RESEARCH ARTICLE

On the Inclusive Relation between Translation and Communication in Classics Translation: A Case Study of Chu Ci

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ABSTRACT

To clarify the relationship between translation and communication will be of great help to Chinese classics’ “going global” and the establishment of communication studies of translation. Chu Ci (楚辞) is one of the significant Chinese classics. Therefore, to carry out a case study of it will be very meaningful. Through the case study of Chu Ci, this article aims to solve the following two questions: 1) What communication forms can be seen in classics translation? 2) What is the implication for studies on the relationship between translation and communication in classics translation with respect to the establishment of communication studies of translation? This article finds there is an inclusion relation between translation and communication, and the study objects of communication studies of translation should contain all modes of communication including translation and other modes of translation-related communication.

1. Introduction

Classics are the product of ancient Chinese civilization. Translation of classics is an important way to tell Chinese stories, spread Chinese voices, and build Chinese images all over the world. However, in spite of the tremendous manpower and resources China has put into the translation of classics, the results are not satisfactory. Obviously, when studying the translation and dissemination of classics, we should not only focus on translation, but also pay attention to dissemination.

Chu Ci is an important Chinese literary classic. Its translation and communication are typical and worth attention. It will be meaningful to figure out the relationship between translation and communication in classics translation through a case study of Chu Ci. It can also contribute to the establishment of communication studies of translation and provide theoretical interpretation and guidance for the transmission of Chinese classics.

This article attempts to address the following two questions:

(1) What communication forms can be seen in classics

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translation?

(2) What is the implication for studies on the relationship between translation and communication in classics translation with respect to the establishment of communication studies of translation?

This article has probed into the relationship between translation and communication in classics translation and contributed to the establishment of communication studies of translation.

2. Materials and Methods

This article employs a case study of Chu Ci to explore the relationship between translation and communication in classics translation. It is a trans-disciplinary research. It discusses the communication characteristics of translations and the translation characteristics of other modes of translation-related communication. The author analyzes and summarizes the translation variations in other modes of translation-related communication through descriptive and explanatory methods.

3. Results

3.1 A Theoretical Analysis Model for the Translation and Communication of Classics

Classics are important national literature \(^{[1]}\), or important literature that records ancient laws and regulations, or ancient books in general \(^{[2]}\). In Chinese academic community, the definition of “Chinese classics” is still inconclusive, but scholars have reached an agreement that “Chinese classics” must be the literature that has appeared in Chinese history and gone through a long-term historical precipitation, with a great significance \(^{[3]}\). All the above definitions of classics emphasize their importance. Therefore, “classics” in this study are limited to the important literature in ancient China.

Translation is an important way of communication. However, in addition to “pure” translation, that is, complete translation and abridged translation, there are other modes of classics’ dissemination, such as literary anthologies, works of literary history, scholarly monographs and journal articles, Ph.D. and M.A. theses, sinological textbooks, conference proceedings, and so on. For instance, A History of Chinese Literature by Herbert Giles has promoted the dissemination of Chinese classical literature in Europe. This type of communication modes is closely related to translation. It contains rich translation variations, such as translation rearrangement, explanatory translation, and reference translation. However, it is not classified as translation in this research because translation does not play a main role in it.

Both translation and other modes of translation-related communication of classics have also promoted the foreign transmission of Chinese classics and are worthy of study. Therefore, we believe that “communication” in the study of translation and communication of classics refers to the dissemination properties of classics translation, as well as the generation and dissemination of other translation-related classical texts. Translation can be divided into complete translation and abridged translation. The research on translation can focus on the choice of the source text and translation strategy, and the effect of communication. For example, questions like “Why does the translator choose abridged translation instead of complete translation?” and “What are the reasons and purpose for the translator to choose certain translation strategies?”, can be discussed. Research on other modes of translation-related dissemination can be done with Translation Variation Theory (henceforth “TVT”) \(^{[4]}\). The research focus can be the form of the text, the variations being used and their effects, and the overall transmission effect. Based on the above discussion, a theoretical analysis model for the study of the translation and dissemination of Chinese classics has been tentatively constructed (see Figure 1).

It should be pointed out that “translation” and “communication” in the translation and communication of classics are not the same. In this study, “translation” only refers to pure translations, such as complete translation and abridged translation. “Communication” includes all the modes of translation-related dissemination, such as literary anthologies, works of literary history, scholarly monographs and journal articles, Ph.D. and M.A. theses, sinological textbooks, conference proceedings, and so on. In other words, the study on the translation and communication of classics includes the study on translations and the study on other modes of translation-related communication. The study on translations will analyze how the translations are generated and disseminated from a communication perspective. The study on other modes of translation-related communication will discuss how these modes are formed and explore the translation variation’s function in the whole communication process from a translation perspective. Then the relationship between translation and communication will be clarified in order to provide theoretical interpretation and guidance for the classics translation.

