

Domestication and the Strategy of Culture-Reserving in the Translation of Shaanxi Local Literature—A Case Study of “Mountain Savage”*

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“Mountain Savage” has been well-received for its depiction of geographical features and cultural traits of Shaanxi.¹ Focusing on the English translation of “Mountain Savage”, this paper illustrates the application of domestication and foreignization, as proposed by Venuti, to literary translation. Also, by taking the authors’ translation praxis of Shaanxi local literature into consideration, this paper proposes and exemplifies how during the course of the “Going global” strategy—especially the “going out” of local literature and culture—the use of the culture-reserving strategy proves more practical and efficacious. This helps to convey the linguistic and cultural traits of the source language and at the same time, the strategy of domestication is applied so as to minimize misunderstanding that arises through cultural differences. These two methods complement one other and assist vitally the project of literary translation and cultural transmission.

Keywords: literary translation, domestication, culture-reserving strategy

Introduction

German philosopher and theologian Schaller Mach put forward two translation methods in his Berlin Speech “On Translation” in 1813: “One is to keep the author as close to the reader as possible; the other is to keep the reader” (Dryden, 2006, p. 225). This bisection was further interpreted in 1995 by the famous American translation theorist Lawrence Venuti as “domestication” and “foreignization” in *The Translator’s Invisibility* (1995, p. 20).

Domestication means that translators keep the target language readers close to the target language and advocates the use of the language habits and expressions to convey the original content, while foreignization

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¹ Mountain Savage is a novella written by Ms Ye Guangqin, a renowned writer based in Shaanxi Province, China. It is selected from the English version of Ye Guangqin’s novel *Mountain Stories*, a collection including this novella and other five stories that has been translated into English and published in the UK by Valley Press (Scarborough, North Yorkshire) in 2017. It formed the first installment in the new “Shaanxi Stories” series of translated literary works (Series Editors: Hu Zongfeng and Robin Gilbank). *Mountain Stories* is translated by Prof. Hu Zongfeng, Dr. Zhang Min of Northwest University and Mr. He Longping.

means that the source language culture should be used as the basis and translators should get close to the author. Foreignization further requires translators to convey message in source language, keeps the cultural connotation and local customs of the original text, and makes the text fully appreciated by target language readers.

In the practice of translation, due to cultural differences, the method of domestication often leads to incomprehensible phenomena, and sometimes even distorts the connotation and charm of the original work, while foreignization leads to obscure translation that may confuse readers of the target language or even cause misunderstanding due to cultural differences and lack of background knowledge in the source language.

Moreover, whether the translator adopts method of domestication or foreignization is mainly influenced by the social, historical, cultural, and aesthetic characteristics, purpose of translation, source language and target language. However, these factors keep a dynamic trend in different social and historical periods of time. Thus there is no final conclusion about which method of the two is the dominant strategy. In the history of literary translation in China of more than 100 years, translators in each period have their own tropism. By combing the historical process, it is clearly seen how translators' strategy are influenced by social, historical, cultural, and other factors in each period.

Domestication and Culture-Reserving Strategy

In *The Translator's Invisibility*, Venuti (1995) further thinks that the translator can choose the translation method of domestication or foreignization. The former focuses on nationalism, plans foreign values into the target-language culture, and invites the original author to the target-language country, while the latter displays expressions of linguistic and cultural differences in foreign texts and sends readers abroad. On this basis, he promotes domestication and foreignization from the level of translation strategy to the level of philosophical thought, cultural hegemony and nationalism. He holds that the European and American translation circles are controlled by domestication theory, and proposes that the idea of foreignization should be used to break the mainstream culture and hegemony in Europe and America. In doing this can it change the circumstance of translators' invisibility and the suppression of source language and culture by European and American hegemony.

This thought is of positive guiding significance to the translation and transmission of Chinese literature at the present stage. With the further development of Sino-Western communication, the spread of Chinese literature and culture has brought about a brand-new situation. During this process, as put forward by Venuti, the strategy of foreignization should be adopted to present the Chinese cultural connotation and cultural differences so as to better spread the Chinese culture. However, due to the diversity of Chinese literature, the mere use of foreignization strategy often leads to cultural misunderstanding, especially in the process of translation of local literature. Preserving the heterogeneous cultural characteristics of Chinese local literature (that is, source language culture. This refers to Shaanxi local culture in this paper) and at the same time adopting the strategy of domestication can avoid the cultural misunderstanding brought about by translation to target language readers. Therefore, this paper believes that by flexibly applying the strategy of domestication and cultural preservation and making both strategies complement each other under the new situation, and by seeking similarities out of differences in literary translation, can we make full use of the historical opportunity of "Going Global". It should then be enhanced that the preserving of heterogeneous culture with the assistance of proper use of domestication should be adopted to promote the cultural diversity and overseas publicity.

