

A Study of the Translation of Mo Yan's *Frog* From the Perspective of Domestication and Foreignization

Hui Li

School of Foreign Languages, Shanxi Normal University, Taiyuan 030031, China

Abstract—Mo Yan is a famous Chinese writer. He has become the first Chinese to win the Nobel Prize in literature. *Frog* is one of Mo Yan's masterpieces. His works were strongly influenced by magical realism and told the legend which took place in Gaomi, Shandong Province, during the Cultural Revolution and the early years of reform and opening up. Different countries have different cultural formation processes, which have led to creating their culture-loaded words. Culture-loaded words refer to the words, phrases, and idioms used to signify objects peculiar to specific cultures. These culture-loaded words and expressions are the direct reflections of the unique features of Chinese culture. The translator needs to avoid errors and omissions in translation, especially when translating cultural information. Based on domestication and foreignization translation strategies, this article takes Howard Goldblatt's English translation of Mo Yan's *Frog* as the research object to explore the translation and effect of culture-loaded words in the novel. The translator uses foreignization and domestication strategies to explain and convey these Chinese characteristics. It achieves faithfulness to the original text and flexibly handles culture-loaded words with Chinese characteristics, ensuring the attractiveness and affinity of the translated text. The research on the English translation of the Chinese culture-loaded words in the novel is helpful for foreign readers to understand and accept the culture with Chinese characteristics.

Index Terms—culture-loaded words, domestication, foreignization

I. INTRODUCTION

Frog is one of Mo Yan's masterpieces. Howard Goldblatt is an essential translator of Mo Yan's works. He has translated more than ten works of Mo Yan, including his masterpieces such as *Red Sorghum*, *Big Breast and Wide Hips*, *Frog* and other works. The accuracy and popularity of Howard Goldblatt's translation make Mo Yan's works easy to be accepted by readers, which helps Mo Yan win the Nobel Prize in Literature to a certain extent. Howard Goldblatt has made an outstanding contribution to the dissemination of Mo Yan's work in the English-speaking world. Moreover, with the gradual increase in the number of English translations of Chinese novels, literary translation is playing an increasingly important role in translation studies.

Culture-loaded words are important symbols of a culture. Due to the significant differences between China and other countries in historical development and political, economic and cultural aspects, culture-loaded words have gradually been derived in the translation process. It is not easy to transfer the culture-loaded words correctly and effectively to the cultural system of the target language. Lian Shuneng, a well-known translator and professor at Xiamen University, once pointed out that translation is a kind of interlingual transfer and a kind of cross-cultural communication. The translation must achieve lexical and syntactic equivalence. The translator also has to consider and translate their specific cultural connotations to facilitate the transmission and exchange of culture-loaded words in the source language. The quality of the translation of culture-loaded words in a novel is directly related to the reader's understanding and evaluation of the novel. These words are difficult to translate (Lian, 2006).

Therefore, based on the translation strategies of domestication and foreignization, this article explores the specific translation techniques used by Howard Goldblatt when translating culture-loaded words. The study of the English translation of the culture-loaded words in *Frog* will help us to summarise the skills of translating culture-loaded words, as well as facilitate the understanding and acceptance of Chinese culture by foreign readers, and promote the exchange and dissemination of Chinese culture with other cultures. The translator uses foreignization and domestication strategies to explain and convey culture-loaded words. It can be seen that in the process of translating Chinese literary works into English, the Chinese culture-loaded words should be flexibly translated. The excellent and easy-to-understand images are domesticated, and some rare and incomprehensible images are directly foreignized. It is convenient for foreign readers to understand and accept the culture with Chinese characteristics.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Culture-loaded Words

Culture-loaded words refer to words, phrases and idioms that mark things unique to a certain culture. These vocabularies reflect a nation's unique activities that have gradually accumulated in the long historical process and are different from other nations (Liao, 2000). Culture-loaded words are words or phrases that can reflect the information contained in a culture. Bao Huinan and others called culture-loaded words as vocabulary vacancies, that is, the lack of corresponding words caused by the unequal concepts in the two languages (Bao et al., 2004). Nida divides culture-loaded words into five categories: ecological load words; religious load words; material load words; social load words; language load words (Nida, 1945). Moreover, Newmark subdivided it, such as material load words, into construction, food, clothing, and other sub-categories. This article will combine relevant theories to discuss the translation of cultural-loaded words in the English version of *Frog*.

