

An Ethical Analysis of Imagery Translation in Ancient Chinese Books and Records

A Case Study of *Six Chapters of a Floating Life*

Weiwei Cao^{1,*}

¹College English Department, Zaozhuang University, Zaozhuang, Shandong, China

*Corresponding author. Email: 275196897@qq.com

ABSTRACT

Translation ethics mainly focuses on the ethics and norms in translation studies. Based on ethical-approach translation studies and employing quantitative explanations interspersed with supplementary qualitatively-based case analysis, this thesis explores the cultural imagery in *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* translated by Lin Yutang and analyzes how Lin deals with the transmissions of these Chinese culturally-associated imagery, aiming to prove the potential possibility and profound significance of the application of Lin' translation ethical principles to image transmission in translation study, realize the overseas promotion of Chinese literature, and better spread the values of traditional Chinese culture.

Keywords: translation ethics, imagery, cultural transmission, ancient Chinese books and records

I. INTRODUCTION

Evolving from the ancient painting of divinatory symbols of Yin and Zhou dynasties and playing an indispensable role in ancient Chinese Books and Records, imagery bears a significant Chinese cultural connotation. Thus, one cannot research the translation of ancient Chinese books and records without having image translation studied. Domestic scholars have made an abundant study of imagery translation from different aspects using diverse approaches and theories. Some explores the poetry translation methods, some discuss the movie translation strategies, and some study the imagery translation in practical advertising and tourism texts. These researches contribute to, in great extent, the formation of proper translation principles, adoption of appropriate translation strategies and giving play to imagery's practical use. The non-poetic imagery translation study, however, fall rather short of satisfaction, let alone one from an ethical angle study.

Based on ethical-approach translation studies and employing quantitative explanations interspersed with supplementary qualitatively-based case analysis, this thesis explores the cultural imagery translation related to Yun, the main character in *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* translated by Lin Yutang, analyzes how Lin deals with the transmissions of these Chinese culturally-associated imagery, aiming to prove the potential possibility and profound significance of the application of Lin' translation ethical principles to imagery transmission in translation study and realize

the overseas promotion of Chinese literature, and better spread the values of traditional Chinese culture.

II. ANALYSIS OF IMAGERY RELATED WITH YUN

In this part, this paper makes a corpus selection from *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* and analyzes Lin's translation strategy and cultural diffusion effects.

A. Corpus selection

Six Chapters of a Floating Life is an autobiography of Shen Fu, a scholar in the Qing Dynasty. It is saturated with cultural imagery and so loved by Lin Yutang that he translated it into English. Through a continual process of refinement of words and phrases, Lin transmitted the Chinese imagery to Western readers. Shen Fu depicted in his book the picturesque landscape and cultural features of Jiangnan, his inner feelings and the beauty of his wife, Yun, whose natural beauty and charm, whose pursuit of truth, kindness and beauty in adversity, and whose genius for resignation and contentment were spoke highly of by Lin Yutang and thought as the "the loveliest women in Chinese literature" (1999, p.20). With the help of the imagery, readers could explore the abundant inner world of Shen Fu, savoring the cultural and artistic flavor of the book.

B. Lin's translation strategy and cultural diffusion effects

Gary B. Palmer, an American linguist, believes that "imagery is what we see in our mind's eyes" (1996,

p.3), “besides visual imagery, it should also allow for auditory, kinesthetic, olfactory, and temperature imagery. There is also the complex imagery that arises from the emotions-the affective imagery of feeling states.”(1996, p.46) By citing Palmer’s definition of imagery, this thesis includes 98 Yun-related imagery and its translation, collected and labeled by hand. The imagery is further classified as the following four

groups: appearance, gesture, clothes and behavior. They are easily apprehended by Chinese readers but difficult to understand by foreign ones. This thesis will make an quantitative analysis in the first place of whether they could not only be seen but also understood by western readers, or whether Lin could handle well both their linguistic and cultural connotations.

