

# A Study of Translation Strategies of Culture-Loaded Words in Knechtges' Ci and Fu Version From the Perspective of Memetics<sup>\*</sup>

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Chinese Ci and Fu has a wide selection of materials and contains rich words. It is extensive and profound which is rich in Chinese cultural connotation and national characteristics. D. R. Knechtges is a famous Sinologist, specializing in Ci and Fu and being proficient in *Wen Xuan*. His translation of the Fu in *Wen Xuan* was a masterpiece. Through the perspective of memetics, this paper studies five kinds of culture-loaded words in Knechtges' version about Fu in *Wen Xuan*, analyzes translation strategies used in these translations, and discusses the transmission mechanism of the culture memes which are culture-loaded words. Then get the conclusion, the mode which is given priority to with foreignization, domestication strategy as the auxiliary pole, combination of transliteration, literal translation, free translation, and annotation translation method, is advantageous to the culture-loaded words in the target language culture becoming a strong memes and spreading widely in the foreign countries.

*Keywords:* memetics, culture-loaded words, Ci and Fu, translation strategies

## Introduction

*Fu* is the overlord of Han literature, describing things in an exhausted way with rhetoric and catchy rhythm, which has rich national cultural connotation. The *fu* in *Wen Xuan* represents the major achievements in the development of *fu* literature before the Tang Dynasty, and its status as a classic Chinese literature is beyond doubt. American Sinologist Professor Knechtges specializes in *ci* and *fu* and is proficient in Xuan studies. In the 1970s, he began to systematically translate the *fu* in *Wen Xuan*. These *fu* translations have become the classic translations recognized by Chinese and Western scholars, filling the gap in the English translation of *ci* and *fu* classics. Through the perspective of memetics, this paper studies five kinds of culture-loaded words in Knechtges' version about Fu in *Wen Xuan*, analyzes translation strategies used in these translations, and discusses the transmission mechanism of the culture memes which are culture-loaded words.

## The Definition of Key Concepts on Memetics and Culture-Loaded Words

Memetics is a new theory that explains the laws of cultural evolution based on Darwin's theory of evolution. It

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attempts to interpret the universal connection between things and the evolutionary laws of the essential characteristics of cultural inheritance from a diachronic and synchronic perspective (He, 2005, p. 54). Meme is the most central term in this theory. The word meme is derived from the book *The Selfish Gene* written by British biologist Richard Dawkins in 1976. It is based on the word gene which means the genes in cultural communication. By definition, a meme is the basic unit of cultural communication or a basic unit that can describe imitative behavior (Dawkins, 1976, pp. 242-243). The transmission mechanism of a meme is like the transmission mechanism of a virus. It spreads from one host to another, and replicates from one brain to another through similar or mutational replication. Memes have three characteristics, namely the degree of replication, the number of replications, and the replication cycle (Wang, 2004, p. 38). The degree of replication refers to the faithfulness of replication. The more faithful a meme is copied, the more original connotation can be retained; the number of replications refers to the prolific nature of the meme replications. The faster it replicates, the greater the number of memes. Just like genes, the productivity of meme replication is more important than the longevity of a meme; the replication cycle means that the longer the meme exists, the greater the number of replicators. Memes with copying faithfulness, prolificity, and persistence gradually become strong memes in the process of dissemination, and form composite memes with some similar memes, which continue to spread in the culture, while other memes gradually die out during the spread.

Culture-loaded words have rich cultural connotations, which indirectly or directly reflect some cultural information. Liao Qiyi (2000, p. 232) defines culture-loaded words as words, phrases, idioms, and allusions in a certain culture. These words reflect the unique lifestyle of a nation. Culture-loaded words are also a kind of lexical gap, that is, the cultural information in the source language vocabulary does not correspond to the cultural information in the target language (Bao, 2001, p. 13). Translation is a memetic communication behavior (Wang, 2004, p. 40). Due to the asymmetry of cultural memes, the translation of culture-loaded words has become a major problem. Culture-loaded words must become strong memes in the process of translation and prevail in the target language culture. Only in this way can Chinese culture go out more widely.

