

# Translation Strategies and Cultural Stand

## A Study of the Chinese-English Bilingual *Taipei People*

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**Abstract**—Pai Hsien-yung and Patia Yasin adopt various translation methods in the Chinese-English bilingual *Taipei People*. Regarding the expression with the distinctive Chinese cultural characteristics, they employ foreignization to reproduce the source culture and domestication to promote the understanding and reception of the readers. As the translation strategy is closely intertwined with the translator's cultural stand, it is proposed that, by striking a balance between the strategies of foreignization and domestication, the translators of *Taipei People* aspire through translation for the equal exchange between the Chinese and western cultures.

**Keywords**—translation studies; *Taipei People*; translation strategies; cultural stand; self-translation

### I. INTRODUCTION

Different translation strategies can be applied to translation, especially in terms of the literary type. Such diversity, to some extent, demonstrates more than merely the translator's preference and inclination while engaged in the translating practice. More importantly, it sheds light on what the translator attempts to omit and preserve in the translated text, which further helps uncover what his or her cultural stand is when facing the gains and losses in the literary translation. A translator is faced with the domestic and foreign cultures that he or she is to bridge. In consideration of these two cultures and out of different motivation, the translator is free to select from at least three kinds of cultural stand: he or she might give priority to either the source culture or the target culture, or spare no efforts to boost the communication between the two cultures (Xu Jun, 2002: 66). Against this background, it is of significance to study the translation strategies in order to observe the translation in the cultural perspective. Accordingly, this study aims to explore the translation strategies adopted by Pai Hsien-yung and Patia Yasin in translating *Taipei People*, with the intention of interpreting their motivations based on their cultural stand.

### II. A BRIEF INTRODUCTION OF PAI HSIEN-YUNG AND HIS LITERARY WORKS

#### A. *Pai Hsien-yung as a Writer*

Pai Hsien-yung, born in 1937 and raised in Guilin City, Guangxi Province, is known as a writer and critic. Having received the training in the famous Iowa Writers' Workshop, Pai Hsien-yung devoted himself to literature and has so far

completed some novels, play scripts, movie scripts, as well as a biography for his father Pai Chung-hsi, a former senior general of the Republic of China.

#### B. *Pai Hsien-yung's Achievements in Literature*

Pai Hsien-yung's literary works have been highly appreciated by not only the ordinary readers but also the professional critics. Among the rest, Xia Ji-an, a well-known Chinese translator and critic in around the first half of the 20th century, once stated that, from Lu Xun to Eileen Chang, there were no more than five or six writers who could compare to Pai Hsien-yung for his novels in his later years. In the western world, Patrick Hanan, Professor of Harvard University and a distinguished sinologist, and Henry Miller, an important figure of American Beat Generation, considered Pai Hsien-yung as "a master of portraiture" and recognized his talents for composing short stories. Back in 1999, Pai Hsien-yung was ranked the 7th by the journal *Asiaweek* for Best Chinese Novels in the 20th Century, topping the lists of all the writers alive. It is therefore safe to conclude that Pai Hsien-yung has been widely recognized for his literary achievements.

#### C. *The Characteristics of Pai's Hsien-yung's Works*

Pai Hsien-yung has attracted some attention from the scholars in the field of literary studies and translation studies. Liu Jun, a professor from School of Liberal Arts of Nanjing University, is one of the major scholars who research on Pai Hsien-yung's works. Having published several related books such as *A Sense of Compassion: Biography of Pai Hsien-yung* and *Emotion and Beauty: A Biography of Pai Hsien-yung* as well as some academic papers, Liu Jun conducted in-depth research on Pai Hsien-yung. He concluded that the feature of his works could be summarized as follows: a perfect integration of the tradition and modernity, the depiction of a bunch of figures that are exclusive in his literary world, a strong and deep historical sense as well as his unique linguistic forms (Liu Jun, 2009).

### III. TAIPEI PEOPLE TRANSLATED BY PAI HSIEN-YUNG AND PATIA YASIN

So far there are three versions of *Taipei People*, i.e. the first one titled *Wandering in a Garden*, *Waking from a Dream-Tales of Taipei Characters* published by Indiana

University Press in 1992, the second one by the Chinese University Press with the title changed into *Taipei People* to stay consistent with the original text and also to preserve a sense of irony, and the latest version with the same title that was published by Guangxi Normal University Press in 2013, without any further changes. The newest version is selected for this study.

