

Chinese Assistant in Sinology

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The rapid development of China has given birth to the craze of Sinology, and Sinology has received more and more attention. However, due to the differences in language and culture, even senior sinologists may have difficulties or mistakes in understanding. Therefore, this paper will focus on sinologists in translation and demonstrate the important role of Chinese assistants in translation and the importance to the long-term development of Sinology by analyzing the advantages of Chinese-foreign co-translation models. Based on the conclusions, this paper analyzes the limitations of independent translation of sinologists, and on this basis, it proposes to establish an institution to train sinological assistants and coordinate translation work.

Keywords: sinologist, Chinese-foreign co-translation model, sinological assistant

Introduction

As one of the cradles of world civilization, China's long and appealing traditional culture has been deeply attracting scholars at home and abroad, so the dissemination of Oriental learning has a history of thousands of years; Sinology is a discipline emerged in such a long history. Sinology refers to a discipline in which scholars outside China study various aspects of China including classics, history, famous works, and exegetical texts (Liang, 1998). Sinology has nowadays become an international academic undertaking, which has spread the Chinese culture and strengthened the cultural exchanges between China and the West. However, it is foreign scholars who are studying Chinese culture, so it is hard to avoid misunderstandings at the level of words or culture, and thus misrepresent Chinese culture. In small cases, the misrepresenting may make other foreigners misunderstand a certain cultural phenomenon. In large cases, they may misunderstand the image of China, and even give rise to stereotypes. In this regard, co-translation can deepen the translator's understanding of the true meaning and style of the original text, reduce some obvious errors in information transmission, and make the translation authentic and smooth, meeting the aesthetic requirements of readers, so as to be more acceptable to them (Yuan, 1989). Therefore, with the help of examples in the field of translation, this paper introduces the advantages of Chinese-foreign co-translation models, in order to demonstrate the important role of Chinese assistants in translation and their importance to the long-term development of Sinology. Based on the conclusion, this paper analyzes the limitations of independent translation of sinologists, and assumes that an institution can be set up in Sinology to train sinological assistants, so as to ensure the quality of sinologists' research, the correct and effective transmission of Chinese culture, and the healthy development of Sinology.

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The Superiority of Chinese and Foreign Co-translation Models

Translation can be divided into two modes: One is independent translation and the other is cooperative translation. Typical traditional cooperative translation modes include vertical cooperation, oral and written translation, main translation and auxiliary translation (Liu, 2009). The Chinese-foreign co-translation model discussed in this paper belongs to the main translation and auxiliary translation, which is led by sinologists and assisted by Chinese assistants.

In the 1960s, the China International Communication Group planned to adopt the Chinese-foreign cooperative translation model for the four Great Novels of China: Yang Xianyi and his wife Gladys Yang co-translated *A Dream of Red Mansions*, American sinologist Robert Moses and Ren Jiazhen co-translated *Historical Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, British sinologist Francis Jenner co-translated *Journey to the West* with Tang Bowen, and sinologist Sidney Shapiro collaborated with Tang Bowen and Ye Junjian to translate the *Outlaws of the Marsh*. After the release of the translation version, the highest praise abroad at that time was to affirm the title of the four Great Classics of China, which was believed to be worthy of the name, and the popularity of the translation was obvious. And the success of these translated works must be inseparable from the Chinese-foreign co-translation mode, which ensures the authentic expression, and also preserves the rich and colorful traditional Chinese culture, so that the West can understand the real China in a way that is acceptable to both Chinese and foreigners.

In recent years, British sinologist Robin Gilbank and Hu Zongfeng, dean of the School of Foreign Languages at Northwestern University, have collaborated on translation activities. They worked together to translate the works of more than a dozen Shaanxi writers, including Chen Zhongshi and Jia Pingwa. The translation of regional literature focuses on accurate understanding and idiomatic expression, and the advantage of Chinese and foreign co-translation mode is that it has both the understanding advantage of Chinese translator and the expression advantage of foreign translator, so that both understanding and expression can reach an ideal height. Robin Gilbank and Hu Zongfeng give full play to the advantages of the Chinese-foreign co-translation model, and connect their literary minds with readers, achieving such an artistic conception, standing on the top of the mountain, feelings like filled with mountains; looking at the sea at the seaside, the imagination is like the surging sea water. They are now being asked to translate by foreign publishers, partly because more and more foreign readers want to learn more about China through literary works, and partly because their translation works are recognized. Their cooperative translation enables these regional literature works to go abroad effectively, which not only helps foreign readers have a comprehensive understanding of modern Chinese literature from different aspects and angles, but also presents the diversified Chinese culture to the world.

