Original Research Article

On C-E Translation of Culture-Specific Items from the Perspective of Eco-translatology—A Case Study of Howard Goldblatt's *Red Poppies*

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Abstract: .This thesis researches the translation of Chinese culture-specific items in *Red Poppies* from the perspectives of Eco-translatology. Eco-translatology, which was put forward by Chinese scholar Hu Gengshen, adopts some concepts of ecology in translatology and provides a new perspective for translation study and practice. *Red Poppies* is a novel by Alai whose contents covers a wide range of Tibetan culture and history, which is praised as Tibetan encyclopedia. On one hand, the study focuses on the definition and features of culture-specific items, and their classification of in *Red Poppies*. Based on Nida's classification of five categories of sub-culture, those culture-specific items are classified into five groups, namely linguistic culture-specific items, material culture-specific items, ecological culture--specific items, social culture-specific items and religious culture-specific items. On the other hand, this thesis explores how Goldblatt deal with those culture-specific items from the perspective of three-dimension transformation in eco-translatology, and it finds translator adopts a combination of foreignization strategy and domestication strategy, and the former plays a dominating role. Besides, various translation methods are adopted such as free translation, transliteration, transliteration plus annotation, and amplification and so on.

Keywords: Chinese Culture-Specific Items; Eco-translatology; *Red Poppies*; Translation Method and Strategy

1. Introduction

Culture, as the soul of a nation and the foundation of civilization dialogue, plays a crucial role in comprehensive national power competition among countries. Obviously, nothing can be richer in cultural connotation than culture-specific items. Chinese scholar Wang Zuoliang(王佐良 1991: 3-4)once put forward that "the greatest difficulty in translation lies in the difference between two cultures". Since there are often no equivalent remedy for the unique culture-specific items in another culture and language, resulting in that transcending cultural barriers becomes the most challenging and pivotal steps for translators.

Eco-translatology, proposed by Chinese scholar Hu Gengshen, combines translation studies with ecology so that it provides a new perspective for translation researcher to explore the intercultural communications. The author thinks that this theory could help the author to perform studies on the C-E translation of culture-specific items from a relatively new and multi-dimensional perspective in the present study.

Therefore, this study is expected to enrich the study of culture-specific items with keeping pace with the times, thereby inspiring more translation researchers to further explore new paths instead of being content with conventionally-established theories and previous achievements.

2. Theoretical framework: eco-translatology

2.1 An overview of eco-translatology

Chinese translation scholar Hu Gengshen, inspired by Darwinian's ideas "natural selection" and "the survival of the fittest", as well as Chinese traditional philosophy thoughts of "harmony between man and nature", puts forward the opinion of " taking translation as the process of adaptation and selection" in his article in 2001. Until In 2004, Hu Gengshen's book An Approach to Translation as Adaptation and Selection was initially published, which indicates Chinese translation researchers' first successful attempt in putting forward a new translation theory from a fresh perspective. According to Hu(胡庚申 2008: 13-14), Eco-translatology focuses on the wholeness of transnational ecology to illustrate the translation process, and it also describes the relationship between transnational Eco-environment and the translator. In addition, the theory emphasizes on the the translator's capability development from the perspective of transnational eco-environment[1].

Hu Gengshen(胡庚申 2008: 13-14) sets forth the concept of translational eco-environment which refers to the fields of the source languages and the target languages, embodying the social, linguistic, cultural and communicative aspects of translating, as well as such elements as the author, the reader, and the client. Obviously, all the factors are associated with the translator and the translation is covered by translational eco-environment. Therefore, translational eco-environment exerts profound influence on translation activity.

2.2 Adaptation and selection

The process of adaptation and selection is regarded as the basis of Eco-translatology. Hu Gengshen(胡庚申 2004:222) holds that translation is translators' adaptation and selection activities in a certain translational eco-environment[2]. The adaptation means that the translator acclimatizes himself or herself to the external and internal environment of both source and target language in order to have a clear and comprehensive understanding of both source text and target language, while the selection means the translators choose his or her own way to understand and digest the original text and then selects the most appropriate forms and contents to convey the original meaning. According to Hu Gengshen, translation could be described as a cyclic process of translator's adaptation and selection.

