

A Comparative Study on the English Translation of *The Travel Dairies of Xu Xiake* from the Perspective of Eco-translatology

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Abstract: Chinese classics are one of the representatives of traditional Chinese culture, and translating excellent classics is a way to inherit and spread brilliant Chinese culture. *The Travel Dairies of Xu Xiake* is of great value, and its two latest English translations, namely *The Travels of Xu Xiake* translated by Lu Changhuai and Jia Xiuhai and *The Travel Dairies of Xu Xiake* by Li Weirong et al. (i.e. the version of “Library of Chinese Classics”), are selected. The two translations of its first diary entitled “A Visit to the Tiantai Mountain” and “Tiantai SHAN” respectively are selected as main research objects. Based on the three-dimensional transformations of eco-translatology, the two translations are compared and analyzed in linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions, and the reasons why the latter is superior to the former are concluded in hopes of providing certain references for the translation of similar Chinese classics, helping more Chinese classics enter the world, and further promoting the improvement of Chinese cultural soft power.

Keywords: Eco-translatology, Three-dimensional Transformations; *The Travel Dairies of Xu Xiake*; Translation of Classics.

1. Introduction

In recent years, China has paid more and more attention to cultural self-confidence and put forward the strategy of cultural “going out”. Excellent Chinese classics are the representatives of excellent traditional Chinese culture, and they can “go out” through the bridge of translation. *The Travel Dairies of Xu Xiake* written by Xu Xiake is not only a travel diary, but also a famous geographical and geological classic and a literary masterpiece. Scholars at home and abroad have done a lot of studies on it. However, there are not many English translations of this great book. There are three notable English translations so far and relatively few studies on them. The translation by Li Qi was published earlier, and Li Fangfang [1] has made a comparative study of this version and the translation by Lu and Jia using eco-translatology. Inspired by this, Lu and Jia’s translation are compared with the latest one.

2. Source Text and Studies on its English Translation

Xu Xiake was an outstanding traveler, geographer, historian and writer in the Ming Dynasty. He completed his work *The Travel Dairies of Xu Xiake* in 1642 [2]. This book is not only a classic of geoscience systematically investigating China’s geology and geomorphology, but also a masterpiece of tourism describing the Chinese landscape, as well as a great literature with beautiful words, which has a far-reaching influence at home and abroad [3].

This classic was introduced to the West earlier. About ten years after Xu Xiake’s death, the Italian missionary Martino Martini used it to assist him in compiling a map of China [3]. France, the United Kingdom, the United States and other countries have a certain amount of researches on it. Dr. Needham, a famous British scientist, an expert in the history of science and an academician of the Royal Society, spoke highly of Xu Xiake and his book.

However, there are few English translations of this great work. So far, there are three versions, all of which are not complete versions. In 1974, the translation by Professor Li Qi was published. In 2010, the translation by Lu Changhuai and Jia Xiuhai was published. In 2016, the translation by Li Weirong et al. was published and it belongs to “Library of Chinese Classics”, a project of classics translation and publication [4].

Among 400 papers about this masterpiece on CNKI, there are less than 20 papers studying its English translation. And the studies mainly include the following aspects: the English translation situation, the English translation of place names, the English translation of weights and measures. The English version of Li Qi was published earlier, and Li Fangfang [1] has made a comparative study of this version and the version by Lu and Jia using eco-translatology. Inspired by this, Lu Chang and Jia’s version are compared with the latest version, i.e., the version of “Library of Chinese Classics”, and the advantages of the latest one are concluded, in order to provide some reference for the translation of similar classics.

