

The Translation Strategies of Early French Sinologists for Culture Loaded Words From the French Version of *Leifeng Pagoda Legend*

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Leifeng Pagoda Legend is a Qing Dynasty vernacular novel about gods, demons, and ghosts. It tells the story between the famous Chinese folk legend of Bai Suzhen and Xu Xian. The novel contains a large number of cultural loaded words with rich connotations, such as names, traditional Chinese cultural elements, idioms, etc., which bring great difficulties to translation. As early as the 1840s, French sinologist Julien translated this novel into French and published it in France. This article takes the cultural loaded words in the Julien's translation as the starting point, and selects specific cases to analyze the translation strategies used in it. The study on the French version of *Leifeng Pagoda Legend* will help to provide practical and specific reference for contemporary Chinese French translation practice, provide some reference value and practical application for the translation of culture loaded words in Chinese classical literature, and further enrich the external dissemination of Chinese classical literature.

Keywords: Leifeng Pagoda, Julien, culture loaded words, translation

Language is a medium of communication and an integral part of culture. It's closely related to all aspects of human social life. Language is an important carrier of culture, and the language of each ethnic group contains its unique cultural phenomena. Mr. Wang Zuoliang also pointed out that the biggest difficulty in translation is the difference between two cultures. Cultural loaded words refer to words, phrases, and idioms that symbolize unique things in a certain culture. These words reflect the unique ways of activities that a specific ethnic group has gradually accumulated over the long historical process (Liao, 2000). This poses a huge challenge to the translator's work.

The vernacular chapter novel *Leifeng Pagoda Legend* of Qing Dynasty tells the love story between the Bai Suzhen and Xu Xian, which is familiar to Chinese readers. Lots of words with Chinese traditional cultural characteristics are incorporated into it. As early as the early 19th century, it was translated by the famous French sinologist Stanislas Julien (1797-1873) as *Blanche et Bleue, ou les deux couleuvres fées* and introduced to France. As a translator, Julien has realized that the plot of this novel carries a lot of fantasy colors, the emergence of spirits and ghosts, as well as ethnic customs and habits. Starting from the French version of *Leifeng Pagoda Legend*, this paper will analyze the translator's treatment of culture loaded words in the novel from the aspects of the names of the characters, folk festivals and customs, as well as Chinese traditional cultural elements in the text of the novel, and explore its translation value and experience.

Name Translation

Name is a specific name symbol given by humans to distinguish individuals, and it is a symbol that distinguishes individuals through language and textual information. As a component of social language, personal names have a long history of formation and can reflect the cultural characteristics of each ethnic group. The broad form of Chinese name symbols is that the surname comes first and the first name comes last (Wang, 1999). The author selected several names that appeared frequently in the main text of the novel to analyze the translation of Julien.

Table 1

Names of Main Characters in Chinese and French

The Chinese names of the main characters	The translation of Julien
许仙/汉文	Hiu-sien/Hân-wen
许娇容/许氏	Hiu-kiao-yong/Hiu-chi
李公甫	Li-kong-fou
法海	Fa-ha i
白蛇/珍珠/白氏	La Couleuvre Blanche/Thchin-niang/(la) Blanche
青蛇/小青	La Couleuvre Bleue/(la) Petite Bleue
黎山老母	La v éritable d éesse du mont Li-chan
真武北极大帝	Tchin-wou, le puissant g énie du p ôle du Nord
南极仙翁	Le dieu du p ôle austral
观音菩萨	Le dieu Kou ân- ñ
文曲星官	Le g énie de l'astre Wen-sing

From the table above, it can be seen that Julien has adopted different methods for translating the names of some of the main characters appearing in the novel

The first type is transliteration. Transliteration is a method of using sound to represent meaning. Transliteration is also called writing, that is to use a character symbol (such as Latin script) to represent the process or result of a character symbol (such as Chinese characters) of another character system (Fang, 2005). The transliteration used by Julien is to use Roman letters and symbols to spell out the sounds of Chinese words.

Of course, the processing method used by Julien to convert Chinese characters into corresponding phonetic letters may make current readers feel a bit awkward or strange when reading. However, based on the time and historical background of Julien's translation work (1840s), there was no recognized Roman phonetic system for Chinese characters or a Sino French dictionary in European society at that time. Although Nicolas Trigault (1577-1628), a French missionary who came to China in the 17th century, cooperated with Wang Wei, a Chinese scholar, to complete and publish a Roman phonetic book of Chinese character called *A Help to Western Scholars*, which helped western missionaries or foreigners to learn Chinese and Chinese characters. But few Chinese arrived in France from China in the 19th century, and these people may not have the opportunity to study this book, understand and learn the methods. Therefore, Julien may have transliterated the content of the novel based on his understanding of the Chinese novel text and the pronunciation of the novel by the Chinese in France at the time.