B. Domestication and Foreignization

The evolution of translation from an unconscious, empirical act to a conscious, large-scale endeavour has naturally given rise to a long-standing debate between literal translation and free translation. This controversy continues today (Wang, 2002). The German translation theorist Schleiermacher first proposed two translation methods "close to the reader" and "close to the author". The dispute between literal and free translations began to shift to a dispute between domestication and foreignization. However, Schleiermacher proposed the method without naming it. This theory was further improved and developed by Lawrence Venuti, a famous American translation theorist, and he defined it as domestication and foreignization. Foreignization and domestication are the sublimation of literal translation and free translation on the cultural, aesthetic and political levels. In 1995, Lawrence Venuti proposed these two major translation theories in the book *The Invisibility of the Translator*. Domestication refers to the target-culture-oriented translation in which unusual expressions to the target culture are exploited and turned into familiar ones to make the translated text intelligible and accessible for the target readers. Foreignization is a source-culture-oriented translation which strives to preserve the foreign flavor as much as possible in order to transfer the source language and culture into the target one. When dealing with the cultural factors hidden in the original text, domestication translation strategy advocates taking the source language as the basic, preserving the exoticism of the source language and culture. Foreignization translation strategy emphasizes taking the target language as the basic, focusing on removing cultural barriers and taking care of the readers' feelings. These two translation strategies are diametrically opposed, each with its own advantages and disadvantages. There have been constant debates, but at the same time, they can complement each other in order to achieve the best translation effect (Venuti, 1995). In recent years, scholars have studied the application of domestication and foreignization strategies in the translation of novels. Chen Gang analyzed the translation of Mr Luis Cha's *The Deer and the Cauldron* and found that domestication translation will continue to persist and serve as the overall strategy for long in cross-cultural communication (Chen, 2006). Zhang Jidong et al. compared the styles of the two translations of *The Kite Runner* and found that Li Jingyi's translation adopted more foreignization strategies, while Li Jihong's translation adopted more domestication strategies. The differences between the two translations are the purpose of translation and the social and cultural background of the translators (Zhang, 2020). Zhu Ying analyzed the translation for culture-loaded words in *Red Sorghum* from the perspective of domestication and foreignization theory (Zhu, 2021).

Foreignization and domestication strategies have their advantages and disadvantages. In the actual translation process, different translators have their own different choices. There has also been a dispute between domestication and foreignization in China. Nevertheless, when doing literary translation, translators often use domestication and foreignization in a suitable combination to translate works that are easy for readers to understand and maintain Chinese characteristics.

III. ANALYSIS OF TRANSLATION STRATEGIES OF DOMESTICATION AND FOREIGNIZATION OF CULTURE-LOADED WORDS

Frog is typical local literature. The author uses a large number of regional vocabulary and expressions. The story took place in Gaomi, Shandong Province. The dialogue and plot possess the characteristics of Chinese history, society, language and culture. In translation, the translator uses foreignization and domestication strategies to explain and convey these Chinese characteristics. It achieves faithfulness to the original text and flexibly handles culture-loaded words with Chinese characteristics, ensuring the attractiveness and affinity of the translated text.

A. Foreignization Strategy

The systematic theory of foreignization and domestication first appeared in the book *The Invisibility of the Translator* by American translation theorist Lawrence Venuti. Venuti believes that foreignization strategy encourages readers to move closer to the author in the translation of literary works. The translator should accept and retain the literary characteristics and cultural differences of the foreign language text in the translation to the greatest extent, so as to integrate the target language readers into the context of the foreign language text. In short, the foreignization strategy requires the translator to preserve as much as possible the linguistic characteristics and cultural atmosphere of Chinese literature and to present the original Chinese "exoticism" to English readers. Foreignization is also inevitable due to the vast differences in social culture, historical processes and language and script. The use of foreignization strategies retains the Chinese character of the original work and conveys the Chinese cultural traits. It is these cultural differences that make the work more attractive. If readers can accept the translation, the heterogeneity of Chinese culture can

gradually be understood and accepted.