#### A. *Taipei People and Its Culture-specific Items*

*Taipei People* is an anthology that consists of fourteen short stories written by Pai Hsien-yung. As indicated by the title of the book, it tells the stories of different people from the Chinese mainland who settle down in Taipei city. As one of Pai Hsien-yung's representative works, *Taipei People* is well received among the readers for various reasons. Among others, its characteristics might be summarized as follows: the author's unique language use, the description of figures, the shifting narrative perspectives and the literary quotation from other works such as *A Dream of Red Mansions* and *The Peony Pavilion*, due to which he improves the poetic taste of the book.

Featuring a bunch of figures with the diversified backgrounds, the anthology is full of the culture-specific items of all kinds, including the names of people and places, festivals, dialects, idioms, slangs, proverbs, poems, allusions and so forth. Needless to say, it poses a challenge for the translators to render the text into another language and culture.

#### B. *The Translation of Taipei People*

The translating practice of the book might differ from other translating activities in that it involves both self-translation and teamwork. Pai Hsien-yung himself is both the author and one of the major translators. He translated this book together with Patia Yasin, an American Canadian who is an expert in literature, and then had their translation proofread by George Kao, a well-known Chinese translator and editor who settled down in the United States. Also worth mentioning is that three novels in the anthology, that is, "The Eternal Snow Beauty", "New Year's Eve" and "Glory's by Blossom Bridge" were translated by other translators. Needless to say, the unique way of translating *Taipei People* will probably contribute to a distinctive translated text, and is therefore worth a close and detailed study.

### IV. TRANSLATION STRATEGY AS A RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE IN STUDYING *TAIPEI PEOPLE*

Attention has already been drawn on the translation of *Taipei People*. Some research focuses on a certain aspect of the translation, for example, that of people's names (Chen Xi & Li Xiaoxiang, 2016), some extend the perspective and explore on the overall translation strategy exhibited in the book (Yu Rongqi 2014; Shi Hui 2016) while the other highlights the translators' tasks according to what strategy they use (Wu Bo 2004). All in all, nevertheless, there still lack a detailed study of the bilingual text as a whole, especially regarding the translation strategy, the analysis of which may lead to some enlightening conclusion about not

only the translators or the text themselves, but also about the translators' cultural stand, self-translation and translation studies in a macroscopic sense. In consideration of this, the study aims at a more thorough exploration of the book, with special reference to the translation strategies and methods.

#### A. *Translation Strategies, Methods and Techniques as Clearly Defined*

Translation Strategies, methods and techniques are three significant concepts in translation studies, yet they have more often than not been used without discrimination. Considering this phenomenon, Xiong Bing distinguishes the differences between those concepts by clearly defining them respectively:

Translation strategy is the overall principle and a set of solutions in accordance to which the translation purpose is fulfilled in the translating activity. It constitutes foreignization and domestication.

Translation method is a subcategory, which represents a specific approach, procedure and means determined by a translation strategy to achieve a goal in translation. It can be further divided into zero translation, transliteration, word-for-word translation and literal translation (those four methods belong to foreignization strategy), free translation, imitaion, variation and creation (domestication strategy).

Translation technique is a more specific concept. It means some skills used in translation according to a translation method and stands for the operation and manipulation of the text on the linguistic level. Still, translation technique can be classified into the following ones: addition, omission, division, combination and shift.

For the convinience of analysis, this study is conducted on the basis of translation strategies and methods.

#### B. *An Analysis of Taipei People Based on Translation Methods and Strategies*

To conduct an analysis that is more detailed, the study is intended to explore the text on the basis of varying translation units, including words, phrases and sentences. Conspicuously, foreignization strategy is widely used in translating *Taipei People*.

1) *Word-for-word translation*: Either in China or abroad, the discrimination of word-for-word translation and sense-for-sense translation or similar pairs has long been put forward. The former emphasizes the closeness to the source text in terms of the form in particular.

