

Translation Studies from a Cross-Cultural Perspective: Reinventing Subjectivity—A Case Study of English Translation of *A Dream of Red Mansions*

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The integration of cross-cultural inquiries into the realm of translation has given rise to a distinct subfield known as cross-cultural translation studies. This approach emphasizes the importance of delving into the cultural subtleties and the awareness of cultural subjectivity within the translation process. Central to this framework is the concept of reshaping cultural nuances and the subjectivity of culture. This paper introduces three principal translation strategies that emerge from a cross-cultural standpoint: the alienation translation strategy, the ‘cannibalism’ translation strategy, and the destructive translation strategy. Utilizing the English translation of “Dream of the Red Chamber” as a case study, the paper examines how cultural nuances and cultural subjectivity influence the selection of translation strategies and demonstrates the practical application of cross-cultural research within the translation sphere. Hence, the significance of cross-cultural translation studies lies in its capacity to offer a novel lens through which to view translation studies. It encourages a reevaluation of cultural nuances and subjectivity in translation, which is of profound practical importance for advancing the field of translation studies, enhancing cross-cultural communication, and facilitating the spread of Chinese discourse on the global stage.

Keywords: cross-cultural, translation strategies, *A Dream of Red Mansions*

From Translation Studies to a Cross-Cultural Perspective: The Awakening of Cultural Subjectivity

The cross-cultural perspective has emerged as a critical socio-cultural viewpoint in response to the increasing interconnectedness of the world due to economic globalization. This perspective emphasizes the interplay of politics, economy, and culture in a globalized context, where nations with advanced economies and cultural influence share their values and traditions with other parts of the world, including developing regions. It raises awareness of the potential for cultural dynamics to impact local traditions and the importance of preserving cultural diversity amidst the spread of what are considered universal values (Jia, 2019). The study of translation strategies from a cross-cultural perspective refers to the application of cross-cultural perspectives to the

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theoretical research and practice of translation, exploring how translation is affected by unequal cultural identities and subjectivity, and then providing support for the reshaping of cultural subjectivity consciousness. Subjectivity refers to the ability of individuals or groups to identify and shape their own cultural identities and values. The rise of cross-cultural perspectives reflects not only the impact of multicultural studies theory on the development of translation, but also the importance of reaffirming cultural diversity and cultural subjectivity in the context of globalization. Translation studies from a cross-cultural perspective represent an overflow and extension of cultural studies into the field of translation research. This signifies the emergence of a new approach to translation practice and theory, one that emphasizes cultural subjectivity and values the cultural differences and multiplicity underpinning translation. This cross-cultural viewpoint offers a distinct mode of thinking, prompting translators to reevaluate the essence and worth of translation. Against the backdrop of an era marked by globalization, the practice and theory of translation within a cross-cultural framework provide vital insights and support for the advancement of intercultural communication and the celebration of cultural diversity (Cui, 2019). It fosters a heightened awareness and reshaping of cultural subjectivity, thereby contributing to a more nuanced and inclusive global discourse.

Translation in Words: Choosing Translation Strategies from a Cross-Cultural Perspective

Language, as a vessel of culture, involves more than just linguistic transformation in the process of translation; it touches on deeper conflicts of values and ideologies. This is one of the core concerns in translation studies from a cross-cultural perspective, which aims to uncover issues of cultural difference and subjectivity within the translation process. It calls for translators to be aware of the subject consciousness inherent in culture, to oppose cultural hegemony, and to respect the subjectivity of the target language text (Jia, 2019). By examining the selection of three distinct translation strategies as a point of entry, the impact of a cross-cultural perspective on translation is analyzed. This approach not only highlights the importance of cultural sensitivity and adaptability in translation but also advocates for a more equitable exchange that acknowledges and appreciates the diversity and complexity of different cultural contexts.

