US-China Foreign Language, December 2022, Vol. 20, No. 12, 463-468
doi:10.17265/1539-8080/2022.12.006

A Study on the Translation of Terms in Chinese Online Xianxia Novels

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With the rapid development of the Internet and technology, Chinese internet literature has emerged and been exported to many overseas countries, which sets off a boom of Chinese culture. The online xianxia novels have attracted the attention of overseas readers due to their unique concept of world view and abundant fantasy elements. Undoubtedly, the quality of translation plays a crucial role in the process of introduction to overseas and cultural communication and dissemination. Therefore, this paper takes the terms in Chinese online xianxia novels, which carry distinct Chinese cultural connotations, as the object of the study, and analyzes the translation methods and strategies by selecting some specific cases for better support of Chinese culture going global and cross-culture communication.

Keywords: internet literature, xianxia novels, translation of terms

Introduction

In recent years, with the enhancement of China's comprehensive national strength, Chinese culture has shown its infinite charm to the world in the process of cultural communication and exchange. However, due to the huge difference between Chinese and western cultures, traditional Chinese literature has encountered many difficulties in the process of exporting to the outside world. But now the rise of internet literature makes a difference. It has created a series of popular IPs, which have been adapted into films, comics, games, and other works and been exported to many other countries, including Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Europe, and the United States, providing an immersive experience of Chinese cultural for the audience all over the world.

Such kind of network novels have a large number of themes and a fairly wide scope, with the largest number of novels in the genre of wuxia, xianxia, and fantasy, in addition to other genres such as science fiction, urban stories, mystery, thriller, and online games. Different from traditional classical literature, Chinese online novels are rich in fantasy elements, leaving plenty of room for reverie, thus overseas readers can not only experience a unique world view, but also can immerse themselves in the white space of their imagination, so as to achieve a fully enjoyed reading experience.

Chinese xianxia novels are generally based on the setting of immortals, human beings, devils, and demons in Chinese mythological stories, with adding the concept of martial sects and kungfu in wuxia novels. The relevant terms carry the characteristic cultural connotation and contain different ideas, such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, which may be difficult to explain clearly in translation and lead to misunderstandings of the content in novels by western readers. Thus, translators need to consider how to accurately and reasonably

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convey the cultural connotation in the terms. In my perspective, the study on the translation of terms in online xianxia novels is of great value to enhancing the influence of Chinese culture, and plays an important role in facilitating cross-cultural communication and exchange between China and the outside world.

Literature Review

Although a large number of network literature works are exported to the world, the translation quality of these works is uneven. At present, the translation research of network literature in China is still in its initial stage. Through research and analysis on China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), it shows that the translation studies of online literature are relatively more on fantasy, wuxia (martial arts), and science fiction themes, while relatively less on xianxia themes. The research patterns can be roughly divided into the following three categories.

The first category is a holistic study on the current situation and development trend of internet literature translation, which is relatively rare in the academic field. Li (2021) adopted a dedicated retrieval model based on literature metrology, and uses VOSviewer to conduct data analysis and visualization review, so as to explore the historical development, hot topics, and research trends of the English translation of Chinese online literature, with CNKI as the data source. The research results show that the high-frequency keywords in this field mainly include overseas communication, translation, Wuxiaworld, wuxia novels, "going global", cross-cultural communication and publishing. He believes that the current research in this academic field focuses on the overseas translation, introduction, and cultural dissemination of Chinese online literature, and that the study of the expansion of overseas markets based on cultural communication will remain a hot issue and trend in the future, which can effectively promote the overseas communication and exchange as well as enhance the influence of Chinese culture in the international arena.

The second category is the main research on its overseas translation and cultural transmission combined with communication studies. From the perspective of Lasswell's communication model theory, the website of Wuxiaworld is always chosen as the research object. Liu (2018) studied the influence of its operation model, material selection, and translation strategy on the dissemination of the translation and readers' acceptance, while Liang (2020) summarized the successful experience of this website as "a shared translation and communication model", that is, on a shared network platform, the binary opposition between the subject and the audience is broken and the translation communication flows in a bilateral and non-linear way. Under the background of Chinese culture "going global", Yang (2021) compared domestic Flying Lines website with foreign Wuxiaworld website, and integrates the universal English translation mode of xianxia novels, including material selection, translation authorization, and translator's background before the task, the selection of cultural strategy and division of labor mode during the task, as well as text quality assessment and language asset management after the completion of the task. This kind of research is currently a major hot topic in the academic field. Due to the successful cultural export case of Wuxiaworld website, the majority of researches select wuxia novels in internet literature as object of the study, while there are still relatively few studies on the theme of xianxia novels.