Translation Strategies in the Translation of “Mountain Savage”

“Mountain Savage” is a novella written by the famous Chinese writer Ms. Ye Guangqin (2017), which has been translated by the team of “Translation of Shaanxi Literature” of Northwest University and published in the UK. This novella is very important among Ye Guangqin’s series of Qinling Mountains novels. The author depicts the ecological and humanistic environment in the depths of Qinling Mountains with an unusual graceful touch. She describes a sad story about a modern “mountain savage”, using the lines on mountain ghost from “Nine Odes” written by the renowned ancient Chinese poet Qu Yuan. With the discussion of the above-mentioned translation strategies, taking the translation of “Mountain Savage” as an example, this paper probes into the application of domestication and culture-reserving strategies in literary translation from the perspective of how the translator handles culture-bound images and words in local literature and folk culture in Shaanxi.

1. The Use of Domestication Strategy

Original text: 小岩鼠拖着 一根湿漉漉的大尾巴钻进窝棚，它是他的老熟人，是住的离他最近的邻居，有两只，他将它们一个唤做“岩岩”，一个唤做“鼠鼠”，岩岩是公的，鼠鼠是母的，它们住在窝棚后头的岩缝里，“男耕女织”，夫唱妇随，过着如胶似漆的恩爱生活。

Translation: A rock rat sneaks into the shack dragging its big wet tail behind. It is his old acquaintance and his closest neighbour to boot. There are two of them, one he has named “Rocky” and the other “Ratty.” Rocky is male while Ratty is female. Both of them dwell in the fissures behind the shack. They live a pastoral life whereby “Adam delves and Eve spins” and have become deeply attached to each other.

In the translation of Chinese names in literary translation, except for a few cases of fixed translation, translators often adopt transliteration and literal translation methods. The author of this paper believes that the translation of names in literary works should be divided into two cases. First, the person’s name is only used as a character code, which does not involve background knowledge or context. This kind of names can be dealt with directly by transliteration. In the other case, the name of a character is related to the story and background, often with puns or metaphor purpose, which should be appropriately naturalized according to the context in order to help the target language reader to enter into the story.

The example given here is the second case. The author (Ms. Ye) named a pair of rock rats “Yanyan” (the first character of rock rat in Chinese) and “Shushu” (the second character of rock rat in Chinese), which not only clearly shows the biological properties of the small animals, but also suggests the intimate relationship between them. Therefore, the simple transliteration of “Yanyan” and “Shushu” will undoubtedly cause some difficulties for the target language readers and fail to translate the metaphorical meaning of the naming by the author.

Original text: 没有人扶他，一圈人围着他看，张着嘴傻乐，模样都像傻x。

Translation: No one extends a supportive hand. The onlookers watch him in a circle, laughing at him, much like a bunch of bastards.

The term “Shabi” (stupid cunt), with the characteristics of vulgarity and abuse, has a certain popularity in many places of China in oral communication. Its meaning is different in different regions and different contexts. In English, there are a certain number of coarse sayings of the same nature. Therefore, how to translate them accurately depends on the context. In the context of this paradigm, the protagonist of the novella (aka Chen Hua) went down from the mountains to the town post office to post letters. He was treated by the local people as

nomads and even a savage who ran out of the mountains. When he went to a restaurant, he was driven out by the owner of the restaurant and pushed down to the ground. There was a crowd of bystanders around him who watched the scene with a lively attitude. In that presence of the onlookers, he was treated as a savage-like man whose hair is untidy and who dressed in rags. The onlookers' state of mind is high on the table at this time, so the look they show is not totally foolish, but rather mocking and teasing. Therefore, how to deal with the term "stupid cunt" is significant, and the translator naturalizes it into "bastards" according to the context, which highlights the context and the embarrassing situation of the protagonist. This also serves to forecast the sad ending of the story.

Original text: 立刻那妇人变了脸，拍着膀向众人说，不吃他倒耍了个大！

Translation: The woman suddenly changes face, telling the crowd, "He's bragging by refusing to eat it!"

