

A Study on the Translation of Culture-Loaded Words in Lin Yutang's Translated Version of *Six Chapters of a Floating Life*

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Abstract: During the Qing Dynasty, Shen Fu's autobiographical prose collection *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* contains many culture-loaded words, which have solid cultural characteristics and play a pivotal role in the cultural exchange between China and the West. Due to the difference in cultural background and way of thinking between China and the West, Western readers' perception of Chinese unique culture-loaded words is biased and difficult in the language conversion process. Hence, studying the English translation of culture-loaded words has theoretical and practical significance. The artistic creation of language is inseparably related to strangeness, and translation strangeness means that linguistic symbols do not always refer to the same object. The translation of the culturally loaded words in Lin Yutang's translated book *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* allows the target language reader to experience a different world in a familiar and unfamiliar transition. Studying its translation is also valuable for helping translators to open their minds and use different means of translation to create new expressions of strangeness.

Keywords: Culture-loaded words, Translation, Strangeness.

1. Introduction

As China's economic power grows more robust and more and more countries are paying attention to it internationally, the world wants to know more about China, and China urgently needs to show its presence on the international stage. Literature is an essential reflection of a nation's culture and is necessary for other countries to understand China. China has also long elevated "Chinese culture going out" to a national strategic policy. President Xi has repeatedly mentioned, "Make good use of the platform of significant activities and important events to tell the Chinese story and let China win the understanding and recognition of the international community." In order to promote the outreach of Chinese culture, in 2019, 154 Chinese academic translation projects of the National Social Science Foundation have been established, including "Fifteen Lectures on Chinese Philosophy", "The Humanistic Spirit of Our Time: The Construction of Contemporary Chinese Philosophy of Value", and "Introduction to Chinese Philology". Although China has attached great importance to promoting Chinese culture "going out", Chinese foreign translation projects are still not recognized in Western countries. When Chinese translators translate Chinese works for foreigners, they inevitably fail to achieve the integration of sight due to the aesthetic and cultural differences, and the vitality of the translated works will be damaged. Therefore, the translation of Chinese literary works faces two significant difficulties: first, if the translation strategy of naturalization is adopted to reduce the misinterpretation of foreigners, the "strangeness" of literary works will be significantly reduced, resulting in a significant loss of the aesthetic function of literature; second, if all the articles done by direct translation, target language readers will not understand or even not want to read them.

In the history of cultural exchanges between China and the West, there is no shortage of scholars who have worked hard, and one of the masters who has achieved great success is Lin

Yutang. Lin Yutang was both a literary scholar and a translator. On the one hand, Lin introduced Western culture to Chinese readers by writing articles. On the other hand, he actively disseminated outstanding ancient Chinese literature to the West by translating articles. His works greatly bridged the gap between China and the West and gave Western readers a more comprehensive understanding of China. Lin Yutang's translation of *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* contains many culturally loaded words, which are national cultural overtones and can directly and sensitively reflect the history, culture and folk customs of the nation. These words not only carry rich cultural connotations but also exist only in one culture and are blank in another, combining two significant difficulties in translating Chinese literary works. It is also called "lexical gap", which means that the cultural information carried by the source language cannot be adapted to the translated language, including social customs, flora and fauna, religious beliefs, food and so on. It not only causes difficulties in understanding due to language barriers in the process of cross-cultural communication, but also brings great inconvenience to the readers of the target language, and even leads to misunderstanding or prejudice (Yuan & Zhao, 2022). This paper analyses the translation study of culturally loaded words from four aspects: festivals and customs, place names, literary quotations and classical poems.

2. The Reason of Strangeness Retention

Although cultures are diverse and unique, "beauty" is a common pursuit, and trustworthy "beauty" is not limited by national borders and can be appreciated by people of all countries. If many countries favour a culture, they will not have a strong sense of isolation when reading it. Many novels written during the Ming and Qing dynasties were based on Confucianism and officialdom. However, few described the ordinary life between husband and wife. However, Shen Fu's *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* focuses on the trivial matters

between husband and wife, with bitterness and happiness that are easy to appreciate. Ancient China has a long history, and the feudal imperial system derived from this history is rich in connotation, which is difficult for Westerners to understand at once. But for the quiet little things in a couple's life, the warmth of a small home, people growing up in any culture can easily find resonance with.