### **Analysis of Translation Strategy of Culture-Loaded Words in Knechtges' Translation of *Wen Xuan* From the Perspective of Memetics**

Due to different understandings of the concept of culture-loaded words, different scholars have different classification standards. But the most widely used classification standard is based on Nida's classification of culture. He divides culture into five categories, namely, ecological culture, material culture, social culture, religious culture, and language culture (Nida, 1945, p. 196). Language is the main carrier of culture (Z. R. He & X. L. He, 2003, p. 205), so culture-loaded words can be divided into five categories accordingly, namely, ecological culture-loaded words, material culture-loaded words, social culture-loaded words, religious culture-loaded words, and linguistic culture-loaded words.

#### **Ecological Culture-Loaded Words**

Ecological cultural load words are a comprehensive reflection of the unique natural environment, geographic location, climatic characteristics, and biological species of a country or region. For example, the Xiangjiang River, the Yangtze River, the Yellow River, and Mount Tai are all unique ecological geography in China.

Case 1: “焦溪涸，汤谷凝。火井灭，温泉冰。沸潭无涌，炎风不兴。”（谢惠连《雪赋》）

Version: Scorching Creek dries up, scalding Vale freezes, fire wells are extinguished, hot springs ice over, frothing pools no longer bubble, fiery winds do not rise.

According to Li Shan's commentary, “焦溪, 汤谷, 火井, 沸潭, 炎风” in the original text refer to the names of water, mountains, and wind in myths and legends. Knechtges adopted the method of free translation and annotation for the translation of these ecological and culture-loaded words. While translating the original text with the strategy of domestication, it added the interpretation of the original text and marked the pinyin and Chinese characters. For example, his comment on “焦溪” is “Scorching Creek (Jiao xi 焦溪) may refer to the stream mentioned in the *Shui jingzhu* as flowing south from Scorching Springs (Jiao quan 焦泉) in the vicinity of modern Hui 辉 xian, Henan” (Knechtges & Xiao, 1996, p. 22). This method conforms to the characteristics of the faithfulness of memetic replication and helps this ecological meme to form a strong meme in the target language culture.

### Material Culture-Loaded Words

Material culture-loaded words include products created by human beings and tools used in labor. Clothing, transportation, architecture, food, tools, musical instruments, and works of art are all material culture-loaded words.

Case 2: 罗丰茸之游树兮, 离楼梧而相撑。(司马相如《长门赋》)

Version: Floating uprights, in plenteous profusion, ranged in rows, thickly clustered, are joined and braced together.

In Case 2, “游树” refers to the short pillars on the beams of ancient palaces that support the roof, “游” refers to hanging in the air, and “树” means pillar. Knechtges' textual note on it is “The ‘floating uprights’ (you shu 游树) refer to ‘slanting struts’ (xie zhu 斜柱) or ‘king-posts’ (zhuruzhu 會儒柱)” (Knechtges & Xiao, 1996, p. 162). Knechtges first carried out an intra-language translation of the word, and after fully understanding its meaning, it was translated into “floating uprights” by means of literal translation and annotation. In the process of dissemination the material cultural meme of “Youshu”, the host (translator) spreads the cultural connotation of the meme to the target language country through similar copying, that is, verbatim literal translation. This method has both the linguistic form of the target language and the linguistic charm of the source language, which is a proper way of translating.

### Social Culture-Loaded Words

Social culture-loaded words are the most complicated one of these five types of culture-loaded words. They include the culture of a country and nation at the ideological level, such as customs, values, ethics, political systems, stories of historical figures, and so on.

Case 3: 系高颉之玄胃兮, 氏中叶之炳灵。(班固《幽通赋》)

Version: Our lineage began with the “dark scions” of Gao-Xu, our clan descends from the “blazing numen” of the middle ages.

Gao Xu is the chief of the tribe in ancient legends. Knechtges adopted the method of transliteration and annotation for this historical figure. The annotation is

Gao-Xu is a combination of Gaoyang and Zhuanxu 颛顼, the clan name and reign name respectively of one of the Five Lords who reputedly ruled before the Xia dynasty. In Chinese correlative thought, Zhuanxu ruled by virtue of water, which was to which the Ban family traced its ancestry. (Knechtges & Xiao, 1996, p. 82)

Translator spreads it into English-speaking countries' cultures through similar duplication, and expresses the cultural connotation of the meme by adding annotations, which not only retains the language form of the source language meme, but also makes the target language readers fully understand the historical and cultural background behind the memes.