3. Theoretical Foundation

The concept of eco-translatology is a new translation theory proposed by Hu Gengshen [5] in recent years. Eco-translatology summarizes the translation method as three-dimensional transformations. Linguistic dimensional transformation refers to the translator’s appropriate transformation of language forms in the process of translation. Cultural dimensional translation means that the translator pays attention to adapting to the whole cultural system of the source language, and focuses on the differences in nature and content between the source language culture and the target language culture while making linguistic transformation. In addition to paying attention to the transformation of linguistic information and the transmission of cultural connotations, the translator should also focus on the communicative level in the process of translation, and pay attention to whether the communicative intention in the original text is reflected in the

translation [6]. Only when the translation achieves corresponding transformations in at least these three aspects can it fully preserve and transform the linguistic, cultural and communicative ecology of the original text, so that it can withstand the test and survive in the new ecological environment [7].

The translation method of three-dimensional transformations is also the most important index to evaluate the quality of translation. It can be applied to evaluate whether the linguistic, cultural and communicative information of the original text are well retained and transformed into the ecology of the translation, and it is an evaluation of the translation itself [8].

4. Three-dimensional Transformations in the Translation of “Tiantai SHAN”

According to eco-translatology, only when the translator truly makes transformations of at least three dimensions in the translation process can an appropriate translation be produced [9].

4.1. Linguistic Dimensional Transformation

There are obvious expression differences between Chinese and English. The translator should first consider the linguistic transformation when translating. At the linguistic level, the translator must first translate the original meaning completely and accurately. The translator also needs to carefully choose words according to the context and try his best to use accurate and authentic words.

There are some mistranslations in Lu and Jia's translation. The translation of Lu and Jia is called TT1, and the translation of “Library of Chinese Classics” is called TT2. The examples is as follows:

Example 1:

TT1: When climbing, I had to hug the cliff as the holes were barely big enough to hold a toe [10].

TT2: When climbing, I had to hug the cliff as the holes were only big enough to hold half of one foot [3].

In this case, Lu and Jia committed the fault of interpreting without real understanding. After verification, “*zhi*” in the original here does not mean the toe, but the foot. According to the actual situation, if each hole on a wall can only accommodate a toe, ordinary people are unable to pass against the wall. After all, ordinary people cannot climb walls like Spider man. If half a foot can fit in each hole, it is possible to pass. TT2 can be described as excellence. In TT2 “*zhi*” is translated into “foot”, correctly dealing with this extremely error-prone place.

In the process of translation, the translator often needs to choose words carefully and strive to present the best translation. Comparing the two versions of “Tiantai SHAN”, Lu and Jia's translation has the problem of misnomer, while the translation of “Library of Chinese Classics” is accurate in choosing words, for example:

Example 2:

TT1: I found a waterfall coming down from a col, running freely and quickly [10].

TT2: I found a waterfall crashing down from a col, running freely and quickly [3].

The original sentence describes a cascading waterfall, and the two versions use “come” and “crash” to describe the waterfall respectively. In TT1 “come” is too common to

reflect the spectacularity of the waterfall. TT2 uses the word “crash”, which in the Oxford Dictionary means: to hit sth hard while moving, causing noise and/or damage; to make sth hit sb/sth in this way [11]. A raging waterfall immediately appears before the readers' eyes as they read the word “crash”.

4.2. Cultural Dimensional Transformation

The language is the carrier of culture. In addition to the language form, the translator should also pay attention to the cultural connotations behind the language. *The Travel Dairies of Xu Xiake* is a geographical work, in which place names and landscape names abound.

For the translation of place names, landscape names and other names, Lu and Jia directly uses *pinyin* and the method of literal translation. “The Lianghuang Mountain” and “the Pine Gate Ridge” are examples. In the translation of “Library of Chinese Classics”, the method of “transliteration + Chinese name (+ literal translation)” is adopted for the names that appear for the first time (except for the title). This practice not only retains the phonological feature of this name, but also conveys its cultural meaning.

Both common place names and landscape names are often composed of their own names and category names, or proper names and general names [12]. For example, the names of administrative areas are generally composed of their own names and attribute names, such as Ninghai County and Fenghua County, and landscape names are generally composed of their own names and landscape category words, such as Tiantai Mountain and Songmen Ridge.