(1)我娘临盆时, 奶奶按照她的老规矩, 洗手更衣, 点了三柱香, 插在祖先牌位前, 磕了三个头, 然后把家里的男人都轰了出去。 (Chapter 4, Vol I)

When my mother's time came, my grandmother did what tradition called for her: she washed her hands, changed clothes, and lit three sticks of incense, which she stuck in a burner in front of the ancestral tables. Then she bowed three times, rapping her head against the floor, and sent all the males in the family outside.

(p.17, Vol I)

In this example, the series of activities of grandma before the mother is about to give birth is a form of praying to ancestors in traditional Chinese culture. Since the target language readers do not know this Chinese tradition, the translator has added some content to the description of behaviours in the translation. For example, the three sticks incense is inserted in the incense burner in front of the ancestor's tablet, and grandmother bowed three times before she knocked on the floor. These supplements are based on the translator's detailed understanding of traditional Chinese culture, so the target language readers can also understand this unique form of blessing. It will help readers understand Chinese culture.

(2) 我自己去卖豆腐的王环家定了四十斤豆腐, 让袁腮去买了十棵大白菜, 十斤粉条, 二十斤白酒。

(Chapter 4, Vol II)

Then I went out and ordered forty jin of tofu from Wang Huan, the bean curd peddler, and told Yuan Sai to buy ten Chinese cabbages, ten jin of bean noodles and twenty jin of liquor.

(p.63, Vol II)

In this example, there are some common foods in winter in northern China. In the translation of "tofu", the translator directly translates "tofu" and then explains it so that readers in the target language can understand Chinese food culture. The translation of "Fen Tiao" focuses on its raw materials and shape, distinguishing it from vermicelli in Western food. In addition, "Jin" is the Chinese unit of weight. The translator directly translates it as "Jin".

(3)那是两间朝西开门的厢房, 房檐低矮, 房间狭小。一进门就是锅灶, 锅灶后是一堵二尺高的间壁墙, 墙后就是土炕。

(Chapter 3, Vol I)

Two cramped rooms with hanging eaves faced west, the first thing you encountered after entering was the stove, which was backed by a two-foot-high wall. The sleeping platform, the kang, was behind that low wall.

(p.9, Vol I)

"Kang" refers to a bed made of bricks or adobe in northern Chinese residences, with mats on the top and tunnels underneath communicating with chimneys and pots and stoves, which can be heated by fire. It is not available in other countries, so the translator first explained its use of "The sleeping platform" in the first translation in Example 3. Then adopt the method of foreignization to restore its Chinese characteristics so that readers in the target language can understand foreign material and culture characteristics while reading.

(4) 当然, 中队长说, 也幸亏了他这本日记, 才让你姑姑得到解脱, 否则他就是跳进黄河也洗不清了。

(Chapter 9, Vol I)

It was a good thing they had his diary, his squadron commander said, for it left your aunt in the clear. Without it, she could not have recaptured her good name even if she'd jump into a cleansing water of Yellow River.

(p.33, Vol I)

"Tiao jin huanghe ye xi bu qing" is a Chinese proverb, which means it is difficult to get rid of the relationship and avoid suspicion. This means that the aunt's good reputation would be difficult to recover if not for this diary. The translator directly translates the proverb without adopting the corresponding expression in Western culture. The translator adds "cleansing" here to tell the target readers that the water in the Yellow River is clean to prevent misunderstandings. On the other hand, the contrast between "cleansing waters" and "Yellow River" is more dramatic. It will allow the reader to understand the meaning of the proverb fully.

