

Examining the English Publicity Materials of the Cultural Heritage in Xi'an from the Perspective of Functional Equivalence Theory

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Abstract—Xi'an, one of the political, economic and cultural centers of ancient China and the starting point of the New Silk Road, has increasingly become an important window through which Chinese culture is introduced to the outside world. The publicity materials of Xi'an cultural attractions contain rich Chinese cultural elements. At present, the study of their English translation in the academic circle is still fragmented, relatively macro and insufficient in the cases, which seriously affects the communication and exchange between Shaanxi and foreign cultures.

In this essay, a series of important cultural terms were selected from the publicity materials of Xi'an cultural attractions issued by Shaanxi Tourism Bureau. Then the literal and cultural meanings of these terms in Chinese and English were compared so that the problems in their translation were studied. It is found that there were three kinds of translation problems: disparity in both the literal and cultural meaning; disparity in acquired meaning; disparity in associated cultural meaning. The results of this study have some theoretical value in the translation of important cultural terms, and have certain practical value in introducing the Chinese culture to the rest of the world and improve the image of Xi'an.

Keywords—Xi'an tourism publicity materials; Cultural terms; functional equivalence theory

I. INTRODUCTION

As the capital city of Shaanxi Province, Xi'an had been China's capital in 13 dynasties. It was once an important economic, political, and cultural center of ancient China. Now, Xi'an, as the starting point of the New Silk Road, serves as a significant window through which the rest of the world get to know Shaanxi local culture and even the Chinese culture. Among the varied ways of introducing Xi'an to the outside world, tourist attractions of cultural heritage function as one the most vital carriers of cultural information. Therefore, the publicity materials of those cultural heritage are often one of the most important sources of information foreigners can obtain, and they often carry important cultural concepts or terms. The mistranslation of those cultural terms may cause serious misunderstanding in cross-cultural communication.

Previous researches on the translation of publicity materials mainly focused on viewing the materials from a certain translation theory or perspective [1], studying merely the Chinese traditional culture rather than cultures of the both the source and target language [2], or researching on the specific attractions in local culture [3]. However, very few scholars have touched on the translation of important cultural terms, which have far-reaching impact on cross-cultural communication. Mistranslation of important cultural terms is

likely to lead to the failure of the cross-cultural communication, thus ruining the image of Xi'an and even the Chinese nation.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Varied Focuses or Perspectives of Previous Studies on Publicity Material Translation

Yang [4] applied the four framing strategies of translation to guiding the translation of tourism culture in Enshu Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture

Cao and Wang [1] analyzed the differences between Chinese and English tourism texts in terms of language style, information content and text structure using German functional theory of translation purpose. They proposed such strategies as deletion, addition and rewriting can be appropriately adopted when translating.

Guo [5] examined Henan tourism translation from linguistic, cultural and ecological perspectives respectively on the basis of ecological translation science Based on Katharina Reiss' text typology theory, he classified the texts of tourist scenic spots in China according to their different functions and purposes, with the online introduction of scenic spots above 4A level in Shaanxi Province as an example, and recommended corresponding translation strategies for different types of texts.

From the perspective of the principle of multidimensional adaptive selection in ecological translation, Zhang [6] mainly talked about the English translation of tourism web pages and proposed that translators need to strengthen their linguistic sensitivity, improve their ability to integrate cultural information and reproduce communicative intent.

Li [7] analyzed the commentaries of selected tourist attractions in Shaanxi based on the functional translation theory, and proposed relevant translation strategies such as word addition, deletion, decoding, compilation and retranslation.

Zhou and Li [8] analyzed the differences between English and Chinese languages and cultures from the perspective of translation purpose theory, took the tourist attractions in Shaanxi as an example, guided the translation of tourist materials based on functional purpose theory, and proposed translation methods such as provincial translation, split translation, integration and rewriting.

