A Comparative Study of Two English Versions of Hong Lou Meng in the light of Domestication and Foreignization

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Abstract. The debate about domestication and foreignization has been an ongoing focus in the field of translation, which, however, never prevents them from being employed as two main strategies in practice. The translation of Hong Long Meng is a good case in point. This great work has been translated into many different languages ever since its birth, of which, A Dream of Red Mansions by Mr. and Mrs. Yang and The Story of the Stone by David Hawke are the most widely accepted. Data for analysis are selected by comparing and categorizing the selected samples from the original work and the two English versions. The study finds that the Yang’s are foreignization-oriented to show Chinese culture to the readers, whereas Hawkes’ is more of domestication to retell the story to readers. Besides, reasons such as, different cultural backgrounds, different translation purposes and different readers they address to, also account for translators’ different choices of strategies. This thesis concludes that translators should combine the two strategies to make their translation faithful to the original texts and produce a better interpretation to the target-readers.

1. Introduction

Hong Lou Meng, known as one of the four Chinese classic masterpieces as well as gems of world culture, is considered to be a great encyclopedia of Chinese culture. This great work not only belongs to Chinese people, but a treasure of world literature.

It has been translated into 17 kinds of foreign languages. The translation of this great work is of great significance to the intercultural communication as well as to the promotion of Chinese culture soft power. The most popular English versions are Yang Xianyi’s titled A Dream of Red Mansions and David Hawkes’s titled The Story of the Stone. Both versions successfully reproduced the original text with different translation strategy. As the study of Hong Lou Meng has aroused “a red tide” in China, the dispute about which translation is better lasting a long time. The disputation actually focuses on the domestication and foreignization.

The paper aims to figure out how did people translate Hong Lou Meng in different ways and why they choose different translation strategies as well as which translation is better. This article will first give a brief literature review, which explains the definition of domestication and foreignization and the significance of Hong Lou Meng. Chapter 3 provides the study method. A comparative study of these two versions from the perspective of domestication and foreignization was done to find out which of version is more faithful to the original content. Both quantitative study and qualitative analysis are adopted to compare the differences in these two versions. Chapter 4 compares these two versions from culture and linguistics to analyze different translation methods. The last chapter provides a summary of this thesis and states the author’s opinion about the translation.
This study intends to achieve two goals. First, the paper hopes to be exposed to the splendid traditional Chinese culture and figure out which translation version is better. Second, the paper hopes to provide inspirations for translators to choose proper translation strategy.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definition of Foreignization and Domestication

Been widely used in literature translation, domestication and foreignization are originally proposed by the German theologian and philosopher F. Schleiermacher. He initiated two methods of translation in this speech, “there are only two (translation methods), paraphrase and imitation”[1]. Schleiermacher put forward author-oriented and reader-oriented translation methods. This pioneering practice broke the boundary between literal and free translations, which has a far reaching significance for the later scholars.

According to the Dictionary of Translation Studies, domestication refers to a transparent, fluent style adopted to minimize the strangeness of the foreign text for the target language readers[2]. The typical representative is the translator Eugene A. Nida, whose idea of domestication is reflected in his principle “closest natural equivalence”. He insists on “functional equivalence” rather than “formal correspondence” as he believes foreignization will inevitably change the purpose of communication lies in making the messages intelligible [3].

Domestication advantages in breaking the barrier on the cultural exchange and avoiding the culture conflict. Moreover, it makes the target language readers resonating with the translation. However, domestication deficits in missing some of the source language information since domesticated translation is like a rewriting in the target language, leaving no traces to the source language. The target language readers wouldn’t feel any exotic taste in the domesticating translation.

Foreignization is the translation strategies in which a target text “deliberately breaks target conventions by retaining something foreign of the original text” [1]. Represented by Lawrence Venuti, foreignization argues to select a foreign text that is marginal in the target culture while being translated in a fluent way [4].

Foreignization focuses on the culture content of source language. The fundamental principle is to admit and to retain the differences between the source language and the target language. Apart from this, foreignization helps “restrain the ethnocentric violence of translation.”[4].

Foreignization advantages in reproducing the original culture to the reader and bringing the source language culture to the target language culture and thus enriches the content of the target language culture. But the communication obstacle in foreignization may lead to confusion in reading.

In a word, domestication means bringing the foreign culture closer to the reader in the target language, making the translation more recognizable and more familiar to the readers. While foreignization is source language, culture oriented translation which strives to preserve the original flavor in order to retain the foreignness of the source language culture.
2.2. An Introduction to *Hong Lou Meng*

As one of the four Chinese classic masterpieces, *Hong Lou Meng* represents the peak of literary development reached by Chinese novels. The great value of this novel lies not only in its artistic employment of language, but also in its profound ideological content.

