# Cultural Translation and Translation Culture —Standing on a Position of Chinese

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With the development of economy, society and culture in contemporary China, the status of Chinese as a subject of translation has been strengthened and promoted, which is reflected in translation strategies, translation process and translation texts. In this paper, the discussion of cultural translation is no longer rigidly adhered to the so-called preaching of translation theory, but mainly through several cases (Facebook, Meta, Gourd Ladle Pouring Rain, Chinese Calendar Crosswords and Soulscape, etc.)of cultural translation in China's current real life, to elaborate that standing on a position of Chinese, translation as a branch of learning, needs to emphasize Chinese flavor and Chinese culture. Of course, great works will not lose their greatness due to translation, but if we do not realize that the language in translation is deeply rooted in the cultural soil, then translation seems to be difficult to achieve an idealized realm and scale. In the context of globalization, it is inevitable and indisputable that cultures communicate in all directions, influence, absorb and integrate each other. In such a process, whether it is the introduction, understanding and absorption of culture, or the comparison, selection and blending of culture, translation is indispensable. Nowadays, more and more translators and translation researchers not only pay attention to the relationship between translation and language issues such as phonetics, semantics and discourse, but also put forward the concepts of cultural context and cross-cultural communication. Understanding and grasping the cultural background, cultural knowledge, especially cultural differences, has become an increasingly important issue. The realization of ideal translation depends not only on the profound language foundation and the application of language skills, but also on the translator's ability to understand and experience the cross-cultural connotations of both sides and even multi-cultural

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In the catalogue of disciplines in China, there are eight secondary disciplines under the first-level discipline of Chinese language and literature, including linguistics and applied linguistics, Chinese linguistics and philology, literature and art, Chinese classical philology, ancient Chinese literature, modern and contemporary Chinese literature, Chinese minority languages and literature, comparative literature and world literature. Among them, there is a discipline direction in the secondary discipline field of comparative literature and world literature, which is called translatology; in recent years, referring to the idea of setting up the second-level disciplines under the first-level disciplines of Chinese

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language and literature, the state of China has adjusted the catalogue of the first-level disciplines of foreign language and literature according to the idea of "language belongs to language, literature belongs to literature," breaking the way that the first-level discipline of foreign language and literature was classified into the second-level disciplines according to different languages in the past, and adjusting it into five. One of them is translatology or translation studies. The other four are foreign linguistics and applied linguistics, foreign literature, cross-cultural studies, national and regional studies. It is not difficult to see that with the increasing influence of Chinese culture on the world, the role of translation has also been highlighted with the times, what to translate and how to translate have become the primary issues in front of academia and translation fields.

Comparative Literature and World Literature as a secondary discipline of the first-level discipline of Chinese language and literature, is in the Chinese Department, not in the Foreign Language Department, however, it also involves translation

to some extent. In recent years, there have been a variety of translation theories in China, but with the conversion from academic degrees to professional degrees, the State of China advocates professional degree education, establishes many professional degrees, for instance, MTI (Master of Translation and Interpretation), MTCSOL (Master of Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages), and so on, which all emphasizes more and more practicality and application. Recently, the National People's Congress of China passed and promulgated the Vocational Education Law, which further shows that the state pays more attention to the cultivation of applied talents of professional education, and needs more practical talents of translation. Meanwhile, more and more international conferences on translation focus on case studies rather than theoretical studies. For instance, on 15-16 October, 2022, the School of Linguistics & Translation of Badr University in Cairo, Egypt, held its Second International Conference on Literature, Linguistics, Translation and Language Teaching, was a bit similar to the Second LOTUS International Language and Translation Studies Conference holding on 3-4 November 2022 by Selcuk University School of Foreign Languages in Türkiye. The title of my keynote speech at the first conference was: "Today's Literary Theories in China," which was formally published in Symploke (No.1-2,2019), a journal of comparative literature in the United States. Also at that conference, an Arabic-speaking Italian academic spoke on the topic: Is There a Standard Translation Theory? My keynote speech paper argues that nowadays comparative literature should return to "literature" itself and have the consciousness of de-theorization(Zhang, 2019). Of course, the theorization of comparative literature studies, has a certain historical background and reasons, and has had a wide impact and made some contributions, but the current reflection has the danger of leading to the separation of literary studies from "literature" itself. In the speech, I quoted the concept of "compulsory interpretation" of Professor Jiang Zhang at University of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and comments on this concept from Professor Longxi Zhang at City University of Hong Kong. The development of western literary theory in the 20th century has made literary criticism more systematic, but at the same time, there is a trend that theory replaces literature and produces what Jiang Zhang calls "compulsory interpretation." It is the only way for the normal development of literary criticism to pay attention to the reality of the text and prevent the compulsory interpretation which is divorced from literary works and far-fetched. How to establish a reasonable and convincing

