

Study on English Translation of Chinese Canons from the Perspective of “Appropriateness”

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ABSTRACT: Many Chinese scholars advocate that Chinese translators should translate the excellent Chinese canons actively to disseminate and promote Chinese culture by adopting the method of “Exportation”, which, however, has not achieved the expected results in current situation. From the perspective of “Appropriateness”, this paper, in the following four aspects—source text selection, translator selection, translation principles, and translation strategies, will carry out a research on the current situation of the English translation of Chinese canons, aiming at identifying the problems and then finding the solutions to them.

KEYWORDS: “Appropriateness”; English translation of Chinese canons; Problems and solutions

1 INTRODUCTION

English translation of Chinese canons (ETCC for short), as one of major means of disseminating Chinese culture to the world, has gained much prominence and undergone a process from partial translation to full translation, from fragmentary translation to translation of collections. Moreover, the quality of translation is improving constantly. However, the acceptance and influence overseas of most English translations of Chinese canons made by Chinese translators leaves much to be desired. In face of such a situation, this paper reflects on the existing problems in ETCC from the aspects of source text selection, translator selection, translation principles, and translation strategies from the perspective of “Appropriateness”.

2 SOURCE TEXT SELECTION

2.1 *Factors influencing source text selection*

Source text selection is a complex process, which is influenced by such factors as patronage, ideology, target language readers, and etc.

Patronage: According to Lefevere, patronage is defined as “something reading, writing, and rewriting of literature” (1992:15). The control which the “patron” exercises consists of three elements: ideological constraints on form and subject matter, economic provision for writers, translators and other rewriters, and the bestowing of status on these individuals (1992:16). In this way, patronage plays a vital role in the process of translation by

manipulating the selection of source texts.

As for ideology, in the source language, the ideology of patrons, publishers, and translators influences the selection of source texts; while ideology in the target language influences the source text selection by controlling the publication and acceptance of target texts.

Target text receptors of ETCC make the major market and one of the main constructors. Readers’ expectancy plays an important role in the selection of source texts.

2.2 *Current situation of source text selection in ETCC*

As demonstrated in ETCC, no matter whether it is translated by domestic translators, foreign translators, or corporate translators, the selected Chinese canons centered around culture-loaded works in humanities, history, and philosophy. Professor Wang Hongyin pointed out the urgency of strengthening English translation of non-literary canons and works of ethnic groups, as well as expanding the scope of canons selection to include works on classical Chinese laws, medicine, economy, military affairs, astronomy, and geography. Under the background of disseminating Chinese culture and enhancing Chinese cultural soft power, the Chinese government undertakes such forceful measures actively as advocating multilateral cooperation and supports in both policy-making and finance. Institutions like CIPG act as patronage in ETCC to ensure the selected canons can represent

the excellent Chinese culture and the selection is systematic and orderly. Besides, as indicated in the history of ETCC, inadequate attention was paid to readers in target language when conducting source text selection, which is mainly controlled by patronage and mainstream ideology in the source language.

2.3 *Source text selection in ETCC from “Appropriateness” perspective*

From the perspective of “Appropriateness”, translators should take into consideration all the factors such as patronage, ideology, and target text readers, make appropriate decisions in source text selection, and adjust the selection criterion according to the changing situation. In the context of “Exportation” of Chinese canons, source text selection should give preference to target text readers, whose interests and requirements should be highly emphasized. Specifically, the selected source texts should be to the readers’ taste in both thoughts and forms of expression, making sure the selected texts are readily marketable, and conducive to their disposition-fostering and anxiety-relieving.

3 TRANSLATOR SELECTION

Translators of Chinese canons should ideologically take enhancing Chinese culture as their own responsibility regardless of personal benefits, and academically have a thorough knowledge of both English and Chinese learning. The selection of translators is mainly concerned with whether native speakers of Chinese or English are more suitable for the mission of ETCC.

3.1 *Four current standpoints on translator selection*

Native speaker of English as translator: One viewpoint as represented by A. C. Graham maintains that translation of Chinese canons into English can only be done by translators who are native speakers of English rather than Chinese because translation is generally done into, not out of, one’s mother tongue, and some translations by non-native translators were rendered in an unbearable kind of “Chinese English”.

Chinese native speaker as translator: Contrary to Graham, scholars like Pan Wenguo holds that native Chinese translators should undertake the task of ETCC and act as the “Watchman” of Chinese culture.