The third category is to analyze translation methods and strategies for specific cases, guided by different translation theories, such as skopos theory (He, 2018, p. 14), functional equivalence theory (Zeng & Li, 2021, p. 177), and ecological translatology (Yao, 2021, p. 10), etc. In addition, most of the cases focus on the English translation of the internet novels as a whole or on the culture-loaded words, but the researches on terms are relatively less, which usually concentrates on terminology of martial arts rather than xianxia stories. Most scholars choose well-known works in Wuxiaworld website as research objects, for instance *Coiling Dragon* (《盘

龙》) and *Stella Transformations* (《星辰变》). However, there are really few options for xianxia novels except the famous ones like *To the Sky Kingdom* (《三生三世十里桃花》) and *I Shall Seal the Heaven* (《我欲封天》).

To sum up, the translation research on Chinese xianxia novels in internet literature is still a relatively niche direction, and the choices of research objects remain limited in view of the translation copyright and quality. It is expected that more scholars will broaden their research perspectives from multiple fields such as ecological translatology and cognitive linguistics, and seek more different works for terminology translation research, as well as make use of corpus, statistical analysis, and other means to conduct creative translation research in the context of the new era.

Translation Methods of Terminology in Xianxia Novels

As is known to all, the genre of xianxia emphasizes more on the immortal and supernatural, while the genre of wuxia places more emphasis on martial heroes who fight against evil and injustice. Thus, the characters in xianxia novels are always in pursuit of strength and immortality to extend their life span and transcend the world. In particular, xianxia novels are closely related to traditional Chinese religious thought, including Taoist and Buddhist ideas.

This paper takes the novel *Heaven Official's Blessing* (《天官赐福》) and its English translation as the research object, and selects the relevant terms to specifically analyze its translation methods and strategies.

Transliteration

The method transliteration is mostly used in translating the name of human beings such as Lingwen (灵文), Junwu (君吾), Fuyao (扶摇), Xiaoying (小萤) and the name of places, such as Banyue (半月), Yongan (永安), etc. The names of people and places are terms that do not have to be translated (Du & Shi, 2020, p. 173), so translators can directly use Chinese phonetic alphabets for translation.

In addition, there are some phases translated by transliteration plus literal translation. The method of transliteration is adopted to preserve the characteristics of their names, while literal translation avoids misunderstandings by readers, for example Kingdom of Xianle (仙乐国), Xuanzheng Palace (玄真殿), Mount Yujun (与君山), Juyang Palace (巨阳殿), Nanyang Temple (南阳庙), Puji Village (菩荠村), Yinian Bridge (一念桥), as well as the name of the weapons like silk band Ruoye (若邪绫).

Furthermore, some words contain complex connotations of traditional Chinese culture, and it's difficult to find corresponding expressions in English. If the literal meaning of the words is directly translated, the connotation of the translated text will be different from that of the original text, and may even lead to misunderstandings among readers. The ancient Chinese prose advocates simplicity and often uses concise and condensed words to express things with complex meanings, and even a single word can constitute a term, so that the terms in Chinese online xianxia novels are highly generalized. For example, "Qi (气)" in Chinese can refer to many different meanings, including odor, human breath, essence, spirit, and so on. But in xianxia novels, it is generally an abstract concept. The strategy of foreignization is used to retain its cultural characteristics, which is conducive to the understanding and communication between different cultures. If such terms as these are fully translated in all aspects, the length of the translation text is obviously too large and makes the plot contents complicated, which is likely to interrupt the readers' thoughts and is not conducive to the overall reading effect. In this case, the method of transliteration plus annotation can be adopted. That is to say a glossary of terms can be attached at the end of the text, added with detailed note after transliteration. Thus, it can not only make the

translation clear and smooth, but also ensure that the cultural connotation contained in the terms can be completely conveyed to the readers. Taking "中元节" for instance, it is a distinct festival in ancient China. "元" means the origin of the universe in Chinese philosophy, thus the yuan festival celebrates the divine forces that invigorate the world, including the heaven, the earth, and the water. "中元节" is translated as "Zhongyuan Festival or the Ghost Festival", which falls on the 15th day of the seventh month of the Lunar Calendar. The festival celebrates the underworld and people offer sacrifices to the dead and pray for the dead, burning paper ingots and floating river lanterns. Such detailed information needs to be added in the annotation.

Literal Translation

The method of literal translation can faithfully express the content of the original text but it does not mean translation word by word. It can make appropriate adjustments without being confined to the structure of the original text. After finding the corresponding English expression, it is the best to take into account both the connotation and form of the original text. For instance, "武神" can be translated as "martial god", "人界" as "Mortal Realm", "天界" as "Heavenly Realm", "鬼界" as "Ghost Realm", "祥云" as "auspicious clouds", "妖魔鬼怪" as "ghost, monster, and demons", etc.

