chinese loose, but English is featured by compound and complex sentences connected by conjunctive words (Zhang, 2002). In order to deal with these differences, the translation technique of addition is needed.

#### Example (5)

ST: 内容方面, 经过多次讨论, 本书遵从笺画、出处、释义、中文、英文基本结构。

TT: The editor group had many discussions about the content and this book follows the pattern of writing-paper, its origin, Chinese interpretation and English translation.

#### Example (6)

ST: 他曾积极帮助刘秀反抗旧朝, 东汉建立后, 严光功成身退, 归隐田园, 改名换姓, 每天在桐庐富春江畔钓鱼, 过起了隐逸的生活。

TT: He helped Liu Xiu overthrow the previous government and built the Eastern Han Dynasty. However, he decided to leave the official court at this time. He changed his name and led a seclusive life in the countryside, fishing beside the Fuchun River every day.

## Example (7)

ST: 本书从策划到出版花了近两年时间，最终由国家图书馆授权使用郑振铎先生捐赠的明代初版笺谱原图、范景中先生作序、韦力先生撰跋、赵力先生为后记的《十竹斋笺谱图像志》中英日文版出炉。

TT: It takes two years to accomplish the publication in Chinese, English and Japanese and we are deeply indebted to all these people as well as to many others for their help in making our ideas clearer. We wish to thank the National Library that finally permitted us to use the original inscriptions in the Ming Dynasty donated by Mr. Zheng Zhenduo. Thanks are due to Mr. Fan Jingzhong who wrote the preface, Mr. Wei Li who composed the postscript and Mr. Zhao Li, writing the afterword.

There is no clear subject in Example (5) and if the translator does not add a subject, the sentence will be incorrect. Since this is the preface written by the *Painting Academy of the Ten Bamboo Studio*, the translator decided to use “the editor group” to show the subject of the sentence.

In Example (6), the sentence talks about the life of Yan Guang, who helped the emperor build a new dynasty, but chose to live in seclusion later. The translator added the word “however” to show his unexpected behavior as most people who had helped the Emperor build a new government would seize a powerful position in the new dynasty.

In Example (7), the translator added many words to show the gratitude of the editor group. On the one hand, although it is not written in the source text, the hidden meaning is to deliver the gratitude to people who have made contributions to the publication of the book. On the other hand, almost every author in the Western countries will write lengthy words in acknowledgement. According to Mei (2014), the target text is not a great success until the translation activity is accepted by the society of the target text. Therefore, the translator modified the text to make the preface more readable for the target readers.

**Shift**

Another translation technique that is often adopted by the translator is shift. Xiong (2014) believes that shift is to transform the linguistic structure of the source text into similar structures in the target text. Here it mainly encompasses the shift of voice, the shift of parts of speech and the shift of word order.

## Example (8)

ST: 仁、知、义、礼、乐、忠、信、天、地、德，君子十德尽在其中。

TT: Involved in it are the ten virtues composed of ren (benevolence), zhi (wisdom), yi (friendship), li (rite), yue (music), zhong (fidelity), xin (promise), tian (heaven), di (earth) and de (virtue).

## Example (9)

ST: 我们以全心全力投入复刻《十竹斋笺谱》，并编辑本书《十竹斋笺谱图像志》。

TT: All the editors have devoted themselves to the reproduction of the Decorated Writing-Paper of the Ten Bamboo Studio and the editing of this book.

Passive voice appears frequently in English and the use of passive voice in the target text can make it more objective. In Example (8), the subject of the sentence is the *Decorated Writing-Paper of the Ten Bamboo Studio*

and the sentence can be converted to “*The Decorated Writing-Paper of the Ten Bamboo Studio* contains the ten virtues...”. However, as the title of the book has appeared before, “it” is used to avoid repetition and the positive voice is converted to the passive voice according to the linguistic features of English.

Likewise, nouns appear more frequently in English, but verbs are considered to be more frequently used in Chinese. By converting the verbs in Chinese, “复刻” and “编辑”, into nouns in English, “reproduction” and “editing”, the target text is more adequate, as Nord (2007, p. 30) claims that the selected information can be converted to those expressions that the translator thinks are adequate. In this way, it can facilitate the target reader’s reading and improve the quality of the target text.

### **Translation as an Inter-personal Action**

“Translation is an inter-personal action”, which focuses on the different roles in the translation process (Munday, 2008, p. 125). These roles consist of the people that initiate the translation activity, the commissioner, the people producing the source text, the people that create the target text, the user of the target text and readers. This translation project is no exception and the *Painting Academy of the Ten Bamboo Studio*, the target text producers and the potential readers are the major roles that influence the translation from different aspects.