3.2 Translation as a Mode of Communication

In the case study of Chu Ci, translation can be divided into two categories, complete translation and abridged translation. Complete translation refers to the translations of the full text of this canon, while abridged translation is
the rendering of one or several poems of it. It is noteworthy that there is a category named selective translation in TVT. However, it is different from abridged translation in this research. Selective translation in TVT refers to dependent translation texts which are only parts of the entire communication material, such as the translations of Li Sao and Yu Fu in *The Shambhala Anthology of Chinese Poetry* compiled by J. P. Seaton [5], while abridged translation in the domain of pure translation refers to independent translation texts, such as *Tian Wen: A Chinese Book of Origins* by Stephen Field [6].

There are two English complete translations of *Chu Ci*, *Ch’u T’z’u: The Songs of the South* by David Hawkes [7] and *The Songs of Chu* by Gopal Sukhu [8]. But the source texts of these two translations, or the communication content, are not the same. Hawkes’s translation is based on *Chu Ci Zhang Xv* compiled by Wang Yi, while Sukhu’s rendering is based on *Chu Ci Ji Zhu* by Zhu Xi (朱熹). Hawkes thinks that Wang Yi is the earliest person we know for sure that has been involved in the compilation of the great work. Sukhu argues that most modern Chinese versions of the anthology are based on Zhu Xi’s version. But he makes a small change with Zhu Xi’s edition. In other words, he puts *Jiu Ge* before *Li Sao* because there is evidence showing that the latter was completed under the influence of the former.

*Chu Ci* is abundant in images and metaphors. It is difficult to read, even for some experts in classical Chinese. Therefore, Hawkes finds a middle ground between literal translation and free translation to prevent the translation from being too obscure as well as to reproduce the sense of the poems, while maintaining the original sounds with all his efforts. Both Hawkes and Sukhu have frequently used explanatory notes in their translations. But there are a number of footnotes in Hawkes’s translation, while Sukhu prefers to put the notes on separate pages.

As for the target readers, or the audiences, Hawkes aims at the non-specialist reader who wants to gain some knowledge about ancient Chinese poetry and mythology. He makes a great effort to give the notes and introductions in brief and minimize their complexity. Top priority is given to students and general readers among the readership in Sukhu’s translation. But Hawkes and Sukhu have also taken the specialist reader or scholars into consideration. Hawkes offers a separate section of textual notes for consultation and Sukhu inserts philological notes among the general ones. Therefore, it can be argued that target readers are an important factor that can affect the translation process, especially the translators’ choice of translating strategies and methods.

**Figure 1.** A theoretical analysis model for the study of translation and dissemination of Chinese classics.
Abridged Translation

Most translations of Chu Ci are abridged ones and they are mainly those of the poems written by Qu Yuan, especially Li Sao and Tian Wen [9]. In the translation process, translators take part in the gatekeeping work, which means that they choose the chapters or poems of the anthology to be translated and decide the content to be communicated to the readers.

Li Sao is widely acknowledged as the masterpiece of Qu Yuan, and the most innovative and influential work among Chinese poems. It is so famous that some scholars know it without knowing Chu Ci. For example, L. Cranmer-Byng [10] has even mistaken it for the anthology. He thinks of it as an anthology and even includes Shan Gui in it. Tian Wen is the earliest trace of Chu Ci’s communication in the West [11]. And a mass of allegories, puns, metaphors, and allusions can be found in the two poems, which makes them valuable literary works and great sources for the study of ancient Chinese history and culture. These may be part of the reasons why they are popular with the translators. For instance, James Legge, who did not admire Li Sao at all, translated it just because of its high literary status.

However, translators, as gatekeepers, are not always impartial, which can be detected in the way they treat the translations and their tones. For example, there were many obvious misunderstandings in the early translations of Chu Ci, and casualness can be easily observed. And that is because of the sinologists’ or the translators’ disdain of Chinese culture resulting from the poverty and weakness of China at that time. They subjectively or unconsciously refuse to take the translation of the canon seriously because of this contemptuous attitude [12]. Lim Boon Keng [13], on the contrary, openly trumpets Qu Yuan and the poems being anthologized in it.

It is hard to fairly rank all the translations of Chu Ci according to their communication effect. But what is for sure is that their communication effect can be influenced by public policies, translation quality, publishers and distributors, and so on. Let us take the Library of Chinese Classics as example. It is a significant governmental project of disseminating Chinese culture. It does not only involve organizing the translation of Chinese classics to guarantee the translation quality, but also promoting the translations in many ways, such as sending them to Confucius Institutes overseas. And Chu Ci is one of the items in this project.