However, this method also has certain limitations. When the meaning of the original text cannot be fully conveyed, the translator can use literal translation plus annotation to make up for this defect. Taking "红绳" as an example, it can be translated as "red string" from the literal meaning. But in Chinese culture, it refers to an invisible red string tied at two lover's finger, usually the pinky finger, that predicts the fate of love between two individuals. Thus, it is necessary to add annotation to express the unique connotation in Chinese cultural. The second example "飞升" is translated as "ascension", describing immortals transcending the Heavenly Tribulation after suffering in the mortal realm. In tradition xianxia tales, gods are born of nature with divine, while immortals are born mortal and can achieve longevity after ascension from the Mortal Realm to the Heavenly Real. However, in this novel, it also refers to immortal's attaining godhood by overcoming the Heavenly Tribulation in the Mortal Realm again. Therefore, it is necessary to add complete and detailed explanation by annotation in the targeted text.

Liberal Translation

When using the liberal translation method, the term is translated according to its real implication rather than the literal meaning of the word or phrase. Especially when the original text cannot find its equivalent in western culture, resulting in difficulty for western readers to understand, liberal translation method can be a good choice for translators. There are some specific examples as follows.

The first example "无间" is a Buddhist term derived from *The Lotus Sutra* (《法华经》) and refers to the deepest hell among the eight hell in Buddhism. It is believed that those who commit serious crimes before their death should fall into the hell forever and suffer endless pain. So the extended meaning of this word implicates that there is no interruption of pain. Besides, it is also a metaphor for an extremely painful situation from which one cannot escape. Thus, the translator uses the domestication strategy to translate "无间" as "abyss" to emphasize the depth of suffering. The second example "桃源" represents the land of peach blossoms in its literal meaning. It is a kind of image to describe the beautiful scenery or refer to the place where immortal people live. Later, it derives into a fictitious land of peace and happiness or a place of retreat and fairyland. Corresponding to this meaning in western culture, "桃源" can be translated as "paradise" which indicates similar denotation in the Bible. In the third example "下下签", it involves a traditional model of prayer in China, that is to draw lots and

consult oracle in order to predict people's fate in the future. The person who gets it implies that the bad things will happen to him and he will have the bad luck in the future. This stuff is made of wooden sticks, but if the word is translated as "the small sticks underneath" literally, it obviously cannot convey the meaning of predicting bad luck, which even may lead to readers' misunderstanding or ambiguity. Thus, it is better to translate "下下签" as "the worst of bad luck".

The above three examples are related to simple and short phrases, and then the next example is relevant to more complicated phrases. "荧惑守心" is an phenomenon that Mars moves to overlap with Antares (in Scorpio) from the perspective of modern astronomy. Actually, it is a normal astronomical phenomenon. But the Chinese character "荧惑" contains the meaning of bewilderment, which mostly refers to the situation of chaos such as rebellion, thief, disease, death, hunger, and war, while "心" stands for the king of heaven (namely the emperor) in astrology, signifying the political destiny of the emperor. In the ancient time, it is regarded as the most ominous celestial sign in Chinese astrology, especially an ill omen for the death of the emperor. Thus, this phrase can be translated as "an ominous omen" to reveal its cultural connotation.

Amplification

In the process of translation, some terms are rich in connotation, so it is not enough to translate them only from the surface meaning of the words. The method of amplification adds the related knowledge to make supplementary explanations. That is to say, adding the missing information in the source language to ensure that the readers can have a better understanding of the cultural connotation of the source language. For instance, translating "七窍" as "seven apertures" from the surface meaning will definitely confuse the readers. Adding a specific explanation, it can be translated as "the seven facial apertures (the two eyes, nose, mouth, tongue, and two ears)".

Besides, some phrases also need to be translated with hidden meanings in addition to their surface meanings. For example, the surface meaning of "天煞孤星" refers to the star of solitude. When it comes to human beings, it refers to a person who is always unlucky and destined to live a lonely life, bringing misfortune and evil to those around him. Therefore, this phrase can be translated as "the star of solitude—a person's doomed lonely life". Taking "业火" for instance, it derives from the *Shurangama Sutra* (《楞严经》), one of the most famous Buddhist classics. In Buddhism, the evil karma does harm to people just like fire does. And, it is also the abbreviation of "红莲业火" among the four god fires in Chinese ancient mythology. It is the nemesis of evil spirits. According to legend, people with severe evil karma and sin will be sent to the 18th level of hell after death and be burned by the red lotus karma fire. The fire will not be extinguished until the sin burnt up. Thus this word can be translated as "the fire fueled by sin and karma in the hell, which cannot be extinguished until it burns up the sin" for better understanding.

Conclusion

Based on the setting of traditional Chinese immortals, human beings, demons, and ghosts, Chinese online xianxia novels add a lot of fantasy elements, presenting a unique world view for western readers. Since the content features Chinese cultural characteristics and involves religious thoughts including Buddhism and Taoism, the translation strategies of domestication and foreignization can be flexibly adopted in the process of foreign translation. A diversity of methods can be used in the translation of the terminology in online xianxia novels, including transliteration (plus literal translation or annotation), literal translation, liberal translation (plus

annotation), and amplification. High quality of translation in this field contributes to conveying the Chinese cultural connotation completely to readers and provides them with immersive reading experience, which enhances the international influence of Chinese culture and facilitates cross-cultural communication and exchanges between China and other countries.

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