*Hong Lou Meng* contains 120 chapters in total, which the first eighty chapters were written by Cao Xueqin, and the last forty chapters were finished by Gao E. Focused on the prosperity and decline of the four illustrious families, the novel presents the lives of people in different class. *Hong Lou Meng* has been read and discussed by numerous academics from different aspects since 19th century. It has gradually become a specialized branch of learning called “Redology”. Therefore, it is of great significance to introduce this great work to the world. Being translated into seventeen foreign languages, *Hong Lou Meng* is a Chinese classic novel and receives a high reputation all over the world. There are nine English translations of the novel in total, among which the two best-known are *A Dream of Red Mansions* by Mr. and Mrs. Yang and *The Story of the Stone* by the David Hawkes and his son-in-law John Minford.

Yang’s edition mainly adopts foreignization with strong sense of original Chinese culture. While in Hawkes version, he adopts domestication as the principal strategy.

The previous research studies two versions in detail either from culture or linguistic aspect separately with few comparative studies of the two English versions. So this thesis aims to process a comparative study of the two English versions from both linguistic and culture aspect with an approach of domestication and foreignization.

3. Methodology

This paper aims to compare two versions on the basis of previous studies from the perspective of foreignization and domestication. As to this chapter the methods and principles applied in this study is provided.

This study will base the comparative study of the two versions of *Hong Lou Meng* on Venuti’s theory together with some inspiration from other scholars’ findings in the relevant field, such as Schleiermacher and Nida. Their theories will function as the guideline to analyze the topic to draw the conclusion that Hawkes’ version is mainly domesticating and Yangs’ version tend to be foreignizing.

Affluent sample is necessary to process the investigation as the more the sample, the more accurate the results. Potential data and their source are recorded in notebook to facilitate later collection. Every sample has manifested the translation strategy with its typical characteristic. These materials are put into systemic and logical sub-categories to reveal the theme from distinct angle.

This thesis conduct an investigative study on the different translation strategies employed in the two English versions of *Hong Lou Meng* with respect to linguistic and cultural. 1). How do the two versions differ from each other in culture and linguistic level? 2). Why the translators chose different translation strategies? 3). Which version is better?

In order to achieve the goal satisfactorily, rational and empirical, deductive and inductive methods and procedures are employed in the study. The chosen samples were identified according
to various patterns in order to answer the research questions. The inductive method are employed in
dominance together with deductive method.

As to the procedure of this thesis, first, a hypothesis is proposed concerning the translation
policies applied in the two English versions as well as the respective purpose of the translator. Then,
abundant samples selected from the two English versions are provided as the target of the present
study. Next, samples which were coded according to the requirement of the research questions will
be analyzed within the framework of the domestication and foreignization and thus leading to
findings toward the translation strategies and other factors in translation. At last, the author will
explain some opinion concerning which version is better.

4. A Comparative Study of the Two Versions of *Hong Lou Meng*

Chapter 4 focuses on analyzing different choices of translation strategies of the two versions from
linguistic and cultural prospects. The author selects 230 samples of different strategies in terms of
culture and linguistics by tagging from the beginning to the end of the two translated versions.

|                  | Domestication | Foreignization |
|------------------|---------------|----------------|
|                  | Linguistic    | Culture        | Linguistic | Culture | Total |
| Yang             | 28            | 31             | 69         | 102      | 230   |
| Hawkes           | 73            | 93             | 24         | 40       | 230   |

|                  | Yang (%)      | Hawkes (%)     |
|------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Domestication     | 25.65%        | 72.17%         |
| Foreignization    | 74.34%        | 27.83%         |

From Table 1, it can be seen that Yang applies mainly foreignization, accounting for 74.34% in
total, while Hawke prefers to domestication, accounting for 72.17% in total. The figure tells that
Yang’s version mainly adopts foreignization and Hawkes’s translation mainly adopts domestication.
The selected samples are analyzed from linguistic and cultural aspects in the following.

4.1. Domestication and Foreignization in Culture

4.1.1. Differences in Garden Architecture

In *Hong Lou Meng*, one of the most significant culture aspect belongs to the description of
architecture. The garden architecture not only represented the honorable status of the family, but
embodied the extravagant life in Jias’ Mansion. The author will compare the following examples
from architecture. The samples are compared from architecture.

(a) Original: …仪门内大院落，上面五间大正房，两边厢房鹿顶，耳房钻山… [5]

Yang: …passes through a ceremonial gate into a large courtyard. The northern building had five
large apartments and wings on either side. [6]
Hawkes: …through an inner gate into a large courtyard. The big building at the head of the courtyard was connected at each end to galleries running through the length of the corners. [7]

The sample portrays the magnificence of the Jia Mansion is in Daiyu’s eyes, so the translation should demonstrate the luxury to put readers in the real circumstance as Daiyu.

“仪门”, “厢房”, “耳房” are typical Chinese architecture terms. “仪门” was translated into “ceremonial gate” in the Yang’s by foreignization, which conveys the function of the gate to the target language readers. Translation of “inner gate” in Hawkes’s version fails to provide the conception of “仪门”, but still readable and acceptable to the target language readers. Therefore, Hawkes’ version achieves coherence rule as Yang’s version fulfills fidelity rule. Yang intends to introduce the architecture culture, while Hawkes tries to portray the complicated structure of the Jia Mansion. Yang’s translation of this section is more concise than Hawkes’.