explanation is a problem we need to discuss further(Zhang, 2014; Zhang, 2016). However, translation theory is another issue also need to discuss further. At the same time, it seems that we should also notice that when comparative literature and world literature in the first-level discipline of Chinese tend to de-theorize or deconstruct theorization, literary studies in the first-level discipline of foreign language and literature advocate a theoretical construction. Some time ago, Professor Dan Shen at Peking University gave a lecture on the topic of Theoretical Innovation beyond Aristotle's Narrative Research Tradition-Invisible Process and Dual Narrative Process(Lothe, 2021; Phelan, 2021). Professor Xiaoyi Zhou, a commentator at the lecture, said that both Terry Eagleton and Fredric Jameson studied the West Marxism, but Fredric Jameson was slightly inferior to Terry Eagleton precisely because the later did not have a systematic theoretical system especially without theoretical terms provided. He also said that the reason why Shen can now rank among the world's top scholars and talk to the world is that she has constructed a dual narrative theory(Shen, 2016, 2018). The other keynote speech paper entitled "Is There a Standard Translation Theory?" in Egyptian conference above argues that from the perspective of translation practice, many translation theories are either not applicable to translation practice or out of date quickly, so there is no standard translation theory.

In my opinion, no matter how many definitions and theories there are about cultural translation and translation culture, translation cannot lose its inherent cultural connotation, and if cultural connotation is lost, there will be no cultural translation, and translation culture will be lost as well. In this sense, the goal of translation is to be applied and used, and the same principle should be followed, that is, while emphasizing the application of translation, its inherent cultural connotation should not be lost. Although I may not absolutely agree with their arguments above, but inspired by these factors, this paper will not talk about translation theory, but deliberately dilute theory, mainly talk about translation cases, focusing on cultural translation cases.

### **Cases and Examples**

#### Facebook: 脸书 Lianshu or 脸谱 Lianpu?

When I was studying at Harvard University in 2006, my classmates in the same apartment often organized some activities, and every time someone took pictures. At one event, a female student from Croatia took a lot of photos,

and we wanted her to share them with everyone. She said that we could see all the photos on Facebook, so from then on, everyone started a new social media Facebook, into daily life. Later on, I also saw the English report about Hong Kong Changjiang Group's investment in Facebook, and later, the more Chinese people used Facebook, the more literal translation Lianshu of Facebook came into being.

When it comes to translating Facebook into Lianshu, I felt uncomfortable at that time. Indeed, Facebook is a combination of "face" and "book," which literally means face and book or facial book, and was originally just a store of social photos for easy sharing. However, the term Lianpu has long been used in Chinese, although it does not mean the same thing, but as a Chinese name for a social networking site or social media is much more comfortable than Lianshu, at least more like Chinese.