The context of this paradigm continues that of the previous one. The hero of the novel, after being knocked down to the ground, was surrounded by onlookers. A woman "with exaggerated generosity on her face" threw him half a pancake as if she were feeding a homeless dog. He refuses her "exaggerated generosity" and malicious kindness, which so irritates her, and she angrily scolds him: "bragging!" "耍了个大" is a typical culturally-loaded word of Shaanxi folk culture, meaning "insolent, arrogant, unappreciative." If translated literally or with foreignization method, the translation will more or less cause some difficulty in understanding to the target language reader. Therefore, the domestication strategy is adopted in the translation, and the word "bragging" helps to imply that the woman is angry and at the same time her feeling is somewhat ineffable.

2. Cultural-Reserving Strategy

Original text: 遗像的左右角夹了两张当红男女影星的相片，很有些金童玉女的味道。

English translation: On either side of the portrait hang a picture of a popular movie star, one male and one female – like the golden boy and jade girl effigies in a shrine.

The phrase "金童玉女" (Golden Boy and Jade Girl) is a typical exemplar of Chinese folk culture and language. If it is only translated or domesticated into "a man and a woman" or "a boy and a girl", it will greatly offset the metaphorical intention of the author in the original text. Here, the way the translator treats it as "golden boy and jade girl", which preserves the heterogeneity of Chinese folk culture, and with the addition of "effigies in a shrine", further helps target language readers understand its content and connotation as well as the feature of folk culture of this saying.

Original text: 天河分叉，单裤单褂，天河调角，棉裤棉袄。

Translation: When the galaxy becomes forked, you wear thin pants and shirts; when the galaxy shifts its angle you wear thick cotton-padded trousers and jackets.

This idiom has strong local features and belongs to the typically culture-loaded language in the southern part of Shaanxi Province. From the structural point of view, the four four-character phrases not only correspond to one another, but also embody the profound and delicate Chinese folk culture in terms of rhythm. At the same time, there is a strong metaphorical meaning underlying the literal meaning. Therefore, how to translate this colloquial phrase accurately is a considerable challenge for the translator. Generally speaking, the translator adopts the strategy of culture-reserving in dealing with this proverb, which employs the structure corresponding to the original text in form, and at the same time is faithful to the source language and culture in content. The translator translates this proverb from Chinese folk culture ingeniously, retains the heterogeneous cultural characteristics of local literature, and avoids misunderstanding to the target language readers.

Original text: 这里的人视猫头鹰为不吉，俗称“夜猫子进宅，无事不来”。

Translation: People here regard owls as ominous, as the saying goes “If ‘night-cat’ enters a house, trouble will come at once.”

The image of owl has different metaphorical meanings in Chinese and foreign literature. In Shaanxi, its image is quite unfavorable. The negative connotation is conveyed by the image of owls, and the words “not auspicious”. The author even adds a folk culture idiom to strengthen the metaphorical meaning: “If ‘night-cat’ enters a house, trouble will come at once.” In dealing with the translation of this sentence, the translator has also adopted a culture-reserving strategy, hoping to convey more of the cultural identity of the source language. Since owls have been used in the previous sentence, the translation of owls into “night-cat” in the latter sentence does not confuse the target language reader, but is highly faithful to the original text, while retaining the cultural identity of the source language. In addition, in terms of structure and prosody, the translator tries to preserve the original culture as much as possible under the circumstance that there is no fixed translation. By translating the proverb into “If ‘night-cat’ enters a house, trouble will come up at once” it not only makes the structure correspond in form, but also tries to get close to the original text in rhythm, which reads catchy. Meanwhile, the special treatment of this animal image by the author is retained, and the cultural reservation is achieved to the greatest extent.

Conclusion

To sum up, we can see that domestication and foreignization, as translation strategies, are both very important and indispensable in the history of translation theories and practice in China and abroad. In each social and historical period, different translators would adopt different translation strategies due to the constraints of history, politics, culture, language and translation objectives. After combing the history of the Chinese literary translation for more than 100 years, it can be stated that the translator’s translation strategy has gradually been developing from one strategy to a balance between the two strategies. The foreignization strategy put forward by American translator Venuti in 1995 and the idea of breaking the cultural inequality by means of foreignization have certain guiding significance for Chinese literary translation, especially for local or regional literary and cultural translation. However, the mere adoption of the foreignization strategy will simply result in the cultural misunderstanding of the target language readers. With the author’s practice of translating local literary works in Shaanxi, the author holds that in the process of “going out” of Chinese literature, culture-reserving strategy should be used to convey the cultural characteristics of the source language and domestication should be employed to reduce the misunderstanding caused by cultural differences. In order to better carry out the translation and transmission of Chinese literature and culture, the two strategies should be used together to supplement each other.

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