After comparing the names of the people in the table in Chinese and French, we can find that Julien basically adopts the method of transliteration for translation for some ordinary people appearing in the novel, such as Xu Xian, Xu Shi, Fahai, et al., and directly retains the composition of the Chinese naming habit that first name comes after the last name, capitalizing the first letter of the last name, and connecting the surname with the first name

using French hyphen “-”. This kind expression of name is very different from the way of putting first name before the last name that western readers are familiar with. This approach may also bring an exotic eastern flavor to the target language readers.

For the names of immortals and monsters, the translation methods used by Julien are much more abundant compared to the names of mortals: There is a literal translation, which means translating according to the literal order or meaning. If White Snake is translated as *la Couleuvre Blanche*, I believe this may be due to the mention in the novel that it is a White Female Snake (白母蛇精) (Yushanzhu, 2013). When translating, Julien chose to use the feminine word “couleuvre” instead of the masculine word “serpent” that also represents snake, which more accurately expresses the gender of the snake. Another example is the woman who transforms from a white snake and calls herself Bai Shi. Due to her original form being a female white snake (*la Couleuvre Blanche*), Julien chose to directly translate Bai Shi (白氏) as *la Blanche* (white), rather than transliterating Bai Shi as *P é chi*.

In addition, there is a combination of transliteration and literal translation, such as the famous Taoist deity “Zhenwu North Pole Emperor” (真武北极大帝), which is translated by Julien as *Tchin-wou*, “*Le puissant génie du pôle du Nord*”, where Zhenwu is transliterated as *Tchin-wou*, and North Pole Emperor is literally translated as “*le puissant génie du pôle du Nord*” according to the Chinese literal meaning. As a member of the same immortal lineage, Lishan Laomu (黎山老母), Jurien translated “Lishan” (黎山) as “*le mont Li-chan*”, while Laomu (老母) chose the method of free translation to translate it as “*la vénérable déesse* (a respected goddess)”. In Chinese traditional culture, female immortals are called “Lao Mu”, such as “Mount Taishan Lao Mu” and “Lingshan Lao Mu”. The translation of “*la vénérable déesse*” adds free translation on the basis of literal translation, which makes the translation more appropriate to the original meaning, and also conveys the Chinese cultural elements in the words.

Although there is no unified and fixed translation method for the names of the main characters in the novel, perhaps this treatment can make it easier for target language readers to distinguish between mortals, immortals, and monsters in the novel.

Translation of Folk Festivals and Customs

In the novel, it also mentions some traditional Chinese folk festivals and customs. For example, during Tomb Sweeping Day, people would go to worship and sweep the graves of their ancestors, and also go out for outings. During the Dragon Boat Festival, people have the custom of drinking realgar wine to ward off evil spirits.

Example 1:

The original: 时届清明佳节……汉文坐在店中，看那路上纷纷皆是要去祭扫坟莹。

Translation : Bientôt arriva l'époque désirée qu'on appelle Tsing-ming (le 5 avril) ...Hân-wen étant assis dans la boutique, voyait la route couverte d'une foule de personnes qui allaient nettoyer les tombes de leurs parents, et y déposer des offrandes funèbres. (Julien, 1834)

Tomb Sweeping Day is not only one of the 24 solar terms in China, but also a traditional Chinese folk festival. In Julien's translation, 清明 is transliterated into “*Tsing-ming*”, and the date of April 5 is added after inserting parentheses. This time is also consistent with the joint time of Tomb Sweeping Day. This is the processing of transliteration and annotation.

坟莹 is the tomb. 祭扫坟莹 is one of the traditional activities of the Chinese people during the Qing and Ming Dynasties, which is to pay tribute to their ancestors and clean the tombs. In the translation, Julien used

literal translation to translate the literal meaning of the activity of worshipping and sweeping tombs, and used a pronoun “y” to indicate the location where the offerings were placed, which is the place where the cemetery was cleaned. Readers can easily understand that during Tomb Sweeping Day, many Chinese people would go to clean graves and pay tribute to their ancestors.

