

Domestication and Foreignization: A Comparative Study of Translation Strategies for Chinese-Themed Works in British and American Literature

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ABSTRACT

Against the backdrop of globalization and cultural confidence, the translation of Chinese-themed works in British and American literature serves as a crucial link in cultural dissemination and cross-cultural communication. This study takes the theory of domestication and foreignization as the core to interpret cultural images, culture-loaded words, social customs, and values in literary works, thereby exploring the selection of translation strategies for literary works and analyzing the underlying factors influencing such strategies. The research reveals that domestication and foreignization are dialectically unified. In the current context of promoting Chinese culture "going global", the strategy of "taking foreignization as the main approach and domestication as a supplement" is more conducive to preserving and disseminating the unique characteristics of Chinese culture, which can provide references for translation practice and English teaching.

KEYWORDS

Domestication and foreignization; Translation strategies; Cultural dissemination

1 Introduction

Globalization has accelerated cultural exchange, and the quality of literary translation directly affects the effectiveness of cultural dissemination. With the enhancement of China's cultural confidence, promoting Chinese culture to "go global" has become an important strategy. Chinese-themed works in British and American literature are key windows for Western readers to understand China; their translation strategies not only relate to the readability of the works but also influence the accurate presentation of Chinese culture in the West. From the perspective of English teaching, traditional teaching focuses on linguistic knowledge while paying insufficient attention to cultural factors in translation, resulting in students' weak cross-cultural communication competence. Studying the translation strategies of such works can provide case resources for English teaching, help students recognize cultural differences, and cultivate their cultural awareness and critical thinking, thus possessing both theoretical and practical value.

Domestication and foreignization are important theories in translation studies. The translation strategies of domestication and foreignization were first proposed by Lawrence Venuti in his work *The Translator's Invisibility* (1995)^[1]. In fact, these two terms can be traced back to the German philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher, who argued: "The translator either stays as close as possible to the author and lets the reader move towards the author as much as possible, or moves away from the author and moves towards the reader as much as possible." Domestic scholar Wang Dongfeng (2002) pointed out that excessive domestication would lead to the loss of source culture^[2], while Xu Jun (2003) emphasized that translation strategies should be selected based on text types and translation purposes^[3]. Foreign studies mostly focus on the cultural representation of literary works, with scattered discussions on translation strategies. Existing research results mostly concentrate on single works or translators, lacking systematic comparative analysis.

This study breaks through the limitation of single-case studies, constructs a framework of "theoretical analysis-case comparison-factor exploration", and proposes the strategy of "foreignization as the main approach and domestication as a supplement" in the context of cultural "going global", providing guidance for contemporary English teaching.

2 Theoretical Analysis and Applicability of Domestication and Foreignization Strategies

2.1 Analysis of Core Theories

The domestication strategy requires reducing the sense of strangeness caused by cultural differences during translation, meeting readers' demand for the readability of the target text, and ensuring that the target text is as smooth and coherent as possible. In contrast, the foreignization strategy demands preserving the cultural and national characteristics of the source language, allowing readers to experience and understand the source culture in an immersive way^[4]. There have been two viewpoints in the academic circle: the "opposition theory" and the "unification theory", and this study endorses the "unification theory". Excessive domestication will lead to cultural "distortion"; for example, translating "京剧" (Peking Opera) as "Chinese opera" fails to convey its artistic characteristics. Excessive foreignization, on the other hand, will make the target text obscure; for instance, literally translating "水袖功" (the skill of water sleeves in

traditional Chinese opera) as "Skills of the water sleeve" makes it difficult for readers to associate it with the corresponding scene^[5]. In actual translation, it is necessary to balance the two to achieve the unification of "cultural authenticity" and "reader acceptance".

2.2 Analysis of Applicable Scenarios

Hans Vermeer, the founder of Skopos Theory, pointed out that translation behavior is guided by the expected function (Skopos), and translators need to select translation methods based on the communicative purpose of the target text^[6]. When the goal is public entertainment and leisure, for informative and vocative texts (such as popular novels and advertisements) targeting ordinary readers, domestication tends to be adopted to adapt to readers' cognition and improve readability. When the purpose is academic research or in-depth cultural exchange, for expressive texts with heavy cultural load (such as classical documents and philosophical works), foreignization is preferred to preserve cultural characteristics. If translators hold a cultural dissemination stance, they will adhere more to the foreignization strategy.

3 Case Study-Comparison of Strategy Selection and Effects

3.1 Transmission of Cultural Images

Cultural images are specific things formed by different ethnic groups in long-term production and life as well as historical inheritance, which can arouse group resonance. The transmission of cultural images, in essence, is a process in cross-cultural communication, translation, or dissemination, where the core connotation of the source cultural image is transmitted to the recipient in a way that adapts to the target culture, thereby triggering effective resonance.

