



# An Analysis of the Translation Strategies of English Versions of *Kong Yiji*

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Received: 12 Apr 2023; Received in revised form: 15 May 2023; Accepted: 25 May 2023; Available online: 03 Jun 2023

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**Abstract**—*Kong Yiji* is one of Lu Xun's representative short stories whose dissemination cannot be separated from the efforts of Chinese and western translators. Created under the background of the collision of old and new cultures, its cultural connotation and linguistic features bring obstacle for its translation. At present, the most authoritative version are those translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, Julia Lovell and William A. Lyell. A comparative study of the translation strategies and methods adopted by the three versions can help translators learn from them. After comparative analysis, it is found that the translation strategies adopted by the three translations are different in dealing with language and cultural differences, among which foreignization is more conducive to presenting the linguistic characteristics of the original text under the premise of ensuring the fluency of the translation.



**Keywords**— *Kong Yiji*, English version, translation strategy and method

## I. INTRODUCTION

Translation strategies of foreignization and domestication can be traced back to 1813. According to the German philosopher Schleiermacher (1813/2012:49), the translator either tries to bring the reader closer to the author or the author closer to the reader. Venuti, an Italian-American scholar, refers to these two translation strategies as foreignization and domestication. According to him, naturalization is ethnocentric, reducing the foreign language to the cultural values of the target language and bringing the author into their own country; the former method opposes the ethnocentric approach and advocates recording the language and culture of the foreign text, thus sending the reader abroad. Eugene Nida is a representative of the naturalization strategy. Nida (1969:24) defines dynamic reciprocity as a situation in which the reader of the receiving language responds to almost the same extent as the reader of the source language (1995:20).

As the founder of modern Chinese literature, Lu Xun's work has been the focus of academic research. *Kong Yiji* taken from Lu Xun's short story collection *Cry Out*, is

written in a witty and humorous style, describing how a poor and stubborn scholar is devastated by the Chinese feudal education system and the indifference and numbness around him. The translations of Yang and Dai, Julia Lovell, and William A. Lyell selected for this article are the bilingual edition of *Cry Out* released by Yilin Press in 2009, *The Real Story of Ah-Q and other Tales of China* published by Penguin Classics in 2009, and *Diary of a Madman and Other Storys* published by the University of Hawaii Press in 1990. Some scholars in China have studied the English translations of this work in terms of style, cultural load words, and translation strategies, among which the main object of study is the translations of Yang and Dai, while a careful comparative study of the translations of Yang and Dai, Julia Lovell and William A. Lyell is lacking. Some scholars believe that Yang's translation mainly adopts the strategy of foreignization, while Julia and Lyell naturalization strategies. However, in this paper, the authors find that the translation strategies of the three translators are not so clearly divided. The translators of the three translations have their own measurement and choice of translation strategies and methods especially when it comes to culturally loaded

words. Therefore, this paper selects some typical examples of sentences and analyzes the differences and similarities of the translation strategies and methods adopted by the three translations in order to provide reference for translators.

## II. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE THREE TRANSLATIONS

Example 1:

鲁镇的酒店的格局，是和别处不同的。Yang: The layout of Luzhe's taverns is unique.

Julia: The taverns in Luzhen were rather particular in their layout.

Lyell: The layout of wineshops in Lu Town is different from that in other places.

The original text begins by introducing the reader to the location of the story: the hotel in Lu Town. In Yang and Julia's translation, "Lu Town" is directly translated as "Luzhen", which is a strategy of foreignization; while Lyell's translation is "Lu Town", which is a strategy of foreignization plus domestication and the corresponding translation method is phonetic translation plus paraphrase. Lu Town is the city where most of Lu Xun's novels take place, and it is a unique feature of Lu Xun's work. It is difficult not to associate Lu Xun's works with this word, as Kong Yiji, Sister Xianglin and Ah Q are all characters of Luzhen. Therefore, it is required to think twice about the translation of this word. "Lu Zhen" is a proper noun and is composed of the proper name "Lu" and the common name "Zhen". Translating both the proper name and the common name with its own meaning into Pinyin is easy to cause misunderstanding. For example, if the pinyin of two places is translated as "luzhen" without distinguishing the tones, then the same pinyin corresponds to two words, which can easily cause confusion and memory difficulties for English readers who do not have tones. Regarding the shortcomings of pinyinized place names, Ge believes (2009) that pinyinized place names themselves eliminate the meaning of Chinese place names. If they are marked with tones in order to distinguish the tones of different place names, the effect of distinguishing the meaning is only effective for Chinese readers. Therefore, whether to mark the tones or not, it is all a question. The 2000 edition of the *New Era Chinese-English Dictionary*, published by the authoritative publishing house Commercial Press and compiled by a group of authoritative Chinese-to-English experts, is the most reference Chinese-to-English dictionary. The English translations of the administrative divisions and major place names of China in the appendix of the dictionary are based on the phonetic and

transliteration method. Although the phonetic translation adopted by Yang and Julia can present the original pronunciation of "Luzhen" in Chinese, it is only friendly to "elite readers", and readers who do not know Chinese Pinyin will be confused when they read this word. Therefore, transliteration plus paraphrase adopted by Lyell does not hinder the spread of the original culture, but makes the translation clearer, avoids misunderstandings, and is more conducive to English readers' acceptance of the translation.

