

Cultural Facsimile In The Translation of Jiangxi Nuo Culture

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Abstract

The translation of nuo culture, in its nature, is one of intercultural translation. At present, the main problems of the translation of nuo culture in China are the deficiency in cultural connotation reproduction and the inappropriateness in the translation of culture-specific terms. Based on the analysis and comparison of the translated texts of exorcising culture in Jiangxi province, this paper points out that the key to the successful translation of nuo culture is to accurately reproduce the connotation of nuo and to fully consider the reading psychology of target language readers. Therefore, translators should strive to find the balance between reflecting the original text's differences to promote native culture and satisfying the reading habits and needs of the target readers to expand its acceptance among target readers.

Keywords

nuo culture, culture-specific terms, culture facsimile

Introduction

Originated in Shang Dynasty, Nuo is one of the oldest religious exorcising dances in Jiangxi Province. Commonly known as Gan Nuo, (Gan is shortened form of Jiangxi), it is an important part of Chinese exorcism culture. Exorcising activity in Jiangxi can be traced back to Yin shang period. After three thousand years of inheritance and development, Jiangxi nuo culture has formed such distinctive features as rich historical accumulation, primitive appearance and primitive simplicity, numerous cultural remains and comprehensiveness. According to the statistics in 1995, there were 25 counties (cities) in the province with exorcising activities, and 247 exorcising operas were reserved. Among them, exorcising dances in Nanfeng, Wuyuan and Le 'an were among the first batch of National Intangible Cultural Heritage, and were living fossils of Chinese exorcising culture. Nanfeng nuo has been invited to perform and communicate at home and abroad for many times, which has caused great repercussions at home and abroad. Amid the increasingly frequent cultural exchanges, the translation and spread of nuo culture in Jiangxi Province is good not only for the promotion of Chinese traditional folk culture, but also for the enhancement of Chinese cultural awareness and cultural self-confidence. Moreover, it adds to the world cultural diversity and contributes to the multicultural sustainable development¹. The essence of translation is interlanguage and intercultural communication, so the reproduction of nuo cultural connotation is the key to the success of its translation. From the perspective of cultural translation, this paper explores how the cultural elements in nuo culture can be reproduced in the context of different languages to spread the nuo culture connotation and characteristics to the maximum extent.

The Status quo of Nuo Culture Translation

Nuo culture originated from people's religious belief in primitive society and has attracted the attention of numerous scholars at home and abroad since the 20th century. Current studies on nuo culture mainly approve the issue from the perspective of anthropology, folklore, sociology, and so on. These in-depth studies are rich in achievements and have yielded numerous writings.² However, the translation of nuo culture in China still lags behind, which is out proportion to the attention it received and will hinder its diffusion in western world.

In this paper, the author analyzes the factors hindering the translation of nuo culture from the perspective of translation and communication, and offers means to tackle these problems. So far, the translation and transmission of China nuo culture is still inadequate, the author searched the websites of China Daily English and Jiangxi Folk Culture for information of nuo culture and found that relevant introduction mainly focuses on nuo dances, with vivid images, helpful to foreign readers in understanding Chinese nuo culture and cultural significance and has played a positive role in communication and transmission. From the perspective of Skopos theory and cultural translation, the most striking features of nuo culture is the abundant folk culture, historical significance it carries. However, these translations and introduction of exorcising are at most an overview of exorcising culture, short of introductions on such defining features as geographical features, historical origins and morphological features of nuo. It's safe to conclude that the translation of exorcising culture in Jiangxi is still problematic, and the problems come in mainly two aspects:

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Insufficient Connotation Conveyed

In nature, the translation of exorcising culture is intercultural communication. The purpose of translation is to promote the communication of heterogeneous culture by means of translation. Therefore, translators should explore the unique features of the text, such as specific sources, features, unique forms of expression, important historical, anthropological and folklore research values, as well as the information about its protection and threats.³ As a national non-material cultural heritage, nuo, developed in the primitive society of China and covering nuo dance, nuo masks, nuo opera, and nuo rituals, is of rich connotation. After three thousand years of evolution, it epitomizes people's longing for happiness and a better life. Cao Yuceng, chairman of Dramatist Association once remarked: the cultural phenomena carried by nuo is literally a "cultural art great wall" of our nation, and with the deepening of study, new discoveries may rewrite the history of Chinese dramas. In spite of this, the current translation and publicity of nuo is far from enough and is incongruous with its significance in Chinese human history, making it hard for foreign readers to appreciate the mysterious ancient culture that displays tremendous vitality even to this day.

Improper translation of culture-specific items

Aixela, A Spanish translator once defined cultural-specific items as "the ones that have no corresponding counterparts in the cultural system of the target language. As a result, translation difficulties occur when functions and meanings of words the source language in the source text are transferred to the translation". In other words, "what the readers of the target culture feels ideologically or culturally incomprehensible or unacceptable is a cultural-specific item".⁴ Jiangxi nuo is the product of farming culture since primitive time, reflecting the multi-god worship in ancient times, not only deities in Chinese mythology, but also secular characters in history, and this is characteristic of Jiangxi nuo culture. In the translation of these cultural-specific special items, the translator should not only strive to convey the meaning of the original text, but also reproduce the cultural connotation in the source language. As the translator Liu Miqing said: the purpose of translation is not to translate culture, but to translate the content or meaning of cultural information.⁵ When it comes to the national intangible cultural heritage, the translation of exorcising should "adhere to its own cultural subjectivity to ensure the integration of the source language culture into the target language culture, and maintain the target language audience's curiosity for the intangible cultural heritage"⁶. In the translation of cultural terms, the translator should stay on guard against going to extremes while highlighting the unique cultural value, thinking mode and imagination of the Chinese nation through the transmission of the traditional connotation of Chinese culture, and express their cultural diversity in the world civilization.