In Chinese culture, "龙" (long, the Chinese dragon) symbolizes auspiciousness and authority, while in Western culture, it represents evil^[7]. The early translation of Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth* adopted domestication, translating "龙" as "dragon". Although this conforms to linguistic habits, it distorts the cultural connotation. In recent years, the retranslated version has adopted foreignization, translating it as "long" with annotations explaining its cultural meaning in China, which accurately conveys the connotation and is beneficial to cultural dissemination.

In Chinese culture, "西风" (west wind) often implies bleakness and homesickness (e.g., "西风紧"-the west wind blows fiercely), while in Western culture, it mostly represents vitality (e.g., Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*). For popular texts targeting the general public, the line "昨夜西风凋碧树" (Last night the west wind withered the green trees) can be translated using domestication as "Last night the autumn wind withered the green trees", where "autumn wind" helps readers understand easily. For academic or cultural texts, foreignization is more appropriate, translating it as "Last night the west wind withered the green trees" with annotations explaining its cultural connotation.

3.2 Translation of Culture-Loaded Words

Culture-loaded words, also known as culture-default words or culture-specific words, refer to words that express unique things or ideological concepts in a specific culture. They carry profound cultural connotations and distinct folk characteristics, and possess regionality, uniqueness, and timeliness^[8].

"仁" (ren), a core concept of Confucianism, has rich connotations. James Legge adopted domestication in translating *The Analects*, rendering "仁" as "benevolence", which simplifies its connotation. In contrast, D.C. Lau's translation adopted foreignization, translating it as "ren" with annotations, which fully conveys the essence of Confucian culture and meets the needs of academic research.

The term "功夫" (kung fu) encompasses both martial arts skills and spiritual connotations. Early translations used domestication, translating it as "martial arts", which loses its unique connotations. In recent years, foreignization has been adopted, and the transliteration "kung fu" has been included in English dictionaries. For example, Barack Obama mentioned "kung fu" in his autobiography and introduced its cultural connotations, realizing two-way cultural exchange.

3.3 Expression of Social Customs and Values

The expression of social customs and values, in essence, is a process where specific groups externally present their commonly recognized behavioral norms and value judgments through daily behaviors, symbolic rituals, linguistic texts, etc. It is a core carrier through which culture is perceived and transmitted.

In *Mencius*, the phrase "行天下之大道" (walk the great Dao of the world) was not translated literally (e.g., translating "道" as "road"). Instead, the domestication strategy was adopted, and it was translated as "pursue the cause of common good". This converts words with Chinese characteristics into expressions understandable to Western readers and accurately conveys the meaning of the original text^[9].

Chinese collectivism emphasizes that individuals should submit to the collective. The early translation of *Red Crag* (by Luo Guangbin and Yang Yiyan) adopted domestication, translating "集体" (collective) as "group", which led to misunderstandings among Western readers. The retranslated version adopted foreignization, translating it as "collective" with explanations of its connotation, helping readers correctly understand Chinese collectivism.

3.4 Summary of Translated Case Comparisons

Table 1

Original Text (Source)	Translation with Domestication	Translation with Foreignization	Effect Analysis and Comparison
"龙"(赛珍珠《大地》)	He guarded his land like a dragon.	He guarded his land like a "long"	Domestication:Conforms to linguistic habits but distorts connotation; Foreignization:Accurately conveys culture but increases reading burden.
西风(晏殊《蝶恋花》)	Last night the autumn wind withered the green trees	Last night the west wind withered the green trees	Domestication: Simplifies connotation; Foreignization: Fully conveys culture.
"仁"(《论语》)	benevolence	ren	Domestication:Conveys basic meaning but loses connotation; Foreignization:Preserves uniqueness and enriches English vocabulary.
"功夫"	martial arts	kung fu	Domestication:Conveys basic meaning but loses connotation; Foreignization:Preserves uniqueness and enriches English vocabulary.
"行天下之大道" 《孟子》	pursue the cause of common good	pursue a common road	Domestication:Accurately conveys customs and values; Foreignization:Improves readability but simplifies connotation.
"集体利益高于个人利益"(罗广斌、杨益言《红岩》)	the interests of the group are more important than individual interests	the interests of the "collective" are more important than individual interests	Domestication:Causes misunderstanding; Foreignization: Accurately conveys connotation.

The core trade-off between domestication and foreignization strategies-specifically in conveying Chinese cultural images, culture-loaded words, and social customs and values-is explicitly elucidated through six translation cases of core Chinese cultural elements in Table 1. Domestication focuses on "lowering the threshold of readers' understanding", while foreignization centers on "preserving cultural authenticity". The difference in their effects is directly related to the cultural specificity of the translated objects.

4 Analysis of Underlying Factors Influencing Strategy Selection

4.1 Translators' Cultural Stance and Ideology

Translators' cultural stance and ideology are key subjective factors influencing the selection of domestication and foreignization strategies. Their cultural background, attitude towards Chinese culture, and the ideological orientation of the era they live in all directly affect the choice of strategies.

