

English Translation Studies: Chinese Literary Works

Ruoyi Lu^{1,*}

¹Digital media art ,Beijing Union University ,Beijing ,China

*Corresponding author:
2024210469015@bnu.edu.cn

Abstract:

This paper examines the two most prevalent strategies employed in the English translation of Chinese literary works. First, the effectiveness of literal translation is examined, with a focus on how well it renders legal documents, historical accounts, textbooks, and religious texts. Since accuracy and faithfulness to the source text are crucial in these kinds of works, the use of literal translation in these situations is justified. Second, it is examined that when the cultural content and context of the source text need to be successfully communicated, free or idiomatic translation may be an essential tactic. When translating literary works, where imagination is crucial, this method is invaluable. Furthermore, this study explores the cross-cultural difficulties that arise when translating between Chinese and English, paying particular attention to idioms, which frequently present serious translation challenges. The study also investigates the translation of seminal works such as *Water Margin*, *Journey to the West*, and others, alongside Botev's Translation, to illustrate how adept translation can reconcile the linguistic and cultural differences between the source and target texts. Furthermore, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into translation processes is examined, along with the associated possibilities and challenges. By examining these translation strategies and their applications, this study aims to contribute to the field of translation studies and enhance the appreciation and understanding of Chinese literary works in English-speaking contexts.

Keywords: English Translation Studies; Chinese Literary Works; Literal Translation; Free/Idiomatic Translation

1. Introduction

Since the first half of the nineteenth century, there have been numerous attempts to transliterate Chinese

literary texts into the English language. An important turning point in the history of translating Chinese literary works into English was reached when English translations of „Qianlong's Imperial Poems“ first ap-

peared in 1809–1810. For the first time, Chinese literature was made available to English-speaking readers through these translations. It's also important to acknowledge the work of John Francis Davis, a well-known British sinologist at the time who translated and published old Chinese poetry in English.

Moreover, Xun Lu occupies a unique position in the annals of modern Chinese literature. His works have significantly impacted society by bombarding readers with fresh perspectives and innovative approaches, which are evident in his modern literary creations. Authors like Xun Lu are often characterized by their critical mindset and unwavering commitment to the social contract. Their writings are distinguished by a keen sense of criticism and a profound dedication to social responsibility. Xun Lu's prose anthology, „Na Han,“ which translates directly to „Shouting“ or „Cry Out,“ has been rendered in English as „Call to Arms.“ In this context, the phrase „Call to Arms“ does not refer to the mobilization of soldiers but rather signifies the physical mobilization of individuals from a state of inactivity to action in response to perceived threats. The anthology captures the ignorance, corruption, and turbulence prevalent during that time, depicting the hardships endured by individuals toiling under a feudal society.

The importance of examining the English translation of Chinese literature lies in its potential to foster cultural exchanges between China and the global community. This effort requires a careful recognition of the current deficiencies in the field of Sino-foreign translation within the larger context of translation studies. This study aims to lay a strong foundation that will facilitate better international distribution of Chinese literary works in the future by carefully identifying areas that need improvement. By doing this, we may help audiences who speak English comprehend and value Chinese literature more deeply while bridging cultural gaps [1].

2.Striking Translated Works of Literature

Cultural and linguistic discrepancies pose one of the most formidable challenges in the practice of translating Chinese literary works into English, and vice versa [2]. There are significant intrinsic distinctions between the Chinese language and culture and the English language and culture. As a result, it is difficult to faithfully express meaning, style, and even the cultural subtleties that are ingrained in these languages [3]. This innate complexity has given rise to translated literature, which frequently owes its existence to the inventiveness and originality of translators even though it contains many outstanding masterpieces.

Take, for instance, the English translations of “Water Margin” and “Journey to the West.” These translations exemplify the delicate balance that translators must achieve

between fidelity and adaptation to the target cultural context. By successfully bridging linguistic divides, such translations not only facilitate cross-cultural understanding but also enrich global literary heritage. They serve as testament to the profound impact that skilled translation can have on cultural exchange and comprehension, illustrating how adept translation can reconcile the linguistic and cultural differences between the source and target texts.