On the basis of the core theoretical perspectives such as "translation adaptation selection theory" and "three-dimensional" transformation in ecological translation and the schema theory in cognitive poetics, the author Dai

and Cai [9] took the introduction of tourist attractions in Guangzhou as the object of analysis, and explained how translators activated the source language schema in the translation process, constructed a comparative schema between the source language and the translated language, and how to adapt the translation from the linguistic dimension, cultural dimension and communicative dimension, and accordingly proposed general guidelines and specific translation strategies for ecological translation.

In the above-mentioned literature, it can be easily inferred that the authors usually applied different theories of translation or linguistics to specific analytical materials to present the problems of the existing translated texts. Very few researches have taken the purpose of translation, namely, cross-cultural communication into consideration.

B. Previous Studies on Problems on Publicity Materials Translation and Their Countermeasures

Many scholars focused their study on the problems in publicity materials translation. Duan [10] discussed the problems in the translation material of Yunnan tourism routes designed by a business tourism company, and proposed some corresponding countermeasures to the problems.

Ding *et al.* [11] investigated the status quo of English translations of the publicity materials of some important tourist attractions in Hebei Province, pointed out the main problems, proposed translation strategies for historical culture, religious culture and food culture in tourism resources in Hebei Province, and made suggestions for the standardization of the translation of cultural traits of tourism resources in Hebei Province.

Xie [12] investigated and analyzed the current situation of Chinese-English translation of tourism texts in Hainan Province. Meantime, he also wrote the strategies and methods to be adopted for Chinese-English translation of tourism texts.

Liu and Chen [13] analyzed many problems, such as misspelling, multiple names in one place, outdated spelling, and cultural omission, in tourism materials translation of Ganzi Prefecture, especially the English translation of the names of tourist attractions. In order to solve these problems, such methods as re-standardizing and unifying the English translation names of attractions, organically combining phonetic translation, meaning translation and transcription were suggested to be applied.

Tan [14] analyzed the problems of the Chinese-English translation of public notices of three scenic spots in Tibet and put forward specific measures and suggestions to improve the quality of Chinese-English translation of public notices of scenic spots in Tibet.

Zhang [15] discussed the problems of English translation in tourism scenic spots, and their causes from the perspective of the translator's subjectivity in the translation process, i.e., the translator's Chinese-English language ability, Chinese-English cultural literacy, professional knowledge in tourism, and translation attitude.

Hui and Wen [8] outlined the problems in English translation of tourist attractions in Xi'an, analyzed the causes of the problems, and proposed countermeasures: to standardize the spelling and writing, translators should write the translation carefully; to translate the information

language concisely and clearly, the choice of words was crucial; the same name should be translated in a uniform way; to realize the internationalization of tourism translation information, translators can borrow the public language of western countries directly.

To sum up, relevant previous studies in Shaanxi province focused on translation strategies and methods, grammatical structure and syntax of translated texts, few researches have been conducted on the translation problems from the perspective of cross-cultural communication and important cultural terms.

The literature on publicity material translation in other provinces considered the cultural and the translation levels, which can provide reference for the analysis and research on the cultural level of tourism translation in Shaanxi Province.

III. TRANSLATED MAJOR CULTURAL TERMS IN XI'AN'S ENGLISH PUBLICITY MATERIALS

A. Disparity in the Literal and Cultural Meaning

1) Case study one: "long"

As an important cultural term in China, the "long" is used widely especially in the publicity materials relates to Xi'an culture, and the word "dragon" appears frequently in the context when introducing the "long" culture and other related terms. There is still a great controversy about whether "dragon" is correspondent with the cultural term of dragon. The author will outline the differences between the cultural term of "long" in Chinese and Western cultural contexts, and further explore the semantics of "long" by citing different materials related to it.

In the West, the first English and American literature in which the word "dragon" appears is the heroic poetic history "Beowulf". In the legend, it is a fierce monster, guarding the treasure, and is finally killed by the hero "Beowulf". The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of current English defines dragon as "a winged, clawed, fire-breathing crocodile-like or snake-like monster." The American Heritage English has a similar definition that "it was a lion-clawed, snake-tailed, crocodile-like creature that looked like a large reptile." The New Columbia Encyclopedia defines dragon as "a monster often associated with evil."