### VR, Meta: 元宇宙 Yuanyuzhou or 灵境 Lingjing?

Some time ago, Mark Elliot Zuckerberg changed Facebook's name to Meta, and the concept of "meta universe" quickly became popular, later on, at the beginning of 2023, ChatGPT emerged, people from all walks of life began to interpret, discuss and anticipate "meta universe" "ChatGPT." As we all know, Meta, in the contemporary context, is Metaverse, which originated from *Snow Crash* by Neal Stephenson, a famous American cyber science fiction writer, and it is not too much to call it a literary term, even in essence and function. It is the literature of Generation Z and the present era.

Neil Stephenson imagines that in the future, human beings can enter the virtual three-dimensional world simulated by computers, everything in the real world can be digitally copied, and people can do anything in real life in the virtual world through digital channels. Simply put, people can live in a virtual world, build interpersonal interaction similar to real life, meet the work, communication and entertainment scenes, whether in the conference room to talk with colleagues, or in the distant world to hang out with friends, people will be able to enter the virtual environment to gather and communicate, and through some hardware facilities (glasses, somatosensory vest, etc.) let people achieve the same sensory stimulation and feeling as in real life.

In this way, the so-called Meta is VR (Virtual Reality), which was translated as Lingjing (spiritual realm) by Xuesen Qian, the founder of China's aerospace industry and very renowned scientist, more than 30 years ago in 1990. In his

letter to Chengwei Wang, who was doing scientific research with him at that time, he said: Virtual Reality, the Chinese translation of this word can be Lingjing. I especially like "Lingjing," "which has a strong Chinese flavor."

The sentence "which has a strong Chinese flavor" tells the essence of translation. Standing on a position of Chinese, Translation, as a branch of learning, needs to emphasize Chinese flavor and Chinese culture. Of course, great works will not lose their greatness due to translation, but if we do not realize that the language in translation is deeply rooted in the cultural soil, then translation seems to be difficult to achieve an idealized realm and scale. In the context of globalization, it is inevitable and indisputable that cultures communicate in all directions, influence, absorb and integrate each other. In such a process, whether it is the introduction, understanding and absorption of culture, or the comparison, selection and blending of culture, translation is indispensable. Nowadays, more and more translators and translation researchers not only pay attention to the relationship between translation and language issues such as phonetics, semantics and discourse, but also put forward the concepts of cultural context and cross-cultural communication. Understanding and grasping the cultural background, cultural knowledge, especially cultural differences, has become an increasingly important issue. The realization of ideal translation depends not only on the profound language foundation and the application of language skills, but also on the translator's ability to understand and experience the cross-cultural connotations of both sides and even multi-cultural connotations. The translation of foreign languages into Chinese is the same as the translation of Chinese into foreign languages.

## 瓢泼大雨 Piaopodayu: Raining cats and dogs or Gourd ladle pouring rain?春节 Chunjie: Spring Festival or Dumpling Festival?

Five years ago, I published an article in *Meiwen* magazine to show a translation orientation and translation strategy. Such orientation and strategy can be understood by combining some phenomena as context. For example, at the beginning of this century, China Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that in the future, the spokesman/spokeswoman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would only release information and answer questions in Chinese, and no English translation would be provided. This requires foreign journalists to have a strong Chinese ability and level, and further urges them to learn Chinese well. Of course, this orientation and

strategy are naturally formed by relying on cultural and social development, which is in line with the reality of contemporary international culture exchanges, and peopleto-people exchange, so it is very timely and appropriate. To better illustrate this point, here is another example: in Chinese, there is such an expression as Piaopodayu (literally means "gourd ladle pouring rain,") which describes the rain is very heavy, which is a vivid expression rooted in the context of traditional Chinese culture. "Piao" is a ladle made from a dried gourd. Coincidentally, in English, there is also an idiom to express the rain is very heavy, that is, "It's raining cats and dogs." It is literally translated as there are lot of the cats and dogs down, which is also a rhetorical use rooted in the British context. In the past, if we encounter the Chinese expression Piaopodayu, we usually translate it as "It's raining cats and dogs," and when we encounter the English expression, we also translate it as Piaopodayu in Chinese, so as to facilitate the understanding of both side. However, in today's context, I do not advocate such a translation, but according to the original literal translation and annotations. This brings challenges to both translators and readers, foreigners need to understand the origin of ladle in a Chinese cultural context, Chinese people need to understand why the British use "cats and dogs" to describe rain, such challenges are beneficial to better understand the culture of both sides, so it is also conducive to cultural understanding and cultural exchanges.

