

The Comparative Study of *Chuangtse's* English Translations Under the Theory of Spirit Transmission and Meaning Conveyance

QIN Xiaowan, PENG Keming

Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou, China

Cultural-loaded word is one of the most popular topics in translation studies. The theory of spirit transmission and meaning conveyance provides a new way for the translation of cultural-loaded word. Based on the *A Happy Excursion*, this paper makes a comparative analysis of the translation strategies of seven English versions. This study will reveal the similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign translators' translation strategies.

Keywords: *Chuangtse*, spirit transmission and meaning conveyance, comparative study

Introduction

The theory of spirit transmission and meaning conveyance (传神达意理论) is proposed by Wang Rongpei and is first used in Chinese painting theory and philosophy. Applying it to translation studies is a successful interdisciplinary innovation. Under this theory, the translator must accurately reflect his or her understanding of the original text. Meaning conveyance includes both external forms and internal meanings, such as background, connotation, tone, etc. Translators should first reach the meaning of the words and then use rhetorical patterns in Chinese when translating canonical texts. While spirit transmission includes likeness (形似) and resemblance (神似), resemblance should maintain the similarity in spirit and substance and avoid word-for-word correspondence, thus providing a vivid and realistic impression (Wang, 1994). The translator should also consider factors such as form, emotion, phonetics, etc. Therefore, the spirit transmission and meaning conveyance are inseparable.

The English translations of *Chuangtse* (《庄子》) are important in helping Chinese classics going global and have full translation, short translation, compiled translation, etc. (Wenjun, 2012). English translations studied by Chinese academics are mainly from Chinese translators or foreign sinologists who are familiar with source language, compared to the translations with higher acceptance by the target-language readers. Therefore, this paper summarizes the reviews of *Chuangtse* on Taoism section of Reddit: First, most target-language readers prefer the translations of Giles, Watson, Mair, Graham, and Ziporyn. Second, the reason why Feng Youlan and Lin Yutang's translations fail to draw a wide attention, may be because foreigners prefer full translations.

QIN Xiaowan, M.A., School of Interpreting and Translation Studies, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou, China.

PENG Keming, Ph.D., School of Interpreting and Translation Studies, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou, China.

Therefore, this paper aims to compare the translation strategies of seven English versions and reveal the similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign translators' translation strategies.

The Realization of Meaning Conveyance

Cultural-loaded word shows the function of language in carrying cultural information and reflects the unique activity of a nation that have been accumulated over a long history. *Chuangtse* has 560 terminologies and reflects the unique cultural system of China. Culture-loaded words in *Chuangtse* enable readers to understand the Chinese canon. According to Nida's classification of cultural-loaded words, this paper selects typical socio-cultural, ecological, and material cultural-loaded words in *A Happy Excursion* and compares their English translations.

(1) The Sociocultural-loaded Word 逍遥游

Giles: Transcendental Bliss

Graham: Going Rambling without a Destination

Fen & Lin: The Happy Excursion

Mair: Carefree Wandering

Watson: Free and Easy Wandering

Ziporyn: Wandering Far and Unfettered

There are three types of translations. The first type emphasizes religious meaning, like Giles's translation. "Transcendental" especially refers to religious or spiritual transcendence and esotericism; "Bliss" refers to heavenly blessing. This translation is religious, thus it explains 逍遥游 as a spiritual experience. The second type emphasizes the state of mind. The Chinese scholars Feng and Lin both translate it as "Happy Excursion" and use the subjective feeling "Happy" to express the meaning of freedom. Besides, "Excursion" highlights the long distance, which is alluded to the parable of 鲲鹏 migrating from the North Sea to the South Sea. The third type emphasizes the meaning of freedom, like the translations of Watson, Mair, Ziporyn, and Graham. This interpretation is quite common in the English world. Among them, two verb-ing forms of "going" and "rambling" in the Graham's translation echo the meaning of walking with the same structure of 逍遥游.