The "long" occupies an exceptionally important place in the ancient traditional Chinese culture. As a cultural cohesion and accumulation, the "long" has penetrated deeply into the subconsciousness of every Chinese person and has permeated all aspects of Chinese social life, thus making it a symbol of the Chinese nation. As a carrier of Chinese culture, the language is also inevitably loaded with cultural connotations.

1. "Long" is used as a metaphor for the supreme, noble, highly respected and distinguished and extraordinary person.

(1) "Long" is used as a metaphor for the emperor. After the Han Dynasty, everything related to the emperor can be crowned with the name "long", "Long" is the symbol of the emperor.

(2) "Long" is a metaphor for a person who is outstanding, intelligent or highly respected.

(3) "Long" is used as a metaphor for a person's demeanor, spirit or aura.

2. "Long" is a metaphor for the change of personnel and the prosperity and decay of dynasties.

3. “Long” is a metaphor for brilliant writing or calligraphy.

4. “Long” is a metaphor for something peculiar, hard and precious.

The above is the general semantic situation of “long”. In addition, there are some texts related to “long” in other fields such as Taoism, Buddhism, and astrology, but they are only a few and regard “long” as mysterious and holy objects of worship to predict people’s fate. In short, in Chinese perception, “long” always has a positive meaning and represents something that can bring good fortune to people, while in Western culture, dragon often has a pejorative semantic meaning. Translating “long” as dragon does not respect the inherent cultural connotation of this cultural term, and may cause mistranslation in certain contexts with cultural connotations. The author suggests that when translating similar cultural terms, translators can appropriately make additional translations to supplement the background of cultural knowledge related to “long” culture, such as citing “long” allusions or adding the cultural meaning of “long”.

B. Disparity in Acquired Cultural Meaning

1) Case study two: “Hong”

The basic meaning of “Hong” as a color is very easy to understand both for Chinese and English speakers. That meaning is like the color of blood, such as red leaves; red light, etc. However, when reading the historical and cultural materials of Xi’an, we can easily find that red has other meanings in special or particular contexts. These meanings are often derived from its basic meaning, at the same time those words are very common, therefore translators tend to ignore the cultural meanings behind them.

In Chinese culture, “Hong” is the color of fire and blood, the Chinese people regards red color as something noble, from the ancient worship of the sun. The sun rises from the east, its fiery red appearance and hot high temperature give people the mysterious and unpredictable feelings; thus, the ancients produced the reverence for red. Examples will be given on how the word red differs in the English and Chinese languages to demonstrate the difference especially in their cultural meanings.

Some of the meanings of red in Western culture are the same as those in Chinese culture, some of them are different, and some are even the opposite. For example, when Western countries receive important guests, a red carpet is always rolled out to show the importance of the guests. Although Western culture also regards red as the color of blood, it is considered to carry negative symbolic meanings such as bloodshed, sacrifice, and the withering of the flower of life, so the word red in English is often associated with anger, anger, and bloody violence, such as “red revenge,” “see red” (angry), “a red battle” (bloody battle) and so on. Unlike Chinese culture where red symbolizes fortune and profit, in Western culture red symbolizes loss, for example, “red figure” and “red ink” both indicate financial crisis and debt. In English, for example, “red figure” and “red ink” both indicate financial crisis and heavy debt, “in the red” means in a state of loss, “out of red” means turning a loss into a profit, and “red balance” means deficit difference. In addition, in both Chinese and Western cultures, red has the meaning of emergency and danger.

e.g.

1. The red flag waves against the wind.

The semantic meaning of “red flag” in English is derogatory according to the Oxford dictionary:

- (1) a signal of danger
- (2) a flag indicating rebellion
- (3) something that causes danger

e.g.

2. The Suspect murder was caught red-handed.

The semantic meaning of “red-handed” in English is derogatory:

(1) At the scene of the crime or in the presence of the meaning.