In the 1980s, through the joint efforts of the Chinese government and the academic community, Chinese *pinyin* was adopted as a unified standard for the spelling of Chinese personal names, place names and other proper nouns, which has been recognized internationally [13]. At present, the common method of place names translation in the sinological field is to first give the Chinese *pinyin* of the name, then the Chinese, and last the literal meaning put in a parenthesis if necessary.

Capitalizing the category words SHAN and XIAN is based on the following consideration: When the place names appear for the first time, the words marking their attributes or categories are highlighted, so that the readers will know that xxx SHAN is a mountain and xxx XIAN is a county in subsequent reading [13], eliminating the dyslexia and smoothly conveying the communicative intention of the original text. Last but not least, it is helpful for foreign friends to learn Chinese and improve the soft power of Chinese culture [4].

4.3. Communicative Dimensional Transformation

Communicative dimensional transformation refers to that the translator focuses on the communicative level in addition to the transformation of linguistic information and the transmission of cultural meanings, and pays attention to whether the communicative intention in the source language system is transmitted to the readers [14]. Theoretically, the transformation of this dimension is the result of the further deepening and development of the above two dimensions [15].

Comparing the two translations, Lu and Jia's translation often fails to conform to the English expression habits and its expressions lack logic frequently, which causes difficulty achieving the communicative effect. For example:

Example 3:

TT1: After a two-*li* journey, I found myself looking down at a protruding rock, which was rather beautiful and impressive. But when I arrived there, I found that a monk had built a hut in front of the Cave for Huang's Buddhist Sutras. He had piled stones at the opening of the cave to block the draught. I sighed with regret at this. I backtracked to the Taibai Hall and ascended to the top along a path [10].

TT2: After a two-*li* journey, I found myself looking down at a protruding rock which was rather beautiful and impressive, but when I arrived there, I sighed with regret because I found that a monk had built a hut in front of Huangjing DONG, and he had piled stones at the opening of the cave to block the draught. Hence I backtracked to Taibai TANG and ascended to the top along a path [3].

The original text expresses Xu Xiake's sign of regret when he learned the truth about the stone. TT1 is in the same order as the original text, first describing what Xu Xiake saw and then expressing his regret. In TT2 the word order is adjusted and it first expresses Xu Xiake's sigh when he saw the big stone blocking the door, and then uses "because" to lead to the reason for his sigh. Generally speaking, if there is a narrative part and a statement part in English, the statement part (judgements, conclusions, etc.) comes first, and the narrative part (facts, descriptions, etc.) comes second. In Chinese, the order is often reversed [16]. Therefore, TT2 is more in line with the English expression habits and successfully realizes the communicative intention of the original text. In terms of English and Chinese, Chinese is paratactic while English is hypotactic. There are few logical words in Chinese while English often uses a variety of means to express relations and connections [16]. TT1 adopts the method of division and it is loosely structured. Meanwhile, the lack of connectives leads to the lack of logic. By contrast, TT2 adds "because", "and", "hence" and other connectives to reflect the logical chain of the original text. It is more very compact and accords with the hypotactic characteristics of English, successfully realizing the communicative intention.

5. Conclusion

The excellent Chinese classics contain rich and excellent traditional Chinese culture. With the improvement of China's international status and the in-depth development of Sino-foreign cultural exchanges, China now attaches more importance to culture. In this favorable ecological environment of translation, it is easier for Chinese classics to go out.

From the perspective of linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions, the translation of "Library of Chinese Classics" is better than that by Lu and Jia. The former uses a variety of translation techniques, such as combination, addition, annotation, parataxis-hypotaxis transformation, and pays attention to the changes of translation ecological environment, which helps it meet the requirements of multi-dimensional transformations. Therefore, its quality is higher.

In fact, linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions are integrated and closely related in translation practice, and no dimension exists independently. The texts to be translated are of different genres, and the emphases may be different, which requires the translator to meet the multi-dimensional transformations as much as possible according to the whole translation ecological environment, so as to produce high-quality translations.

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