4.1.2. Differences in Diet

Numerous terms and descriptions concerning dietetic culture are peculiar in Chinese without corresponding English terms, which causes great difficulty in translation. Therefore, choosing right strategy to convey the brilliant Chinese diet culture has been a great issue for translators.

(b) Original:这盒内一样是藕粉杜糖糕，一样是松攘鹅油卷。 [5]

Yang: In one were cakes made of ground lotus-foot flavored with fragrant osmanthus and pine-kernel and goose-fat rolls. [6]

Hawkes: In the first box there were two kinds of steamed things: marzipan cakes made of ground lotus-root and sugared cassia-flowers, and pine-nut and goose-fat rolls. [7]

There are two kinds of traditional Chinese food in the sentence; “藕粉杜糖糕”, a famous cake in south China, is made from the lotus-root powder and the osmanthus sugar; “松攘鹅油卷”, a traditional snap, is made of pine nut and goose-fat rolls. In Yang’s version, “cakes made of ground lotus-foot flavored with fragrant osmanthus” covers all the materials of the cake and thus be faithful to the source text. Hawkes’ translated it into “marzipan cakes made of ground lotus-root and sugared cassia-flowers”. The marzipan is a kind of popular cake in western countries made of almond and egg white. Hawkes applied domestication to help the readers to imagine the flavor of the cake. However, the author finds Hawkes mistranslates “杜” into “cassia-flowers”, a kind of flavoring used to cook meat in China, however, the “杜” in this case refers to the osmanthus flower. The mistranslation may result in the misunderstanding of Chinese diet culture. From the comparison, Yang’s version betters in the translation of Chinese diet culture.

4.2. Domestication and Foreignization in Linguistic Level

One of the distinctive features in Hong Lou Meng is the large number of the character and the ingenious name of the characters which implies their characteristic and destiny. The differences of the translation of the two categories of names were analyzed between two versions. The following charters provide a direct sign of the differences in the translation of names.
Table 2. Names of the main characters.

| Characters | Yang’s Translation | Hawkes’ Translation |
|------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| 宝玉       | Pao-yu             | Bao-yu              |
| 黛玉       | Tai-yu             | Dai-yu              |
| 宝钗       | Pao-chai           | Bao-chai            |

Table 3. Names of the servant girls.

| Characters | Yang’s Translation | Hawkes’ Translation |
|------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| 袭人       | His-jen            | Aroma               |
| 平儿       | Ping-erh           | Patience            |
| 鸳鸯       | Yuan-yang          | Faithful            |

As can be seen from the above tables (Table 2 and 3), Yang’s translation applies transliteration or transliteration plus annotation. In general, Yang’s translation strategy is foreignization. On one hand, the adoption of foreignization in the translation of characters’ name saved the pronunciation of the name therefore be consistent with the original text. To some westerner reader, they might notice the “strange” name, which may inspire them to explore the culture background information. However, to some readers, this kind of translation might be an obstacle in reading and thus lose the reading interest. On the other hand, although Yang tends to remain the cultural information of source language, but applying transliteration method regardless of the characters’ social status and personality fails to convey the inherent artistic quality of the names.

As to Hawkes’ version, domestication functioned as the main method in the translation of characters’ names and his translation is more flexible compared with Yang’s version.

First of all, Hawkes applies different translation method according to the characters’ status and identity. Transliteration is employed in the translation of the heroes names such as “宝玉”, “黛玉”, “宝钗” to highlight their honorable identity. The servant girls’ personality and characteristics are presented in the translation, for instance, “平儿”, Wang Xifeng’s maid, powered in the housework, is obedience to the masters and very tolerance to the people of lower class. The translation of “patience” not only shows her characteristic but the pronunciation of “patience” is similar to the “Ping”. Besides, “鸳鸯” is translated into “Faithful” which manifests her faithfulness to the master. The readers can get a direct impression on the characters’ personality from Hawkes’ translation of the characters’ name.

In a word, Yang mainly applies foreignization, which successfully kept the original flavor but might lead to obstacles for target readers. Hawkes flexibly deals with the translation of the characters’ name making the translation text more readable.
5. Conclusion

This thesis compares two English versions of *Hong Lou Meng* in the light of foreignization and domestication. Domestication is target language oriented, which avoids the confusion caused by the culture gap and produces better communicative effects. Foreignization is the source language oriented strategy, which preserves the original flavor but may lead to some obstacles for target readers in understanding. Domestication and foreignization are against to each other and at the same time be complement to each other.

Two English versions by Yang named “*A Dream of Red Mansions*” and Hawkes named “*The Story of the Stone*” adopt different translation strategy. Through the study, the author draws the conclusion that Yang’s version mainly applies foreignization while Hawkes adopts domestication.

In fact, translation strategy is not rooted in a translator’s mind and he faces the dilemma to choose between distinct translation policies during the whole process of translation. The purpose of translation and the acceptability of readership are two main factors that influence the translators’ choice.

Through the study, the author also finds that it is unwise to say which translation method is better because they both have their advantages and shortages as well as it is hard to say which English version is better. A good translation should both be readable to the target reader and be faithful to the original text.

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