1a. "我们细丁香好本事，钓到一头千年大金龟。" (Pai Hsien-yung, 2013: 181)

1b. "Isn't our little Lilac the sharp one! She's hooked herself a thousand-year-old gold turtle!" (Pai Hsien-yung, 2013: 180)

2a. 这一屋，里里外外，什么芝麻绿豆事不是我一一把抓？ (Pai Hsien-yung, 2013: 265)

2b. This whole house, inside and out, every little sesame seed of a thing, ain't I the one who lays my hand to it all? (Pai Hsien-yung, 2013: 264)

Anyone familiar with the Chinese culture would know that it is nothing uncommon for a Chinese to say that one has found herself a “gold turtle husband” (金龟婿, Jin Gui Xu) when playing jokes with friends or with a sense of irony. In “The Last Night of Taipan Chin”, Miss Chin is being sarcastic when she heard that Daidai, her former colleague in Paramount, married old man P'an the Textile King. In example 2, Mamma Lo is telling Nanny Shun-en about the misfortune befalling the family she serves. While the whole family are encountering such catastrophe, Mamma Lo becomes increasingly important in the family and has to run out of her way to put things together, that is, she has to handle “every little sesame of a thing”—whatever trivial things in fact. However, the translators decide to render those culture-loaded words as closely as possible without giving any explanation or annotations, and thus might cause some trouble for the foreign readers if they find the Chinese culture unfamiliar.

2) *Literal translation*: Literal translation is a concept that is also frequently discussed in translation studies. However, it is nothing superfluous to distinguish it from the aforementioned concept of “word-for-word translation” in that literal translation, though highlighting the closeness to ST as well, takes into account the difference between the source and receptive language and culture, and therefore is adopted only when the TT makes sense. In other words, in using this kind of translation method the translator takes into account the reception among the foreign readers.

3a. 她是横了心了，等到两足一伸，便到那十八层地狱去尝尝那上刀山下油锅的滋味去。(Pai Hsien-yung, 2013: 207)

3b. She had made her mind up, she had hardened her heart: the minute her number was up she was going to head straight down for the eighteenth level of Hell and get to know what it's like climbing the Knife Mountain and diving into the Boiling Oilpot. (Pai Hsien-yung, 2013: 206)

4a. 有些眷属天天到庙里去求神求菩萨，算命的算命，摸骨的摸骨。(Pai Hsien-yung, 2013: 109)

4b. Some of the wives took to going to the temples every day to plead with the gods and pester the Bodhisattvas; others went to fortune-tellers to learn what their future would hold; still others went to physiognomists to have their bones felt. (Pai Hsien-yung, 2013: 108)

According to the first example, while reflecting on the past, Taipan Chin decides to live in the moment as it is regardless of the old Chinese saying that people would fall to the eighteenth level of hell and be demanded to climb the mountain made of knives and be tossed into a pot full of boiling oil, if he or she has misbehaved when alive. In example 2, the wives of the pilots turn to the superstitious activities while waiting anxiously for their husbands during the period of war, that is, they ask the fortune-tellers to predict their spouses' futures or have their own bones, such as their skulls, their hand bones and skeletons, felt so that

they could know what might happen in the future, according to the traditional Chinese physiognomy. The translators translate those culture-specific items literally without providing further explanation.

Worth mentioning is the use of the abundant annotations following each novel, which might be classified differently in accordance to either the contents or types. For instance, the latter mainly consists of the explanation for the culture-loaded words, allusions, analogies, the customs, the idioms etc. (Shi Hui, 2016). All in all, it is a means widely used when the translators tend to preserve the foreignness of the TT while attempting to improve the readers' perception.

3) *Transliteration and annotation*: this translation method is employed when the source text refers to the historical figures.

5a. 这种事情历史上是有的：褒姒、妲己、飞燕、太真——这起祸水！(Pai Hsien-yung, 2013: 73)

5b. Oh, it's happened many times before—just look at history: Pao-ssu, Ta-chi, Fei-yen, T'ai-chen<sup>11</sup>—what a bunch of troublemakers! (Pai Hsien-yung, 2013: 74)

In this case, the translators use the method of transliteration to render the names of the historical figures. While the names do sound familiar to the Chinese readers, they might cause other readers to be at loss. In consideration of the latter, Pai Hsien-yung and Patia Yasin resort to an annotation that describes the four women as “femmes fatales in Chinese history”, followed by further introduction to those four women.