Example 2:

The original: 一直出门，王端挑担随后，望西关城外而来。到得墓所，王端将祭物排列，汉文跪下哭拜一番，祭奠已毕，将钱纸焚化，王端收拾祭物，二人一路回来。

Translation: Il sortit aussitôt, suivi de Wang-touan, qui portait les offrandes, et se dirigea vers le cimetière de l'Ouest. Quand ils furent arrivés près du tombeau, Wang-touan rangea les offrandes prescrites. Hân-wen se mit à genoux, et les yeux baignés des larmes, il adressa ses hommages à son père et à sa mère; ensuite il présenta les offrandes, et brûla des monnaies de papier doré. Lorsque cette triste cérémonie fut achevée, Wang-touan recueillit les offrandes funèbres, et s'en retourna avec son maître.

This passage describes some customs of worshipping ancestors during Tomb Sweeping Day, such as preparing sacrifices, arranging them neatly in front of the tomb, kneeling down and crying during worship, and burning paper money. For these actions of worshipping ancestors, Julien basically adopts a literal translation method, following the meaning and structure of Chinese and directly translating them into French. The target language readers can also understand their meanings. When dealing with the word 哭拜, Julien chooses to translate the words crying and bowing separately, “Les yeux baignés des larmes, il adressa ses hommages à son père et à sa mère” (with tears in their eyes, paying tribute to their father and mother), and transforms the action of crying into a state of tears in their eyes, which can preserve the cultural color of the original text. It enables target language readers to understand the cultural connotations of the original text.

Example 3:

The original: 明日乃端阳佳节，家家户户皆要买用雄黄酒。

Translation: C'est demain le jour de fête appelé Touan-yang¹. Dans toutes les familles, on achète du vin où l'on mêle du soufre mâle².

Notes:

1. Cette fête tombe le cinquième jour de la cinquième lune.

2. On met du soufre mâle dans le vin pour chasser les maléfices des démons. (Julien, 1834)

The Dragon Boat Festival is one of the traditional Chinese festivals. Around the Dragon Boat Festival, the southern region enters the rainy season with a hot and humid climate, and mosquitoes, flies, and pests began to move and breed. Realgar is one of the sulfide minerals of arsenic, and it is also a traditional Chinese medicine. The Compendium of Materia says realgar is an essential medicine for curing ulcers and poisons (Li, 2013). Another medical book *Effective Prescription for Generations* also records that realgar treats snake wounds and injuries caused by snakes, bee flies, centipedes, poisonous insects, and dog bites. Mix realgar powder with vinegar slowly, and drink with wine (Wei, 2020). Since ancient times, people have had the custom of drinking realgar wine on Dragon Boat Festival to ward off evil and insects. As for the translation of the festival Duanyang, which is similar to Tomb Sweeping Day, Julien also chose to transliterate it first, and added a note saying that the festival is the fifth day of the fifth lunar month.

For realgar wine, Julien chose to translate it literally as “vin où l'on mêle du soufre mâle” (wine with male sulfur). At the same time, he added notes, indicating that people add realgar to the wine in order to exorcise evil to explain why every family buys realgar wine. Although the translation of realgar to “le soufre mâle” (male sulfur)

by Julien may be due to a mistranslation by the translator's insufficient knowledge of traditional Chinese medicine, its translation can help target language readers understand that on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, Chinese people have the custom of drinking a wine that can ward off evil spirits.

Translation of Traditional Chinese Cultural Elements

The core essence of traditional Chinese culture is Taoism, Legalism, and Confucianism. It has undergone thousands of years of evolution and has a unique historical background, religious culture, and social customs (Wang & Hu, 2016). However, these unique Chinese traditional cultural elements can hardly be accurately expressed in French translation. Julien noticed these cultural elements in the process of translating *Leifeng Pagoda Legend* and also gave his own solutions. The author analyzes the translation of Julien from two aspects: the ancient Chinese courtesy name and the Chinese Taoist culture.

Example 4:

The original: 姓许名仙，字汉文。今年十七岁。

Translation: Mon nom de famille est Hiu; mon surnom est Sien, et mon nom honorifique H ân-wen: j'ai maintenant dix-sept ans accomplis.

The short text of the novel contains a unique cultural phenomenon in China, which is composed of surname, first name, and courtesy name.

In modern Chinese, a name is a person's name, while in ancient Chinese, there is a difference between a name and courtesy name. A name is a person's name, and a character is a different alias based on the meaning of the person's name. (Zheng, 1980)

Therefore, many ancient Chinese people had characters in addition to their surname and first name.

Courtesy name is an explanation and supplement to name, and it is mutually external and internal to name, so it is also known as courtesy name (Peng, 2020). The use of courtesy name stems from the ancient people's emphasis on etiquette. The Records of Qin Dynasty says: In ancient times, it was basic courtesy to call oneself first name and to call others courtesy name. If one violates it, it would be disrespectful. Therefore, it can be seen that in ancient times, in interpersonal communication, names can generally only be used as a form of humility or humility, or as a form of address from top to bottom, or from the old to the young, peer to peer. The younger generations and predecessors often use courtesy name to refer to their elders and predecessors, which is the basic etiquette of ancient communication.