Corporative translation of native speakers of both Chinese and English: Just as the example set by British sinologist and Chinese scholar Wang Tao indicates, corporative translation of both Chinese and English native speakers has its own advantages.

In this kind of translation, the Chinese translator can ensure a correct understanding of the source text, while the English translator is to check the correctness of expression.

Polishing translation: According to Huo Yuehong, in polishing translation, the subject of translation is native Chinese translator with the English speaking translator polishing the finished translations.

3.2 *Translator selection in ETCC from “Appropriateness” perspective*

The four standpoints mentioned above are reasonable to some degree and in some specific circumstances may serve as the proper selection. But in current context, the selection of translators of ETCC should take such factors as translation theory and practice, ideality and reality, adequacy and acceptance into consideration.

In view of the features of translators of both Chinese and English native speakers, the best way to carry out ETCC in current context is corporation of translators from both Chinese and English native speakers, or at least, communication should be promoted between them. What need to be noted is that in corporative translation there is no absolute division of task, and the role of English translators should not be confined to polishing the finished work because their “born” knowledge and comprehension of both the dynamic target culture and the intellectual atmosphere, reading interests and habits as reflected in Western culture products and best-sellers are just what Chinese native translators lack. Currently, for some kind of readers and texts, the translation can even be left for English native translators with their Chinese partners checking the misleading expressions.

4 TRANSLATION PRINCIPLES

In this part, the existing translation principles of ETCC are firstly discussed, and then on this basis come the comments of translation principles of ETCC from the perspective of “Appropriateness”.

4.1 *Current situation of translation principles of ETCC*

The following are some main translation principles of ETCC. Pan Wenguo put forward his specific translation principle of “Understandability”, “Readability”, and “Succinctness” for ETCC, in view of Chinese canons’ language features of being rich in content and succinct in style, and preferring parataxis to hypotaxis. Huang Zhongxi holds that, translators considered, translation principle refers to translators’ norm of self-discipline, which, as a

holistic principle, features the dynamic correlation among “fidelity”, “readability”, and “creativity”. From their own translation practice, Professor Xu Yuanchong and Professor Wang Rongpei proposed their translation principles of “Three Beauties” and “Transmitting the spirit vividly” respectively. Another popular principle of “Plural complementarity of translation standard” was brought forward by Gu Zhengkun. Professor Gao Jian from his own translation experiences proposed the principle of “Coordination Translation Theory”, which emphasized “harmony” and “neutralization”.

4.2 Translation principles of ETCC from “Appropriateness” perspective

As illustrated in current translation principles above, it can be concluded that almost all of them concern more with fidelity to the original texts and less attention is paid to the target text receptors. From the perspective of “Appropriateness”, the identification of translation principles demands a proper negotiation between adequacy and acceptability, taking different types of readers and different types of texts into account. And in current context, the principle of readability should be given the priority.

5 TRANSLATION STRATEGIES

As two controversial translation strategies put forward by Venuti, domestication and foreignization have preference to either “approaching the target receptor” or “approaching the source text”. While domestication requires to get close to the readers of the target language, adopt the expressive ways with which the readers of the target language are familiar, the strategy of foreignization requires that the translator get close to the original and adopt the expressive ways of the original language so as to preserve the unfamiliar heterogeneous factors and convey the content of the original as much as possible.

5.1 Current situation of the employment of strategies in ETCC

In ETCC, many scholars hold the view that the strategy of foreignization should be adopted to disseminate Chinese culture, while some scholars maintain that a more reasonable attitude will make a compromise between the two strategies.

5.2 Translation strategies of ETCC from “Appropriateness” perspective

From the perspective of “Appropriateness”, when selecting translation strategies, translators should give full play to their subjectivity in choosing the most appropriate and effective strategy according to a series of restraining factors when dealing with different kinds of readers or texts, or even different contents in the same text. The key lies in how to find the optimum balance point between the two strategies. Since the balance point is changing all the time, translators should base their selection on the current situation regarding receptors and source texts and get ready to change the strategies accordingly.

6 CONCLUSION

Research on ETCC from the perspective of “Appropriateness” shows that translators should give a full play to their subjectivity in making appropriate decisions in the four aspects—source text selection, translator selection, translation principles, and translation strategies. Specifically, in current cultural context, the selected source texts should be to the readers’ taste in both thoughts and forms of expression; the subject of ETCC is corporation of translators from both Chinese and English native speakers, or at least, communication should be promoted between them; the principles and strategies should take both the receptors and source texts into account.

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