Actually, many people use food names instead of traditional festival names and translations. For example, when eating "zongzi" on the Dragon Boat Festival, the Dragon Boat Festival is simply called Zongzi Festival and then translated into Zongzi Festival. When we eat "Yuebing" or mooncakes on Mid-Autumn Festival, we call it Moon Cake Festival, which is later translated into Yuebing Festival or Mooncake Festival. If it goes on like this, the Spring Festival which is the most important Chinese traditional festival will be in danger of being translated into Jiaozi Festival or Dumpling Festival. I am critical of this translation phenomenon. The reason why this is a dangerous trend is that it will aggravate foreigners' bad impression towards Chinese people as foodies, and will greatly damage the image of Chinese people, and further, it will translate the cultural connotation of Chinese traditional festivals into something just eating. So in this sense, I am very much in favor of United Nations registers 'Türkiye' as new country name to replace "Turkey."

### 九九消寒图 Jiujiuxiaohantu: Cold Elimination Chart or Chinese Calendar Crosswords?

During the Shenzhen Cultural Expo in 2018, Shenzhen Word Culture Company, whose core business is the creative development of Chinese character culture, invited me to translate the Jiujiuxiaohantu (literally Nine-Nine Cold Elimination Map) which is popular among the people of our country into English. I looked up the relevant information, generally translated as Cold Elimination Chart, but such a literal translation, if not with a large space to explain, I believe that most foreigners will be absolutely confused. I translated a large part of the explanation into English and attached it to several scholars and friends from English-speaking countries, and all the replies were "I don't understand." The reason why this company invited me to translate the word is because they encountered such a situation many times before. Then, after understanding the basic content of it, I remembered one thing the British and American people often did when they were flying and traveling in Britain and the United States: crosswords. Almost every newspaper or travel magazine has this kind of game, which is used for leisure and entertainment when people travel. Traveling in British and American countries, people often do this crossword puzzle. If you ask people in the United States and the United Kingdom what crosswords are, most people will be able to tell you the answer. Based on this understanding, I changed the English translation of "Cold Elimination Chart" into "Chinese Calendar Crosswords." Before sending the words to the company, in order to avoid the preconceived foreshadowing of the English-speaking scholars who had read the translation and English explanation of Cold Elimination Chart, I deliberately re-found several other English-speaking scholars and friends, and sent them directly, with only a few pictures of it attached. Their replies were all understood. This new translation, displayed by the company at the Shenzhen Cultural Expo, has received very good results.

### 心景 Xinjing: heartscape or soulscape?

Professor Hong Cheng at Capital University of Economics and Business has been engaged in the study of "natural writings" for a long time, and has translated and published the classic translation series of English "natural writings." She also constructed "the three-dimensional scene theory" of "natural writings." From the perspective of seeing, listening and feeling, this theory harmoniously links nature