Among these, the translator uses foreignization to translate culture-loaded words. The use of foreignization strategy retains the Chinese characteristics of the original works and exports Chinese cultural characteristics. In short, in translating Chinese literary works into English, following the foreignization strategy requires translators to retain the language features and cultural atmosphere of Chinese literary works as much as possible and show the original Chinese culture to English readers. It is a translation strategy that focuses on preserving the characteristics of Chinese culture and emphasizing the direct transformation of national cultural values.

B. Domestication Strategy

The strategy of domestication is to encourage authors to approach readers actively. Translators should take the reading habits of target language readers as the starting point, "localize" the foreign text and translate the text in the way the target language readers are accustomed to. Attraction is a prerequisite for the successful spread of cultural products. If the translation is to be accepted by readers, it is necessary to avoid using obscure expressions in work. Domestication can generate "affinity" and resonate with readers. Appropriate domestication is more acceptable to people and is the prerequisite and basis for foreignization.

(5) 麒麟送子。

(Chapter 8, Vol IV)

Unicorns deliver the babies.

(p.155, Vol IV)

"Qilin" in the example belongs to the ecological culture-loaded word. It is the lucky animal for the Chinese, and their appearance represents the happiness of a generation. Therefore, the Chinese hope that "Qilin" will always accompany them and bring luck and light to them. However, this ancient Chinese mythical animal cannot be found in Western culture. The translator adopts domestication translation strategy. The translator finds the unicorn, a mythical animal in the Western culture, and translates it as "Qilin". Because both "Qilin" and western unicorns have only one horn, they are noble beasts.

(6) 娘娘庙广场上永远是熙熙攘攘。

(Chapter 8, Vol IV)

The Fertility Goddess Temple square is always a hub of activity.

(p.155, Vol IV)

The "Niang Niang" in the example is a religious culture-loaded word. The word refers to gods in the original text, mainly to express people's respect. This word has no corresponding expression in Western culture. However, the translator combined with the context through supplements translated it as "fertility goddess". In this way, the meaning of "birth" in the original text is added. This approach allows Western readers to replace "Niang Niang" with "goddess" and conveniently understand the text through reading the translation. "Fertility goddess" refers to the Chinese goddess in terms of function with the Greek mythology Hera, the Roman mythology Juno, and the Christian Virgin Mary. The goddess mentioned above is already familiar to Western readers, so the translation of "fertility goddess" is more accessible.

(7) 姑姑自我解嘲地说,我就是那只鸡,跟凤凰掐架的鸡,她后来可真是被我揍怕了,见了我就浑身筛糠,像一条吞了烟油子的四脚蛇。

(Chapter 12, Vol I)

In a tone of self-ridicule, Gugu answered her own question. That would be me. A chicken that pecked at a phoenix. A chicken that beat a phoenix into submission. She shuddered when she saw me, Gugu said emotionally, like a lizard that's swallowed a hunk of tar.

(p.35, Vol I)

There is no concept that is entirely equivalent to "shai zi" in English-speaking countries. It is a unique tool in China and other East Asian cultural circles, such as Vietnam. People living in Gaomi Township, Shandong Province in North China use a large "shai zi" to sieve the chaff, which is the outer skin of the grain. This behaviour is difficult to understand by Western readers. In order to avoid using footnotes to explain cultural differences, the translator adopted a translation strategy of domestication, ignoring the cultural image of "shai zi". The use of "shudder" visually conveys the characters' mood in the book, making it less difficult for the reader to understand. The translator translated "you yan zi" into "tar". Tar is used to treat vomiting at home in the UK. People will feel uncomfortable after taking it. It is relatively common and easy for Western readers to understand. It can be seen that, because many words in the source text have unique language characteristics, many cultural phenomena lack direct counterparts in the translated language, and some parts inevitably cannot be transmitted entirely during the translation process. For example, the culture-loaded word "shai kang", and the following words such as "you yan zi" has no similar cultural concepts or language expressions in the target language, resulting in a lack of translation.