### Religious Culture-Loaded Words

Religious culture-loaded words reflect different national beliefs and national religious traditions. Different religious beliefs lead to great differences in religious and cultural vocabulary in different ethnic language systems. Due to the influence of Buddhism, Taoism, and other ideological and cultural influences in China, vocabulary such as “Bodhisattva”, “Buddha”, “Yin and yang”, and “Qi” have been produced.

Case 4: 阴阳为炭兮，万物为铜。（贾谊《鹏鸟赋》）

Version: Yin and yang are the charcoal; the myriad things are the copper.

Knechtges translated “阴阳” into “Yin and yang” by transliteration. The English-English definition of “Yin and yang” in the concise English-Chinese dictionary is “Yin and Yang, the two opposing principles in nature, the former feminine and negative and the latter masculine and positive”. This illustrates that the cultural meme of “Yin and yang” has evolved into a strong meme in the similar copying and dissemination carried out by various translators, and it has spread widely in the target language culture. There are two reasons for this. First, the translation of “阴阳” into “Yin and yang” conforms to the characteristics of copying faithfulness. This translation method retains the pronunciation rules of the source language. Second, the dissemination the word “Yin and yang” to the West has been for a long time, and it has been copied and disseminated by many hosts translators. It is in line with the characteristics of prolificity and longevity. “Tao” and “Yin and yang” are similar memes. These two similar memes promote each other in the process of copying and disseminating, forming a compound meme, to promote “Tao” to become strong meme in the target language culture. The widespread spread of the transliterated “Tao” in the West also proves the success of this translation (Liang, 2020, p. 79). This is why Knechtges did not add any annotations when translating “Yin and yang” and “Tao”.

### Linguistic Culture-Loaded Words

Language culture-loaded words reflect the language characteristics of different language families, including phonetics, semantics, grammar, and language habits.

Case 5: 众变繁姿，参差洊密。（鲍照《舞鹤赋》）

Version: In manifold transformations, multiple postures, diversely disposed, tightly joined.

The binomen word means that two Chinese characters are combined to form a meaning and cannot be understood by splitting the two characters (Wang & He, 2016, p. 148). Therefore, when translating such words, Knechtges adheres to the principle of indivisibility, seizes its pronunciation characteristics, and uses free translation to translate them. In the above example, “参差” is a double-tone word, which is pronounced as “cen” and “ci”, and the initials are both “c”. The meaning of it is the appearance of the irregular arrangement. Knechtges’ translation “diversely disposed” not only reproduces the dual tone of the source language with the alliteration “d”, but also expresses the connotation of the uneven arrangement of cranes. From the perspective of memetic theory, the translator uses the language form of the target language to reproduce the phonology and deep meaning on the basis of mastering the meaning of language and culture memes. This approach allows the target reader to understand the phonological method and meaning of the original meme without barriers. It is worth mentioning that Knechtges reproduced the binomen words with alliteration, so that readers of the target language can appreciate the characteristics of Chinese language and culture, which is an effective method of meme transmission.

### Conclusion

The widespread dissemination of the strong compound memes “Yin and yang” and “Tao” in the West shows

that foreignization translation strategies and transliteration method are the trend of cultural memes copying and dissemination, because they conform to the characteristics of the faithfulness of meme copying. So it can form a strong meme, which is the best way to spread Chinese culture-loaded words. However, it takes a long period of communication to completely disseminate culture-loaded words through the strategy of foreignization translation, because the dissemination of strong memes has also the characteristics of prolific and long-lasting, and the domestication strategy is a necessary way for memes to spread. Therefore, focusing on foreignization strategy, supplemented by domestication strategy, combining transliteration, literal translation, the translation methods of free translation and annotation are used to the dissemination of culture-loaded words in a memetic manner. This method is conducive to the translation of classics and the foreign dissemination of culture-loaded words, thereby helping Chinese traditional culture to go out.

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