Hu states that there are two stages for translators in the translation activity: "nature's selection of translators and nature's selection of translation". From the graph, it is obvious that the translator is in the dominant position making selection and adaption. The first selection (as shown in the left) means the source text selects the translator who is the most qualified for finishing the translation task in translational environment[3]. At the same time, the translator adapts himself or herself to the translational environment. While the second selection indicates that the translator, as an important subject in this process, selects and adopts the most appropriate way to arrange the wording and phrasing, thereby reproducing the meaning of original text in target language. Based on the statements offered above, it can be found that adaption and selection are formed and developed simultaneously. That is to say, selective adaption and adaptive selection are alternatively cyclic.

2.3 Three-dimensional transformation in eco-translatology

For getting an excellent translation, the translator needs to explore the form, style and content of target text based on her or his comprehensively adaption to the eco-environment of both source and target language. However, it is obviously impossible for a translator to take fully every element in the translational environment into consideration. Therefore, Hu Gengshen(2006:2) puts forward the concepts of "three-dimensional transformation" for the process of adaptive selection to guide translators to make decisions, which includes "linguistic dimension, cultural dimension and communicative dimension[4]."

In the process of translator's adaptive selection, transformation from linguistic dimension requires the translator to choose the appropriate form and style of languages when she or he translates the source text into target text. And transformation from cultural dimension means the translator needs to convey exactly cultural connotation of the original text to target readers. Lastly, transformation from communicative dimension means focusing on the communicative intention from original

works to translation works so that target readers can react in the similar way as the source text readers.

3. An analysis of C-E translation of culture-specific items in *Red Poppies*

3.1 Culture-specific items in *Red Poppies*

With respect to the classification of culture-specific items, Nida (1964:91) put forward that there are five types sub-culture, namely religious culture, linguistic culture, social culture, material culture, and ecological culture[5]. In this section, all the culture-specific items in *Red Poppies* are divided into different categories based on Nida's classification of culture. *Red Poppies* was praised as Tibetan encyclopedia on account of its various contents covering all aspects of life. As a result, above all types of culture-specific items can be found in *Red Poppies*. They are introduced respectively as follows.

3.1.1 Material culture-specific items

Material culture-specific items mean those expressions of all kinds of physical objects created by human beings, covering various aspects of their daily life like housing, clothing, transportation and food. As a special carrier, those material creations contain certain culture connotation.

Table 1 Examples of Material culture-specific items

ST	TT	ST	TT
象牙镯子	irony bracelet	洋芋	potato
银腰带	silver belts	蚕豆	broad bean
牛毛毯子	cowhide rug	麦	barley

3.1.2 Linguistic culture-specific items

Linguistic culture-specific items refer to those items that reflect the unique linguistic features of a certain language from different perspectives, such as orthographical aspect, phonetic aspect, syntactic aspect and textual aspect, etc. According to Aixelá, whether a term is "culture-specific" or not depends on which pair of cultures is involved and what the textual function of the item is" (Aixelá1996:57), which indicates that culture-specific items only exist in the context of two languages[6].

In *Red Poppies*, large quantities of culture-specific items which emerges distinctive features at different linguistic levels can be found. There are some examples:

Table 2 Examples of Linguistic culture-specific items

ST	TT	ST	TT
无语凝噎	unable to speak	阿爸	ah-pa
秉笔直书	factual recording	阿妈	ah-ma
命归黄泉	departed this world for the Yellow Spring	恨铁不成钢	make feel guilty over failure to amount to anything

3.1.3 Ecological culture-specific items

With a certain living environment which differs from one nation to another, distinctive ecological culture was formed gradually in different regions. These ecological culture objects include local mountains, rivers, flowers, birds, geographical environment, and climate change, etc. Due to different geographical location, each nation has its own distinctive ecological culture, shaping ecological culture-specific items in literary works, like the following examples in *Red Poppies*:

Table 3 Examples of Ecological culture-specific items

ST	TT	ST	TT
农耕的山口地区	Farmlands	寨子	stone fortresses
官寨	estate house	土坯平房	adobe flat house

3.1.4 Social culture-specific items

Social culture covers a wide range of human society, including ideology, social class, historical background, social relations, customs, ethics, traditions, etc. Since *Red Poppies* describes vividly the Chieftain family's life and the development of Chieftain system, so related social culture-specific items are involved in this book, some of them are listed:

