

Analysis of English Translation Strategies for Diet Culture-Loaded Words in *A Dream of Red Mansions*

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This paper primarily examines the disparities in the translation of Yang Xianyi and Hawkes regarding *A Dream of Red Mansions*, focusing on diet culture-loaded words within the framework of cultural translation theory. Chinese culture-loaded words encompass profound cultural heritage and exceptional traditional cultural attributes, which pose challenges for translators seeking to accurately convey the cultural nuances inherent in such terms. This paper delves into the features of diet culture-loaded vocabulary and illuminates how different translators interpret them based on their individual cultural backgrounds. It also references various translation methods and employs a case analysis approach. The findings of this research suggest that when translating diet culture-loaded words, translators should adeptly apprehend the cultural subtleties within both languages and judiciously select a translation method in accordance with the linguistic context, thereby facilitating a more effective dissemination of Chinese culinary culture.

Keywords: diet culture-loaded words, English translation of *A Dream of Red Mansions*, Cultural translation theory

Introduction

A Dream of Red Mansions stands as the pinnacle of Chinese classical novels, marking the first among the four masterpieces. The novel vividly portrays all aspects of China's feudal society in the first half of the 18th century. It serves as quintessential representations of the feudal society, replete with a multitude of culture-loaded words spanning topics such as marriage, architecture, culture, transportation, and diet. Economic globalization and the Belt and Road Initiative have propelled cultural cooperation and exchanges between China and foreign nations. Culture-loaded words play a pivotal role in facilitating this cultural exchange. Chinese traditional diet culture not only reflects people's dietary habits, but also encapsulates the profound ideological and artistic values inherent in Chinese tradition.

The exploration of culture-loaded words related to dietary culture is instrumental in promoting the dissemination of Chinese traditional culture to a global audience. This paper, utilizing a parallel corpus of *A Dream in Red Mansions*, and extracts examples to analyse the translations by Yang and Hawkes, scrutinizing their translation choices. A review of relevant literature reveals a paucity of articles addressing food culture-loaded words from the perspective of cultural translation theory. Consequently, the authors believe that this study can contribute to a deeper understanding of Chinese traditional food culture and its translation methods.

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A Dream in Red Mansions, being a central focus of literary translation research and translation endeavours by scholars, plays a pivotal role in cultural communication. It imposes higher demands on translators. Translators should focus on aspects such as heritage, nationality, originality, contemporaneity, and professionalism in literary translation (Xu, 2016). The translator's subjectivity should be aligned with the original text and cannot be detached from it. In literary translation, it is crucial to convey its literary essence and unleash the translator's creativity (Liu, 2017). This paper employs cultural translation theory as the theoretical foundation to analyse the translation choices made by the two translators.

In this paper, the authors primarily delve into the background of diet culture-loaded words in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, highlighting its research significance. It elucidates the meaning of diet culture-loaded words and draws insights from relevant domestic and international research as well as cultural translation theory. Emphasis is placed on the fact that translation is a form of cross-cultural communication, tasked not only with achieving content fidelity but also with accurately conveying the cultural nuances of the original text. The selected cases for analysis are sourced from the parallel corpus of *A Dream of Red Mansions* at Shaoxing University.

The study primarily investigates the translation choices of the two translators and analyses the rich cultural context behind diet culture-loaded words using the framework of cultural translation theory. Regarding the translation of diet culture-loaded words, the authors observe that domestication and foreignization are commonly employed strategies. Additionally, transliteration and annotation are also frequently used. The two translators have made their translation choices based on their own interpretations of the diet culture-loaded words, and the authors have benefited greatly from their work.

In the context of economic globalization, China's outstanding traditional culture is gradually gaining recognition abroad. As facilitators of communication and exchange between nations, translators should accurately grasp the cultural essence behind the language. They should prioritize the cultural connotations when translating, contributing to cross-cultural communication and mutual enrichment, all while ensuring the smooth transmission of language. Through an in-depth examination of diet culture-loaded words, this research aims to better promote China's exceptional traditional culinary culture and enable people in other countries to gain a deeper understanding of China.