In these cases, the translator's translation strategy for the culture-loaded words is domestication. Since the translator adopts the domestication translation strategy based on the target language culture, that is, to translate Chinese culture into English culture. In translating Chinese literary works into English, the domestication strategy requires the translator to take care of English readers reading habits and cultural literacy to the utmost extent. It transforms the unique cultural symbols in Chinese literary works into the native cultural symbols familiar to English readers, using concise and straightforward translation. The reason is that the translator is also considering the cultural acceptance of the target language readers. It can reduce the ethnic attributes in the text so that English readers can more easily understand the original text.

IV. CONCLUSION

As a common translation strategy in Chinese-English translation, foreignization and domestication strategies should complement each other in the translation process. Howard Goldblatt flexibly uses foreignization and domestication strategies in the translation process, instead of blindly using foreignization or domestication, to show foreign readers the charm of Chinese literary works to the greatest extent. The most prominent feature of the foreignization strategy is that it retains the native characteristics in the source-language text. In the English translation of Chinese literary works, the use of foreignization strategies can retain and show the humanistic feelings of the Chinese to the greatest extent. It will enable English readers to appreciate the Chinese style in the text. However, suppose the foreignization strategy is used blindly, without considering the English vocabulary, grammar, and English readers' reading habits and abilities, it is easy to cause the English readers to be confused about the translation. English readers do not understand the relationship between the literal meaning and profound meaning of words, which makes the original text lose its original meaning.

The most important feature of the domestication strategy in translation is that it fully considers the ability and habits of the target language readers. The translator does his utmost to transform the more obscure images in Chinese culture

into words with the same meaning in the target language. It makes it easier for readers in the target language to read and stimulates their interest in reading. The domestication strategy is considered from the perspective of the target language readers. If the translator is over-domesticated, it is easy to make the original text lose its Chinese characteristics. Therefore, in the process of translating Chinese literary works into English, the Chinese load words should be flexibly translated. The excellent and easy-to-understand images are domesticated, and some rare and incomprehensible images are directly foreignized. It is also more conducive to the spread of Chinese culture.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bao, H. N., & Bao, A. M. (2004). *Chinese Culture and Chinese-English Translation*. Foreign language press.
- [2] Chen, G. (2006). The study of Domestication Translation and Cultural Identity--the Samples Selected from the English translation of *The Deer and the Cauldron*. *Foreign Language and Their Teaching*, 12, 44-47.
- [3] Liao, Q. Y. M. (2000). *Dang dai xi fang fan yi li lun tan suo* [Exploration of Contemporary Western Translation Theory]. Yilin Press.
- [4] Lian, S. N. M. (2006). *A Coursebook on English-Chinese Translation*. Higher Education Press.
- [5] Mo, Y. M. (2012). *Frog*. The Writers Publishing House.
- [6] Mo, Y. M. (2014). *Frog*. Penguin Group.
- [7] Nida, E. (1945). Linguistics and ethnology in translation-problems. *Word*, 1, 194-208.
- [8] Schleiermacher, F. (1813). *On the different methods of translating*//Andre Lefevere. *Translation/History/Culture*. London &New York: Routledge, 1992.
- [9] Venuti, L. M. (1995). *The translator's invisibility: a history of translation*. London &New York: Routledge.
- [10] Wang, D. F. (2002). About Domestication and Foreignization. *Chinese Translation Journal*, 5, 26-28.
- [11] Zhang, J. D., & Zhu, Y. F. (2020). A Corpus-Based Stylistic Comparison on Two Translated Chinese Versions of *The Kite Runner*. *Technology Enhanced Foreign Language Education*, 5, 50-57.
- [12] Zhu, Y. (2021). *A Study on Subtitling Strategies for Culture-Loaded Words in Red Sorghum from the Perspective of Domestication and Foreignization Theory*. Beijing Foreign Studies University.

Hui Li was born in Taiyuan, Shanxi in 1996. She received her bachelor's degree in Translation from Taiyuan Normal University in 2019. She is currently a postgraduate studying for her master's degree and majoring in Foreign Linguistics and Applied Linguistics in Shanxi Normal University. Her research interests included translation and cognitive linguistics.