and human beings through reading and studying natural writings. "Landscape" is to observe the natural scene with eyes, "soundscape" is to listen to the natural scene with ears, and heart scene is to experience the natural picture with heart. This kind of multi-scene inter weaves and complements each other, forming a unique "scenery" of natural writings, and also deriving unique aesthetic taste and value, which is not difficult to understand for Chinese people living in the Chinese context or in the soil of Chinese culture. For example, in our literary tradition, there is a theory of heart and nature, while the masterpiece of Chinese literary criticism is called Wenxindiaolong (The Literary Heart and the Carving of Dragons). For the English of Fengjing (seeing scene) and Shengjing (listening scene), Professor Cheng uses "landscape" and "soundscape," which is also very easy to understand for writers and critics who live in English context. So, if we translate the "feeling scene" into English according to the same logic of word formation, it should be "heartscape," but obviously, if we translate it in this way, it will be very difficult for people in English-speaking countries to understand, because in their view, the heart scene we are talking about can only be generated in the mind, or realized in the field of spirit and soul. Therefore, Professor Cheng uses "soulscape" when he uses the concept of Xinjing in English. This concept, which also appeared in the English-speaking world earlier, is mostly used in the fields of religion, philosophy, literature and music, so it is easy to understand when you meet people from English-speaking countries without much explanation, especially when you share it with "landscape" and "soundscape."

### 奥林匹克公园 Aolinpikegongyuan: Aolinpike Gongyuan or Olympic Park?

Compared with the five examples above, this is a special case. Although we need to stand in the position of Chinese culture and pay attention to Chinese cultural self-confidence when we are engaged in cultural translation, we cannot deviate from it, after all, going beyond the limit is as bad as falling short.

During the Beijing Winter Olympics this year, Professor Zhou Qinghai, a famous Singaporean Chinese scholar at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, sent an article published in Singapore's Lianhe Zaobao, a Chinese newspaper, entitled "The Snow on the Beginning of Spring in Beijing Bird's Nest," written by Mr. Yan Mengda, former deputy editor-in-chief of Lianhe Zaobao and famous

commentator. Under the title of the article, there are several sentences as a summary: In the end, no matter who takes the lead in the honor list, a successful Beijing Winter Olympics may intensify the determination of the West to suppress China's revival, and China will also declare with practical actions that any suppression is an incentive for them to make progress. By describing the scene of the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics, the full text convincingly shows the point of view in the summary. However, a passage in the article aroused my attention, interest and doubts: Before the Winter Olympics, the names of Beijing's subway stations were changed to Chinese Pinyin instead of the original English names, such as, Summer Palace was replaced by Yi Heyuan in the Summer Palace, and the English name of Olympic Park was changed to Aolinpike Gongyuan. The official statement is that this is to cooperate with the policy of unified translation, but the timing of the Winter Olympics seems to be a metaphor for Chinese cultural confidence.

Then the question comes: Do we need to express cultural confidence in this way? So I immediately decided to take the Beijing subway to see what happened. The result is that English is still English and has not been changed to Hanyu Pinyin. Junshibowuguan is still Military Museum, but not Junshi Bowuguan. Of course, the names of stations such as Tiananmen, Xidan and Dongsishitiao cannot be translated freely, which were originally Chinese Pinyin, and now continue to be retained.

This inevitably makes people think of the change of English names of universities in the first decade of this century. For example, Zhongguorenmindaxue was changed from People's University of China to Renmin University of China. Zhongyangminzudaxue was transformed from Central University of Nationalities to Minzu University of China; Jiaotongdaxue changed from Communication University to Jiaotong University. This situation is different from the renaming of a subway station, because People, Nationalities and Communication are not clear, unable to convey the exact nature and connotation of a comprehensive university, foreigners will not be able to correspond and understand, it is better to transliterate directly as the Pinyin name of a university.

In my opinion, it is meaningless to change the name of the subway station to Pinyin, Chinese people do not need it, foreigners cannot understand it. If so, Germany, the United States, Singapore should be Deguo, Meiguo, Xinjiapo. Therefore, when expressing cultural self-confidence, we also need to be cultured, otherwise we may get half the result with twice the effort or the opposite purpose. This is not without standing on the position of Chinese, on the contrary, it is better confidence in Chinese culture.