It is worth mentioning that there is an interesting saying in the Sinology circle that “if you want to be a sinologist, you must first marry a Chinese wife”. It can be seen from this saying that Chinese wives are very helpful to Sinology work. American sinologist Howard Goldblatt and his wife Lin Lijun have done a lot of literary translation work together; the two of them translated Bi Feiyu’s *Moon Opera* and *Three Sisters*, as well as the Taiwan female writer Zhu Tianwen’s *Notes of a Decadent Man* and a number of other works. In their co-translation mode, Lin Lijun, the wife, completes the first draft translation, Goldblatt revises the first draft according to the original text to get the second draft, then his wife revises the second draft according to the original text, and then Goldblatt revises the English expression without reference to the original text, which is the fourth draft. Finally, the translation is modified and polished according to the opinions of the editors to

produce the final draft. Based on the advantages of the co-translation model, coupled with such a meticulous attitude, the couple's translation can stand up to scrutiny and achieve great success upon publication. There are many similar couples, such as Swedish sinologist Goran Malmqvist and his wife Chen Wenfen, British sinologist Joseph Needham and his wife Lu Guizhen, and so on. They tell Chinese stories well together as a couple, which made great contributions to improving the image of China as a great power and ensuring the steady development of Sinology. Without the power of these Chinese wives, the Chinese taste would be greatly diminished. It can be seen that although sinologists have great talents and profound attainments in the Chinese language, the control of the translation quality by these Chinese wives cannot be ignored. It can be said that it is precisely this kind of perfect cooperation that maximizes the quality of translation and makes the translations of Chinese classics win the favor and admiration of foreign readers.

It can be seen that the Chinese-foreign co-translation model has its unique advantages, and to realize the superiority of the model, both sinologists and Chinese assistants are indispensable, because they each play an irreplaceable role, which contributes to this model in their own way.

The Limitations of Sinologist Independent Translation

Western professional sinologists play a very important role in the transmission of Chinese culture. It can even be said that they play a leading role in the translation and dissemination of ancient Chinese cultural books (Zhang, 2014). However, because of the special cultural identity of sinologists, they have their own advantages but also some limitations in independent translation of Chinese works.

The first problem the early sinologists faced was the language barrier. He (1997) believed that most of the early sinologists such as John King Fairbank and Joseph Needham could not speak Chinese, let alone be fluent. Although contemporary sinologists have made great improvements in the use of language, they are unable to cope with the rich vocabulary and lexical connotation of Chinese.

Secondly, translation is definitely not a simple word-to-word conversion. The purpose is to spread and carry forward the excellent Chinese culture through translated works. However, cultural differences make it difficult for sinologists to have a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the extensive and profound Chinese culture, which leads to a certain degree of misinterpretation or overinterpretation in translation, and the essence of the works may be lost after translation. Yang Muzhi once commented on the two translations of *A Dream of Red Mansions*: "Although the first English translation of *The Story of the Stone* by British Hawkes in the 1970s was highly praised in the West, its fidelity to the original work and its understanding of the charm and customs of traditional Chinese culture were far less than Yang Xianyi's version. For example, in *The Story of the Stone*, Hawkes translated Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism into Christianity".

Finally, due to the different values and aesthetics, sinologists may deviate from the mainstream of Chinese culture when choosing translated texts, which may lead to a one-sided misunderstanding of Chinese culture among foreign readers. Meanwhile, this material selection problem also takes up resources for the translation of fine Chinese works. There are many excellent Chinese classic works and they deserve greater dissemination.

These limitations of sinologists' independent translation are basically due to cultural differences, which are inevitable but can be used to become advantages. Therefore, this paper argues that arranging exclusive Chinese assistants for sinologists is an effective way to solve these problems.

Cultivating Sinologist's Exclusive Chinese Assistant

The excellent translations produced by the Chinese-foreign cooperative translation model prove that excellent Chinese assistants can help sinologists get rid of the limitations brought by cultural differences, and their cooperation can achieve a qualitative leap in translation and in Sinology.

The highest goal of co-translation should be to strive for the historical and all-round integration of the translation version and the original text. The lowest goal should be to achieve unity in understanding and communication between sinologists and Chinese assistants (Zhang, 1999). At this level, to become a Chinese assistant who can assist sinologists, one must first make sure that he/she is good at Chinese and proficient in the target language. The most necessary skill is to master the sinologist's shortcoming—Chinese culture. In addition, Chinese assistants need to have translation knowledge, practical experience, and the ability to proofread translations. At present, there is no shortage of excellence in linguistics, literature, history, or translation in China, but it is not easy to become competent in all these fields at the same time. Such talents are few and far between. In addition, looking at the cases of Chinese and foreign co-translation, cooperation is mostly spontaneous, and the Chinese assistants have not formed a system, which also leads to that the Chinese-foreign co-translation model has not become a stable mode.