TABLE I. LIN’S CHOICE OF TRANSLATION STRATEGIES

Translation strategy (number/ proportion)	Foreignization (68, 71.6%)			Domestication (27, 28.4%)		Total
	Literal translation	Transliteration	Intertextual gloss	Substitution	Omission	
Quantity (number of time)	61	4	4	23	6	98
Proportion (%)	62.3	4.1	4.1	23.5	6.1	100

"Table I" shows a general situation of Lin’s different translation strategies. As for the Yun-related imagery translation, foreignization is more adopted. Omission is used six times, while 3 for idioms translation, and the rest for imagery of the size of women feet, the touch of women skin and a kind of underwear worn by women. As for imagery peculiar to Chinese culture, Lin made use of substitution; this happens with the Chinese phrases “shen li”, or “shen jian”, which were substituted with God of western religion; “pink neck” was replaced with white, “bu yi” simple gowns.

codes and records translation. Thus, a successful transmission of imagery in the translation of *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* seems particularly important. In terms of whether a successful imagery transmission achieved, and whether the transmission result could definitely express the cultural connotation beyond the imagery, this study classifies the Yun-related imagery translation into four groups, namely transmission, transformation, loss and augmentation. With the help of a quantitative statistics, the cultural transmission effects are listed in the following "Table II".

Language carries the cultural connotation of imagery which plays a crucial role in Chinese ancient

TABLE II. CULTURE TRANSMISSION EFFECT OF IMAGERY TRANSLATION

Cultural transmission	Transmission	Transformation	Loss	Augmentation	Total
Number(times)	64	12	19	3	98
Proportion (%)	65.3	12.3	19.4	3.1	100

As a well-known wordsmith and “the bridge between Chinese and Western culture”, Lin Yutang handled perfectly the Chinese culture in his translation. He transmitted directly a large amount of imagery in his translation, which maintains the authenticity of Chinese culture. A literal but not hard translation, though, it achieves a fine balance between authentic images and readers’ acceptability. As shown in "Table II", Lin was inclined to adopt foreignization and transmission, for instance, a translation of “drooping shoulders” effectively conveys an image of a classical Chinese beauty. Such kind of translation makes up 65.3% of all. Therefore, the Chinese flavor of those imagery were mostly maintained though they are foreign to western readers, which in turn help western readers see the

imagery as well as their meanings. The above analysis shows that Lin’ translation not only makes western readers appreciate the beauty of traditional Chinese culture, but also fosters the exchange of Chinese and Western cultures, hence contributing to oversee spreading of traditional Chinese culture.

Different from the translation strategy of culture-shared imagery, namely, to maintain the original images, culture-specific images are handled with the meaning kept. For instance, the image of “lian” was translated into “kick,” with the image of three-inch “golden lotuses” — woman’s bound feet in feudal age lost, failing to transmit its cultural connotations. The other image “qie”, which originally refers to a female’s

self-depreciatory terms, was lost, either, and hence the view that men are superior to women brought by this form of address was discarded. As cultural-specific images contain more abundant cultural information, a more flexible translation strategy should be adopted. An “invasion” of the target language could even be launched when necessary, or transplanting the specific images to foreign culture, realizing the transmission of traditional Chinese cultural connotation to western readers.

III. THE ETHICAL TRANSLATION THOUGHTS REFLECTED IN LIN’S VERSION

Ethical translation was first put forward by French translator Antoine Berman in 1984. From his point of view, the linguistic and cultural differences of the original text should be respected, for translation has its own diversity. Then, an American structuralist translation theorist Lawrence Venuti promoted “Foreignizing Translation” and opposed identity in 1998, which is a kind of ethical translation thoughts that abandoning common ground yet reserving differences. Chesterman proposed in 1997 five models of translation ethics, namely ethics of representation, ethics of service, ethics of communication, norm and commitment-based ethics. While Anthony Pym transferred to a focus on translator’s ethics study.

Meanwhile, ethical translation study also arouses great attention of many scholars at home and showing fruitful results. Xu Jun was the first to step into this field. Besides, scholars like Lv Jun (2001), Wang Dazhi (2005), Luo Xianfeng (2009), Fang Wei(2013; 2017) set forth their view on ethical translation thoughts, and made a great contribution. Fang Wei (2013, p. 75) points out that translation ethics should transfer from “norms to values”, “the core of which lies in the excellency in the process of translation.” The connotation of translation ethics is not only abundant but also complicated. Therefore, ethical translation study should endow with diversity and oneness.

Opium War forced the Qing Dynasty to open its gate to the world outside and therefore, caused the foreign culture to flood in, clashing and colliding with the Chinese ones. Traditional Chinese culture was questioned and suffered a crisis due to the failure of the war. Meanwhile, the Chinese scholars were given a head-on blow, too, forced to contemplate the way out for future Chinese culture. Under the circumstances, Lin experienced an attitude change of Chinese culture from criticism and deconstruction to reflection and reconstruction and to a cross-regional transmission. Lin contributed a great many to the spreading of Chinese culture to western world by means of translation.