(2) Someone violent

In addition to some common meanings above, “hong” often has some special meanings in historical and cultural materials, and the author has roughly compiled their example sentences and their cultural meanings.

1) Female workers, especially women engaged in manual labor.

2) Mourning garment

3) Achievement, Merit

4) Red flowers

The Chinese and Western cultures do not have exactly the same understanding of red. When used as the word color, the meaning expressed is basically the same, while when red appears in the Chinese context, “Hong” has more meanings, such as beauty, wedding, etc. In many popular texts the meaning of the word red changes according to the specific context, so when translating cultural terms, special attention should be paid to the cultural meaning behind it. Otherwise, the translation of cultural terms will not accurately express their cultural meanings, but only their literal meanings.

2) Case study three: “Nine”

“Three” and “nine” are a rhetorical form of exaggeration and a cultural value proposition for full numbers. This is closely related to the philosophical philosophy of the Han people in ancient China.

The symbolic system of changes of the book is based on three and the multiples of three. The changes of the book considers even numbers as “yin” and odd numbers as “yang”, and “nine” as “extreme yang”. The original meaning of “nine” is “long”. Due to the influence of these classical philosophical ideas and concepts, the Chinese scholars have established the concept of “three and nine” as a metaphor for the full number of people, and these concepts are also reflected in the language as a rhetorical form. For example, “nine” in Chinese means big, long, deep and high etc. The “nine bends of the Yellow River” said the Yellow River bends a lot; “Because “nine” in the philosophy of Han culture also contains the supreme cultural connotation, in ancient China set up “Kyushu”.

“Nine” has almost become a symbol of ancient Chinese imperial culture. In the Zhou Dynasty, there were “Jiu Fa” to govern the vassal states, and “Jiu Fu” to control the management of finances; and various armies were collectively called “Jiu Jun”; the types of monarchs were divided into “Jiu Zhu”, there were “Jiu Pin” for the rank of the palace... Even the design of many royal palaces used nine or multiples of nine: the palace gate was nine times, either vertically or horizontally, the number of nails on the gate was nine, and so forth.

To sum up, the number nine occupies an important position in traditional Chinese culture, and its cultural meaning has been passed on and developed since the era of Laozi. The cultural meaning represented by nine has become more and more extensive. Because of its frequent appearance in traditional cultural materials, it, like the color red mentioned above, has different meanings in different or special contexts. If translators do not adopt appropriate translation strategies according to specific contexts when translating historical and cultural publicity materials, the cultural meaning behind it is likely to be overlooked or not fully expressed by the translated text.

C. Disparity in Associated Cultural Meaning

1) Case study four: "Chang River"

The Chang River is the third longest river in the world and, together with the Yellow River, the two most important rivers in China. It has irrigated thousands of hectares of fertile land, nurtured the culture of Wu and Yue, and is also a magnificent scene for writers to write about.

The Chang River was called "Jiang" in ancient times. In that time, "river" was a special term, referring specifically to the Chang River. In the Eastern Jin Dynasty, Wang Xizhi and Sun Choro were the first to use the name "Yangtze River".

The Chang River sometimes also named "da jiang", such as Su Dongpo's famous line. Later, as people's understanding of The Chang River gradually deepened, they felt that the name "jiang" or "da jiang" could not fully express its long-running geographical features, so they gave it a name based on its characteristics—"The Chang River". The name "the Chang River" began in the late Eastern Han Dynasty. After the Jin Dynasty, the number of people who called it "The Chang River" gradually increased. For example, this name was used in Li Bai's poem. Since science was underdeveloped in ancient time and transportation was not convenient, it was difficult for the ancients to recognize the whole The Chang River, so many segmented aliases were formed.

The Chang River is mostly found in historical and cultural publicity materials, but in the current widespread version, the Chang River is translated as The Yangtze River, which is obviously a mistranslation, as the Yangtze River is only a segment of the Chang River, and it is evidently inappropriate to use it to refer to the entire river.

2) Case study five: "Chang'an"

A geographical name refers to the name given to a physical or human geographic entity in a specific location, and this is an important heritage of human national culture, conveying historical and humanistic information.