Moreover, the unique cultural identity and cultural consciousness of sinologists directly determine that their experience horizon is completely different (Li, 2022). All aspects of their translation thoughts and practices, such as translation motivation, selection of translation strategies and methods, and involvement of cultural consciousness, are all unique. In other words, the translation behavior of translators all interprets the identity of translators, highlighting the individual differences of the identity of translators. In view of this, Sinology assistants cannot assist more than one sinologist at a time, because individual differences of sinologists affect all aspects of sinology research and translation work. It is very important to conduct a large number of targeted studies before formally assisting sinologists, and to cultivate tacit understanding and form fixed collocation during formal assistance. Therefore, the exclusive factor in cultivating the exclusive Chinese assistant of Sinologist is also the key point.

Therefore, this paper holds that an institution can be set up to cultivate Chinese assistants to assist sinologists. The institute aims to provide a platform for exchange and learning, bring together scholars who are interested in becoming exclusive assistants to sinologists, and invite experts from various fields such as linguistics, literature, history, and translation to impart their expertise to scholars. In particular, due to the duties of sinology assistant, the translation teaching process also needs to pay attention to co-translation studies. For example, after the Chinese native translator has translated the first draft, how does the English native translator revise and polish it? What issues do the two translators mainly focus on when they have different ideas? How do the two translators negotiate (Zhang, 2018)? The institute should make every effort to obtain their revised manuscripts and carry out targeted academic research on such renowned Chinese and Western translators as the Ge Haowen couple and the Yang Xianyi couple, which will open a new window for translation studies and make important contributions to cultivating excellent Sinology assistants. As for the most important knowledge of Chinese culture, because many elements of Chinese culture exist in the form of non-text in social life, it is necessary to add the part of investigating social life when offering the course of studying ancient books. Apart from these strengthening professional skills, being a qualified assistant also requires knowing how to do support work well. In this regard, it is very important to learn international Sinology well. Only by understanding the history of Sinology, well-

known sinologists and their research work, can Chinese assistants understand what role an assistant should play and how to play it. In addition, the institute should interview active sinologists today and compile a book of their needs for assistants for prospective assistants to learn and practice. For the preparatory assistant, the institution should also analyze their respective advantages through various monitoring and assessment, combined with the analysis of the sinologist; the institution should match the sinologist and assistant, in order to form the optimal combination. Finally, because of the increasing proportion of contemporary works in foreign translation, translators and authors have more direct intersections (Y. C. Wang & K. F. Wang, 2013). This situation has both advantages and disadvantages. The advantage is that the original author can provide the translator with various information about his/her books and sometimes allow the translator to make necessary corrections based on the common goal. The disadvantage is that the personal relationship with the author restricts the free play of the translator to some extent, and it is often necessary to seek the author's opinion on the obvious abridgement and adjustment in the translation. In addition, due to their different understandings of the original novel and translation principles, the relationship between the writer and the translator is sometimes tense. Once the disagreement arises due to the remarks, it will not only affect the discussion between the two sides on the work and translation, but also endanger the possibility of cooperation again. Therefore, in order to avoid this situation and the problem of translation material selection, the best solution is to have an institution responsible for coordination, which requires government to organize related top-level design and strategic planning, and then entrust this institution to carry out overall coordination and dynamic supervision on the selection of translation subject, arrangement of translation process, publishing work, and overseas marketing.

Sinology assistant, as a system, will certainly help sinology achieve great development under continuous improvement, so it is actually necessary to set up an institution to cultivate Sinology assistants urgently and coordinate the translation work efficiently, supporting the development of translation and Sinology.

Conclusion

Sinology aims to study China from a foreigner's point of view and then tell foreigners about China in a foreigner's voice. The author believes that in order to ensure that foreigners can understand the real China, it is necessary to adopt the cooperative translation mode of sinologists and Chinese assistants, utilize the distinct research perspectives of sinologists to enrich the connotation of Chinese culture, and rely on their native language expression to ensure that there will be no language misunderstanding. Combined with the Chinese assistants' strong Chinese skills and understanding of traditional culture, Sinology can truly realize its disciplinary significance. However, the requirements on the ability of Chinese assistants are extremely strict. Their writing skills and literary level must be able to help the sinologist's translation and research to a higher level. Therefore, it is proposed that the Sinology community should set up an institution under the supervision of the government to cultivate Chinese assistants who can assist sinologists well, so as to promote the healthy and long-term development of sinology.

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