Venuti—“Resistant Translation” Strategy

Lawrence Venuti, an American scholar of Italian descent, is renowned as the founder of the “resistant translation” strategy. This approach is designed to highlight the cultural differences and power dynamics between the source text and its translation. Venuti advocates for translators to employ “alienating” techniques, which involve preserving or emphasizing the cultural elements and linguistic styles of the original text within the translation, rather than simply translating them into idiomatic expressions and conventional phrases of the target language. By doing so, resistant translation aims to make visible the foreignness of the source culture and resist the domestication of the translated text, thereby challenging the target culture’s assumptions and expectations. Resistant translation can be seen as a challenge to the mainstream “domesticating translation” or “assimilation translation” strategy, which, while striving for fluency and comprehensibility in the translated text, often “dissolves” or “integrates” the cultural elements and linguistic styles of the original, causing the translation to lose the uniqueness and otherness of the source. The practice of resistant translation includes preserving special vocabulary, word choice, grammatical structures, and modes of expression from the original text, without overly

accommodating the linguistic conventions of the target language; retaining cultural symbols and traditions in the translation to allow readers to understand the cultural context and connotations of the original; and the translator's inclusion of explanatory annotations in the translation to assist readers in comprehending the cultural elements and implied meanings of the original (Yao & Liu, 2023). The purpose of the resistant translation strategy is to maintain the cultural and linguistic style of the original text, more authentically convey its meaning and emotions, and also enable readers to better understand the historical and cultural context in which the original was created. By doing so, it manifests the subjectivity behind the culture and constructs cultural authority. For example,

彩霞咬着嘴唇，向贾环头上戳了一指头，说道：“没良心的！狗咬吕洞宾，不识好人心！”(Cao, 2008, p. 36)

Caixia bit her lips and with one finger rapped him on the forehead, said, “You ungrateful wretch! Like a dog that bit Lu Dongbin—you bite the hand that feeds you.” (Yang & Gladys, 1995, p. 683)

This excerpt is from the 25th chapter of Yang Xianyi's translation of *A Dream of Red Mansions*. The phrase “a dog biting Lu Dongbin, not recognizing a good-hearted person” comes from Chinese folktales and is primarily used to describe someone who fails to appreciate kindness and lacks gratitude (Ye, 2023). Yang Xianyi's translation strategy here is resistant translation; he retains the cultural elements of the original text, such as the reference to Lu Dongbin, without assimilating the heterodox elements of the idiom for the sake of accommodating English readers. The goal is to fully present the cultural context of China, preserve the style of the original, and facilitate the dissemination and construction of Chinese culture in cross-cultural exchanges (Zhu, 2023).

The Campos Brothers in Brazil—A Translation Strategy of Cannibalism

The Brazilian Campos brothers, Augusto de Campos and Haroldo de Campos, were poets and translators from the 1960s in Brazil who proposed the “Cannibalism” translation strategy. This approach suggests that translation should consume and assimilate elements from other cultures, much like cannibalism, to create new forms of cultural expression. The core concept of the cannibalistic translation strategy is encapsulated in the phrase “Tupi or not Tupi, that is the question”, a play on Shakespeare's famous line “To be or not to be, that is the question.” In this context, “Tupi” refers to one of the indigenous tribes of South America, meaning “human being.” Through this statement, the Campos brothers express their cultural stance of consuming and integrating elements from other cultures into their own, thereby generating novel cultural expressions (Oliveira et al., 2017). In practice, the cannibalistic translation strategy involves incorporating elements from other cultures into the target culture to create new cultural expressions. Translators should possess a deep understanding and mastery of the source text, as well as extensive cultural knowledge and cross-cultural communication skills. In the process of translation, translators can creatively renew and imitate elements from the source text, integrating them into the target culture and thus forging new cultural expressions. For example,

周瑞家的道：“说哪里话。俗话说说的：‘与人方便，自己方便’，不过用我一句话罢了，害着我什么。”(Cao, 2008, p. 95)

Zhou rui's wife said: “Don't say that. ‘He who helps others helps himself.’ All I need to do is say one word--no trouble at all.” (Yang & Gladys, 1995, p. 175)

In the sixth chapter of Yang Xianyi's translation of *A Dream of Red Mansions*, the proverb “与人方便，自己方便” is easily understood to mean that by helping others, one helps oneself. The corresponding translation, “He who helps others helps himself,” not only perfectly corresponds to the original text in meaning, but also features a subject clause following the subject “He” in a way that is very characteristic of English expression. This is a quintessential English idiom. This type of translation exemplifies the “cannibalistic” translation strategy, where the essence of the original text is perfectly absorbed and then articulated through idiomatic translation, which is conducive to cross-cultural dissemination.