In the translation of Lin Yutang's *Six Chapters of a Floating Life*, the themes chosen are life of husband and wife, leisure and fun, hardships and sorrows, and travels. Readers who are familiar with these themes and can empathize with them will be interested in continuing to read them. Each culturally loaded word is a composite of conceptual and cultural meanings. Lin Yutang's translation of these words maintains the original cultural flavour to the greatest extent possible, considering both conceptual and cultural meanings in translation. The "strangeness" that exists in them, through Lin Yutang's translation, not only does not alienate the readers, but also promotes the spread of Chinese culture, helps to eliminate misunderstandings about Chinese culture, and facilitates cultural exchanges between China and the West.

The theory of strangeness originates from artistic creation, and translation is the artistic creation of language, which is inseparably related to strangeness (Xu, 2021). The purpose of art is to make people feel things, not just know things. The technique of art is to make the object unfamiliar, to make the form difficult, and to increase the difficulty and length of sensation because the process of sensation is an aesthetic purpose that must be sought to be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the composition of an object but not the object itself being important. The strangeness of translation can be used to reconstruct the sense of things through creative means, thus expanding the difficulty and breadth of perception and constantly giving the reader a sense of freshness. Usually, the symbol and the referent agree (A is A1), but we must also realize that sometimes they do not agree (A is not A1), which is very important to realize. Otherwise, the symbol and the referent will always be automatically related, and people's perception of the real world will become insipid (Erlich, 1965: 181). Therefore, translators must balance the relationship between consistency and strangeness. This paper takes the translation of culturally loaded words in Lin Yutang's translation of *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* as an example to explore how to demonstrate cultural connotations while faithfully conveying the content of the original text.

3. Culture-loaded Words

3.1. Chinese Festivals and Customs

Festivals and customs usually originate from folk traditions and are formed through long years of oral transmission and historical traditions, and are a living culture created, enjoyed and passed on by the people of a nation. These culture-loaded words usually have the following characteristics: They are words that fit the habits of the middle and lower classes. They are trusted in terms of emotional beliefs. They are cultures willing to be passed down from generation to generation (Ding, 2022). After a word related to festivals and customs is created, it needs to be polished and processed by history and years of processing, proliferation and transmission before people generally recognize it. In this process, many words will be passed down as representative symbols of folk culture, with customary, faithful and inherited characteristics.

(1) In *Six Chapters of a Floating Life*, when Shen Fu and

Yun got married, the word “合卺” was used, which is a Chinese wedding custom. This is a Chinese wedding custom, in which the “卺” is a ladle, and a lagenaria is cut into two ladles, and the bride and groom each take one to drink from (cited from Baidu Encyclopedia), so “合卺” means cross-cup wine in vernacular. Lin Yutang translates it as “the drinking of the customary twin cups between bride and groom”, using domestication methods to interpret the action of “合卺” in English, allowing the reader to quickly understand the action described in the original text while the same time was briefly introducing a Chinese wedding custom to the West.

(2) In the sentence “是年七夕 同拜天孙于我取轩中”, Lin translates “七夕” as “the seventh night of the seventh moon”, “天孙” as “the Grandson of Heaven”. But he introduces the story of the Spinster and the Cowherd in his commentary, indicating that Qixi is “the only day in the year when the pair of heavenly lovers” (here Lin makes a mistake, the Grandson of Heaven actually refers to the Spinster). Here, in order not to cut the narrative of the original text, he adopts an foreignizing translation method in the text and later adds notes to introduce the reader to the Chinese festivals and its origins.

(3) Original text: 七月望, 俗谓鬼节。

Translated text: The fifteenth of the seventh moon was All Soul's Day.

The “Ghost Festival”, also known as Zhong Yuan Festival, is a day for Chinese people to worship their deceased relatives and remember their ancestors. Lin Yutang adopts a domestication translation method, choosing “soul” in English as the equivalence of “鬼” in Chinese and translating “鬼节” as “All Soul's Day” so that readers can understand the meaning of mourning for the souls of the deceased without knowing this festival.

