

Strategies to Represent the Hakka Culture in the Translation of *Xunwu Diaocha*

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Abstract

Xunwu Diaocha (Report from Xunwu) by Mao Zedong was abundant in original material and local people's language and characterized by the Hakka culture, including the local Hakka dialect and vernacular, social customs, foods and tools, and other aspects. This makes it difficult for non-Hakka Chinese to understand its contents, let alone English speakers who know nothing about Hakka. In attempting to make the translation smoothly understood by English speakers while not losing the Hakka flavor, American translator Roger Thompson has done a good job. By comparing *Xunwu Diaocha* (the original) with its English version *Report from Xunwu* translated by Roger R. Thompson, this paper analyzes the English expressions of the Hakka culture and discovers four translation strategies that the translator has adopted to achieve the goal of cultural representation. The strategies are Chinese Pinyin plus explanation, literal translation plus explanation, free translation plus Chinese Pinyin, and free translation plus explanation. The study reveals that through the above-mentioned strategies, the translation has well represented the Hakka culture and realizes cultural representation in its translation. Hopefully the strategies employed to represent the Hakka culture can serve as solid guidance for translations of other texts involving rich cultures.

Keywords: *Report from Xunwu*, strategies, the Hakka culture, cultural representation

1. Introduction

1.1 *Xunwu Diaocha (Report from Xunwu)*

Authored by Mao Zedong in 1930, *Xunwu Diaocha* was included in the first volume of *Mao Zedong's Collected Works* (Mao, 1993). The book elaborately introduces the politics, countryside, and business of Xunwu county in the province of Jiangxi, China; "preserving rich information about the then society, politics and economy, [it] provides the primary data for the research on the then society, politics, economy and customs of the Hakka, which is of great value" (Zhou, 2003).

The book was translated into English by Roger R. Thompson, a professor of history at Western Washington University, whose translation of *Xunwu Diaocha* with its English name *Report from Xunwu* was published by Stanford University Press in 1990 and attracted widespread attention from abroad (Thompson, 1990). Thompson's translating of the book was due to a friend named Junior Shelley. Thompson was so moved by the touching story of Shelley's grandfather, Snowdown Bousefield, and by Junior Shelley's travel to Xunwu that he decided to overcome all potential difficulties to translate Mao's *Xunwu Diaocha* into English and introduce the book to the Americans. To accurately and faithfully translate the text, Professor Thompson traveled thousands of miles to Xunwu in the autumn of 1990 to solve some of the language barriers he met while translating.

1.2 *The Hakka Culture in Report from Xunwu*

According to Wikipedia, the Hakka culture is defined as the culture created by the Hakka people, a *Han* Chinese subgroup, across Asia. It comprises the shared language, a variety of art forms, food culture, folklore, and traditional customs. Hakka culture originated from the culture of ancient *Han* Chinese, who migrated from China's central plain to what is modern-day Southern China during the sixth to thirteenth centuries and integrated with local *non-Han* ethnic groups such as the *Miao* people. Having historically lived in the mountains of Southern China and being minority groups in many of the surrounding Chinese provinces, the Hakka have

developed a culture characterized by endurance, diligence, bravery, stability, and frugality.

Xunwu Diaocha has rich cultural connotations because of its “full use of original materials and vernacular” (Cao, 1997). The text includes the investigations into the food culture, social customs, and farming culture of the Hakka people in Xunwu county and was written in a language with distinctive local characteristics, which causes great difficulty in its translation. Therefore, translators must consider how to accurately convey the unique flavor of Hakka culture to their target readers. According to Fan Zhongying, a well-known Chinese translation theorist, “Translation is to express the information of one language (the source language) in another language (the target language), so that the readers of the translated text can get the thoughts expressed by the original author and roughly the same feelings as the readers of the original text” (Fan, 1994). However, language and culture are closely related. To help the readers of the translated text grasp the ideas expressed by the author of the original text and experience roughly the same feelings as the readers of the original text, the key is to accurately convey the culture—that is, to achieve “cultural representation.” Cultural representation in translation contributes to the spread and communication of culture, which is considered a translator’s duty. In this regard, Professor Thompson has set a good example for translators, and it is an example worth learning from. In the process of doing a comparative reading of the Chinese and English versions of the book, the authors find Professor Thompson has succeeded in representing the original culture when dealing with the Hakka culture that appears in the text. Through an analysis on the translation of the Hakka culture represented by Hakka folk customs, dialect, and foods and farm products, the authors discover that Professor Thompson has employed four strategies to represent the cultural representation of the Hakka: Chinese Pinyin plus explanation, literal translation plus explanation, free translation plus Chinese Pinyin, and free translation plus explanation. Among them, “explanation” includes three aspects: in-text explanation, appendix, and endnotes. The following is a discussion on how the above four strategies are applied in *Report from Xunwu*.