Table 4 Examples of Social culture-specific items

ST	TT		
桑吉卓玛	Sangye Dolma	卖其土司	chieftain maichi
翁波意西	Wangpo Yeshi	土司太太	chieftain's wife
索郎泽郎	Sonam Tserang	书记官	historian

3.1.5 Religious culture-specific items

Religious culture-specific items include agious belief, religious practice, religious legend, and anything about religious activities. *Red Poppies* is a masterpiece about Tibet where Tibetan Buddhism originated and flourished. Religious culture-specific items thus appear frequently in *Red Poppies*, for example:

Table 5 Examples of Religious culture-specific items

ST	TT	ST	TT
道场	perform rites	门巴喇嘛	Monpa lama
斋僧茶	vegetarian meal and tea	袈裟	cassock
《超生经》	Reincarnation Sutra	经堂	sutra hall

3.2 Traslator's adaption and selection from the three-dimensional transformation

3.2.1 Linguistic dimension

Translator's transformation from linguistic dimension mainly refers to the language structure and wording and phrasing at different linguistic level. As Xiong Bing(熊兵 2012:4)suggested in his article, in translation practice, we should figure out "how information is encoded at different linguistic levels in the two languages and try to decode at different linguistic levels in the two languages". In *Red Poppies*[7], Howard Goldblatt makes adaptive selection from different linguistic level, such as phonological level, lexical level, and syntactic level, etc. Following specific examples will be discussed.

Example 1:

ST:

姐姐回来一趟,父亲给了他整整两驮银子,还有一些宝石.（阿来,2000:163）

TT: What my sister got from her trip was enough silver for two loads on horseback and some gemstones. (Howard Goldblatt, 2002: 165)[8]

"两驮" is considered as a special measurement in China, which indicates two horses can carry it. The translator Goldblatt translates the words into "two loads on horseback" to convey its deep meaning. In this way, the target readers would understand how much silver it is. From another angle, it will give target readers the impression that horse is a kind of transportation in Tibet at that time and the horse is also used to be a measurement. In this example, foreignization strategy is also adopted properly to minimize the cultural difference between two languages .

Example2:

ST: 她的傻儿子这样对她说.她很失望地苦笑,并

做出一副要我感到内疚的恨铁不成钢的样子.(阿来,2000:255)

TT:With a comment like that from her idiot son, she smiled even more wryly, obviously disappointed. The look on her face meant to make feel guilty over failure to anything.(Howard Goldblatt, 2002: 257)

"恨铁不成钢" comes from A Dream of red mansion(红楼梦), one of four Chinese classical novels. It indicates one feels disappointed that others don't live up to his expectations. It is usually used to express the elder's expectation for the young generations. In *Red Poppies*, Goldblatt adopts free translation to deal with the idiom for adopting the eco-environment. So "恨铁不成钢" is translated into "make feel guilty over failure to amount to anything", and the expression "not amount to anything" in English means nothing will be in success, which exactly conveys the real connotation of original text[9]. For English readers, they can easily understand character's mental world.

3.2.2 Cultural dimension

There is no doubt that culture profoundly influenced the translation activities. In order fulfill successfully the transformation at couture level, the translator not only should focus on the content and form of original text, but also need to pay attention to cultural connotation. In *Red Poppies* the author mainly introduced the story about the chieftain Maichi's family, so a large amount of Tibet culture-specific expressions could be found in the book. Therefore, it requires the translator should have an in-depth understanding to the connotation of cultural items involved by the source text.

Example 3:

ST: 几声号角,一股黄尘,我们的马队就冲出去了,然后是一对手捧哈达的百姓,其中有几位声音高昂的歌手,然后是一群手持海螺与唢呐的和尚.（阿来,2000:23）

TT: At the sound of horn, our contingent of horse galloped off amid clouds of yello dust. They were followed by a procession of serf holding Khatag, the Tibetan silk offering. this group include singers with loud, booming voice. After them came a group of monks carrying giant conch shells and the woodwind Suonas.（Howard Goldblatt, 2002:27）

In this example, a splendid reception ceremony is organized to welcome the honored guest, Special Emissary Huang. "哈达" and "唢呐" are used to welcome distinguished guests by Tibetan people. Goldblatt adopts the method of transliteration plus annotation to translate "哈达" into "Khatag" and add explanation the "Tibet silk offering", and to translate "唢呐" into "Suona" and add the pre-modifier woodwind. The adoption of foreignization strategy by adding explanation can reduce the strangeness to original language. As a result, on one hand, the translation preserves distinct characteristic of Chinese culture. On the other hand, cultural difference between two languages was compensated to some extent so that target readers are more likely to understand the translation. In this example, the foreignization strategy with transliteration plus annotation helps translators to fulfill adaptive transformation from culture dimension.

