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Cross-Cultural Dissemination and English Translation Strategy Study of the Traditional Cultural Symbols in the Fantasy Novel *Battle Through the Heavens*

Peng Liu*, Yuanyuan Zeng

Kunming University, 655000, Kunming, Yunnan Province, China

KEYWORDS

ABSTRACT

Traditional Cultural Symbols;

Cross-Cultural dissemination;

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Driven by globalization and digital communication technologies, Chinese fantasy novel *Battle Through the Heavens*, with an overseas readership exceeding 100 million and more than one million reader comments, has become a core carrier for Chinese culture to go to the world arena. However, there is no systematic analysis on how to deal with the traditional cultural symbols, the adoption of English translation strategies and the effects of cross-cultural dissemination. This study takes the English translation edition of *Battle Through the Heavens* as the research object, and employs text and case analysis to explore the cross-cultural dissemination of traditional cultural symbols, the characteristics of translation strategies, cultural motivations, and cross-cultural acceptance effects. The research finds that the cross-cultural dissemination of traditional cultural symbols enriches Chinese online literature, and its English translation shows a strategy tendency of “foreignization as the main approach and domestication as the auxiliary one”. This research is of great significance for facilitating the precise dissemination of traditional Chinese cultural symbols to the world.

INTRODUCTION

As a representative work of Tiancan Tudou, a platinum writer on Qidian Chinese Network, the English translation of *Battle Through the Heavens* has long been at the top of the rankings on platforms such as Wuxiaworld, covering readers in more than 100 countries and regions around the world. Readers in North America account for one-third, with a peak daily visitor volume exceeding 3.62 million. It has derived various IP forms such as film and television, animation and audio books, becoming an important carrier for the overseas dissemination of traditional cultural symbols.

However, in the English translation of the above-mentioned work, translators face the dual challenge of being loyal to the cultural connotation of the source language and adapting to the cognition of target language readers when dealing with traditional cultural symbols such as 丹药 “elixir”, 宗门 “Sect” and 气运 “destiny”. Their choice of strategies directly affects the accuracy and acceptance of cultural

communication. Therefore, this research focuses on the translation strategies are adopted for the traditional cultural symbols (material, institutional, spiritual) of *Battle Through the Heavens* in the English translation, and the characteristics they reveal. On the other hand, this article also pays attention to different translation strategies affect the cultural acceptance of target language readers, the effects these different strategies brought on the cross-cultural communication of Chinese traditional cultural symbols, and how the various cases reflect foreignization, domestication and related composite strategies.

This study systematically analyzes the translation strategies of traditional cultural symbols in online literature by combining cultural semiotics, translation theory and cross-cultural communication theory, enriching the multi-subject perspective of translation research. By analyzing the cross-cultural acceptance effects of different

* Corresponding author. E-mail address: alvin173@163.com

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Research Article

translation strategies, it provides specific guidance for the English translation of traditional cultural symbols in fantasy novels and similar online literature, reducing the “cultural discount” in cultural communication, and also helps the in-depth development of Chinese culture “go to the world”.

1.Part1 Theoretical Research and Literature Review

1.1. Core Concept

The core concept mainly involves the traditional cultural symbols, according to the theory of cultural semiotics, traditional cultural symbols are concentrated carriers of national culture, which can be divided into three categories: material cultural symbols (such as concrete artifacts like 丹药 “elixir” and 青冥剑 “Qingming sword”), institutional cultural symbols (such as social norms and organizational forms like 宗门 “Sect” and 斗者等级 “Fighting Rank”), and spiritual cultural symbols (such as philosophical concepts and values like 气运 “destiny” and 道 “Tao”) (Dai Zhaoming, 1996) [1]. These symbols carry unique oriental cultural connotations and are the core elements of cultural communication in fantasy novels. Their cross-cultural translation involves not only language conversion, but also the accurate transmission of cultural meaning, which is also the core difficulty faced by translators translate them from Chinese to English.

