

A Study on the Translation of the Festival Terms from the Perspective of Cultural Translation—A Case Study of Selected Plays of Guan Hanqing

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ABSTRACT

There is a close relationship between the folk customs of festivals and the occurrence and development of traditional operas. From the perspective of cultural translation theory, this paper probes into the English translation of the festival terms in Yuan drama, analyzes their cultural connotations and functions, and puts forward the translation method of cultural translation to fully present the source language information such as semantic functions and cultural connotations.

KEYWORDS

Cultural Translation View; Yuan drama; traditional festival

1 Introduction

Since the beginning of 1980s, a new round of translation climax is still going on. The latest development in this field puts forward the new directions---a cultural turn in cultural studies, which starts a new era in the intercultural research. (Lefevere, 2001, p.15)

There are many traditional festivals and customs in Chinese opera, such as celebrating the spring festival with neighbors, celebrating the lantern festival in a village, attending a tomb at Qingming festival with cold food, shooting willow and thumping pills at the dragon boat festival, offering sacrifices to The Weaver Girl and the Cowherd on the Double Seventh Festival and watching the moon on the Mid-autumn Festival in August. On the one hand, Chinese opera is likely to bring the festive atmosphere into Chinese opera. On the other hand, Chinese opera is also an important performance season. (Peng, 2023, p.10)

The Chinese opera festival not only reflects the general language information in Chinese, but also conveys the Chinese culture. Through the analysis of the traditional Chinese opera festival and its translation, people can have more understanding of the opera festival. The translator should accurately convey the linguistic features and cultural connotations of Chinese opera festivals to the target audience, so as to achieve the effectiveness of cross-language and cross-cultural communication.

Culture is considered as "the totality of beliefs and practices of a society." (Nida, 2003, p.38) From Newmark's view, culture is a kind of way of life and its manifestation, which is specific to a society where language is used as its means of expression. (Newmark, 2001, p.17) Newmark recognized the intimate relationship between language and culture. Language is a system of symbols aiming at communicating with human being through language. As an essential way of human

communication, the peculiar structure of language reflects people's way of thinking to a certain extent and develops with culture in the long history. Language is affected and formed by culture. Meanwhile, it influences culture. (Nida, 1993, p. 34) Translation is a process where translators constantly make choice, and at the same time such choice is influenced by either internal factors such as linguistic difference or external factors such as society, history and culture. However, the influence from external factors may be more decisive when translation is studied under the extensive background that lays emphasis on history, ideology and culture. Therefore, cultural translation makes a breakthrough in literary translation among different countries and offers the exploration translation studies with a higher status and broader space.

The cultural turn in translation studies has changed the focus of attention from the language and textual structure to the analysis of discourse and the production of translation.

2 Festivals with Cultural Connotation

There are some difficulties in dealing with the source message, such as festivals with their cultural connotation, festivals with their mythology, festivals with their famous historical figures, festivals with their nationality custom, and festivals with moral tradition.

Chinese traditional opera culture works as foundation and essence of China. The names of Chinese traditional opera festivals are distinctive, dynamic, vivid and influential. It represents the principal values of Chinese traditional culture and vividly shows Chinese people's inner world. Festivals play an important role in strengthening cultural memory and psychological identification. It keeps national cohesion. In addition, it can provoke and restore feelings and adjust to the relationship between human being and nature. The relationship between the terms of traditional Chinese opera festivals and Chinese culture can be distributed into four sections. Traditional Chinese opera festivals originated from the Chinese agricultural culture and philosophy, "the harmony between heaven and man". The names of traditional Chinese opera festivals are significant symbol of Chinese culture. The translation of Chinese traditional opera festivals shows our ethos. (He, 2002, p.9) It shows our national emotion and plays a significant role in making our community in harmony.

Chinese mythology is a collection of oral and written cultural tradition, folk tales and religions. They consist of myths and legends about the creation of Chinese culture and the founding of the Chinese nation. They were thought to be, at least to some extent, the true record of history. Myths and legends existed in oral speaking way for more than a thousand years, before it being written in books like *Shan Hai Jing*.