Spivak—Deconstructive Translation Strategy

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, an Indian-born female scholar and translator, introduced the concept of “deconstructive translation.” This strategy aims to challenge the authority of mainstream translation practices. Deconstructive translation strategy advocates for translators to disrupt the power dynamics between the source and target texts by dissolving the cultural characteristics and implicit meanings of the original text. This approach encourages readers to engage in their own interpretation and understanding when reading the translation. Deconstructive translation practices include the domestication of cultural symbols, idiomatic expressions, and linguistic features from the source text into the idiomatic expressions and styles of the target language, making it more accessible and comprehensible for the readers. Translators may also add their own annotations and interpretations in the translation, encouraging readers to independently contemplate and explore the implicit meanings and cultural backgrounds of the original text. Additionally, translators may selectively add or remove certain elements in the translation to better align with the needs and aesthetics of the target language and audience. The advantage of deconstructive translation lies in its ability to challenge the authority and exoticism of mainstream translation practices, allowing readers a greater autonomy in understanding the meaning and cultural characteristics of the original text. It also fosters dialogue and exchange between different cultures, breaking down cultural barriers and boundaries. However, deconstructive translation presents certain challenges that require the translator to possess a certain level of linguistic and cultural literacy to ensure the quality and accuracy of the translation.

上面是五色富贵不断头卍字的花样，所以他的名字叫做卍儿。(Cao, 2008, p. 255)

On which were designs, in variegated colors, representing opulence and honor, and a continuous line of the character Wan; and that this reason accounts for the name of Wan Erh, which was given her. (Joly, 1893, p. 540)

This is from the 19th chapter of H.B. Joly's translation of *A Dream of Red Mansions*. The character 卍 (wan) is a Buddhist term signifying the gathering of auspicious virtues, which is considered an obscure word even for many native Chinese speakers. H.B. Joly used the Wade-Giles romanization system to transliterate this term directly as “Wan Erh.” Furthermore, since Mingyan provided an explanation for 卍 earlier in the text, readers who are unfamiliar with this term in the target language can still grasp its meaning through the context. At the same time, this approach retains the distinctiveness of the Chinese language, which is beneficial for the dissemination of Chinese culture.

The Emergence of the Subject: The Significance of Translation Studies from a Cross-cultural Perspective

Translation itself is a process of reshaping cultural subjectivity, and its more significant function lies in the transmission of information and expression of meaning in cross-cultural communication. Traditional translation perspectives often overlook the subjectivity of culture, overemphasizing the centrality of the target language's culture, leading to cultural subject inequality in translation. In contrast, translation studies from a cross-cultural perspective increasingly emphasize respect for cultural diversity, the subjectivity behind culture, and a serious consideration of its cultural background and values. Translation studies from a cross-cultural perspective emphasize equality and respect, aiming to establish more meaningful connections between different cultures, oppose cultural hegemony, and reshape cultural subjectivity awareness.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the field of translation studies has been significantly enriched by the integration of cross-cultural perspectives. This approach has shed light on the complexities of cultural subjectivity and the nuances of cultural exchange inherent in the translation process. By examining the English translation of *A Dream of Red Mansions* and analyzing the application of various translation strategies—such as Venuti's "resistant translation," the Campos brothers' "cannibalism," and Spivak's "deconstructive translation"—we have seen how these methods can either challenge or reinforce cultural dynamics and power structures. The significance of cross-cultural translation studies lies in its potential to foster a deeper understanding of cultural diversity and to promote a more equitable representation of different cultural voices. It encourages translators to be mindful of their role as cultural mediators, to respect the integrity of the source text, and to engage with the target audience in a manner that is both respectful and enlightening. By embracing cross-cultural translation studies, we can look forward to a future where translation is not merely a conduit for communication but a platform for cultural celebration, where every translated work is an opportunity to learn, to grow, and to appreciate the rich and varied narratives that make up our global community.

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