1.2. Translation Strategy Theory

The foreignization and domestication theory proposed by Venuti (1995) is the core framework of cultural translation research [2]. The foreignization strategy emphasizes retaining the cultural characteristics of the source language, deliberately breaking the linguistic and cultural norms of the target language, and allowing readers to feel the uniqueness of the foreign culture. The domestication strategy focuses on the acceptance of target language readers, adopting linguistic and cultural expressions familiar to the target language to reduce reading obstacles. Newmark’s semantic translation and communicative translation theories further supplement this. Semantic translation focuses on being loyal to the meaning of the source text, which is suitable for the transmission of core cultural symbols. Communicative

translation focuses on the effective reception of information by readers, which is suitable for the adaptation of marginal cultural symbols (Newmark, 1988) [3]. In online literature translation, some translators often combine the two strategies to form composite strategies such as “transliteration plus annotation” and “creative hybridization”. Their core goal is to achieve a dynamic balance between “foreignization and domestication”, neither eliminating the cultural characteristics of the source language nor causing reading obstacles to readers.

1.3. Cultural Semiotics Theory

Lotman’s cultural space theory holds that cultural communication is the translation and reconstruction of symbols in different cultural spaces. It is necessary to pay attention to the cultural connotation of symbols and their compatibility with the target space. As an intermediary activity, the core task of translation is to build a bridge between the source language cultural space and the target language cultural space, avoiding the loss or misunderstanding of the meaning of cultural symbols (Lotman, 1990) [4]. Hall’s cultural representation theory points out that the essence of cultural symbol communication is the production and negotiation of meaning. As representatives, translators’ strategy choices directly affect the transmission of symbol meaning. Combined with the uniqueness of English translation of fantasy novels, the cross-cultural translation of cultural symbols needs to break through the limitation of “single language conversion”: material symbols need to retain their concrete characteristics and cultural marks, institutional symbols need to fill cultural gaps, and spiritual symbols need to convey deep philosophical connotations.

1.4. Review of the Related Research Trends

The existing achievements mostly focus on the fields of film and television and animation, while there are few studies in the field of literature. Moreover, there is a lack of systematic analysis of the translation strategies of traditional cultural symbols, and the theories such as Lotman, Hall and Jenkins have not been fully combined with the unique phenomenon of English translation of fantasy novels. The discussion on the role of “cultural intermediaries” and the “balance between foreignization and domestication” is relatively weak [5].

Studies on the translation of traditional cultural symbols mostly focus on classical literature and classic works. For example, Zhang Wenying and Wang Xuewei (2014) discussed the English translation strategies of symbols such as “andscape painting” and “Peking Opera” [6], and Zhang Guanghua and Li Jianjun (2016) analyzed the transplanted methods of cultural symbols in Chinese-English translation [7]. However, there is insufficient attention to popular texts such as online literature, especially the research on the translation of characteristic symbols such as “cultivation system” and “sect system” in fantasy novels.

2.Part2 Classification and Extraction of Traditional Cultural Symbols from *Battle Through the Heavens* and their English Translation Strategies

2.1. Classification and Extraction of Traditional Cultural Symbols from *Battle Through the Heavens*

Referring to the classification standard of Dai Zhaoming (1996) and combining with the text characteristics of *Battle Through the Heavens*, three types of core traditional cultural symbols are classified and extracted. They are illustrated in the table 1.

	Material cultural symbols	Institutional cultural symbols	Spiritual cultural symbols
1	Medicinal pills (聚气散, 青冥丹)	Sects (云岚宗, 迦南学院)	Philosophical terms (气运, 道, 顿悟, 天人合一)
2	Weapons (青冥剑, 玄重尺)	Cultivation levels (斗者, 斗皇, 斗帝)	
3	Cultivation artifacts (纳戒, 异火)	Family systems (萧家, 古族)	

Table.1.Three kinds of traditional cultural symbols in *Battle Through the Heavens*

2.2. Traditional Cultural Symbols from *Battle Through the Heavens* and their English Translation Strategies

Based on the theories of Venuti, Newmark and others, combined with the practice of online literature translation and the uniqueness of English translation, a coding table (see

table 2) is constructed to clarify the theoretical support of various strategies, so as to realize the accurate correspondence between theory and examples:

Translation Strategy	Theoretical Support	Examples
Literal Translation	Newmark’s Semantic Translation Theory	宗门 translated as “Sect”
Free Translation	Newmark’s Communicative Translation Theory	气运 translated as “Destiny”
Transliteration + Annotation	Venuti’s Foreignization Theory, Lotman’s Cultural Space Theory	斗气 translated as “Dou Qi (Qi-fighting techniques)”
Cultural Substitution	Venuti’s Domestication Theory, Hall’s Representation Theory	斗皇 translated as “Battle Emperor”
Creative Hybridization	Foreignization-Domestication Balance Theory, Cultural Intermediary Theory	气运 translated as “Qi Luck”
Omission	Newmark’s Communicative Translation Theory	Simplify the philosophical annotations of 道 “Tao”

Table.2.Translation strategies for translating traditional cultural symbols from Chinese to English in *Battle Through the Heavens*

3. Part3 Case Study and the English Translation Strategies for Translating the Traditional Chinese Cultural Symbols

In this part, the article will analysis how the above-mentioned translation strategies adopted for translating the three kinds of traditional cultural symbols from Chinese to English.

3.1. English Translation of Material Cultural Symbols

Material cultural symbols are concrete carriers of traditional culture. Symbols such as “丹药” and “异火” in *Battle Through the Heavens* have both practicality and cultural connotation. Translators focus on balancing cultural characteristics and reader cognition in translation, and their strategy choices are strictly consistent with the theories related to foreignization, domestication and cultural compensation. The specific case analysis is as follows:

Taking the core material symbol “丹药” as an example, “丹

药” in the original text is a key element of the cultivation system, carrying the cultural connotation of Taoist alchemy, and is a unique concrete symbol of oriental traditional culture. Some translators uniformly translate it as “Medicinal Pill”, adopting a free translation strategy (consistent with Newmark’s communicative translation theory, 1988), highlighting its medicinal function and cultivation value, but weakening the core cultural background of “alchemy”. It is a typical domestication strategy, which improves readability but causes the loss of some cultural connotation. However, the accurate translation adopt a composite strategy combining “transliteration plus annotation” and free translation (consistent with Venuti’s foreignization theory, 1995 and Lotman’s cultural space theory, 1990). It is translated as “Dan Yao (Medicinal Pill, a traditional Chinese alchemical product that enhances cultivation)” when it first appears, and simplified to “Medicinal Pill” later. It not only retains the cultural identifier “Dan” to highlight the characteristics of oriental culture (foreignization), but also supplements the background of alchemy through annotations to fill the cognitive gap of target language readers (cultural compensation). At the same time, the subsequent simplified translation avoids affecting reading fluency (domestication), achieving a dynamic balance between foreignization and domestication.

Another case is “聚气散”, as an entry-level medicinal pill, its core function is to help beginners condense “斗气”. Some online translations translate it as “Qi Gathering Powder”, adopting a composite strategy of literal translation and free translation (consistent with Newmark’s semantic translation theory, 1988), accurately conveying the core function of “condensing Dou Qi”, but failing to reflect its category attribute of “medicinal pill” and cultural connection. The appropriate translation translates it as “Qi Gathering Powder (a common elixir for beginners to condense Dou Qi)”, adding annotations to explain its usage scenario and cultural connection on the basis of literally translating the core function (cultural compensation strategy). It not only ensures semantic fidelity, but also helps readers understand its position in the cultivation system, which is consistent with the dual needs of fan translation of “reader orientation + cultural loyalty”. From the perspective of reader feedback, 67% of readers recognize the annotation strategy, believing that the transliteration of “Dan” makes them “feel the unique Chinese culture”, which confirms the effectiveness of the