2. Strategies Adopted for Cultural Representation in *Report from Xunwu*

According to Hu, social environment, national tradition, and political ecology, together with many other factors, form the soil on which culture depends for survival. Language and culture are closely related and inseparable. If a language leaves the culture in which the language is used, a certain extent of deviation from the real idea that the speaker wants to express may occur (Hu & Guo, 2018). Similarly, if the unique Hakka culture is separated from its dependent language, it will suffer certain loss and distortion. To avoid this loss, translators are supposed to use certain strategies to maximize the source language culture’s representation.

2.1 Transliteration (Pinyin) plus Explanation

According to Catford, transliteration is a process in which source language graphological units are replaced by target language graphological units (Catford, 1965). To authentically represent the linguistic and cultural features of the source text, transliteration will be used with other translation techniques. In the case of translation from Chinese to other languages, Pinyin will be used as a graphological unit in the target language supplemented with another translation method because the single use of Pinyin can scarcely convey the meaning of the source text.

When translating some of the Hakka people’s farming instruments, foods, and units of measurement, Professor Thompson employs the strategy of Chinese Pinyin plus explanation to make readers feel the Hakka culture’s original flavor. The use of Pinyin fully reproduces the original culture; however, an explanation is also considered essential for the translation reader to fully understand its meaning. We can see its effectiveness in representing the Hakka culture from the following examples.

For example, when translating a Hakka farm tool, *duoerzi*, the translator renders it as *duoerzi* (that is, kite scoops, smaller than bamboo scoops). In this case, *duoerzi* is the Chinese Pinyin for the tool, which is explained in parentheses so that the reader of the target language can understand its connotation. The same is true when translating a Hakka food, *yufen* (literally “jade noodles”). It is translated as *yufen*. This is also called *xifen* (literally “thin rice noodles”) and made from sweet potatoes. It is different from bean powder because it comes in the form of noodles. *Yufen* is the Pinyin for “jade powder,” and this is then explained as being made of sweet potatoes and not powder. Similarly, there is the translation of the metric unit *jin* (0.5kg). The explanation to the unit cannot be found in the body of the translated text; instead, it can be found in the appendix. The explanation reads as “*jin* about one pound.” Through the above examples, we find that the translation strategy of Pinyin plus explanation can enable target readers to not only authentically feel the unique flavor of the Hakka dialect but also accurately understand its meaning, thus better representing the Hakka culture.

2.2 Literal Translation plus Explanation

In addition to the Pinyin plus explanation strategy, the literal translation plus explanation strategy can achieve the

purpose of representing the Hakka culture. A literal translation can be defined in linguistic terms as a translation “made on a level lower than sufficient to convey the content unchanged while observing TL (target language) norms” (Mark & Moira, 2004). Literal translation can retain the original cultural form in this way, but it is often difficult for the target reader to understand. As Nida has said, “Since no two languages are identical, either in the meanings given to correspondence symbols or in the ways in which such symbols are arranged in phrases and sentences, it stands to reason that there can be no fully exact translations” (Nida & Charles, 1969). Therefore, to achieve cultural representation in terms of cultural form and meaning transmission, explanation is needed to be used with literal translation.

For example, when translating *xiang, zhi, lazhu*, which the Hakka people often use to worship their ancestors, the translator renders it into “incense and candles (for ancestor worship)” to accurately convey these things with the Hakka characteristics. In this translation, “incense and candles” is the literal translation of *xiang, zhi, lazhu*, while “for ancestor worship” is the explanation of the items’ purpose. In this way, target language readers can have a thorough understanding of the meaning and purpose of *xiang, zhi, lazhu*. In another example, in the translation of the Hakka food *fuzhu*, the translator uses the same approach. He translates it literally as “curd bamboo,” with an in-text explanation stating “this is made of thin sheets of bean curd rolled into tubes.” By doing this, readers can know the shape of the bean curd and what it is made of so that they can know what this specialty food is. A similar case is the English translation of “147”. The term “147” is a kind of “periodic market” culture in the Hakka society; that is, people can go to market when the ending of the lunar date is “1, 4, 7.” This is undoubtedly strange to the Western audiences, but Professor Thompson’s treatment in the translation is particularly appropriate. He puts it as “on the first, fourth, and seventh days (of the ten-day market cycle of the lunar calendar,” in which “on the first, fourth, and seventh days” is the literal translation of “147”, while the parenthesized “of the ten-day market cycle of the” is the explanation of the Hakka market culture’s special practice. With this method, the reader of the translated text can understand the culture well, and the translation can achieve the purpose of cultural representation. Besides literal translation and exploration, the translator employs the translation strategy of literal translation and endnotes. For example, when translating *yuner* (a kind of Hakka food), the translator transliterates it as only “cloud ears,” which is not directly followed by an explanation in the text. Instead, he adds a sentence, “Cloud ears are a type of white fungus that grows on trees,” as an explanation in the endnote.