Julian translated 姓许名仙，字汉文 into Chinese as "Mon nom de famille est Hiu; mon surnom est Sien, et mon nom honorifique H ân-wen". The translator translated first name as "surname" and courtesy name as "nom honorifique" (Honorary name), which is clearly due to cultural differences. The author believes that when translating courtesy name, it can be understood as a name used in public (nom personnel public). At the same time, adding annotations help target language readers understand their cultural origins.

Example 5:

The original: 到得夜来，三更时分，白氏手执宝剑，踏罡步斗，口念真言，驱召五方小鬼。

Translation: La nuit arrive, et, à la troisième veille, Blanche saisit sa précieuse épée, s'élève au sommet de la constellation du Boisseau; et à l'aide de quelques paroles magiques, elle évoque tous les démons des cinq parties du monde.

According to the translation of Julien, 踏罡步斗 is rising to the peak of Big Dipper, but the actual situation

is not so. 踏罡步斗 is the step of Taoist mage praying for heaven or summoning gods. 罡 refers to the handle of the Big Dipper, that is, the fifth to seventh stars of the Big Dipper; 斗 refers to the Big Dipper. 踏罡 means following the Big Dipper, while 步斗 means that the trajectory is like the shape of Big Dipper. Therefore, 踏罡步斗 is to draw a distribution map of Big Dipper on the ground and walk on it according to certain rules and procedures. In China's traditional culture, the Big Dipper is composed of seven stars: Tianshu, Tianxuan, Tianji, Tianquan, Yuheng, Kaiyang, and Yaoguang. According to the modern international naming system, the Big Dipper belongs to the constellation Ursa Major. The author believes that when dealing with 踏罡步斗, we can literally simplify it to walk in the shape of Big Dipper, and then add notes to let readers understand that this is the most important step form of Taoist magic.

Julien translated 口念真言, 驱召五方小鬼 as “à l'aide de quelques paroles magiques, elle évoque tous les démons des cinq parties du monde” (with a few magical words, summon all the monsters from all over the world). Although there were some deviations in the translation of 五个小鬼, Julien understood 五个小鬼 as all the monsters in the five lakes and four seas; the meaning of summoning ghosts and monsters through spells in the Chinese sentence was well conveyed to the readers.

Conclusion

In recent years, the domestic foreign language academic community has conducted extensive research on the translation of many Chinese cultural classics into foreign languages. However, the research works mainly focus on works such as: *A Dream of Red Mansions*, *Heroes of the Marshes*, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, and *Strange Tales of a Lonely Studio*, and the attention to ancient civic literature works that combine popularity, interest, and literary quality is not high. In the face of this situation, this paper chooses the vernacular novel *Leifeng Pagoda Legend* of the Qing Dynasty. It takes culture loaded words as the starting point, makes a preliminary analysis of Julien's translation through specific cases, and expounds and analyzes the highlights and related problems in the translation.

Firstly, it should be pointed out that the translation of Julien is valuable. He respected the original text and kept the details of the story as complete as possible, without adding any personal opinions in the translation. For example, the translator retains all the chapter titles and poems in the original text of the novel, and uses various methods such as transliteration, literal translation, free translation, annotation, etc., to translate the names of people, traditional Chinese festivals and customs, Chinese cultural elements, as well as idioms, proverbs, and idioms in the novel. Compared with many early and later French translations of ancient Chinese classics, even other foreign language translations, there are very few omissions in his translations. Julien is not only faithful to the entire content of the novel, but also attempts to convey the language style of Chinese classical novels to readers.

It is also of great practical significance to study the culture loaded words in the French version of *Leifeng Pagoda Legend*. Julien's translation is an important reference for studying how to translate Chinese literature into French. In the 19th century, when there were no many useful tools, translators could only translate by their language knowledge, which was limited to the quality of their sinology training and their personal understanding of Chinese culture. Julien has never visited China, but he attended the Chinese class of his teacher Ramusa (1788-1832) at the French Academy. It is not easy to translate *Leifeng Pagoda Legend* and subsequent works of Chinese literature. From the perspective of Sino French cultural communication, Julien's translation work has played a

role in promoting the development of French sinology, allowing French readers to feel the life of ordinary people shown in Chinese popular literature. Even today, the handling of Chinese cultural loaded words in this translation is still worth our reference and learning.

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