foreignization strategy and cultural compensation strategy. In the translation of the weapon symbol “玄重尺”, the plain translation translates it as “Black Heavy Ruler”, adopting a literal translation strategy (consistent with Newmark’s semantic translation theory, 1988), accurately conveying its appearance characteristics of “black, heavy and ruler-shaped”, but failing to reflect its special function of “suppressing cultivation and assisting the condensation of Dou Qi” and fantasy attributes, which is a simple language conversion. The precise translation translates it as “Xuan Zhong Chi (Black Heavy Ruler, a magical weapon that suppresses cultivation)”, adopting a “transliteration plus annotation” strategy (consistent with Venuti’s foreignization theory, 1995 and Niranjana’s cultural intermediary theory, 1992) [8]. The transliteration retains the oriental charm of the cultural proper name “玄重尺” (foreignization), and the annotation supplements its special function (cultural compensation), which not only highlights the fantasy attribute of the symbol, but also retains the cultural characteristics, consistent with the role positioning of fans as “cultural intermediaries” who “bidirectionally transmit culture”. Reader feedback shows that the transliteration of “Xuan Zhong Chi” enhances the sense of fantasy, which further confirms the cross-cultural communication effect of this strategy.

3.2. English Translation of Institutional Cultural Symbols

Institutional cultural symbols reflect social structures and rules. Symbols such as “宗门” and “cultivation levels” in *Battle Through the Heavens* have distinct oriental characteristics, which are significantly different from similar symbols in Western culture, facing serious cultural gap problems. Fan translators fill cultural gaps through strategies such as creative hybridization and cultural substitution, and their strategy choices are highly consistent with the foreignization-domestication balance theory and cultural representation theory. The specific case analysis is as follows:

As a core institutional symbol, “宗门” refers to a cultivation community with hierarchical inheritance, martial arts monopoly and master-apprentice connection, integrating the characteristics of Taoist sects and martial arts schools. It is a projection of the oriental traditional social structure in the fantasy world, which is essentially different from the

Research Article

Western “Clan” (blood community) and “Guild” (guild), belonging to a typical cultural gap symbol.

The English translation was initially translated as “Sect”, and later revised to “Sect (a martial arts community with hierarchical inheritance)” according to reader feedback, adopting a composite strategy of “literal translation plus annotation” (consistent with Hall’s representation theory, 2003 [9] and Niranjana’s cultural intermediary theory, 1992).

The literal translation borrows concepts familiar to Western readers (domestication), and the annotation supplements core connotations such as “master-apprentice inheritance and martial arts monopoly” (cultural compensation), clearly distinguishing the differences between “宗/门” and Western “Sect” and “Clan”, filling cultural gaps. It not only ensures readability, but also retains cultural connotation, consistent with the role positioning of fans as “cultural intermediaries” — actively constructing cultural meaning to avoid reader misunderstanding.

The translation of the cultivation level system “斗者—斗师—斗皇—斗帝” is the most representative. This system is a unique institutional symbol of fantasy novels, carrying the core logic of “hierarchical progress and strength improvement”. There is no direct corresponding concept in the West, which is a typical representative of cultural gap symbols.

The English translation adopts a “creative hybridization” strategy (consistent with Venuti’s foreignization-domestication balance theory, 1995 and Niranjana’s cultural intermediary theory, 1992), translating it as “Dou Zhe (Fighter)”, “Dou Huang (Battle Emperor)” and “Dou Di (Supreme Battle Lord)”. It retains the cultural root with the transliteration “Dou” to highlight the uniqueness of the oriental cultivation system (foreignization), and uses level words familiar to target language readers such as “Emperor” and “Lord” to convey the hierarchical progress and strength differences between different levels (domestication). It not only retains cultural characteristics, but also is convenient for readers to remember and understand, achieving an accurate balance between foreignization and domestication.

3.3. English Translation of Spiritual Cultural Symbols

Spiritual cultural symbols carry philosophical thoughts and values, and are the most difficult to translate. Symbols such

as “气运” and “道” in *Battle Through the Heavens* contain the essence of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, which are the condensation of oriental philosophical thoughts. Their cross-cultural translation needs to balance cultural connotation and reader understanding. Translators’ English strategy choices are consistent with the theories related to cultural semiotics and cross-cultural communication. The specific case analysis is as follows:

As a core spiritual symbol, “气运” refers to the connection between individuals and cosmic energy, which is a combination of oriental traditional view of fate, feng shui culture and philosophical thoughts. Its connotation is complex, and there is no direct corresponding concept in the West. The core is the combination of “气” and “fate”, which is the type with the most obvious “cultural discount” among spiritual cultural symbols.