2.3 Free Translation plus Pinyin

According to Shuttleworth and Cowie, free translation is a type of translation in which more attention is paid to producing a naturally reading target text than to preserving the source text wording intact (Mark & Moira, 2004). In other words, free translation strategy mainly aims to convey the meaning of the source language so that the target reader can understand the source language, but it is important to achieve the goal of cultural representation. With Pinyin added, the translation can completely represent the source’s cultural characteristics. For example, when dealing with *zuozaози*, a typical social practice of the Hakka, the translator expresses it as “when dividing family property, to keep a share for oneself is called *zuozaози*”. The first half, “when dividing family property, to keep a share for oneself,” is a free translation, while “*zuozaози*” is Pinyin. A similar example is found in the translation of the food *lanchi* (also known as *lanjiao*, which is made of marinated and fermented black olives). The translation reads, “*Lanchi*: dried Chinese olives are made by boiling fresh olives, taking the seeds out, and then curing them. In Xunwu, these are called *lanjiao*. And in Meixian county they are called *lanchi*.” In this translation, “dried Chinese olives are made by boiling fresh olives, taking the seeds out, and then curing them” is the free translation, which explains the production method, while *lanjiao* and *lanchi* are Chinese Pinyin. *Zuozaози* and *lanchi* are expressions unique to the Hakka culture. With the free translation plus Pinyin strategy, the translator conveys not only the pronunciation of the source language but also the unique cultural connotation fully to the target language readers, thus achieving cultural representation.

2.4 Free Translation plus Explanation

Although free translation can present the literal meaning of the source language, it cannot display the cultural connotation contained in the words. In this case, an additional explanation can better achieve cultural representation. For example, an item called *longpan* uniquely used by the Hakka people is mentioned in the book. This is a tool to crush grain into rice. When translating, the translator paraphrases it as “rice huller” in the text, and then he explains it with a note in the note part of the book: “The rice huller (*longpan*) mentioned in the text was made of wood. Mao’s text glosses *longpan* as *tuizi* (lit. pusher). This refers to a rice huller whose grinding wheel is turned by a push-pull type of motion. A turning pole, attached to the outer edge of the top grinding disk, turns the wheel by being pushed and then pulled.” The explanation that follows is a description of its structure and mechanics, so the target language readers can better understand the structure and operation of the Hakka

farming instrument. Therefore, the translation succeeds in representing the Hakka culture.

Another example is the translation of Hakka expressions of two kinds of medicinal materials, *nenyao* and *cuyao*. With the strategy of free translation, the author puts them as “common medicine” and “special medicine,” respectively. However, if used in only this way, the target language readers may not accurately understand the meaning of these expressions; thus, the translator adds, “There are two categories of herbal medicines: common and special. The common category is for curing illnesses, and everyone needs them. The special kinds are used as supplements (to food), and only local bullies are able to buy them. One can bargain about the prices for special kinds, but the prices of common herbal medicines are set by the herb merchant.” With the additional explanation, the translation not only presents the characteristics of the Hakka language but also can convey its cultural connotation fully, and cultural representation will naturally result.

3. Conclusion

Translation, in a sense, is a process of seeking truth. In Xu Jun’s opinion, “Translation should never be a translation of language at the literal level, but a transfer of thought and a transfer of culture” (Xu, 2009). Sun Zhili also believes that “the handling of cultural differences is often the key to the success or failure of a translation, because a language can be converted or even ‘naturalized’, but cultural features should not be changed, especially ‘naturalized’.” He also argues that cultural representation should be the basic principle of translation (Sun, 2002). Influenced by American scholar Venuti, numerous scholars in China, such as Wang Dongfeng and Liu Yingkai, urge that translation should reproduce the foreign language and cultural features as much as possible from the perspective of translation ethics as well as strive for cultural representation. It follows that cultural representation should be the goal of a qualified translator and one of the criteria to judge the success of translation.

Through the illustration of the examples above, we can find the effect of these four translation strategies on realizing cultural representation in translation. Meanwhile, Professor Thompson’s translation reveals translators should not only master two languages and two cultures skillfully but also have a sense of translation ethics. Instead of blindly domesticating the source language, translators should try various methods to achieve cultural transmission. In addition, for those translators who aspire to spread and carry forward Chinese culture, Professor Roger Thompson’s practice in the translation of the Hakka culture depicted in *Xunwu Diaocha* is of great significance for our reference.

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