(2) The Ecological Cultural-loaded Word 鲲 (鹏)

Giles: Leviathan (Rukh)

Feng, Ziporyn: Kun (peng)

Lin, Watson, Graham, Mair: k'un (p'eng)

The first type of translation focuses on naturalization, such as Giles's translation. "Rukh" refers to the legendary roc in Arabic. However, this translation strategy may easily deviate from the meaning of the original text. For example, Giles translates 鲲 as Leviathan, an evil sea monster in the Bible. In this article, 鲲 is transformed into a roc and has been considered as a positive symbol. Therefore, Giles' translation conveys the impression of an evil to readers, which is contrary to the original work. The second type of translation focuses on alienation, such as the translations of Feng, Lin, Watson, Graham, Mair, and Ziporyn. The cultural factors in the original language are preserved. Their translations are in line with the requirement of preserving cultural factors. This translation method is conducive to the understanding of foreign culture by western readers.

(3) The Material Cultural-loaded Word 北冥(南冥)

Giles: northern ocean (southern ocean)

Feng, Lin, Mair: Northern Ocean (Southern Ocean)

Watson: Northern darkness (southern darkness)

Graham: North Ocean (South Ocean)

Ziporyn: Northern Oblivion (Southern Oblivion)

The first type regards 冥 as "ocean", namely the translations of Giles, Feng, Lin, Graham, and Mair, some of them capitalize the initial letter, regarding Northern Ocea as a proper name. 冥 means "darkness", but it also be written as 溟, which means "ocean", so it's sensible in 北冥有鱼. The second type regards 冥 as "darkness", namely Watson's translation. However, if 冥 is only regarded as sea, it may lose its dark tones, and the philosophical meaning of mysterious nature of Taoism. In addition, *Chuangtse* does not always use 冥 when

referring to sea. For example, in *Qiushui*, the author uses 北海 rather than 北冥, so we can't simply equate 冥 with sea. The third type regards 冥 as "Oblivion", namely Ziporyn's translation. In the context of Chinese culture, it means chaos, but it may be difficult for foreign readers to understand.

The Realization of Spirit Transmission

The spirit transmission not only conveys the external form, but also the deeper meaning, such as the background, central idea, author's attitude, etc. Therefore, it needs to be analyzed at the level of sentences. The language of *A Happy Excursion* is very vivid and its open-minded spirit has inspired many people. *Chuangtse's* ideal is to be free from the worldly things. The common translation strategies are naturalization and alienation, and this paper chooses three famous lines and analyzes the similarities and differences of translation strategies.

(1) 斥鴳笑之曰……不过数仞而下，翱翔蓬蒿之间……此小大之辩也。

Giles: A quail... I rise but a few yards in the air..., is the difference between small and great.

Feng: A quail... I have reached not more than a few yards... This is the difference between great and small.

Lin: A lake sparrow... I rise but a few yards in the air..., is the difference between small and great.

Watson: The little quail... I never get more than ten or twelve yards... Such is difference between big and little.

Graham: A quail...I've gone more than a few dozen yards... This was in disputation about small and great.

Mair: A marsh sparrow... more than a few yards... This shows the difference between great and small.

Ziporyn: The quail... I get farther than a few yards... Such is the difference between large and small.

First, 斥鴳 is a small bird that flies less than one foot high. The first type is "quail", translated by Giles, Feng, Watson, Graham, and Ziporyn, which doesn't maintain the cultural factors in source language. The second type is "sparrow", translated by Lin and Mair, which retains the cultural factors in source language and is more conducive to readers' understanding of culture. The latter is better and can promote Chinese culture going global. Second, 仞 is an length unit. One 仞 equals seven yards in Han dynasty, and one yard equals 0.33 meters, so one 仞 equals 2.33 meters and several 仞 are about 10 meters. Therefore, the unit conversions of seven translations are all justified. The translation of "yard" is culturally appropriate, which is conducive to cross-linguistic communication. However, as a unique Chinese unit of length, 仞 can also be translated as "ren", just as many translators translate 里 as "li", which retains the cultural elements of source language and promotes the cross-linguistic communication. Third, 辩 equals 辨, which means "distinguish". It's common in ancient Chinese. Therefore, Graham's translation of "disputation" seems inappropriate.

(2) 若夫乘天地之正，而御六气之辩，以游无穷者，彼且恶乎待哉！

Giles: ...driving before him the elements as his team while roaming through the realms of For-Ever...

