

Chinese Translators' Opinions on Cultural Differences in Chinese Classics Translation

Nannan Ma

Shenyang Aerospace University, Shenyang, Liaoning, 116001, China

Abstract

Compared with traditional translation studies, Medio-translatology, a branch of comparative studies, tends to study translation from the perspective of culture. Chinese Classic works symbolize Chinese wisdom and spirit. This article tends to study the principles and strategies applied in translating Chinese culture from the perspective of Medio-translatology. The translation process of Chinese classic works should be interdisciplinary and culture-oriented, aiming at instructing the culture involved and avoiding cultural revulsion.

Keywords

Medio-translatology; Chinese Culture; Translation.

1. Introduction

Since the 17th National Congress of the CPC, enhancing the national cultural soft power has been enlisted in China's developmental guidelines and the focus of Chinese translators has been converged from localizing foreign cultures into Chinese Culture's "going out". Chinese culture has a history of more than 5000 years and is the wisdom and talent of Chinese people. Understanding Chinese culture is an inevitable trend. Dissemination of Chinese culture may deepen other nations' understanding of Chinese people and enhancing their communications with China.

Translation has become the linkage between Chinese literature and foreign cultures. Translation is of both cultural collision and infusion. Consequently, one of the most stark issues that translators in China face in translating Chinese classics is to meet the requirements of recipients from both cultures. Localization of Chinese culture in translation is essential in the field of Chinese classics translation.

This article aims to shed more light on the problems Chinese translators have encountered in the translation process and the translation strategies they have applied in translating Chinese classics. Chinese translators' opinions about differences between Chinese and Western target groups were viewed and related localization activities were investigated.

2. Previous Studies of Chinese Classics Translation

With such a long history, it is difficult to define Chinese Classic literary works. Chinese classics can be referred as the literary works which can display the core value of Chinese culture and its cultural characteristics. Chinese classics can also be referred to the ancient books with academic value. The number of Chinese classics is huge with roughly 80000 kinds of ancient books. Though it is difficult to define Chinese classics from the etymology, the collation of ancient books began in 26 BC in Western Han Dynasty, presided by Liu Xiang and Liu Xin. The collation work included searching, collating, classifying, cataloging, etc.

"Qi Lue", the first Chinese bibliography book, was compiled. "Qi Lue" divides the collected books into six categories: Six Arts, Zhuzi, military books, numerology, square techniques, poetry, Fu and Lue. The book has been lost for a long time, but its essence has been preserved in the

Hanshu Yiwenzhi 《汉书·艺文志》 of Ban Gu. Traditional classification method finally formed in Tang Dynasty by Wei Zheng, listing as JING (经), SHI (史), ZI (子), JI (集), which was then categorized into 40 items. JING refers to the Confucian books, political and religious books, ethical books and doctrines in ancient society. SHI refers to historical works with diverse genres. ZI refers to the works written by ancient philosophers.

In contemporary studies, Wang Rongpei, who mainly focuses on the classification of literary classics, classifies Chinese classics into prose, poetry, drama and novel (as cited in Yao, 2010, p. 18). From the style, Chinese classics can be categorized as the artistic style and the sci-tech. Artistic classics refer to literary works, concerning poetry, novel and other Chinese classics. The sci-tech style refers to scientific classics and military-guiding classics (Q. Zhang, 2009, p. 104).

Previous studies in the field of Chinese Classics have mainly focused on the contents studies of Chinese classics translation work. Western translators have contributed a lot in Chinese classic translation. Most of foreign translators strive to show the genuine Chinese culture in the translation work. Since the 19th century, Chinese translators have started to translate Chinese classics. Currently, the studies of Chinese Classics are also disciplinary. Rosemont, Jr., Henry, and Roger T. Ames attempt to show the important role the Chinese Classics – Xiaojing plays in comparative philosophy. Rosemont and Ames translate “Xiaojing” as “family reverence” to emphasize pious deference to people—“living and dead in this world”—rather than to religious figures associated with the major Western religions aiming at having a positive impact on the readers [1]. Tung-En Chien and Shelley Shu-Ching Young develops an image-based reading system to help people comprehending Chinese Classics [2]. Yao Zhenjun tends to solve the problem of extracting the cultural terms in Chinese classics and their related English translation versions from the perspective of heterogeneous literature. Zhe designs a tool of text processing to realize the matching of patterned texts aiming at improving the translation operating efficiency.

Though studies on Chinese classics is comprehensive, little is known about Chinese translators' opinions on cultural differences in Chinese classics translation and on how to localize these classic works. This article aims to shed more light on Chinese translators' opinions on Chinese classics translation and to further investigate their localization activities in translating Chinese classics.

3. Method

3.1. Participant

12 Chinese translators in the field of Chinese Classics translation voluntarily participated in this study without any incentives. They were interviewed by the author of the article, who is also a translator in the field of Chinese classics translation. The interviews were performed via a working platform - Ding Talk. The interviewees were chosen following two criteria. Firstly, they should have the experience of translating Chinese Classics works in both Chinese and English, to ensure that they are familiar with the research target. Secondly, they must be native Chinese with a comprehensive understanding of western cultures, to ensure that cultural bias cannot affect the results of the study.