Literature Review

As we all know, culture-loaded words are part of a country's unique cultural vocabulary, holding profound meanings within them. A correct understanding of culture-loaded words can help people gain a better understanding of the culture and customs of a particular country or region. Different countries have their own culture-loaded words, which, at the same time, present challenges to cultural exchanges, reflecting cultural disparities and lexical gaps. In cross-cultural translation, when Chinese culture-loaded words lack direct equivalents in the target language, they often resort to transliteration. Some scholars argue that when English works involving Chinese culture are translated, they should maintain the host culture's characteristics and style, primarily through transliteration. For instance, instead of using "Beancurd" as the translation for "tofu", they choose "toufu" to preserve its Chinese essence. However, relying solely on transliteration is not always feasible. Western readers may not grasp the lexical meaning through simple transliteration due to their limited understanding of Chinese culture, which can lead to misunderstandings. Hence, explanatory translation becomes necessary (Wang, 2006).

Chinese culture-loaded words encompass all aspects and convey China's distinctive traditional culture. Translators should adhere to the principle of cultural equality in their communication, preserving the original text's characteristics while considering the target readers' sensibilities. Regarding the translation methods for culture-loaded words, apart from transliteration, domestic scholars have also identified methods such as transliteration with annotation, literal translation, literal translation with annotation, a combination of transliteration and literal translation, and free translation (Zheng, 2016).

Some scholars have studied the translation of *A Dream of Red Mansions* from various perspectives such as eco-translatology, relevance theory, and functional equivalence theory to explore the translators' conventional translation strategies. Upon consulting relevant materials, the authors noted the scarcity of articles exploring this topic from a cultural translation theory standpoint. Cultural factors play an indispensable role in translation, imbuing it with its very essence. Therefore, the authors have chosen this theory as the framework for discussing this topic. The theory of cultural translation was introduced by British translation theorist Susan Bassnett, who shifted the theoretical focus from the linguistic level to the cultural level. This approach emphasizes the importance and significance of culture in translation. Specific languages may reveal their unique significance within a particular cultural context. Translation is rooted in culture and extends beyond language. Its purpose is to achieve cross-cultural communication, not merely the transformation between two languages.

Over time, translation norms and principles have evolved, but their fundamental purpose remains unchanged—both serve to selectively meet communicative requirements. Achieving absolute equivalence between translation and the original text is impossible due to differences in cultural backgrounds, leading to vocabulary gaps. In literary translation, this phenomenon is particularly pronounced. Translators can adapt to the target language and culture, harness their subjectivity, and modify the original text's form when necessary to attain cultural equivalence between the original text and the target language culture (Bassnett, 2004). The theory of cultural translation also imposes certain requirements on translators, who need to possess a deep understanding of the target language culture and its linguistic style, striving to bridge the gap between the two cultures.

The authors believe that if translation were a person or the skeleton, culture would be the flesh and blood, giving true form to the entire entity. All three elements are indispensable. The theory of cultural translation also encompasses aspects such as meaning, symbolism, discourse, and more (Zhan, 2022). Regarding cultural translation methods, translators primarily employ naturalization and alienation.

Translation Methods Analysis

Diet culture-loaded words have gradually accumulated over time, influenced by national and regional characteristics. Chinese food culture places a strong emphasis on people's health. Ancient Chinese cultivated a culture of healthy eating under the influence of yin-yang and the five elements theories, which is reflected in a wide variety of delicacies. Accurate translation of Chinese food culture-loaded words by translators can not only allow readers to savor the colors, aromas, and tastes of Chinese cuisine but also enable them to appreciate the intricacies of Chinese health culture, offering readers aesthetic and spiritual enjoyment (Guan, 2021). Food culture, to a certain extent, reflects the aesthetic, moral, and other spiritual characteristics of the Chinese nation, leaving a profound impact on the world. Ancient people categorized tastes into sour, sweet, bitter, and salty, and it was only when the harmony of all five flavors was achieved that a dish could be considered delicious. Furthermore, the intricate names of dishes not only reveal the cooking methods and seasonings of the food but

also encompass historical allusions, providing diners with a source of endless appreciation and elevating the significance of these delicacies.

