

Translation Strategies in Zhao Yanchun's *Three Word Primer in English Rhyme*

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Abstract: Under the background of Chinese culture “going out”, the translation and introduction of classic books is of great significance for telling Chinese stories and disseminating Chinese culture. Based on the theory of domestication and foreignization of Venuti, the research analyzes the translation strategies applied by Zhao Yanchun in rendering the *Sanzijing* into *Three Word Primer in English Rhyme* from its form and content, and finds that the translation is almost completely foreignized in terms of form and is highly domesticated in terms of content, successfully reproducing the sound effect, rhyme and literariness of the *Sanzijing*. However, inevitably, the ideological content and cultural connotation in the source text are damaged, which goes against to the goal of cultural communication and may even cause misinterpretation. This paper affirms the necessity to consider literariness in the translation of classic books, but we should not pay too much attention to the foreignization of form and let the content to cater to the form, resulting in the loss of thoughts and culture embodied in classic books. Domestication and foreignization strategies are embodied in form and content, and the balance between them is worth considering in the translation process, so as to maximize the communication across cultures.

Keywords: Domestication, Foreignization, *Three Word Primer in English Rhyme*, Zhao Yanchun.

1. Introduction

The 19th CPC National Congress emphasizes the importance of telling Chinese stories and spreading Chinese culture to the outside world. China is in a critical period of going out culturally, while the translations of Chinese classics, which carry the essence of Chinese culture, values and worldviews, are an important force in promoting the outward dissemination of Chinese culture. However, “the existing translations of Chinese classics are not in a good situation” [1], and “there are about 35,000 classical books in China, but only about two-thousandths of them have been translated into foreign languages to date” [2]. Therefore, in the context of Chinese culture “going out”, it is urgent to solve the problem of “how to successfully translate more Chinese classics containing the essence of Chinese culture to foreign countries”.

In recent years, the *Three Word Primer in English Rhyme* translated by Zhao Yanchun (hereinafter referred to as “Translation of *Sanzijing* by Zhao” or “Zhao’s Version”) has been well received by both Chinese and foreign readers, serving as a successful example of Chinese cultural dissemination abroad. The *Sanzijing* has been translated into foreign languages for a long time. Obviously, there is no lack of excellent versions, but “basically all of them are translated by semantic interpretations of the original text in a foreign language” [1], failing to retain the linguistic characteristics, rhyme and rhythm of the original text. From the perspective of semantic reproduction, these current translations can be deemed as well-rendered, but in terms of the language form, they lose the beauty in rhythm, phonology, etc. of the original text. Therefore, such translations have lost its classic character, so that they cannot be counted as a classic. Zhao’s Version, on the other hand, retains the “three-word” feature of the original text and the literary character of the *Sanzijing* as a classic. This paper, based on Zhao’s Version, analyzes the translation strategies embodied in it on the basis of Venuti’s theory of domestication and foreignization, and discusses what can be

used for reference and what is inappropriate in these translation strategies, with a view to providing reference for the translation of similar Chinese canonical books.

2. Current research on Zhao Yanchun's *Three Word Primer in English Rhyme*

Since its publication, Zhao Yanchun's *Three Word Primer in English Rhyme* has received extensive attention from the translation field because it is the first rendition that is exactly the same as the original text in terms of the number of words or characters and reproduces the rhyme and rhythmic effect of the original text. A search at the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) reveals that studies on Zhao's Version mainly include: 1. exploring the cultural self-consciousness and cultural awareness of canonical translations based on Zhao's Version; 2. appreciating and criticizing Zhao's Version from different theoretical perspectives, including without limitation functional equivalence, “Three Beauties”, aesthetics, and text typology of Reiss; 3. making a comparative study of Zhao's Version with the previous translation, in order to explore the advantages and disadvantages of Zhao's Version; 4. Research on the translation strategies, skills, and procedures of Zhao's Version, such as domestication and foreignization, implicitness and explicitness, semantic and communicative translation. Most of the existing studies praise Zhao's Version, saying that Zhao's Version has achieved fidelity in “sound, form and meaning”, embodying cultural self-awareness, and has been well received by both Chinese and foreign readers, achieving excellence in cultural dissemination and communication. This paper, with a more critical attitude, not only analyzes the advantages of Zhao's Version, but also focuses on its disadvantages. After comparing Zhao's Version with the original text, it is found that Zhao Yanchun chooses the translation strategy based on foreignization in form and the strategy based on domestication in content. He prefers words

and translation methods that can achieve the prosodic effect of the original text rather than convey the content and cultural connotation of the original text. As a result, the translation cannot fully reproduce the profound thoughts and culture contained in the original text, which is not conducive to cultural dissemination, and may even lead to cultural distortion and dissolution.