Eight female and four male translators participated. They were on average of 38 years old ($SD=5.5$). They have been working in the field for 9.5 years on average ($SD=2.8$). Eleven participants have got a master degree in linguistics or cultural studies. One participant has got a doctor degree in economics.

3.2. Procedure and Interview Themes

All the interviews were conducted and recorded via Ding Talk. Before the interview, all the interviewees were informed about the research goals and targets. They were informed that the

interview would be recorded for further study and all of them were consent with the interviewing process.

The theme encompassed five questions to get insight in the translators' opinions if Chinese classics translation were proposed, but not in the same sequence. Why are Chinese classics translated? What kinds of Chinese classics ought to be translated into English? Who are optimal translators of Chinese classics, sinologists, domestic translators, or cooperative translation? How should Chinese classics be translated and communicated? How cultural factors are considered in the translation of Chinese classics?

In the interview, the interviewees' demographic information concerning age, profession, education background, and research interests are taken down. Each interview lasts at least 30 minutes on average.

3.3. Data Analysis

The contents of each interview were transcribed verbatim by the AI recorder of Ding Talk. Despite some minus deviations, most research materials were transcribed accurately. The author further analyzes the research materials in an inductive approach. Data analyzers first read through each recorded interview, tagged relevant fragments and formed a code book which sorted the research materials into the following five categories.

Cultural Influence in Chinese Classics Translation

The Ideal Translators

Necessities of localization

Experiences related to localization

The Essence of Chinese Classics Translation

All the five categories were composed of several subcategories, aiming to define appropriate strategies in Chinese classics translation. The subcategories is designed as 'content', 'style' and 'visuals'. The content refers to the comprehension of Chinese classics. The 'style' refers to the writing style or translating style. The 'visual' part refers to the assistance of tools, such as photography, multimedia videos, etc. The first three parts could be integrated as the parts concerning the concept of translation. The fourth part demonstrated the use of tools and style sheets.

4. Results

4.1. The Necessities of Chinese Classics Translation

Most translators in the interview believed that Chinese classics are not only a cultural representative of Chinese civilization but also a brilliant historical heritage of the world, which should be possessed and shared by people from different nations. Translation of Chinese Classics is also a process of creation. Literal writing and localization should be merged. Most translators believed translation of Chinese classics is of significance. They thought that understanding Chinese classics would not simply affect cultural exchange and cooperation with the foreign countries, but would also enhance the understand and construction of Chinese civilization.

4.2. Cultural Influence in Chinese Classics Translation

The skill of cross-cultural understanding is essential in Chinese classics translation. Understanding of both cultures and languages is a prerequisite for translators, who are required to be a competent professional. Chinese translators expect to communicate Chinese cultures to readers from other cultures. Readers from other cultures may extract meanings from the translation work and understands Chinese cultures.

Most interviewees were conscious of cultural differences between Chinese and Western cultures. All of them considered it necessary to take cultural differences into consideration and to avoid cultural clashes.

4.3. Necessities of localization

Most interviewees shared the opinion that Western people had different expectations from Chinese classics. Overall, they perceived that Chinese classics was diverse from Western classics. The correlation between Chinese and Western classics was not so close that it is difficult to localize Chinese culture in translating process.

Conflicts are inevitable in the translation process. To express Chinese culture accurately to foreign readers, localization may not always be a good choice. Most interviewees thought misunderstanding and confusion could be eased with clear and concise explanation of diversities. Most interviewees mentioned the translators could cultivate readers' thinking and understanding of Chinese culture with detailed illustrations via multiple tools.

4.4. Translators' Role in Chinese Classic Translation

Who are optimal translators of Chinese classics, sinologists, domestic translators, or cooperative translation? There is no clear answer to this question. In the interviews, most participants viewed translators as gatekeepers with the power to filter information.

In the translating process, translators regulate the flow of information and deal with cultural differences with affluent language and knowledge. Translators make decisions about valuable information in a systematic way. Translators are the agents to determine the style, thinking patterns, set of minds and allocation of information in the translation work.

5. Conclusion

Translation is a kind of communication between languages. It is not only a process of language conversion, but also a process of cultural exchange and cultural communication. The translation of our traditional culture often focuses on language, while translatology helps us pay more attention to the exchange of Chinese and Western cultures in the process of translation. Therefore, in our future translation process, we should carry out the practical activity of translation from the perspective of translatology and adopt more flexible methods to deal with cultural differences, Promote cultural exchanges between them.

References

- [1] Wu, C., Sha, H. The classics of ancient Chinese literature. *Front. Lit. Stud. China* 1, 50–79 (2007). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11702-007-0003-9>
- [2] Chien TE., Young S.SC. (2019) Design and Development of an Image-Based System to Facilitate Reading Comprehension of Chinese Classic Literature. In: Ahram T., Karwowski W., Taiar R. (eds) *Human Systems Engineering and Design. IHSED 2018. Advances in Intelligent Systems and Computing*, vol 876. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-02053-8_40
- [3] Susan B, Andre L. (1990) *Translation, History and Culture*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language and Education Press: 7-12.