There are Chinese myths in historical books and philosophical works of emperors, such as *Historical Records and Rites*. Chinese traditional opera festivals are a part of Chinese tradition and an indispensable part of Chinese culture for thousands of years. There are many Chinese traditional opera festivals which are related to Chinese mythology and folklore, but more actually, they may have started from ancient ceremonies in which farmers celebrated their harvest or prayer. (Li, 2011, p.15)

In China, there are a lot of Chinese traditional opera festivals. Generally speaking, these festivals are produced by agriculture, religious belief and social life in ancient China. Moreover, when recalling the origin of Chinese traditional opera festivals, we can also find that there are some Chinese traditional opera festivals and customs that are linked to ancient Chinese historical figures. Consequently, it is worth pursuing and discussing the names of festivals from the perspective of historical figures.

Traditional opera festivals with a long history are various, such as Spring Festival, the Dragon Boat Festival, the Mid-Autumn Festival and so forth, which originated in ancient times relating to people's

agricultural production, religious beliefs and people's social life. (Zhang, 2007, p.16) Along with the development of technology and civilization, in the Qin-Han dynasties, many festivals are gradually forming. Some historical figures replaced the faith of original supernatural beings. For instance, Qu Yuan is greatly praised by later ages.

The national aesthetics of folk literature is significantly affected by the human being, emotion and national features of various folk customs. "Qing Ming Festival" is of great significance due to its complicated origin and various function. Therefore, there is practical significance to study integration of a series of traditional festivals represented by "Qing Ming Festival" from nationality aesthetic and customs aspect. We need to revitalize our traditional festivals and their moral values. It is necessary for us to feel the power of traditional morality and provide new moral resources to modern society. Chinese traditional opera festival has experienced a period of accumulation and gradually developed rich moral value. Chinese traditional opera festivals take the mission of moral education and have strong ethical and moral principles. (Liu, 2005, p.19) Chinese traditional opera festivals have their own features with outstanding morality both at home and abroad. With the impact of Confucianism, Chinese traditional festivals show distinct moral features. Family ethics is reflected in the focus of filial piety.

3 Translation Principles and Methods of Festival Terms in Yuan Drama

There are some problems such as lexical gap and semantic blank in target language. Lexical gap is a gap in the lexicon that occurs because people communicate with others and introduce new concepts to the language for which there are not yet words existing. It is a kind of cultural obstacles in translation. If what is reflected in one language is not elected in another, and if the reflection is strong in this language but weak in that, translators are doomed to meet the difficulties of lexical gap. (Cao, 2009, p.4) The existence of lexical gap indicates what is culturally unique to one nation is a cultural blank to another. Another difficulty is semantic blank, a kind of cultural information gap and a phenomenon in which the source language lexis and the target language lexis have the same denotation, but differ in connotation.

Domestication and foreignization are complementary to each other, both of which have their own strong points and drawbacks. Therefore, a perfect translation will rely on the unification of these two principles and maintaining a good balance between them. In the translation of Chinese festivals, its related celebrations and legends, as well as global words and expressions, should be adopted. Through the principle of foreignization, the traditional expression of the original language can be preserved, so as to promote the cultural interaction between the source context and the target context. (Zhang, 2007, p. 20) With the rapid development of globalization, the ability of reader's understanding has been deeply enhanced, so it is wise to reserve the flavor of the source text for them to enjoy.

There are some suggested translation methods and techniques such as transliteration, transliteration with extra-textual gloss, literal translation with extra-textual gloss, free translation with extra-textual gloss, adoptions of the common practice.

3.1 Transliteration

Transliteration, also called transcription, is a mapping from one language system to another, usually word for word or letter for letter. In other words, transliteration usually adopts the Chinese characters with similar pronunciation instead of loanwords. In this way, Chinese character has lost its meaning but has retained its pronunciation and written form. It is said that about 70% of the sentences need transliterating.