The terms "domestication" and "foreignization" are explicitly proposed by Venuti in *The Translator's Invisibility*. According to the definition given by Shuttleworth and Cowie in the *Dictionary of Translation Studies*, domestication is "a term used by Venuti (1995) to describe the translation strategy in which a transparent, fluent style is adopted in order to minimize the strangeness of the foreign text for TL readers", and foreignization is "designate the type of translation in which a TT is produced which deliberately breaks target conventions by retaining something of the foreignness of the original" [3]. And "the discussion of domestication and foreignization should be divided into linguistic and cultural dimensions". Language and content are inseparable, as language is the carrier of content, and content cannot exist without language. This paper analyzes the reflection of domestication and foreignization in Zhao's Version from two dimensions: linguistic form and cultural content, exploring the dialectical relationship between domestication and foreignization, especially the dialectical relationship between foreignization of form and domestication of content in Zhao's Version, as well as the reference for the translation of similar Chinese canonical texts.

3. Domestication and foreignization in Zhao Yanchun's *Three Word Primer* in English Rhyme

3.1. Foreignization in form

The *Sanzijing* has three major linguistic features: it has three Chinese characters on each line, rhymes and can be read rhythmically. In order to reproduce the rhyme and rhythmic features of the original text, Zhao Yanchun translated the *Sanzijing* "by analogy (analogy), i.e., by using three words in English as analogous to three characters in Chinese" [4]. And at the same time, he adopted the "two-sentence rhyming scheme" [4], which enables Zhao's Version to reproduce the neatness and rhythmicity of the original text. According to Venuti's domestication and foreignization, Zhao's Version is clearly foreignized in form. However, the *Sanzijing* "does not have the same rhyme pattern from beginning to end, but changes its rhymes according to the content, such as: a rhyming every four sentences, and another rhyming every six sentences" [5]. Zhao's Version strictly follows the rhyme scheme of "AABB" and Zhao Yanchun chooses the diction and renditions under the guidance of the rhyme scheme of "AABB". This may be because, while trying to reproduce the rhyme and rhythm of the original text, Zhao Yanchun intends to enhance the aesthetic effect of the translated text, in order to achieve the goal of "translating poetry with poetry, and scripture with scripture" [4], so that the translated text has the classic character of the original text.

There are differences between any two cultures and languages, and it is already very difficult to reproduce the original content as much as possible while ensuring the consistency of language form and style. It is even more difficult for Zhao's Version to not only reproduce the original's literariness, but also to try to make the translation

rhythmically superior to the original, maintaining the classic nature. The *Sanzijing* is a classical Chinese book with refined language and rich connotations. To translate a sentence composed of three Chinese characters into English with three words while reproducing the poetic effect of the original will definitely result in the loss of the original's ideological and cultural implications in the translation. For example, in Zhao's Version, "Dou Yanshan, You yifang. Jiao wuzi, Ming juyang (窦燕山, 有义方。教五子, 名俱扬。)" is translated as "Dough by name. Fulfilled his aim. His five sons. Became famous ones." In this translation, "aim" and "name" form an AA-type rhyming pattern, which is the result of the translator's intentional change of the original meaning in order to pursue the rhythmical effect. However, the sentence "Fulfilled his aim" does not contain the words "Fulfilled his aim". "Fulfilled his aim" does not cover the meaning expressed in the original "有义方", which means "good family education". Thus, the translation cannot reflect the idea that "good family education is an important factor in children's success", resulting in the missing of original's semantic and cultural connotations in the translated text. Another example is that "Jun ze jing, Chen ze zhong (君则敬, 臣则忠。)" is rendered as "Lord loves subjects. And enjoys respects." This sentence is discussing the relationship between the emperor and the subjects in ancient China, and it means that "the emperor should respect his subjects, and the subjects should be loyal to their emperor." However, for the sake of the rhyming effect, Zhao Yanchun replaces "loyalty" and "respects". And both "love" and "respect" are not correct translation of the original's "jing 敬" and "zhong 忠", instead of "respect" and "loyalty". Instead, "jing 敬" refers to "respect" and "zhong 忠". It is obvious that the meaning of the original has been distorted in the translation.