Example 4

ST:要是我是个聪明的家伙,说不定早就命归黄泉,不能坐在这里,就着一碗茶胡思乱想了（阿来,2000:3）

TT: If I had been born smart, I might have long since departed this world for the Yellow Spring instead of sitting here and thinking wild thoughts over a cup of tea.（Howard Goldblatt, 2002:5）

In Chinese culture, all of people would be buried under the ground when they die in ancient China. Since there is usually water under the ground, mixing with loess, it looks like yellow spring, so the place where people are buried is called the yellow spring (黄泉). All in all, "命归黄泉" means that one meets his death. Howard However, in western world, most people think people will go to heaven or hell after they die, so the cultural difference may give rise to obstacles in understanding the meaning. Goldblatt translates it into "depart this world for the Yellow Spring". They adopts the method of literal translation to preserve original culture-specific item "黄泉". Meanwhile, the expression of "depart this world for" is used as compensation to convey the meaning of "命归黄泉", which to some extent narrowed the cultural difference. Obviously, during the process of adaptive selection, the translator chooses the foreignization strategy to remain Chinese culture-specific elements as much as possible, thereby finishing the adaptive transformation from lexical level.

3.2.3 Communicative dimension

Example 5

ST:不枉跟了我们一场,眼光不错,眼光不错嘛!（阿来,2000:148）

TT: She did not live with us in vain. She has good

taste. She has made an excellent choice.（Howard Goldblatt, 2002: 150）

It can be found there are two same phrase "眼光不错" in source text, but the translators translate them into two sentences with different structures and words to represent the connotation to target readers. The translation "good taste" and "excellent choice" completely convey the deep meaning of source text. In this example, translators adopt domestication strategy realized by the method of free translation and amplification, thereby ensuring target readers have the same reaction with original readers.

Example 6:

ST: 不干净的东西有两种,一种是秽的,另一种是邪崇的.（阿来,2000:86）

TT: The word foul held two separate meanings, one dirty, the another evil.(Howard Goldblatt, 2002:87)

In the source text, "不干净的东西" is a religious vocabulary. In Tibet where most people believes in Tibetan Buddhism, it usually means foul, which refers to supernatural and non-material components of human. In many religious cultures, the followers believe that the soul resides in physical body and dominates human. Therefore, the translator chooses "the word foul" transfer the deep meaning of "不干净的东西". In fact, as to western readers, the word "foul" is not strange. In consequence, it is easier for them to understand the meaning of the original text. In this example, domestication translation is adopted by Goldblatt to get similar reaction between original readers and target readers.

4. Conclusion

Based on the researches to above questions, the conclusions are summarized here: Firstly, the author divides the culture-specific items in *Red Poppies* into five groups based on Nida's classification of five categories of sub-culture, namely linguistic culture-specific items, material culture-specific items, ecological cul-ture--specific items, social culture-specific items and religious culture-specific items.

Secondly, though the analysis the author found Howard Goldblatt is of high attainment in Chinese cul-

ture, and he is flexible and rational when dealing with different types of culture-specific items so as to maximally fulfill multi-dimensional transformation with the influence of translational eco-environment. From linguistic dimension, the translator Howard Goldblatt attaches great importance to the features of source text and try to reproduce the sense, form and sound of original language. From culture dimension, translator fully takes into account the cultural differences between Chinese and English and tries to narrow the cultural gap in translation. From communication dimension, he makes great efforts on communicative transformation to accurately convey communicative intention of source text.

Thirdly, at the stage of adaptive selection, Goldblatts adopts a combination of foreignization strategy and domestication strategy, and the former plays a dominating role. In terms of translation method, various translation methods are adopted such as free translation, transliteration, transliteration plus annotation, and amplification and so on. Meanwhile, literal translation is used frequently.

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