Back at that time, the westerners had quite a little knowledge about China except some one-sided and

limited understanding. Apprehending Chinese culture well, Lin strained every nerve to tell about it, transmitting to the western readers “the spirit of truth and beauty, the living art, the genius for resignation and contentment so characteristic of Chinese culture” (Lin, 1999, preface, p.22) by adopting an ethical translation principle, known as foreignization and literal translation. In order for readers to feel Lin’s ethical translation thoughts, this thesis will illustrate it in a case study.

Amplification is adopted. While translating images related to Yun’s appearance, Lin (1999, p.7) writes “Of a slender figure, she had drooping shoulders and a rather long neck, slim but not to the point of being skinny,” which reflects traditional Chinese aesthetic standard. Lin describes in his book *My Country and My People*, a beauty that conforms to traditional Chinese aesthetic standard, which was the very image of Yun depicted by Shengfu. While in the eyes of Western contemporaries, beauty are those who have a body shape of healthy and strong inverted triangle. So “drooping shoulders and a rather long neck, slim but not to the point of being skinny” was everything but the standard beauty from the point of view of western readers. In order to arouse the target readers’ associated meanings of beauty, Lin added a word “slim” to modify the image of “figure”, helping them realize the aesthetic differences between China and the West.

Foreignization is used when it comes to the translation of images of marriage and lovers’ fate. For example, “yue lao” is translated as “the Old Man under the Moon”, with the original image maintained, which, on the one hand, transmits the cultural image to the target readers, and on the other hand, leaves them more space for imagination. The image of “red silk thread” carried by “the Old Man under the Moon”, is noted with its meaning “for the purpose of binding together the hearts of all couples”, conveying readers both the image and its connotation. As for “qian he,” its original meaning is to help hook somebody up. Lin abandons the image and keeps its connotation “make us husband and wife,” making the meaning simple and clear. The image of “he fa tong yan”, specific to Chinese culture, is replaced with a western one “white and ruddy”.

The beautiful natural scenery in Yun’s eyes is also kept in Lin’s translation. It seems that there is forest in “yue lu shuang lin”, but in effect, it is a metaphor, depicting the frost-like bright moonlight. As a culture-shared image, frost could be translated literally, while in Lin’s translation, frost is hidden, with the color “silvery” left and the image of “shadows” added. The beauty is vividly shown to readers’ mind and arouses their fertile imagination. *Osmanthus fragrans* is nothing but a tree. In Lin’s version, the image of this tree is kept and meanwhile the perfume of this plant is conveyed to readers, too, stretching to the field of gustatory sense. In

addition, the usage of “buried in” adds a kinesthetic sense, successfully transmitting Yun’s personality and interest, namely the pursuit of natural beauty and inner peace.

As Feng Zhiqiang (2009, p.68) said, considering all the efforts Lin has made, it is, in fact, a firm belief that “the transmission of Chinese spirit could provide a cure for western illness caused by the overwhelming scientism.” Lin’s translation strategy, which is Sinicization in Chinese-English translation, is well manifested in the version. Moreover, Lin’s translation thoughts which proposes manifesting Chinese culture boldly and confidently, is shown too. Therefore, his translation realizes the overseas promotion of Chinese literature, and forms the base of constructing the soft power of Chinese culture.

IV. CONCLUSION

From the above analysis, this thesis finds out that Lin’s adopted imagery transmission strategy can be classified as transmission, transformation, loss and augmentation. This paper also shows that, while transmitting the meaning of imagery, Lin tends to keep the original imagery and adopts a strategy of foreignization, succeeding let the traditional Chinese culture go out and apprehended by western readers.

Moreover, this research offers, to some extent, a thought-provoking revelation about cultural imagery translation. It turns out that the domestication proposed by the Panda Book Series doesn’t match our country’s international influences today. The translation strategy of the oversea promotion of Chinese traditional culture should be changed into, to a large extent, foreignization rather than catering for the target readers. As for imagery translation, translators are suggested to follow the principle of pursuing an authentic culture transmission, plus an appropriate cultural adaption. Under certain circumstances, they are even encouraged to transplant their own culture and “invade” the target language in an appropriate sense so as to better transmit between different cultures. Meanwhile, this translation principle is a necessary means to let Chinese culture go out and a proper match to the pursuit of the rise of Chinese cultural soft power.

Due to limited space for this thesis and the author’s ability, this paper lacks, to some degree, depth and scope in imagery translation analysis in ancient Chinese books and records. And hence, more research needs to be done in the extension and connotation of ethical translation study by more excellent scholars, so as to contribute more papers to this filed.

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