Feng: ...rides on the transformation of the six elements and thus makes excursion into the infinite...

Lin: ...driving before him the changing elements as his team to roam through the realms of the Infinite...

Watson: ...ridden the changes of the six breaths, and thus wandered through the boundless...

Graham: ...with the changes of the Six Energies for his chariot, to travel into the infinite...

Mair: ...chariot upon the transformations of the six vital breaths and thereby go wandering in infinity...

Ziporyn: ... riding atop the back-and-forth of the six atmospheric breaths, so that your wandering could...

First, 游 has two types of translations. The first type focuses on long distance, like "excursion" translated by Feng. In Chinese culture, 游 means "travel", as Tzu said, "When parents are here, children do not travel far 父母在，不远游". The second type focuses on happy mood, like "roam" translated by Giles and Lin; "wander"

translated by Watson, Mair, and Ziporyn; “travel” translated by Graham. In Oxford dictionary, these words all mean wandering and loitering. It indicates that translators believe the aimlessness of 游 is more important than spatial distance. Second, 六气 has three types of translations. The first type is “element” translated by Giles, Feng, and Lin, which clearly convey the meaning. Lin’s translation adds notes, encouraging readers to figure out the meaning by themselves. The second type is “breaths” translated by Watson, Mair, and Ziporyn, which directly takes the literal meaning of 气. However, “climate” might be better than “breath” in this context. The third type is “energies” translated by Graham, which is more inclined to 五运六气 in *The Yellow Emperor’s Inner Canon*, thus different from six climates in *Chuangtse*.

(3) 至人无己，神人无功，圣人无名。

Giles: The perfect man ignores self; the divine man ignores action; the true Sage ignores reputation.

Feng: The perfect man has no self; the spiritual man has no achievement; the true sage has no name.

Lin: The perfect man ignores self; the divine man ignores achievement; the true Sage ignores reputation.

Watson: The Perfect Man has no self; the Holy Man has no merit; the Sage has no fame.

Graham: The utmost man is selfless, the daemonic man takes no credit for his deeds, the sage is nameless.

Mair: The ultimate man has no self, the spiritual person has no accomplishment, the sage has no name.

Ziporyn: Consummate Person has no fixed identity, Spirit Man has no particular merit, Sage has no one name.

First, 至人 is a unique concept of *Chuangtse*. Watson translates it as a proper noun “Perfect Man”. Most translators recognize this translation. While Graham translates it as “utmost man” and Mair translates it as “ultimate man”, their translations are more philosophical, which can better express 至人. Besides, 至人 is the highest state of Taoist cultivation and the highest man in *Chuangtse’s* mind. He has no ego and is unattached to the world, so “utmost” is more in line with the Taoist spirit rather than “perfect”. Among the translations of 神人, “daemon” originates from Greek culture, which symbolizes a supernatural body between God and man. It is also written as “demon”, which provides readers with a negative cultural association. Second, 无功 is regarded as “achievement” by three translators, so it is translated as “achievement” and “accomplishment”. The other three translators regard it as “praise”, so it is translated as “credit” and “merit”. Only one translator considers it as “action”. Giles translates 无 as a verb “ignore”. However, 无功 means “merit” in the context, so all the translations are acceptable except Giles’s translation.

Conclusion

Under the background of increasingly prosperous cross-cultural communication, the theory of spirit transmission and meaning conveyance can guide translators to grasp the aesthetic and socio-cultural aspects of classics. The spirit of *Chuangtse* is pursuing true self and freedom. The seven translations have different merits. The translations of two Chinese translators are more concise and elegant, focusing on literal translation. While five foreign translators pursue clarity, so their translations are more flexible by literal translation and paraphrase. If the two translation strategies can be combined, *Chuangtse* will be better understood by foreign readers. During the translation, we should pay attention to the words, rhetoric, and culture to convey meaning and spirit.

References

- Wang, R. P. (1994). The translation of the psalms of the Bible by the author. *Foreign Language and Foreign Language Teaching*, 16(4), 11-15.
- Watson, B. (1968). *The complete works of Chuang Tzu*. New York: Columbia University Press.