(4) Original text: 即脱金约指缔姻焉

Translated text: gave her her gold ring as a token for the betrothal

The Chinese often use gold as a metaphor for dignity, preciousness, rarity, permanence and solidity. There is the saying “love is stronger than gold”, which describes a very strong relationship. There is also the saying “golden wedding” in European customs, which refers to the fiftieth anniversary of a marriage, symbolizing the enduring love. In China, before a son gets married, his mother usually hands her daughter-in-law her gold jewelry in the hope that her son's marriage will be strong and long-lasting. Here, Lin Yutang gives the reader the reason for giving Yun the gold ring.

(5) Original text: 随母归宁

Translated text: I went with my mother to her maiden home “归宁” generally refers to a woman's return to her parents' home to pay her respects after her marriage. Here Lin Yutang does not introduce this custom in detail, but adopts a variant treatment to express the fullness and make the lines concise and smooth.

3.2. Chinese Place Name

As a kind of designation symbol, geographical names have solid national cultural characteristics. Chinese people are careful in naming personal and geographical names, which contain historical and cultural connotations and are more humanistic, and are essential cultural load words. China is a vast country with a long history, and the massive number of place names is like a vast ocean, which contains cultural “deposits” in writing and language, literature and art, history,

geography, politics, society, economy and other aspects. Many place names in Chinese history were finally “deposited” after thousands of years. This is because the historical culture associated with these place names has been accepted and recognized by generations. The exchange of different cultures brings about cultural identity, which makes some naming customs spread in space and have significant cultural implications. There are many place names in the book *Six Chapters of a Floating Life*, and it is a great challenge to translate the place names to show the oriental cultural connotation based on conforming to the reading habits of the target language readers.

Due to the existence of geographical differences between China and the West, many ecological and cultural terms are “blank” and “default” in the translated ecological environment (Sun & Han, 2021). The ecological category of cultural load refers to all organic plants and animals in their natural native state and the environment around them, including geography and hydroclimate (Newmark, 1988: 95), and the translation of place names belongs to this category. Lin Yutang combines the methods of “free translation” and “transliteration translation” to make the Chinese culture-loaded words better transmit their cultural connotations in the translated context while preserving the heterogeneous elements in the source language.

(1) Transliteration Translation

沧浪亭 the Ts'anglang Pavilion, 西跨塘 Hsikuat'ang, 戈园 Koyuan Garden, 会稽幕府 the Kueich'i district government...

(2) Free Translation

① 爱莲居

the Lotus Lover's Lodge

② 名曰“我取”，取“清斯濯纓，濯斯濯足”意也

called “after my heart”-- the reference was to an poem: “when the water is clear, I will wash the tassels of my hat, and when the water is muddy, I will wash my feet.”

③ 近山林

forest by hill

④ 福寿山

the Hill of Good Fortune and Longevity

⑤ 宾香阁

Tower of My Guest's Fragrance

The translation should take culture as the translation unit, and the translation should fully consider the cultural factors behind the language for cross-cultural communication and conversion. When naming places, Chinese people tend to make the names elegant and auspicious, which implies the national cultural psychology of good hope. For example, the words “fortune”, “longevity”, and “fragrance” in *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* reflect people's desire for a better life and the pursuit of a long and happy life. Lin Yutang fully explores the information behind the original text to make the translation of place names more cultural and objective.

3.3. Chinese Literary Quotations

Ancient Chinese writers used literary quotations well to express their feelings and make their texts more concise and rhythmic. Allusions usually contain unique Chinese historical stories, myths and legends, and so on. When translating, translators need to consider what kind of translation method to adopt, whether to explain the allusion, how to maintain the readability of the translation, etc.

(1) In the book, Shen Fu uses the literary quotation “鸿案

相庄” to express the mutual respect between himself and his wife Yun. Lin used foreignizing translation method and translated it as “We remained courteous to each other for twenty-three years of our married life like Liang Hung and Meng Kuang(of the Eastern Han Dynasty)”. Although the reader does not know this allusion and Lin Yutang does not adopt the translation method of explanation to describe this allusion, the reader can guess through the contextual background that it is about Shen Fu and Yun respecting each other and taking care of each other, so his translation not only will not make the reader misinterpret, but also can make the reader feel that there are many respectful couples in ancient China, such as Liang Hung and Meng Kuang. It can be seen that there is not only one kind of translation for culturally loaded words, and it is necessary to choose the translation method flexibly with the context.

(2) Original text: 世传月下老人专司人间婚姻事。

Translated text: It is said the Old Man under the moon is in charge of matrimony.