Diet plays a pivotal role in people's lives. Although countries and regions exhibit a multitude of dietary differences stemming from various eating habits and customs, translators can promote mutual understanding by taking the initiative and employing appropriate translation strategies. *A Dream of Red Mansions* offers readers a glimpse into the dietary customs of the feudal society, which is highly representative. Language serves as the framework of translation, while culture can be seen as the soul of translation; these three elements are inseparable. Without culture, discussions about translation and language tend to become mundane. Cultural context holds great importance for translation and language, as language gains profound meaning within a specific cultural environment. The diet culture-loaded words in *A Dream of Red Mansions* carry profound cultural connotations, representing the wisdom of ancient people. According to statistics, there are almost 186 cuisines depicted in this book, being classified into nine categories in total, including 17 types of main snacks, 38 types of food, 23 drinks, and so on.

Consequently, it becomes challenging for translators to find target language equivalents that perfectly align. If translators blindly prioritize the readability of the article's content, it can lead to the loss of the source language culture. Conversely, an overemphasis on cultural preservation within culture-loaded words can confuse readers. Therefore, translating culture-loaded words imposes high demands on translators. It can be considered a quintessential representative of Chinese traditional culture. In this passage, drawing from the theory of cultural translation, the authors analyse and compares the translation strategies employed by Yang and Hawkes in their translations of food culture-loaded words.

The Translation of Meat

Source language	Yang's translation	Hawkes's translation
牛乳蒸羊羔 (Chapter 49)	Lamb embryo steamed in milk	Unborn lamb stewed in milk

“牛乳蒸羊羔” belongs to nutritious gourmet with aromatic and mellow flavor in milky-white color, containing a large suite of hormones and various rich micronutrients. It is prepared for Grandmother Jia in winter in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, and could assist the elderly in prolonging the longevity. “羊羔” principally means the lamb embryo, containing rich protein, cholesterol, and calcium; hence it could benefit qi for promoting production of blood. The two translators translate it into “lamb embryo” and “unborn lamb” respectively, accurately conveying the implication of this word.

Furthermore, as for the cooking method “蒸”, Yang opts for the literal translation; “steamed” absolutely retains Chinese traditional cooking style, whereas Hawkes's translation leans towards the domestication method, which fails to express the original connotation. “牛乳” refers to “almond cream” instead of milk in accordance with the history record. Although the two translations are accurate to some extent, from the authors' perspective, it could not pass on its real ingredients; hence, the ambiguity may incline to occur. Thus, it's preferable to choose paraphrase method and could be translated into “Lamb embryo steamed with almond cream in milk color” in accordance with author's understanding. Consequently, readers will grasp the culinary meaning and will not be misled by superficial expression.

The Translation of Pastry

Source language	Yang's translation	Hawkes's translation
桂花糖蒸新栗粉糕 (Chapter 37)	Chestnut cake sweetened with osmanthus	Chestnut fudge (made of chestnut puree steam-cooked with cassia-flavored sugar)

“桂花糖蒸新栗粉糕” is a tasty and healthy gourmet; its vital ingredients chiefly consist of chestnut, candy, and sweet osmanthus flower. The cuisine can be available in a plain way but requires carefulness and dedication; initially, the chestnut is ground into powder, then add a slight amount of sugar, steam for a while, and finally sprinkle the osmanthus on the surface. The authors prefer the first translation, which leans towards the literal translation method, conveying the ingredients of the cuisine accurately, whereas Hawkes’s translation “cassia-flavored sugar” may deviate from the original meaning of the dish, for there’s no cinnamon in the ingredients. Although it is annotated, the content may easily get biased and fails to align with the real implication. Evidently, Hawkes prones to replenish his own interpretation, turning it into the content that readers know intimately and resonates with them through naturalization.

