

Study of the Translation Strategy on Costumes in *A Dream of Red Mansions*—Taking Yang Xianyi’s Version as An Example

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Because of its overwhelming and long-lasting attraction, *Hong Lou Meng* which is regarded as the most remarkable Chinese novel has never ceased to be investigated by Chinese and foreign scholars. Yang Xianyi’s translation version is one of the best translation versions, especially the dress translation. Yang Xianyi’s version of *A Dream of Red Mansions* provides good examples for translation strategies analysis.

Keywords: *A Dream of Red Mansions*, Yang Xianyi, dress translation

On Costume Materials

Yang’s translation pays more attention to the output of Chinese culture and tries to preserve the features and images of the original text, thus preserving the Chinese flavor in the translation. So on the translation of clothing materials, more often, Yang applied foreignization than domestication.

In Chapter 3, when Jia Baoyu first meets Lin Daiyu, he wears a “石青起花八团倭缎排穗褂”; the material used here is “倭缎”, which is somehow connected with the “silk road”. Whilst “倭” refers to Japan, and “缎” is a kind of material. In another translation version, Hawkes translates it into “Japanese silk damask”. The translation is obvious not proper here, because they are two different kinds of materials. In ancient China, “丝” was the soft thread produced by silkworms. Thus “丝” is often translated into “silk”, and “satin” is a type of clothing with a smooth shiny surface, and it is a general concept of silk fabric. Thus “satin” includes “silk”. More important, “缎” has the equivalent translation in English, that is “satin”. In *Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary*, “缎” means a type of cloth with a smooth shiny surface. So Yang Xianyi translates it into “Japanese satin”, which spotlights the difference between “silk” and “satin”, embodying the features of the material as well as adapting to the cultural background and historical background. Meanwhile, throughout the translation process, all the material of the “缎” is translated into “satin”, such as in Chapter 3, “青缎掐牙背心” is translated into “blue satin sleeveless jacket”; in Chapter 49, “大红猩猩毡与羽毛缎斗篷” is translated into “red capes of wool or satin” as well as in Chapter 68, “青缎披风” is translated into “black satin cape”.

Whilst in the translation of “绫”, in order to demonstrate the features of traditional Chinese culture and more close to the original text, Yang adopt more than one word to describe this material. For in English, it’s difficult to find the equivalent word of this material. In Chinese, “绫” refers to a kind of material, which is a general conception of silk fabric. For the sake of embodying the characteristics of this kind of special Chinese material,

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Yang translates it in a various way. In Chapter 3, Jia Baoyu's "花绫裤" is translated into "Satin trousers", in Chapter 24, yuan yang's "水红绫子袄儿" is translated into "a pink silk jacket".

For the presentation of traditional culture of the source language, and under the guidance of structure objects of adaptability at the lexical level, Yang applies literal translation in the translation of clothing materials in most cases. For instance, Chapter 31, Lady Jia's "大红猩猩毡斗篷" is translated into "red woolen cape". In Chinese, "毡" is "something made of animal hair or chemical fibers, which is used as a cold proof article". While in *Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary*, "woolen" is "made of wool". According to Yang's translation, it emphasizes the material is made of soft fine hair that covers the body of animals, which is proper and exact. Besides, in Chapter 56, the "上用宫绸" is translated into "imperial gauze". In China, "绸" refers to a broad category of silk fabrics. While according to *Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary*, "gauze" is a type of light transparent cloth, usually made of cotton or silk. Thus, it is reasonable to translate "绸" into "gauze", for both of the them do not represent an exact article; "绸" may be made of "silk" or other materials; meanwhile, "gauze" also does not represent a particular thing. Generally speaking, most materials are translated properly and reasonably by using literal translation, which can exemplify their textures and characteristics. It is sensible to use literal translation on costume materials.

On Costume Decorations

In *A Dream of Red Mansions*, decorations and ornaments are one of the most important parts of clothing. Meanwhile, in the work, the decorations are applied to describe the clothing or the people are numerous, such as collar, jade, talisman, lock, necklace, sash, coronet, etc. Not just on clothing materials, Yang's foreignization translation strategy is also applied to decorations and ornaments.

In *A Dream of Red Mansions*, all the decorations and ornaments can exemplify the status in the mansions. In Character 3, the decorations of the first appearance of Wang Xifeng fully exemplify her noble status and symbolize her identity and the wealth. For instance, Yang translates her "金丝八宝攒珠髻" into "gold-filigree tiara was set with jewels and pearls", "朝阳五凤挂珠钗" into "hair-clasps, in the form of five phoenixes facing the sun, had pendants of pearls", "赤金盘螭瓔珞圈" into "necklet of red gold, was in the form of a coiled dragon studded with germs", as well as "豆绿宫绦双鱼比目玫瑰佩" into "Double red jade pendants with pea-green tassels". These translations are all foreignized. These are cultural outputs for English readers whose cultural backgrounds are quite different from those of Chinese. It also embodies the aesthetic taste and costume culture of the Chinese nation. The ornaments translations of other characters play the same role. Such as in Chapter 3, Jia Baoyu's "宝玉" is translated into "precious jade", and "五彩丝攒花结长穗宫绦" is translated into "A colored tasseled palace sash" etc.