Xi'an was the capital of the Tang dynasty, has to be mentioned in the introduction of its cultural heritage, and enormous poets of the Tang dynasty. Those geographical name in poems often have their cultural meanings, while translators often use phonetic or direct translations to deal with the geographical names in these poems, which not only confuse readers about the titles and contents of the poems, but also eliminates the beauty of the poems in a straightforward and rigid way, which is not conducive to the smooth cross-cultural communication. The author selects a few examples of translations from the official materials published by the Shaanxi Provincial Tourism Bureau for further

discussion:

In the Waterfall in Mount Lu Viewed from Afar 《望庐山瀑布》, the information about the origin of the name "Mount Lu" is completely contextualized by the phonetic method. The reader knows very little about Mount Lu and does not appreciate the beauty of Mount Lu because of its majesty.

In farewell to a Friend at Lotus Tower 《芙蓉楼送辛渐》, "芙蓉楼" is directly translated as "Lotus Tower", which creates an image of "lotus" in the reader's mind, but actually the original name does not have that sense.

In the Bamboo Hut 《竹里馆》, the title ignores the tranquility of the bamboo forest. It creates an image of hut made of bamboo, instead. This is mistranslation of the original title that means a hut in the bamboo forest.

For one thing, there are too many geographical names, and it is often necessary to adopt additional translations to avoid the piling up of geographical names; for another, these poems were written thousands of years ago, and many of the geographical names have been abandoned, or some of the geographical names are used to refer to other places in modern times.

The issue of geographical names is often very complex, so the author will only explore the two meanings of the geographical name Chang'an, one of which is as the former name of Xi'an, the capital of many dynasties, and the other is the meaning that often appears in poetry and literature to explore the cultural meaning behind it.

(1) Chang'an is the name of the ancient capital city. The capital was set here in the seventh year of Emperor Gaozu of the Han Dynasty (200 B.C.). After that, the capital was set here at the beginning of Xiandi of the Eastern Han Dynasty, Mindi of the Western Jin Dynasty, the former Zhao Dynasty, the former Qin Dynasty, the latter Qin Dynasty, the Western Wei Dynasty, the Northern Zhou Dynasty, the Sui Dynasty and the Tang Dynasty. At the end of the Western Han Dynasty, Greenwood and Chimei, and at the end of the Tang Dynasty, the peasant rebellion led by Huang Chao also built their capitals here. There are two old cities: Hancheng was built in the time of Emperor Hui, northwest of present-day Xi'an. The Sui city was built in the time of Emperor Wen, and was called Daxing City. The former site included the present Xi'an city and the area to the east, south and west of the city. At the end of the Tang Dynasty, a new city was built to the north of the old city, which is now Xi'an City.

(2) It was often used as a generic term for the capital city in poetry and literature after the Tang Dynasty.

In conclusion, in translating Tang poems or special cultural texts, geographical names carry important cultural meanings, and in many translations text, it is difficult to match the semantics of the target language with the semantics of the source language. As we all know, the translation of geographical names and other information has always been a sticky problem, but from another perspective, geographical names are very meaningful in poems, and translators should pay attention to the literary context and cultural meaning so that the unique quality of Chinese civilization can be spread overseas and become famous worldwide.

IV. CONCLUSION

In summary, through the analysis of typical cultural terms,

the author divides the omissions and mistranslations of cultural terms into three general types: complete mistranslation (conflicting meanings of cultural concepts), complete omissions (ignoring most of the cultural meanings and retaining only the literal meanings), and incomplete omissions (ignoring cultural concepts in specific contexts and requiring additional translations). From the theoretical point of view, the research direction and results of this paper will provide a reference for the research of historical and cultural outreach materials and a reference for future research on the translation problems and strategies of important cultural terms; from the practical point of view, this paper plays a fundamental role in improving the quality of Xi'an tourism translation texts, enhancing the effect of Xi'an's historical and cultural outreach, and telling the Chinese story well.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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