The Translation of Soup

Source language	Yang’s translation	Hawkes’s translation
酸笋鸡皮汤 (Chapter 8)	Pickled bamboo-shoots and duck-skin	Pickled bamboo-shoots and chicken-skin

The delicacy primarily contains sour bamboo shoots and chicken skin, gaining popularity in southwest China. At that time, sour bamboo shoots were scarce; thus the aunt prepared this for Jia Baoyu, showcasing her affection for him. It is regarded as a valuable treasure by locals, in that the sour bamboo shoots contain rich probiotics, assisting people to digest effectively. Furthermore, chicken skin contains rich colloid, which is effective in regulating endocrine disorders and also promotes metabolism, making human skin more flexible and radiant. Both of these translations convey the making method of sour bamboo shoots accurately, while the translation of chicken skin is not the same. Apparently, the first translator translates “鸡皮” into “duck-skin”, which deviates from the original meaning. Hawkes’s translation is more accurate, for it’s beneficial to convey the cultural connotation of the source language.

The Translation of Tea

Source language	Yang’s translation	Hawkes’s translation
枫露茶 (Chapter 8)	Maple-dew tea	Fung Loo

“枫露茶” is a classic tea with a praiseworthy ardor; its making method refers that the tenderest leaves of maple are steamed in a retort, and then added to hot water. In *A Dream of Red Mansions*, the tea mainly conveys the sorrow of blood and tears, for the dew’s color and shape on the skin is similar to blood and tear. Yang leans towards the literal translation method and hence readers could understand the ingredients of the tea directly, while Hawkes prefers the transliteration method, demonstrating its uniqueness while retaining its vocal property. The authors recommend that the translator ought to make a note based on Hawkes’ translation to convey its ingredients and making method. Readers will thus better understand this culture-loaded word and its translation aligns with the principle of cultural translation theory, and then successfully converts the languages (Sheng, 2023). It can be seen that there are disparities in translation choices among translators, and the choice of translation should be taken into account from various angles.

The Translation of Rice Wine

Source language	Yang’s translation	Hawkes’s translation
惠泉酒 (Chapter 16)	Hui Fountain wine	Rice wine

“惠泉酒” derives from the spring water of Hui Mountain and is regarded as a precious tribute wine for the imperial court, which embodies the superiority of the aristocratic life. In *A Dream of Red Mansions*, it is served at banquets, and Sister Feng granted Jia Lian’s wet nurse Zhao a glass of wine with respect. Yang directly translates it into Hui Fountain wine, conveying eminently its birthplace—Hui Mountain, so that readers are prone to grasp the cultural implications. Hawkes’s translation is slightly straightforward and more ordinary, failing to reflect its meaning. Based on the cultural translation theory, Yang’s translation conforms to the cultural exchange of loaded words, while Hawkes’ tends to be less cultural and inclines towards English readers’ reading habits.

Conclusions

From the perspective of cultural translation theory, this paper primarily examines the translation choices made by various translators in their renditions of diet culture-loaded words in *A Dream of Red Mansions*. Owing to the differing cultural backgrounds of the translators, their interpretations of the original text also vary, resulting in the use of distinct translation strategies. An exploration of the two versions reveals that Yang’s translation excels in capturing the cultural nuances underlying the diet culture-loaded words and tends to employ the method of literal translation. While Hawkes’ translation correctly grasps the essence of diet culture-loaded words to some extent, there are occasional discrepancies in the interpretation of certain terms. Nevertheless, the translator opts for transliteration in certain cases, preserving the characteristics of these culture-loaded words. Overall, the use of literal translation for food vocabulary in *A Dream of Red Mansions* is commonplace. Naturally, employing the foreignization strategy is also within the norm. The translation process showcases that the translator scrutinizes and interprets it from the perspective of the source language. This highlights the translator’s profound knowledge of culture and history.

The authors contend that translating diet culture-loaded words should not be detached from their meanings; thus, translators should analyse the complete cultural context. Prior to translation, they must acquire a thorough and accurate understanding of the original culture and then consider the language (Zhao & Ni, 2021), contemplating the appropriate translation strategies to convey the culture effectively. Due to time constraints, the authors have only selected a few representative diet culture-loaded words. Throughout the writing process of this paper, it became evident that many more diet culture-loaded words could be explored in depth. Regrettably, due to time limitations, they could not be thoroughly analysed. Nevertheless, this study has been immensely informative, providing not only a deeper comprehension of Chinese traditional food culture but also insights into the translation strategies and skills employed by various translators.

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