In the context of this research on English translation studies of Chinese literary works, it is crucial to acknowledge the significance of these cultural and linguistic discrepancies. Literal translation and free or idiomatic translation, the two most common translation techniques used in these kinds of translations, are designed to tackle these issues in various ways. For example, legal documents, historical records, textbooks, and religious writings—where precision and faithfulness to the source language are crucial—benefit greatly from literal translation. On the other hand, free or idiomatic translation is essential when it comes to properly communicating the cultural meaning and context of the source text, particularly in literary works where imagination is crucial.

Moreover, this research delves deeper into the cross-cultural challenges inherent in translating idioms, which often pose significant difficulties due to their cultural specificity. By examining the translation of seminal works such as “Water Margin” and “Journey to the West,” alongside other notable translations like Botev's, this study aims to illustrate how adept translation can overcome these linguistic and cultural barriers.

Furthermore, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into translation processes presents both possibilities and challenges. As AI technology advances, it has the potential to revolutionize the field of translation, enhancing efficiency and accuracy. However, it also raises questions about the role of human creativity and intuition in translation, particularly in the context of literary works where cultural nuance and imagination are crucial.

Ultimately, the objectives of this research are to contribute to the broader dissemination of Chinese literature to a wider audience and to advance communication research as a scientific discipline. This study intends to promote more cultural interaction and comprehension by analyzing various translation techniques and their uses in order to improve the appreciation and comprehension of Chinese literary works in English-speaking situations.

2.1 Literal Translation

This translation approach focuses on fidelity to the literal meaning of the original text, striving to maintain both its

essence and structure with precision. Its foremost advantage is its capacity to convey the original text's information accurately. It excels in areas that require exacting accuracy, such technical manuals, historical materials, legal documents, and religious texts. Numerous literary masterpieces from China have been directly translated into English, revealing the richness of Chinese culture. Classics like Confucius's *Analects*, Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*, and Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* have all been translated directly, as well as modern and contemporary works such as Lu Xun's *Diary of a Madman* and Lao She's *Rickshaw Boy*. These translations have contributed to the international dissemination of Chinese culture and literature [1]. However, owing to the inherent cultural and expressive differences between the source and target languages, this practice faces several significant limitations, one of which is reader understanding.

2.2 Idiomatic Translation

In translation, a certain methodology is used. This method entails more than only communicating the text's essential ideas. In particular, it requires adherence to standards that correspond with the usages and customs of the target language. It also stresses the use of suitable rhetoric to ensure that the translated phrase is fluid and natural. In the preface to his work, Jerome felt obliged to anticipate some of the criticisms by writing: "Who is there, whether learned or unlearned, who, when he takes up the volume in his hands and discovers that what he reads therein does not agree with what he is accustomed to, will not break out at once in a loud voice and call me a sacrilegious forger, for daring to add something to the ancient books, to make changes and corrections in them?" [3]. Jerome was right, for his translation of the New Testament produced a storm of protest that followed him through the rest of his life—a life dedicated first and foremost to the translation of the Old Testament into Latin. Jerome's approach to translation was probably one of the most systematic and disciplined of any of the ancient translators. He followed well-conceived principles, which he freely proclaimed and defended, and stated quite frankly that he rendered "sense for sense and not word for word" [4]. In Nida's book *Exploring Translation Science*, Eugene Nida explored the fundamental concepts of "Dynamic Equivalence," later renamed "Functional Equivalence." These are the key concepts: First of all, translating involves more than just changing words and grammar rules. It transfers meaning and culture as well. Second, the reader of the translation is meant to experience the same emotions as the original text's reader. Thirdly, the translation should pay particular attention to functional equivalency rather than formal

equivalency. Lastly, one of the most important things for translators to maintain the authenticity of the source material and allow for cultural and linguistic variances is patience [5].