Example 2:

幸而写得一笔好字，便替人家抄抄书，换一碗饭吃。

Yang : Luckily he was a good calligrapher and could find enough copying work to fill his rice bowl.

Julia: Fortunately, he had a good writing hand-he could have scraped by, copying out books.

Lyell: But fortunately he could write a good hand and was able to keep his ricebowl full by copying books.

This sentence tells the story of Kong Yiji whom the author of this story learned about as a fellow in the hotel through the gossip of others: Kong Yiji once studied but failed to get into the exams and had no ability to earn a living, so he is poor and on the verge of begging for food. Fortunately, he is able to write well by which he can barely make ends meet by copying books for others.

The phrase "换一碗饭吃" here is intended to convey the meaning of "barely supporting oneself". Both Yang's and Lyell's translations adopt the strategy of foreignization, and the translation method is literal translation. Julia's version, on the other hand, uses the domestication strategy, and the free translation method. The domestication strategy discards the foreign culture embedded in the original text and brings the translation closer to the reader. Although "Scrape by" accurately expresses the meaning of "barely making ends meet", which is an authentic and common expression in English, the translation method makes the unique culture of the original text disappear, which hinders the spread of Chinese culture and is not conducive to the enrichment of the target language. The staple food of British and American people is mainly potatoes and corn, while countries and regions such as southern China and Japan are mainly rice with a long history of rice food culture. The difference in food culture can be expressed through language. Chinese people can't eat without rice, so there are many idioms and proverbs related to rice, such as "don't give up for five buckets of rice", "it is difficult for a clever woman to cook without rice", "firewood, rice, oil and salt", "rice pearls, salary and laurel", These words are vivid, interesting and

philosophical. In contrast, the target language--English, reflects the unique culture of maritime civilization because of its proximity to the sea and the inseparability of people's diet from all kinds of fish. In *Longman Dictionary*, there are a lot of slang words about "fish", such as "cold fish" to describe people with a cold attitude; "there are plenty of fish in the sea" is the Chinese equivalent of "there is no grass at the end of the earth", which is used to comfort people who have been abandoned. This kind of language reflects the difference in food and drink, which is a unique feature that distinguishes each culture from others and is not negative. Therefore, if we use domestication strategies to cover them up for the sake of translation fluency, readers of the translated language will not be able to understand the cultural differences behind the source culture. Moreover, the phrase "fill his rice bowl" itself is very vivid and does not make the translation difficult to read. The reader can also understand the meaning in the context.

Example 3:

他对人说话·总是满口之乎者也·教人半懂不懂的。

Yang: He used so many archaisms in his speech that half of it was barely intelligible.

Julia: His speech was so dusty with classical constructions you could barely understand him.

Lylle: When he talked, he always larded whatever he had to say with *lo*, *forsooth*, *verily*, *nay* and came out with a whole string of such phrases, things that you could half make out, and half couldn't.

This passage is a description of Kong Yiji's characteristics, showing the two sides of him from his speech and behavior. On the one hand, he takes pride in his studies as an intellectual; on the other hand, he is pedantic and stubborn, acting like a scholar and abusing the written language regardless of the occasion. According to the Chinese dictionary, "之乎者也" are the four tone auxiliaries "之", "乎", "者", and "也", which are commonly used in literary languages. *The Chinese dictionary* uses "之乎者也" to ridicule readers who only know how to chew on words but cannot solve practical problems, and to describe half-written words or articles. All the three translations adopt the translation strategy of domestication. Differences lie in different words used by translators to interpret this word. Yang uses "archaism" to refer to old words that are no longer in use. Julia chooses "classical constructions". Although its meaning can express "之乎者也", it is mainly positive, meaning "classic and traditional", so it does not match the tone of the original text which is used to satirize Kong