Meanwhile, in contrast to the annotations attached to the text, there are some others contained within the text:

6a. 从前看京戏，伍子胥过昭关一夜便急白了头发……(Pai Hsien-yung, 2013: 121)

6b. A long time ago, I saw the Peking opera “Wu Tzu-hsu Escapes through the Chao Pass.” In the story, General Wu's hair turns white overnight from anxiety. (Pai Hsien-yung, 2013: 120)

Comparing the source text and the target text could identify how Pai Hsien-yung and Patia Yasin add new but necessary information to the latter. For example, in the translated text, they point out the title of the opera “Wu Tzu-hsu Escapes through the Chao Pass” and that the rank of Wu Tzu-hsu is “General”. Since the information is in fact implied in the source text or culture, the translators have not added anything irrelevant but rather, by clarifying the implied they could help readers grasp a better understanding.

Undeniably, a text can hardly be rendered solely by either foreignization or domestication from beginning to end. Without exception, the strategy of domestication can also be found in the translated *Taipei People*.

4) *Free translation*: opposite to literal translation, free translation gives priority to reproducing the ST sense for sense without being confined to the original form.

7a. “两个小孩刀的，诓了大姊的鸡汤，居然还吃起大姊的豆腐来！”(Pai Hsien-yung, 2013: 127)

7b. “These two gallow-birds! ...First you cop my chicken broth, now you have the nerve to get fresh with me!” (Pai Hsien-yung, 2013: 126)

8a. 有些荷包不足的舞客，攀不上叫尹雪艳的台子，但是他们却去百乐门坐坐，观观尹雪艳的风采，听她讲几句吴侬软语，心里也是舒服的。(Pai Hsien-yung, 2013: 43)

8b. Some patrons who could not afford to have her at their tables came nonetheless to the Paramount just to enjoy her radiant presence and listen to her soft Soochow speech, which seemed to make it all worthwhile. (Pai Hsien-yung, 2013: 42)

The first example is typical of demonstrating the Chinese culture by using the expression “eat somebody’s tofu” (吃某人豆腐, literally hitting on somebody), and the translators flexibly select an idiomatic expression in English to ensure that the original meaning get across. However, it should be mentioned that in this way the cultural image is not well preserved in the translated text, for which the readers are deprived of the rights and chances to catch a glimpse of the exotic Chinese culture. The other example shows that Pai Hsien-yung and Patia Yasin decide to render the meaning more clearly, as they interpret what “荷包不足(he bao bu zu, literally having not enough money) so as to help the readers understand the text with ease. In this way, the image of “he bao”, a kind of exquisite pouches decorated with embroidery usually used in the ancient China, is not preserved in the target text.

5) *Imitation*: The concept of imitation is known to be proposed by John Dryden in his discrimination of three types of translation, where he defines the translation method as “where the translator assumes liberty” (Qtd. in Dun Guangang, 2011: 88). Therefore, imitation grants the translator a large amount of freedom when dealing with a text. According to Xiong Bing, this method consists of the more specific techniques, i.e. omission and addition.

First of all, there are two examples of omission:

9a. ....大家都有一种宾至如归、乐不思蜀的亲切之感.....(Pai Hsien-yung, 2013: 57)

9b. ...they had a sense of homecoming, of utter contentment... (Pai Hsien-yung, 2013: 56)

In the example above, the author uses two Chinese idioms to depict how the guests are satisfied when entertaining themselves in Snow Beauty Yin Hsueh-yen’s house. The second idiom is related to an incident in the Period of Three Kingdoms in the ancient China. According to the researchers on history, Liu Shan, the last emperor of Shu Country, was so content with being a captive that he did not want to regain his power. Literally, it means that one is so happy in a new environment that he or she does not intend to return where they belonged. Nevertheless, all those rich cultural characteristics have not been reproduced in the TT.