3. Translation studies

3.1 Translation Expressive of Sino-British Cultural Differences

The translation from Chinese to English frequently encounters cultural and linguistic disparities that amplify its complexity. Idiomatic expressions, particularly, are integral to a culture's fabric, rendering literal translations often clumsily inadequate at best. Take Chinese idiomatic phrases like "Drawing a Snake and Adding Feet" and "Mending the Pen After Losing the Sheep" as examples; they are deeply entrenched in the soil of Chinese history and cultural heritage. These expressions capture distinctive cultural stories, ideals, and knowledge that might not have exact English translations [6]. As a result, their cultural meanings are not adequately conveyed by a literal translation. Translators must instead use their imagination to convey their original meanings in a way that audiences who speak English can understand. Conversely, many English idioms are borrowed from literary sources such as the Bible or Greek mythology, like "A Trojan Horse" or "Crossing the Rubicon." These idioms may pose comprehension challenges for Chinese readers unfamiliar with Western literature [7-8]. The translator connects two very distinct cultural landscapes while translating from Sino to British. In order to ensure proper meaning conveyance, the translator of an idiom must decide whether to keep the original form, locate a similar term in the target language, or provide contextual clarifications. Such translations need a deep knowledge of the languages and cultures involved, as well as the translator's ability to capture the subtleties of the source material without losing its core meaning [9]. Beyond linguistic exchange, translation fosters cultural enrichment between China and the English-speaking world.

3.2 Teaching Cases

This is a translation, when translating how to express the meaning contained in its blood as accurately as possible and we are even thinking about something like cultural value that matters in this language of source text. Different nations have different histories and social ideologies. In Chinese culture, most of the idioms about dogs are pejorative, such as "A dog will leap over a wall in desperation," "a dog threatens based on master's power", "lapdog", all of these words degrade the dog to nothing. But in Western culture, dogs are regarded as loyal friends of mankind,

such as “lucky dog” and the proverb “love me, love my dog [10].” Dong Shi Imitating Xi Shi’s Frown” and “Falling Short in the Examinations Akin to Sun Shan” are two examples of Chinese idioms that are deeply ingrained in China’s rich historical and cultural legacy. Thus, the intricate plots, whether symbolic or not, contain that knowledge and philosophical understanding. In contrast to Finnish, English is adorned with biblical and Greek and Roman mythological idioms [11]. For instance, Achilles’ heel—one’s one weakness, to meet one’s Waterloo—to be completely vanquished Both Chinese and English idioms are gems that have been passed down through the generations.. These expressions which transcend the boundaries of time and place reveal that from a single human experience comes an emotion or wisdom to all humankind, alike framed in different linguistic constructs [12].

4.Strategic research from the perspective of translation studies

As the era progresses, the field of translation studies has attained a higher level of maturity, prompting numerous individuals to harness artificial intelligence as an auxiliary tool to facilitate their English language endeavors. The development of AI translation. With the iterative development of modern intelligent tech represented by AI algorithm, AI development will gradually go through several development stages, such as intelligent tech, intelligent economy and intelligent society [8]. However, there are still issues with AI translation. First of all, it is challenging to comprehend such subtleties since AI translation systems rely too much on the “word,” whether it be the phrase itself or its common sense. Second, readers are assumed to be unconcerned about who is doing what in a sentence when complex sentences are translated by AI. As a result, issues arise when the verb and the subject are in conflict, or when word classes or incorrect usage are absent. Confusion may also result from AI translation’s lack of properly used terminology, even in fields like finance, law, and medicine. Also, there are many cultural nuances that can provoke startling mismatches between the English words and their meanings in Chinese translations, a behavior that exposes a difference between AI translation and human’s. To make matters worse, there is a likelihood of client information being compromised during translation done by the AI, which creates security threats. The concerns focus on the ways the already developed AI translation technology is utilized in many areas. Rather, it should complement and enhance human effort by offering challenges aimed at rectifying whatever remains unpolished.

Equal emphasis on theory and practice: The teaching of translation studies in China not only focuses on the study of translation theory, but also emphasizes the importance

of translation practice. Through case studies and simulation translation, students can apply the theories they have learned to practical translation and improve their translation skills.