Translation Principles of nuo culture

Translation is not mere language exchange, but closely related to the culture of both languages.⁷ (Bassnett &

Lefevere, 1990) In nature, the translation of exorcising culture is one of culture. In translating exorcising culture, the translator should choose the core part that best represents the connotation of nuo and highlights the historical significance with artistic value. On the premise of upholding cultural confidence, the translator should strive to accurately reproduce the historical cultural connotation, rather than mechanically reproduce the characteristics of language forms. Moreover, they should follow the national psychology and reading habits of target language readers when delivering the cultural connotation of source language, and manage to balance the two. The publicity effect of translation can be greatly reduced by heed to either aspect of the two, namely only adhering to the principle of being faithful to the original text or simply catering to the reading experience of target language readers⁸. The translation standards and translation strategies should be dynamic and diversified, so as to find a balance between keeping close to the original text and moderately deviating from the original text, reflecting the original text's differences, absorbing foreign nutrients, promoting domestic culture and meeting the reading needs of the target readers.⁹

Accurate reproduction of nuo cultural connotation

The exorcising culture has undergone thousands of years of changes, with rich forms from nuo rituals to nuo dance and to nuo dramas. At least from Western Zhou Dynasty, the exorcising ritual was regularly held by the emperor during Spring Festival, and during Spring Festival it was the most solemn custom. This custom was recorded in "The Etiquette in Zhou Dynasty", a historical document early in Zhou Dynasty: "with bear-like look and four gold-colored eyes, Fang Xiang wears dark clothes and red trousers, holding a shield and a dagger-axe in hands, and performs exorcising along with hundreds of followers, searching every household for evil spirits." Its rich cultural connotation is mainly reflected in cultural terms, covering nuo ritual, nuo drama, nuo dance and nuo gods. When translating these words bearing Chinese nuo cultural connotation, the translator should not only have solid bilingual translation ability, but also a good knowledge of culture, folklore, history and religion, especially the historical origin of nuo culture, and flexibly use foreignization and domestication or the combination of domestication and foreignization strategy. Take Fang Xiang, the leading nuo god, for example, is the leading role in exorcising and funeral ceremonies. In *Annotated Rites of Zhou Dynasty—Major officers in Xia* by Zheng Xuan in Eastern Han Dynasty, Fang Xiang literally means "fearful appearance beyond imagination". If the translator directly translated as "Fang Xiang" without an in-depth understanding of its meaning, he or she would fail to convey its functions of "exorcising evil spirits" and its horrible look, missing the cultural significance behind its name. Therefore, translators should thoroughly understand the cultural essence implied by words, and flexibly use such translation methods as literal translation, literal translation plus annotation, transliteration plus annotation and free translation, in an effort to reproduce nuo cultural connotation and charm.

Follow the reading psychology of target language readers

According to Hans Robert Jauss, the representative of reception aesthetics theory, before reading any specific work, a reader has an understanding structure and knowledge frame that is in place first. When a work is inconsistent with or even conflicting with the existing expectation horizon of the reader, it can only break this horizon and form a new horizon¹⁰. Therefore, the text that can arouse readers' interest and attract them to keep reading should not only focus on readers, take care of their reading horizon, but also attach importance to readers' initiative and give enough reading space. Therefore, the translator should play the role of subjectivity in the translation process, act as the "gatekeeper", fully consider the language habits and aesthetic psychology of the target language readers, and grasp the "degree" of cultural translation. For words with cultural connotation, if the translation strategies such as literal translation and transliteration are applied blindly, although the cultural essence of the original language can be kept to the maximum extent, the excessive and extensive use will inevitably hurt the readers' interest in reading and affect the translation effect. Translators should use such translation strategies and techniques as excerpt translation, literal translation, transliteration annotation and free translation flexibly in combination with the bilingual culture and historical background to deal with the differences and conflicts of language and culture, so as to meet the expectations of foreign readers and improve the receptivity of translation in the cultural context of foreign language. In particular, translators should follow the reading habits of target language readers, highlight cultural differences and convey cultural characteristics.

In nuo culture translation, therefore, the translator should highlight nuo drama in Nanfeng, which is different from other local features. Therefore, in translation, it is necessary to reintegrate the discourse, adjust the structure of the original text, make it conform to the mode of target text and reading habits of target language readers, and stimulate readers' interest in reading.

Conclusion

As an important component of the country's intangible cultural heritage, Jiangxi nuo culture is of great significance to the study of traditional Chinese religious beliefs, folk customs and the development of traditional dramas. To successfully transplant nuo culture into the heterogeneous culture soil, the translator should have a good grasp of both cultures to accurately reproduce the nuo culture connotation and fit into the target language readers' reading psychology, reading habits so as to give full play to the translators' subjectivity. It's not enough to stress only cultural characteristics, regardless of its acceptance, or focus solely on the reception of the target readers and "cut the foot to suit the shoe". The translator should balance the two in translation to achieve a desirable version which both expresses our ideas and is well accepted by readers from other countries.

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