### 中国白酒 Zhongguobaijiu: Chinese Baijiu or White Wine?

Chinese people often drink Baijiu, and foreigners often drink wine, although both can intoxicate, but it is not the same kind of thing. In English, Jiu usually is translated into "wine," but actually red wine refers to red grape wine, while white wine refers to white grape wine. Therefore, in our daily contacts, we translated Chinese Baijiu back into white wine, but foreigners accustomed to white wine feel very different when they drink our white wine, it is difficult to adapt to it for a while, they will feel stimulating taste, strong taste and even strange, then foreigners who do not know how to make wine will also think that China's brewing technology is backward. To make white grapes so unbearable.

In order to avoid cultural misreading and misunderstanding, facilitate better contacts and communication, and telling Chinese stories well, in real life, both Chinese and foreign parties have made some explanations and efforts. For example, some people call Chinese Baijiu "spirit," some people call it "liquor," or even "firewater" and so on, but these are only some unsatisfactory folk translations with descriptive nature, and show obvious compromise and close translation orientation to English.

After fully listening to the opinions of the China Wine Industry Association, the General Administration of Customs agreed to amend the Import and Export Tariff of the People's Republic of China in 2021, and the new tariff has been formally implemented from January 1, 2021. The Chinese list name is Baijiu, and the corresponding English is Chinese Baijiu. This is very interesting, because this translation revolution is not reflected in textbooks, nor is it officially announced by the translation and scientific research departments, but is perfectly deduced through the Import and Export Tariff.

### Conclusion

Professor Yuanchong Xu at Peking University, who passed away in 2021, has been engaged in translation work for more than 80 years, and has been advocating literary translators to consolidate their internal skills and understand the beauty of translation art from learning, imitation and reference. He

believes that translation practice is prior to and higher than translation theory, and translation theory should be derived and applied to translation practice, while serving the Going Global Strategy of Chinese culture. He regards the translation of classics as a long-term and arduous project, and believes that the Chinese cultural dream needs several generations to complete, and that the theoretical and practical talents of translation should be trained as soon as possible to form an echelon so as to better and more convey the beauty of Chinese culture to the world.

I prefer to regard these cases and examples as a revolution in translation, or at least an innovation in the concept of cultural translation. In history, there are many classic cases about translation. For example, James Legge, the first person to systematically study and translate ancient Chinese classics, was a famous British sinologist in modern times. During the 25 years from 1861 to 1886, he translated all the major Chinese classics such as The Sishu (Four Books) and The Wujing (Five Classics) into English, totaling 28 volumes. His multi-volume works, such as Chinese Classics, Faxian Xingzhuan, Religion in China: A Comparison of Confucianism, Taoism and Christianity, and Chinese Chronicle, occupy an important position in Western Sinology. As the first winner of the Confucian Lotus Translation Prize, he devoted himself to considering and translating many concepts of Chinese classics, and in order to overcome cultural differences, he participated in the famous "terminology dispute" in history. For example, the American educator, translator and philanthropist Calvin Wilson Mateer, known as the pioneer of modern science education in China, has been engaged in education in Shandong for 45 years and founded the first modern higher education institution in China, Wenhuiguan and Guangwen University (the predecessor of Qilu University). In the last 18 years of his life, he served as the chairman of the Bible Translation Committee and presided over the translation of the Chinese version of the Bible, which has been handed down to this day, and translated WORD into Tao, which has become a classic story handed down from generation to generation (Lao, 1989<sup>1</sup>; Lao & Zhuang, 1891<sup>2</sup>).

Cross-cultural translation is also a way for Chinese culture to go to the world. The unequal, asymmetric or bad translation can also cause misreading and misunderstanding in the image of Chinese culture in foreign countries. Therefore, it is very

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The original text is the canonical Te-Tao Ching, with a collated translation by Robert G. Henricks, published with only the translator's credit

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Published with only the translator's credit.

necessary to attach importance to cross-cultural translation and appropriate translation in the context of cross-cultural communication. Translation is not only an issue of language, but also an issue of culture, an issue of cross-cultural understanding and interpretation.

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