Emphasis on intercultural communicative competence: Chinese translation studies instruction places a strong emphasis on developing students’ intercultural communicative competence because translation entails cross-cultural communication. To guarantee that the translation is accurate and seamless, this entails knowing the background, history, and practices of various cultures as well as how to appropriately handle cultural variations in translation..

Focus on language contrast and translation strategies: Chinese translation studies teaching will explain in detail the similarities and differences between different languages, including the comparison of vocabulary, grammar, sentence patterns, etc. At the same time, students will be taught how to choose appropriate translation strategies according to different translation needs, such as literal translation, free translation, transliteration, etc., in order to achieve the best translation results.

Integration of modern technological means: With the development of science and technology, translation tools and techniques are constantly updated. In order for students to become proficient with these tools and enhance the effectiveness and caliber of translation, Chinese translation studies instruction has also kept up with the times by incorporating contemporary technological tools like computer-assisted translation (CAT) and machine translation (MT) into the curriculum..

Emphasis on the importance of literary translation: China has a rich literary heritage and literary translation plays an important role in the teaching of translation studies. Through the translation of Chinese classical literature, modern literature and other works, students can deeply understand the essence of Chinese culture, and at the same time exercise their literary translation ability.

Develop critical thinking: In the process of translation, students need to have critical thinking skills, be able to analyze the intention, style, etc., of the original text, and make appropriate translation decisions. The teaching of translation studies in China focuses on cultivating students’ thinking ability so that they can deal with various problems more flexibly and accurately in translation practice.

Interdisciplinary learning is encouraged: Translation studies involves multiple subject areas, such as linguistics, literature, culturology, etc. In China, teaching translation studies encourages students to study a variety of subjects in order to increase their knowledge and develop their overall literacy. This makes it easier for pupils to comprehend and handle a variety of challenging translation-relat-

ed problems..

To sum up, the teaching of translation studies in China has distinct characteristics, aiming at cultivating translation talents with solid theoretical foundation, rich practical experience, intercultural communication ability, critical thinking and interdisciplinary literacy.

5. Conclusion

The translation of Chinese literary works into English underscores the complexity inherent not merely in linguistic differences but, more profoundly, in the vast cultural disparities between the two languages. This study explores the analysis of literal and idiomatic translation methods, highlighting the need to strike a careful balance between cultural adaptation in the target language and faithfulness to the source text. Idiomatic translation becomes essential when it comes to communicating the complex cultural nuances included in literary works, even while literal translation works well in situations that need for accuracy, such legal and technical documentation..

The disparity in Sino-British idiomatic expressions highlights that translation is far from a purely linguistic endeavor; it is, in essence, a negotiation of cultures. Translators, therefore, serve as cultural mediators, tasked with preserving the essence, meaning, and emotional resonance of the original text for readers of diverse linguistic backgrounds. For example, idioms like “Drawing a Snake and Adding Feet” (a Chinese idiom meaning “to ruin a good thing by adding something unnecessary”) and “A Trojan Horse” (an English idiom referring to a deceitful plan to gain entry into a fortified place) necessitate creative adaptations by translators to maintain cultural integrity.

As translation studies evolve, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) has introduced novel tools and methodologies aimed at streamlining translation processes. But when it comes to managing intricate grammatical structures, cultural settings, and subtle expressions, AI translation still has a lot of limits. Therefore, rather than taking the role of human translation, AI translation should be seen as an additional and helpful tool. Particularly in literary works, human translators continue to be essential for maintaining quality, accuracy, and cultural sensitivity.. It is anticipated that translation studies would incorporate a combination of contemporary technology and tradition in the future. AI translation technologies should continue to be improved in this forward-looking direction. At the same time, training for future translators should include

both language skills and cultural fluency, promoting the ongoing enhancement of global cultural interchange via literature.. By nurturing a generation of translators equipped with both linguistic and cultural competencies, it is necessary to look forward to a future where the translation of Chinese literary works into English not only bridges linguistic divides but also fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation of Chinese culture among English-speaking audiences.

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