Whist in some cases, Yang Xianyi also applies domestication under the guidance of the structural objects of adaptability, for he uses different words to express the same or similar things. For instance, in order to enhance the aura or to form parallel construction, Chinese like to repeat one word, while the English prefer applying different words to pursue various forms. Such as in Chapter 3, when Jia Baoyu first appears, he wears "项圈"; Yang Xianyi translates it into "torque", while in Chapter 35, Xue Baochai also wears a "项圈", and Yang translates it into "necklace". Besides, in Chapter 3, in Wang Xifeng's first appearance, she wears "赤金盘螭瓔珞圈"; here, "瓔珞" is translated into "necklet", while in Chapter 8, when the author is describing Xue Baochai's

ornaments, the word “璆珞” is translated into “locket”. These are following the structural objects of adaptability at the lexical level in Yang Xianyi’s version.

On Costume Patterns

The differences of dress culture between China and western countries are large, especially in ancient times. When reading *A Dream of Red Mansions*, the Chinese readers have fewer problems in the understanding than the foreigners for Chinese and the author are in the same culture background. While the clothing patterns in *A Dream of Red Mansions* full of Chinese characteristics, if the translator merely cares about the source version, the foreigners may find it is really difficult to finish or continue the reading. Under the instruction of the dynamics of adaptability, Yang applies more domestication than foreignization in the translation of clothing styles and patterns.

In *A Dream of Red Mansions*, the pattern “箭袖” occurs many times, such as “秋香色立蟒白狐腋箭袖”, “白蟒箭袖”, “大红金蟒狐腋箭袖”, etc. Jianxiu is a tight sleeve garment worn by ancient scholars. The upper end of the sleeve can cover hand, and the lower half is short, which is convenient for archery. This kind of cloth prevails in Qing Dynasty, which is not well known for many present Chinese. Thus for foreigners, it is even harder to understand. Yang Xianyi translates “箭袖” into “jacket”, which can be better understood by the foreigners for they are familiar with this kind of cloth.

What’s more, in Chapter 52, Lady Jia grants Baoyu a “乌云豹的氅衣”, while “氅衣” is an outer garment which covers on the clothes, used to keep the cold. It is characterized by “straight collar, large sleeve as well as margin in Qing Dynasty, which later developed into cape. Yang translates “氅衣” into “cape”. According to *Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary*, “cape” means “a loose outer piece of clothing that has no sleeves, fastens at the neck and hangs from the shoulders, like a cloak”. Seriously speaking, “氅衣” and cape have some differences, for it is clear that “氅衣” has sleeves while cape not. But in English, the exact word cannot be found to describe “氅衣”, so Yang’s translation of it is reasonable and is easier for foreigners to understand.

In terms of literal translation, it can not only convey the original content, but also can reproduce the original form, which can mostly adapt to the dynamics of adaptability. Such as in the translation of most clothing items, Yang accepts literal translation. In Chapter 3, “厚底大红靴” is translated into “thick-soled scarlet shoes”. For another instance, in Chapter 6, when he describes Wang Xifeng’s costume, every word in the target version is exact. Yang Xianyi translates “桃红撒花袄” into “peach-red flowered jacket”. Also in Chapter 45, Yang translates “棠木屐” into “pyrus-wood pattens”, which basically very close to the original articles, presents the clothing features as well as spreads Chinese traditional costume culture.

Free translation and literal translation are two aspects of the same contradiction. The two are interrelated and complemented to each other. At the same time, they are in harmony with each other and cannot be separated from each other. Most of the costumes and accessories in *A Dream of Red Mansions* are complex. For most clothing articles are unfamiliar or difficult for today’s Chinese to understand, while for westerners, it is even more difficult to figure out. In such condition, the literal translation has its drawbacks; thus the strategy of free translation is more suitable and necessary. While Yang has adopted free translation in translating some words and phrases. In Chapter 45, Yang translates “蝴蝶落花鞋” into “slippers with butterfly and flower designs”. There must be some images and situations which exist only in Chinese culture, when the Chinese ancient costume is translated into

English. “蝴蝶落花鞋” is a typical example. The shoes come from a Yue Opera named “庄周试妻”, which also called *Butterflies Dream* (蝴蝶梦). In this opera, the main character Zhuangzhou wears that kind of shoes which may be made by only a thin peach-colored sole, decorated with flowers made of black or blue flannelette. This type of shoes is called “蝴蝶鞋” because of the opera’s name. But it does not mean that the shoes are embroidered with butterfly patterns. While in English culture, there is no equivalent article; thus slipper is a good free translation. For other instance, in Chapter 15, he translates “白蟒箭袖” into “an archer’s coat embroidered with white serpents”, which is unfamiliar to foreigners and equivalent entities cannot be found in western cultures.

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