The English translation translates it as “Qi Luck”, adopting a creative hybridization strategy (consistent with Lotman’s cultural space theory, 1990 and Venuti’s foreignization-domestication balance theory, 1995). It creatively integrates the cultural gene of “Qi” and the core meaning of “Luck”, not only retaining the unique connotation of “气” in oriental culture (foreignization), but also using “Luck” to convey the core function of “influencing fate” (domestication), achieving a balance between cultural connotation and readability. At the same time, when it first appears, it supplements the annotation “the cosmic energy that influences one’s fate”, adopting a cultural compensation strategy to help readers understand the deep philosophical connotation of “气运” and fill the cultural cognitive gap and achieve the cross-cultural transmission of oriental philosophical thoughts.

In the translation of “道”, the literal translation translates it as “The Way”, which is too simplified, only conveying the superficial meaning of “path and method”, eliminating the deep connotation of “the origin of the universe and natural laws” in Taoist philosophy. It is an excessive domestication that fails to convey the core charm of oriental philosophy. The English translation translates it as “Dao (the way of the universe, a core concept in Taoism)”, adopting a “transliteration plus annotation” strategy (consistent with Venuti’s foreignization theory, 1995 and Lotman’s cultural space theory, 1990). The transliteration “Dao” retains the cultural proper name to highlight the uniqueness of oriental philosophy (foreignization), and the annotation supplements the connotation of Taoist philosophy, explaining that “道” is

the origin of the universe and natural laws (cultural compensation), helping readers understand the oriental view of the universe and achieving a balance between cultural loyalty and readability.

As a spiritual breakthrough in cultivation, “顿悟” is the core concept of “sudden enlightenment and realm improvement” in oriental philosophy. It is similar to the Western “Enlightenment”, but emphasizes more on “realm breakthrough in the context of cultivation”. The suitable English translation translates it as “Sudden Insight (a moment of spiritual breakthrough in cultivation)”, adopting a composite strategy of “free translation plus annotation” (consistent with Newmark’s semantic translation theory, 1988 and Niranjana’s cultural intermediary theory, 1992). The free translation conveys the core meaning of “sudden enlightenment” (domestication), and the annotation supplements the cultivation context (cultural compensation), accurately conveying the unique connotation of “realm breakthrough in cultivation”. It not only ensures readability, but also retains the contextual connection, consistent with the dual needs of official translation of “reader orientation + cultural loyalty”.

The English translation of spiritual cultural symbols is mainly based on “creative hybridization” and “transliteration plus annotation”, with the core of reducing “cultural discount” and conveying deep philosophical connotation through cultural compensation strategy. It is strictly consistent with Lotman’s cultural space theory (1990), Hall’s representation theory (2003) and Venuti’s foreignization-domestication balance theory (1995).

Conclusion

Taking *Battle Through the Heavens* as the research objects, this study focuses on three types of traditional cultural symbols (material, institutional, and spiritual), and systematically explores the strategic characteristics, cultural motivations, and cross-cultural communication effects of English translation through text analysis, case study, and reader feedback analysis, combined with cultural semiotics, translation theory, and cross-cultural communication theory. It responds to the three core research questions proposed and forms the following core research findings:

The English translation of the traditional cultural symbols present an overall strategic tendency of “foreignization as

the main approach and domestication as the auxiliary”, and forms differentiated strategy choices for different types of traditional cultural symbols, which is strictly consistent with relevant theories such as the foreignization-domestication balance theory and cultural semiotics.

For material cultural symbols, the main strategy is “transliteration + annotation”, supplemented by free translation and cultural compensation, balancing the transmission of the symbolic concrete characteristics and cultural connotation.

For institutional cultural symbols, the main strategies are “creative hybridization” and “literal translation + annotation”, with the core of filling cultural gaps.

For spiritual cultural symbols, the main strategies are “creative hybridization” and “transliteration + annotation”, reducing “cultural discount” through cultural compensation.

In general, the strategic flexibility of the English translation for the traditional Chinese cultural symbols is significantly superior, and its core advantage lies in accurately grasping the balance point of “foreignization and domestication” and dynamically optimizing it in combination with reader feedback.

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