Yiji. In contrast, Yang's choice of words is more concise and accurate. But this translation method directly combines four words into one word, which is detrimental to the meaning of the original text. In contrast, Lyell's translation is more accurate. He replaces the four words corresponding to the original text with their English counterparts of archaic words for the set translation method, which interprets the translation by borrowing the idioms of the target language to replace the original words and phrases (Gong, 2011). The words "lo", "forsooth", "verily" and "nay" are all old English words that emphasize the tone and correspond to the original text in function. In addition, Lyell (1990: 43) also explains the usage of "之乎者也" in Chinese by adding a note at the end of this sentence: "Primarily a written language, classical Chinese is not easily intelligible when spoken. Identifying himself with the scholargentry class that ruled China under the imperial system, Kong uses the bookish language of the classics in his everyday speech." Although the method of adding notes ensures the maximum restoration of the meaning of the original text, it affects the fluency of reading. However, it is better to add notes in order to be more faithful to the original text and let readers better understand the cultural load of the words in the translation.

Example 4:

茴香豆的茴字，怎样写的？不是草头底下一个来回的回字么？回字有四样写法。

Yang: How do you write the *hui* in aniseed-peas? Isn't it the *hui* written with the element for grass? There are four different ways of writing *hui*.

Julia: How do you write "aniseed"? It's just 茴 *hui*, the *hui* for "return", with the grass radical on top, isn't it? *hui*.

Lylle: How do you write the character for 'fennel' in 'fennel-flavored beans'? Isn't it a grass radical on top with the character 'back,' like in the phrase 'back and forth'. There are four different ways of writing the bottom part.

This sentence is the question that Kong Yiji asks the author at the hotel when he learned that the author had read books, and the answer that "I" gave to "me" in order to test me, which shows Kong Yiji's stereotype and pretentiousness.

Yang's translation adopts the transliteration method, directly replacing the Chinese homophones "茴" and "回" with pinyin, without distinguishing between them and omitting the explanation of the word "回" in the original text. The explanation of the original text is omitted. This is likely to cause reading difficulties for English readers and can only be understood by readers who are proficient in

Chinese. In contrast, Lyell's translation adopts the strategy of foreignization plus domestication. First of all, "fennel-flavored beans" is a direct translation, and the word-by-word translation retains the form and meaning of the original. When dealing with homophones, the word "fennel" is used to replace "茴" in "茴香豆" and "back" is used to express "回" and explains the meaning of 回 and the position of the word "back" in "fennel" by the use of "back and forth" and "on the bottom". The last word "回" directly uses "the bottom part" to refer to the lower part of "茴". In this way, the confusion caused by the Chinese homophones is cleverly avoided, and the form and meaning of "回" and "茴" are to a certain extent distinguished, while the structure of the Chinese characters is preserved, and the meaning of the original text is clearly expressed by the usual expressions in English. However, Lyell does not show the word "茴" directly to the reader, and after translating it as "fennel" in the first sentence, he then uses the composition of Chinese characters to explain "fennel". The translation is inconsistent. Therefore, only literal translation, transliteration or paraphrase is not a perfect representation for this sentence.

Julia's translation also uses a combination of foreignization and domestication, but it is different from Lyell's. The domestication strategy is reflected in the direct translation of the word "茴" as "aniseed"; the foreignization strategy is reflected in the fact that the word "茴" is not translated, but is directly used into the target text. And the Chinese pinyin is indicated and the composition of the word "茴" is explained. The translation method of directly copying the original words and phrases is often called "zero translation", which is defined as: "Strictly speaking, zero translation is a reverse translation, in which the source language symbols are adopted in the translated language and the reader enters the source language and culture to understand the translated text. (Luo Guoqing, 2011: 43) Since Chinese is a pictographic character and English is a phonetic character, the structure of the word "茴" cannot be shown in English alone, so the appropriate use of "zero translation" can not only clearly express the meaning of the original text, but also achieve cultural exchange and let readers understand the Chinese character. For the last word "回", like Yang, the transliteration method is used without distinguishing it from "茴", which may cause confusion.

### III. CONCLUSION

The main translation methods used by the three translations in dealing with language and cultural differences are: direct translation, free translation,

transliteration, set translation, direct translation with notes, and free translation with notes. When the above translation methods cannot perfectly present the form and content of the original text, the "zero translation" method is also adopted, in which the source language symbols are directly used in the translated language. As foreign translators, Julia Lovell and William A. Lyell do not simply adopt domestication strategy in order to make the original text more fluent and discard the heterogeneous culture of the original. Likewise, Yang and Dai do not use foreignization strategy to make the readers understand Chinese culture when they promote Chinese culture to go abroad. Both strategies should be used with the aim of correctly conveying the content and form of the original text. Translation practitioners should learn from the strengths of the three translations and summarize their weaknesses in order to improve their own translation skills.

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