Undoubtedly, the above translations are result of the deliberate choices by Zhao Yanchun in order to reproduce the rhyming effect of the original, but they fail to faithfully convey the semantic meaning and cultural connotations of the original while ensuring the rhyming effect of the original is achieved in the translated text. For this purpose, Zhao Yanchun intentionally cuts down the meanings of the original in order to realize the formal equivalence, resulting in the semantic inequivalence and loss of cultural connotations. As a result, this paper concludes that, when translating classics such as the *Sanzijing*, it is necessary to pursue the representation of the original's literariness, because "any translation that only reproduces the content, but not the form, is not a complete version" [6]. However, in the process of translation, one should not put the incidental before the fundamental and pay excessive attention to the form while ignoring the ideas and culture contained in the original. After all, the purpose of translation is to promote cultural exchange.

3.2. Domestication in content

Some research statistics show that the domesticated translations in Zhao's Version reaches "48.25%" when dealing with the content rich in cultural connotations [7]. After comparison, it is found that, in some of the domesticated translations in Zhao's Version, words with Chinese characteristics are domesticated into words unique to the Western world. This results in the loss of cultural connotations and may even lead to misinterpretation of Chinese culture among target readers. For example, in addition to the above-mentioned sentence "Jun ze jing, Chen

ze zhong (君则敬, 臣则忠。) – which is rendered as "Lord loves subjects. And enjoys respects.", the sentence "Sangang zhe, Jun chen yi (三纲者, 君臣义。)" is translated into "Three tenets always. Subject Lord obeys." In these sentences, "Lord" means "God" in the Western world, as well as other superior persons having a certain degree of power. "Lord" is absolutely not equivalent to the Chinese character "jun 君", which means "emperor". Therefore, these translations fail to reflect the relationship between the "emperor" and the "subjects" in ancient China. Moreover, "Yang bu jiao, Fu zhi guo. Jiao buy an, Shi zhi duo. (养不教, 父之过。教不严, 师之惰。)" is rendered into "What's a father. A good teacher. What's a teacher. A strict preacher." The translation comparing "father" to "good teacher" can convey the meaning that "a father has the duty to educate his children in addition to the duty of raising them" but comparing "teacher" to "preacher" can convey the meaning that "a father has the duty to educate his children in addition to the duty to raise them". However, comparing "teacher" to "preacher" may create ambiguity and change the content of the teacher's job in China. In addition, the original condemns both the father and the teacher for not fulfilling their duties, and the translation fails to reflect this meaning. Such examples are not uncommon in Zhao's Version and will not be repeated here.

Cao Minglun, in his research on the Chinese translation debate on foreignization and domestication, claimed that "only by "translating what the target does not have with what it has" can it be ensured that the target readers, who are not familiar with the source language, can accept unfamiliar (heterogeneous) concepts in familiar (domesticized) languages" [8]. Venuti once said in an interview that "domesticized translation is not foreignized, but foreignizing translation can only be achieved with domesticized language" [9]. Therefore, it is reasonable for Zhao Yanchun to translate heterogeneous cultures in domesticized language. However, this study finds that domestication must be used with caution for words rich in cultural implications, especially when they are directly replaced by words specific to the target language. Otherwise, it is very easy to cause the lack of cultural connotations in the original and fail to achieve the purpose of cultural diffusion.

4. Conclusion

Zhao Yanchun himself has proposed that "the translation of Chinese classics should reproduce both the canonicity and culture, so as to achieve the maximum degree of semantic equivalence, stylistic harmony, and linguistic effect" [6]. On the whole, Zhao's Version adopts foreignization in form, and is close to the original in rhyme and rhythm, achieving "stylistic harmony". However, Zhao's Version still has room for improvement in terms of "semantic equivalence and linguistic effect". The reason for this is that Zhao's Version has no choice but to make sacrifices in the representation of semantic meaning and linguistic effect as Zhao Yanchun pursues complete foreignization in form. In the meantime, Zhao Yanchun is biased in his domesticized translation of the

cultural contents. In the translation field, most people agree that foreignization in form will lead to a raw and incomprehensible translation with low readability, which in turn affects the acceptance of the translation in the target society. But Zhao's Version is highly domesticized in form and at the same time is still fluent and highly readable. This proves that the translation of Chinese classics is not limited to interpretive translations that fail to restore the poetic effect of the original. The main goal of translating Chinese classics is to disseminate Chinese culture. It is necessary to be wary of putting the cart before the horse, that is, to apply improper domestication of the content in order to realize the foreignization in form, undermining the culturality of the original.

To sum up, domestication and foreignization are not dichotomous, and are not limited to the cultural level, but are simultaneously embodied in and play an important role in the translation of both content and form. The balance between the two affects the role of translation in cultural transmission and is worth considering by translators in the translation process.

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