In contrast, following is an example of addition:

10a. “少爷仔——少爷仔——” 顺思嫂的手臂围拥着胖男人的头颅，瘦小的身子，前后摇晃。(Pai Hsien-yung, 2013: 273)

10b. “Young Master, baby—Young Master, my boy—” Her arms around the large fat man’s head, her thin small body swaying to and fro... (Pai Hsien-yung, 2013: 272)

In this example, Nanny Shun-en is excited and grieved to see the young master, who she nursed but now becomes a man suffering from mental problems. She could hardly contain herself so that she hugs his head tight to her bosom and calls out his name tenderly. It is obvious that in translation a “baby” and a “my boy” are added, yet they illustrate how the translators are attempting to effectively render the complicated emotion of Nanny Shun-en when being confronted with such a miserable situation.

6) *Variation*: In using the method of variation, the translators is entitled with a higher degree of liberty that they can even change the text as long as the meaning is preserved.

11a. 那种台山乡下出来的，在南洋苦了一辈子，怎能怪他把钱看得天那么大？(Pai Hsien-yung, 2013: 185)

11b. How could you blame somebody who left the Toishan countryside and worked his ass off in Southeast Asia all his life if he treated a nickel like it was five bucks? (Pai Hsien-yung, 2013: 184)

Both the examples are demonstrative of how variation is used in translating *Taipei People*. In the first example, Taipan Chin is telling herself that, since her fiancé Old man Ch’en started from scratch, it should be anything but unreasonable that he is truly careful with the hard-earned money now that he is well-off.

Apart from the aforementioned phrases and sentences, the diversification and variation of Pai Hsien-yung and Patia Yasin’s collaborative translation is also exemplified on the level of word translation. Among the rest, the translation of the characters’ names and their laughs require special attention.

TABLE I. TRANSLATION OF THE CHARACTERS’ NAMES

Transliteration		Non-transliteration (Explanation)	
ST	TT	ST	TT
王雄	Wang Hsiung	月如	Moon Boy
吴柱国	Wu Chu-kuo	月月红	Red Red Rose
余钦磊	Yu Ch’in-lei	娟娟	Dainty
顺思嫂	Nanny Shun-en	吴喜奎	Joy Wu
孟养	Meng-yang	萧红美	Little Sweetie
李贤	Li Hsien	丽儿	Little Beauty
家骥兄	Brother Chia-chi	喜妹	Happy

As is shown in “Table I”, Pai Hsien-yung and Patia Yasin adopt various translation methods when translating the characters’ names. As for those with no special meaning, they resort to the simple transliteration; while there is connotation in the name, they tend to get the meaning across. Among the others, Jolie Chin is one of the best translation in that it not only reproduces the meaning of the ST, which means beauty and happiness, but also succeeds in preserving the pronunciation.

In addition, the translators also spare no efforts in reproducing different kinds of laughs, as can be seen in the following “Table II”:

TABLE II. TRANSLATION OF ALL KINDS OF LAUGHS

ST	TT	ST	TT
龇了牙齿 笑道	grinned	冷笑道	sniffed
嘻嘻哈哈 的	laughing it up	歹恶地笑	grinned maliciously
笑吟吟地	all smiles	冷笑了一下	with an icy smile
嬉皮笑脸 地	with a leer	笑了起来	chortled
冷笑道	sneered	笑得乐不可 支	rocked with laughter
吃吃地笑 着	chuckled	不胜欷歔地 笑着	with a nostalgic smile

The translation of “laughs” is typical of the variation in terms of the translation methods used in *Taipei People*. The translators attempt to be faithful to the original text as perfectly as possible and vary the way of expression even if the laughs depicted in the original text are of the same kind.

The analysis above may safely lead to a conclusion that, Pai Hsien-yung and Patia Yasin employ various translation methods when translating the original text. While being faced with the culture-loaded words and phrases, although they would also make alterations when necessary, they also spare no efforts to reproduce the original meaning in the translated text as faithfully as they can. For the sake of reproducing the foreignness of the text, they would even resort to the abundant and detailed annotations which serve as the supplements considering the comprehension and reception on the readers’ side.