Owing to the distinction from politics, economy, culture between different countries, there are things that are different from or even cannot be found in other countries. This phenomenon can be called "lexical gap". We are used to applying "Pinyin" to mean transliteration, which can be more easily accepted and digested by English speakers like "Qi Xi Festival" ' ' .

3.2 Transliteration with Extra-textual Gloss

The definition of translation is to find the similar pronunciation of word correspondingly according to the pronunciation of the word in source language. Nevertheless, it can be found that pure transliteration has its drawbacks, because it can convey the cultural connotation of the source language. Consequently, the use of annotated transliteration can help readers better understand Chinese culture.

Transliteration plus annotation is the best way to retain the cultural information of the original language, such as "Chong Yang Festival" (the ninth day of the ninth lunar month).

3.3 Literal Translation with Extra-textual Gloss

Literal translation is helpful to interpreting the meaning of the source language and showing the writing style of the source language. Literal translation has its inevitable limitations. For instance, sometimes translated version is boring and arcane. The reason why literal translation also has certain limitations is that surface structure and deep meaning are sometimes inconsistent. Sometimes literal translation is needed, such as Double-seventh Festival.

3.4 Free Translation with Extra-textual Gloss

Free translation, also called liberal translation, refers to the translation according to meaning of the original text, rather than word by word translation, which is different from literal translation. Nevertheless, free translation doesn't require translator to reduce, cancel or add the source language and the translator must think seriously of source language. Translators are supposed to master more skills about the culture of both source and target culture. For example, "Qi Xi Festival" is translated into Chinese Valentine's Day.

3.5 Adoptions of the Common Practice

Since some of the translated versions have already been recognized by audience, so unless they are improper, we should keep them in translation. After all, the translation festival is for every common person, and its popularity should be taken into consideration .

The requirement of common translated version needn't to be so explicit. So adopting the common practice is still a significant technique in the practice of translating Chinese traditional opera festivals.

4 Case Analyses of Chinese Traditional Festivals in Yuan Drama

There are some cases of Chinese traditional opera festivals such as the translation of "Chong Yang Festival", "Qing Ming Festival", "Duan Wu Festival", and "Zhong Qiu Festival".

4.1 清明节: Spring Festival (Yang, 2001, p.83)

There are many kinds of translations of Chinese traditional opera festivals, which can be

confusing. "Qing Ming Festival" belongs to one of the 24 solar terms in China. The translation version, "Spring Festival" emphasizes the season of this festival but doesn't deliver its connotation. As time passed away, "Qing Ming Festival" gradually developed to Chinese folk traditional festivals, is an extension of ancient Chinese science and culture symbol. Currently, "Qing Ming Festival" is a time to remember the dead and the dearly departed. More importantly, this is a time to show our respect to deceased ancestors and family members. Because it strengthens the ethics of filial piety, "Qing Ming Festival" is an important Chinese traditional opera festivals. The literal meaning of the Chinese word "Qing" means "clear" and the literal meaning of this Chinese word "Ming" means "bright". It is a "Spring Festival" when the whole family leaves home and sweeps the graves of their forebears. Sweeping the graves is given a period of time---10 days before and after "Qing Ming Festival".

In terms of communication, translators are supposed to focus on the expression of the purpose of the source language in the target language. In addition, different translation versions can also achieve different communicative effects. From my perspective, it is better to render "Qing Ming Festival" into "Ancestor's Recalling Day" (a day falls on April 4th-6th each year with the celebrating form of tomb-sweeping).

4.2 端午佳节 : Double Fifth Festival (Yang, 2001, p.589)

According to *Contemporary Chinese Dictionary*, the Chinese word "Duan" means the beginning. And the lexis "Wu" is a homophone for "Wu". Officially "Duan Wu Festival" falls on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month. "Double Fifth Festival" emphasize the celebrating time, instead of the essence of "Duan Wu Festival". Dragon Boat Race, a major convention in this festival, first appeared in the Warring States Age. At that time, it was only a sacrificial activity. Later, people held dragon boat races to commemorate the poet Qu Yuan drowning himself in the river. Now the dragon boat race is the traditional entertainment of the Chinese people.