Chinese-American translators, who have a deeper understanding of Chinese culture, tend to adopt foreignization. For example, D. C. Lau mainly used the foreignization method when translating *The Analects* [10]. In contrast, non-Chinese translators, who have relatively limited knowledge of Chinese culture, tend to choose domestication; James Legge, for instance, used domestication when translating "仁".

Translators who admire Chinese culture often prefer the foreignization strategy, as seen in Ezra Pound's translation of Chinese classical poems. Some translators who hold a critical attitude towards Chinese culture may distort cultural connotations through domestication; for example, 19th-century missionaries referred to Chinese customs as "barbaric customs". What is more, some translators, driven by a novelty-seeking mentality, may overuse foreignization to satisfy Western readers' curiosity.

As a deeper influencing factor, ideology determines strategy selection by shaping translators' cultural cognitive frameworks. Under the colonialist ideology, translators regarded Western culture as the center and tended to adopt domestication. For example, 19th-century translators translated "科举制度" (the imperial examination system) as "examination system" and emphasized its backwardness. Under the multiculturalist ideology, translators emphasize cultural equality and tend to adopt foreignization; contemporary translators, for example, translate "科举制度" as "keju" and provide objective explanations.

4.2 Target Readers' Expectations and Acceptance Environment

Readers' expectations, cultural literacy, and the era's cultural acceptance atmosphere are also important external factors influencing the selection of domestication and foreignization strategies, determining the choices made by translators during translation. Mass readers pursue readability, so translators mostly adopt domestication (e.g., the English translation of *Moment in Peking* simplifies family relationships). Academic readers focus on the professional presentation of culture, so the foreignization strategy is more favored (e.g., academic works retain culture-specific terms with annotations). College students have relatively high cultural literacy, so more foreignization can be used in translation (e.g., "端午节" (the Dragon Boat Festival) is translated as "Dragon Boat Festival" with explanations in textbooks). Primary and middle school students have limited cognition, so the domestication strategy is more conducive to their understanding (e.g., "the festival of eating zongzi" is used in reading materials for them).

The temporal context is also crucial. In recent years, against the background of Chinese culture "going global", Western readers' understanding of Chinese culture has improved, so the foreignization of "饺子" (jiaozi) as "jiaozi" has become more common. In the 20th century, when Western understanding of Chinese culture was limited, translators mostly used domestication to translate it as "dumpling" to lower the understanding threshold.

4.3 Historical Background and Power Relations

The historical background and cultural pattern of different historical periods are core external factors influencing the selection of translation strategies for Chinese-themed works. The dominant tendency of domestication and foreignization shows distinct stage characteristics with the change of periods, and is deeply bound to the cultural power relations and ideological orientation of the time: From the 19th century to the early 20th century (the colonial period): Dominated by Western cultural hegemony, translation was mainly based on domestication, which was essentially the adaptive distortion of Chinese cultural elements under Western-centrism. After the 1940s: With the rise of post-colonialism (which reflects the dissatisfaction of the colonized with the cultural hegemony of the colonizers and the sense of despair), the translation practice was characterized by a compromising translation strategy, i.e., the domestication strategy^[11]. The 21st century to the present (the era of globalization): Multiculturalism has become the mainstream, and the strategy has shown the characteristic of "taking foreignization as the main approach while considering domestication", with the core of seeking a balance between the equal dissemination of culture and readers' acceptance.

5 Conclusions

Through a comparative analysis of the translation strategies for Chinese-themed works in British and American literature, this study draws the core conclusion: Domestication and foreignization are not opposites but a dialectically unified whole. It is necessary to flexibly balance them according to specific scenarios to achieve the organic unity of "cultural authenticity" and "reader acceptance". "Taking foreignization as the main approach and domestication as a supplement" is the optimal choice for their English translation. The underlying core factors influencing strategy selection include translators' cultural stance and ideology, readers' expectation horizons and cultural literacy, and the historical background and cultural pattern of different historical periods.

This conclusion has important practical guiding significance for the current "going global" of Chinese culture. In translation practice, translators should make dynamic choices based on text types and translation purposes: For culture-dissemination texts, priority should be given to foreignization to convey the uniqueness of culture; for entertainment texts, the proportion of domestication can be appropriately increased to improve readability. At the same time, translators need to enhance their own cultural literacy and cross-cultural communication awareness.

In English teaching, typical translation cases of cultural elements such as "龙" and "仁" can be introduced. Through comparative analysis, students' cultural sensitivity and critical thinking can be cultivated, and their cross-cultural communication and translation application abilities can be improved through practical scenarios. In the future, more detailed empirical studies can be conducted based on specific text types to provide more accurate guidance for translation practice.

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