“月下老人” is a god invented by the people of the Tang Dynasty to be in charge of earthly marriages. The ancients Chinese people believed that the heavens and the spirits decided marriage, and that as long as there was a destiny, a beautiful marriage could be made. The union of a man and a woman, especially when everyone felt it was a suitable and compatible pair, was often thought to be destined by heaven and blessed by the gods. In the translation of this sentence, Lin Yutang omitted the allusion “月下老人” and did not explain it, but the following sentence says, “we shall still depend on his favour in the affair of marriage in the next incarnation”. In order to achieve the smoothness of the original text, the word-by-word translation is not carried out, which makes the text more concise to read. From this, we can see that not all culturally loaded words need to be translated, and it is okay to omit translation occasionally.

3.4. Chinese Classical Poems

Chinese classical poetry, rooted in ancient Chinese culture, is a treasure of excellent traditional Chinese culture, as it unites the great wisdom of our ancestors. Many outstanding poets and lyricists have emerged from various dynasties and generations in Chinese history, and they have created many excellent works. They were good at creating evocative moods and conveying thoughts and emotions by borrowing scenes to express their emotions, creating realities and quoting scriptures (Jian, 2022). In the process of an English translation, if the cultural loaded words are not handled properly, it will affect the reconstruction and reproduction of the original poem's meaning, cause the loss of cultural meaning, reduce the acceptability of the translation, and thus affect the spread of Chinese culture abroad.

(1) In *Six Chapters of a Floating Life*, Shen Fu mentions the purpose of writing this article in the beginning, quoting Su Dongpo's poem “事如春梦了无痕” to compare past events like a dream in spring, passing without leaving even a trace. Because Shen Fu did not want the past to pass by in a hurry, leaving no traces, he wrote it down in ink. Lin Yutang translated the poem, “Life is like a spring dream which vanishes without a trace”, using elegant English vocabulary to express the meaning of the sentence clearly and without losing the imagery of “a beautiful dream”.

(2) Lin Yutang's translation of the poem “秋侵人影瘦，霜染菊花肥” is “Touched by autumn, one's figure grows

slender, soaked in frost, the chrysanthemum blooms full”, the original poem is a five-line stanza, Lin Yutang’s English translation also adopts formal equivalence, the upper and lower stanzas are the same, retaining the imagery of autumn, frost and chrysanthemum, and conveying the meaning of the whole sentence. The imagery of autumn in literature represents sadness, depression and misery. Frost and chrysanthemum are representative images of autumn, which make writers develop a profound and far-reaching mind and feelings of pathos and sorrow, piled up in the heart and thus resorted to the brush. The “sadness of autumn” is a unique sentiment of Chinese literati and a classic literary theme in ancient Chinese literature, especially classical poetry. However, these imagery expressions and symbols are unfamiliar to the target language readers. Lin Yutang boldly introduces the cultural thinking of the source text to make the target language unfamiliar, to shock the perception of the old concept of symbols, and to let the cultural connotations that have existed in China since ancient times show clearly.

(3) Original text: 山高月小，水落石出

Translated text: The moon seemed so small on the top of the high mountain and rocks stood up above the surface of the water, making a most enchanting picture.

Chinese expressions are sometimes subtle and ambiguous, intended to let the reader perceive the meaning expressed in the text. However, if the expression is not clear enough in cultural communication with foreign countries, it is easy to cause misunderstanding. For the translation of this sentence, Lin Yutang first makes sense of the original text and then adds a translation, adding the main idea of “making a most enchanting picture” to clarify the sentence’s meaning and improve the acceptability of the text.

4. Conclusion

This paper takes Lin Yutang’s English translation of *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* as the object of study and analyzes four types of culture-loaded words, namely, festivals and customs, place names, allusions and classical poems. To a

certain extent, the preservation of cultural connotations is the shaping of strangeness, and translators can adopt the strategy of alienation by adding exegetical content or supplementing cultural background information. However, not all culturally loaded words need to be explained, and information that has less impact on the content of the text and will not cause misinterpretation by readers can be translated phonetically or omitted by using the domestication strategy. Both domestication and foreignization translation strategies have advantages and disadvantages, and translators must choose the appropriate translation strategy by combining a contextual background and strangeness when translating.

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