According to all available Chinese-English dictionaries, such as *Chinese-English Dictionary*, the *New Chinese-English Dictionary*, *Modern Chinese and English Dictionary*, *A Comprehensive Chinese-English Dictionary* and so forth, they all offer only one kind of translation version, namely, "Dragon Boat Festival" and some of them give an annotation: the fifth day of the fifth lunar month. Rice dumplings, yellow wine, sachet, tiger shaped cap and colored silk, etc. can be counted as the symbolic representation of Dragon Boat Festival. Moreover, "Dragon Boat Festival" has already been recognized by audience, so "Dragon Boat Festival" is better than "Double Fifth Festival".

4.3 中秋节 : Moon Festival (Yang, 2001, p.31)

As for the translation of "Moon Festival", this method is simple free translation, stressed its symbol but it may easily puzzle the foreigner.

In China, "Zhong Qiu Festival" means family reunion. In the past, due to traffic inconvenience, it took a long time to send a letter. Because of missing relatives, people always gazed at the full moon that represents the family reunion. At present, people still express the Reunion of the festival naturally on the annual lunar August 15th of the full moon. There are various customs such as worshiping the moon, eating moon cake and so on. The translation of "Reunion Festival" is in line with the communicative purpose and more appropriate.

4.4 重阳节 : Aged People's Day (Yang, 2001, p.117)

The lexis "Aged" of "Aged People's Day" contains a bit of derogatory sense. In *Oxford Advanced Learners English-Chinese Dictionary* (the sixth edition), "Aged" means very old. "Aged People's Day"

can not display the profound cultural connotation of "Chong Yang Festival". While, the cultural color contained in "Chong Yang Festival" is inclined to be commendatory. "Aged People's Day" employed the method of free translation. It distorted the cultural color of "Chong Yang Festival".

In *A Multifunction Chinese-English Dictionary*, "Chong Yang Festival" is rendered as "Seniors' Day". Generally speaking, "Chong Yang Festival" is a way of keeping good health drawn from the nature by our ancestors, so "Chong Yang Festival" linked with the old is also very natural. Festivals beholding such a profound cultural connotation can not be found in the west. To cater to the human-oriented idea, it is generally accepted that "Chong Yang Festival" is celebrated by the public as a day to show their respect to the old.

In 1989, the Chinese government decided "Chong Yang Festival" as "Seniors' Day". Since then, all government units, organizations and streets communities will organize an autumn trip each year for those who have retired from their posts. Compared with "Aged People's Day", the word of "senior" refers to a person who is higher in rank or status, so "Seniors' Day" contains a commendatory color. Its cultural connotation is closer to "Chong Yang Festival". From the perspective of the cultural translation, "Seniors' Day" keeps the cultural flavor by adopting free translation and conveys the connotation of the festival.

A "festival" is different from "day". In china, no matter how long the festival lasts for, Chinese people regard it as "Jie" without exception. While, in English, "Jie" is subdivided into several types: "festival", "day", "holiday", and so on. English becomes a language rich in synonyms. Therefore, when translating festival names, the translator should put emphasis on the difference between Chinese and English language and culture.

When a translator translates festival names, he needs to face two different cultures. What the translator needs to possess is not only a good understanding of the cultural connotations contained in the original text, but also the cultural tradition of the target text. Furthermore, cultural is in a changing state and passes down from generation to generation. In practice, cultural differences may lead to non-correspondence in meaning that is very difficult to cope with.

5 Conclusion

Chinese traditional opera festivals can be regarded as the carrier of culture, which has a crucial influence on broadcasting the domestic culture to other countries. When translating the terms of Chinese traditional opera festivals, translators should get a good understanding of its cultural connotation and source. Besides, translators should make the translation version concise, meanwhile, can convey its profound connotation combined with notes. As a matter of fact, in the process of translation, elements of language, culture and communication are intertwined, which sometimes are difficult to be dissociated.

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