#### **Role of the Initiator and the Target Reader**

The most significant influence of inter-personal action comes from the initiator and the target reader. To begin with, the initiator is the party that initiates the translation action, the party that needs the translation, the party that is indispensable to realize the translation act and the party that has absolute right in the process of the translation (Wen & Zhu, 2014). Then, the target reader is also “a decisive factor” in the production of the target text (Nord, 2007, p. 20). Those two roles have great effects on the use of the translation strategy. According to Xiong (2014), translation strategy is a group of rules used to fulfill the translation purpose that is closely connected with the roles in the translation activity.

This translation project is initiated by the *Painting Academy of the Ten Bamboo Studio*, which also serves as the target text user. The Painting Academy requires that the target text should be readable at the first place and insists that the target text should provide readers with background information smoothly, while reserving some Chinese flavor. The target reader is supposed to be foreigners in the English world who are interested in traditional Chinese culture. Based on the requirements of the initiator and the presumptions of potential readers, the translator combined the translation strategy of domestication, which is “toward the cultural values of the target language”, with foreignization, which is toward the culture of the source language (Venuti, 1994, p. 24).

#### **Imitation**

Imitation does not follow the word or the sense of the source text word for word. Instead, it conveys the author’s emotion or passion by translating the general meaning (Dryden, 2006). The translator either only conveys the general meaning, the gist or the key information by omission, or adds words to make the target text understandable (Xiong, 2014). In the source text, there are a wide range of poetry and prose that encompass many images and Chinese function words. To deal with these words, the translation method of imitation is used.

## Example (10)

ST: 它在《方氏墨谱》中的情况是：“合为五卷，离为六则。瑞玺灵符，苍璧黄琮，卿云驹虞，贝阙珠宫，作国宝第一；...于是隍糜之说，罔有遗漏；玄香之名，不胜流播矣。”

TT: That's what is held in *The Chinese Ink Painting of Fang*: “It contains five volumes, which will be six books if it is classified according to the different content. The first book contains auspicious signs, jades and jewelries, which are the first-class national treasures. ...These six books contain a wide range of magic and unique things in this world from the high sky to the earth.”

In Example (10), the author of the source text quotes a paragraph from *The Chinese Ink Painting of Fang*, a traditional Chinese illustrated book in the Ming Dynasty. It encompasses many images and objects, whose meaning is not clear and sometimes repetitive. If the translator translates word for word, the potential readers with different backgrounds may feel confused and cannot get the core idea of the content of each book. Meanwhile, it does not conform to the requirements of the initiator. Therefore, the translator omitted the various images in the source text and replaced them with the general genre. In this way, the key information in the six books are clearly and briefly expressed. At the same time, the translator added the information “according to different content” to make the target readers understand why “five volumes” could be divided into “six books”.

**Role of the Target Text Producer**

The producers of the target text are the members of the translation team and the proofreaders, who may hold different views toward translation. In order to produce a qualified and professional target text, it is important for every translator in the team to communicate with each other and learn from the feedback of the proofreaders. And the translators in the group can set up consistent translation methods and techniques. This method works especially well for the translation of proper nouns, which bear high frequency and are easy to be maintained consistently.

## Example (11)

ST: 黄石公又称圯上老人（see Figure 2）。

TT: Huangshi Gong was also called the old man on the bridge.

According to Luo (2014), though the translation of person names is not vital in the study of translation, its quality has a huge impact on the quality of the target text and the effectiveness of the translation activity. As the majority of the translation material in this project centers on ancient sages, person names appear frequently. For these names, the translation method of transliteration is adopted.



Figure 2. Huangshi Gong.

The Chinese ordinary names are usually composed of two or three words, such as Li Bai (李白) and Xie Lingyun (谢灵运), but there are also unusual names that will confuse the translator, such as “黄石公”. At the very beginning, the translator transformed it into “Mr. Yellow Stone” as the translator adopted liberal translation, but this practice made it inconsistent with the other names in the source text. This problem was discovered by the proofreader and was revised to “Huangshi Gong” according to the translation method of transliteration set up by the translation group. A translator may have several solutions to one single word in the source text, but it is necessary to maintain consistency in the translation method when working under close teamwork.

### Conclusion

The translation of *Iconography of the Decorated Writing-Paper of the Ten Bamboo Studio* contains allusions, prefaces and postscripts, which embody the traditional virtues of the Chinese ethnic peoples and vividly illustrate the fantastic spiritual world of the ancient Chinese sages. However, these stories originated from historical documents as well as myths and legends in ancient China have caused great difficulties for the author and after solving the major difficulties encountered in the translation, the author found that the theory of translational action is important for the translation of allusions and that it helps to modify the target text. The author of the paper hopes that this study will be useful for the translation of allusions and the publicity of traditional Chinese culture across the world.

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