#### V. AN EXPLANATION: THE TRANSLATOR’S CULTURAL STAND

Much attention has been called to the cultural aspect of translation and translation studies since Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere advocated a “cultural turn” in their anthology *Translation, History and Culture* in 1990. It is beyond doubt that literary translation is closely intertwined with culture and is therefore considered as a vital means of cultural exchange between countries. In this case, it is critical for translators to mediate between cultures and choose accordingly the most suitable translation strategy. At the same time, it is important to study the translation strategies adopted by the translators, since the adoption may lead to a more in-depth perception of the translator’s cultural stand.

As has been analyzed above, Pai Hsien-yung and Patia Yasin attempt to use various translation methods in translating *Taipei People*. When dealing with the expression that is closely related to the Chinese culture, though sometimes making alteration in consideration of the comprehensibility of the target text, more often than not they try to preserve what is in the source text, as Pai Hsien-yung

himself once concluded that “the three of us were determined to carry over as much as possible from the Chinese original into English.” (Pai Hsien-yung, 2013: 28) The translation of *Taipei People* has proved that they have been engaged in realizing their ambition by adopting foreignization in translation as much as they can. In essence, their choices in translation could be interpreted concisely by the editor George Kao’s comment that “it is legitimate to translate literally from the Chinese for the sake of verisimilitude, and admirable if one can do so without ludicrous results (Pai Hsien-yung, 2013: 14).

Despite the fact that he spent dozen of years in America, Pai Hsien-yung was born and raised in China and received his early education in Taiwan. With a sense of patriotism and nostalgia, he composed short stories depicting the life trajectory of the Chinese characters, that is, the Chinese stories about the Chinese society. It is therefore needless to address that those stories are filled with the Chinese cultural features. Based on a detailed analysis of the translation methods adopted in *Taipei People*, it is evident that the translators strive for a balance between the strategies of foreignization and domestication while being confronted with cultural differences. In essence, the inclination is determined by their cultural stand that encourages them to pursue the fusion and accretion of cultures. Under the guidance of such a cultural stand, Pai Hsien-yung and Patia Yasin are free to experiment on using “a bold and flexible way of translating”, that is, They retain the Chinese idiom as much as possible, while adopting American colloquialisms, even slang, that convey the spirit of the original (Pai Hsien-yung, 2013: 17).

In addition to the vital direction given by the translators’ cultural stand and translation principle, on the other hand, it is due to the uniqueness of the self-translation and collaborative translation that the diversified methods could be combined effectively in *Taipei People*. Being both the author and translator, Pai Hsien-yung is entitled with the priority in perceiving and interpreting the source text and is thus endowed with more freedom when it comes to translation. Besides, the cooperation between the two translators and the proofreading work conducted by George Kao as well as their discussion and negotiation also contribute to the translated text. It is under the suggestion of George Kao that such translation as Red Red Rose, Jolie Chin and Nuits de Paris was produced.

#### VI. CONCLUSION

A wide range of translation methods are used in the Chinese-English bilingual *Taipei People*, which exhibit that Pai Hsien-yung and Patia Yasin are flexible in adopting the strategies of foreignization and domestication when encountering the culture-specific items. Demonstrated by this inclination is their sharing a cultural stand to pursue the cultural fusion and accretion and to spread the Chinese literature and culture as well as possible, since the translator’s cultural stand and his or her translation should be mutually influential and reflective (Wang Shaodi, 2012: 118). Their translation practice should be instructive for translation studies. Translation has long been considered as the bridge

for cultural exchange and is critical and irreplaceable in the case of two cultures hugely differing from each other. Translators are not only the communicator of culture but also the agent of enriching the languages for different nations. It is in this sense that they are supposed to lead the readers while serving them. As the envoy of cultures, translators should play a significant role in promoting the cultural transmission and integration between nations (Xiong Bing, 2003: 6). The Chinese translators ought to put emphasis on the inclination between domestication and foreignization in selecting the translation strategy from the perspective of the Chinese culture. Only by striking a balance between the two translation strategies can they promote the equal exchange between the Chinese and western cultures (Gong Xiaobin, 2009: 70).

translated by Pai Hsien-yung] [J]. *Journal of Changchun University of Technology (Social Science Edition)*, 2014 (3): 128-130.

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