3.3 Other Modes of Translation-related Communication

Contrary to the view of many translation scholars, commu-
erary history is not the literary works but the recording and analysis of the literary history as well as the outline of the major literary achievements. Scholars may not put the literary works as what they are in the works of literary history. They may only translate parts of the original works, condense them, or use their own translation or even borrow other translators’ translation as a tool to complete their writing. In other words, selective translation, condensed translation, and reference translation can be found in the works of literary history.

Victor H. Mair [15] guides the readers through all the chapters of *Chu Ci* in limited space. He gives no full translation of any poem in the anthology. For some poems, he just presents a rather brief introduction and does not translate them at all. For others, he employs condensed translation. For example, he informs the readers of the main content of *Li Sao* within seven sentences, while the source text is the longest political lyric poem in ancient China.

There are also some scholars who may not give their own translations but employ others to complete their works. This can be seen as reference translation. It is different from plagiarism because scholars use these translations as tools to accomplish their works rather than use them as the main body of their work. This is what Kang-i Sun Chang and Stephen Owen [16] do in *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*. They mention in the preface that the translations they use belong to the contributors of the book. They use the translation of several lines of *Li Sao* to affirm their interpretation of it. The translation serves as a proof. The translation of several lines of Xiang Jun serves as a supplement to their writing to illustrate an unsuccessful quest. These two translations are both reference translations. But the translation of *Zhao Yin Shi* in this book is not a reference translation. The length of the original poem is largely reduced. The original main content and ideas are reproduced through no more than 50 words, which can be seen as a condensed translation.

**Monographs and Journal Articles**

Scholarly monographs and journal articles are also important modes of *Chu Ci*’s dissemination abroad. Scholars use them to express their own ideas and communicate with other scholars. Various modes of translation variation have been employed in them, such as imitation, selective translation, translated narration, translation and commentary, explanatory translation, and translation-writing.

Luo Zhicheng and Michelle Yeh [17] imitate *Li Sao*’s form and style and write *On Encountering Sorrow*.

Burton Watson [18] gives an introduction to *Chu Ci* and chooses to translate *Li Sao*, *Yun Zhong Jun* and *He Bo* which are two poems in the chapter of *Jiu Ge*, and *Huai Sha* among all the poems in the anthology. In fact, he has translated *Li Sao* twice, and the two translations mingle with each other. One of Watson’s translation of *Li Sao* is a poem as the original text is. The other is a narration, which can be viewed as translated narration. It can be seen that he uses the method of annotation to enable the readers to know more about Hsi-Ho (羲和, xi he) and Yen-tzu (崦嵫, yan zhi), which, in some sense, can be seen as an explanatory translation. After his translation of them, he also offers a commentary of the four poems. Watson talks about the advantages and disadvantages of the content of the translation. His commentary, along with his translation, is translation and commentary from the perspective of TVT.

It is worth mentioning that, instead of simply regarding journals as a place to spread their ideas, some scholars treat them as a battlefield where they can point out the disadvantages of other scholars’ articles and defend their own opinions. For example, Giles and Waley battled with each other for several rounds over the translation of *Da Zhao* published in the journal, *The New China Review* [19]. Apart from the translation variations discussed above, these two scholars provided their criticism of each other’s translation and argued over translation criteria as well as translation strategies, which can be regarded as translation-writing. Their argument improves the textual research and the translation quality of *Da Zhao*, gives rise to the re-translation of *Da Zhao*, and contributes much to the international communication of *Chu Ci*.

**Sinological Textbooks**

At the beginning of the 20th century, sinology as a major became common in universities in Europe, and *A History of Chinese Literature* by Giles is one of the representative sinological textbooks. Selective translation and adaptation translation are used in this textbook. Among all the poems of *Chu Ci*, Giles [20] selects *Yu Fu* and *Shan Gui*. His full translation of the latter can be seen as a selective translation. But when he translates the former, he renders it as a story that relates the content of it to the readers. The translation is not a verse anymore. And the language of it is much plainer than that of the source text. The form and style are both altered in the target text. So his translation of *Yu Fu* can be regarded as an adaptation translation.

Legge’s serialized article “The *Li Sao* Poem and Its Author” is also worth mentioning. It consists of three parts, “The Author”, “The Poem”, and “The Chinese Text and Its Translation”. They have been respectively published in three issues of *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* of
Great Britain and Ireland. But they are not classified as journal articles in this thesis because Legge initially prepares them as sinological teaching materials. Selective translation, explanatory translation, translated narration, translation-writing, and translation and commentary can be found in them.

In these three parts, Legge offers the translations of Huai Sha and Li Sao, which can be seen as a selective translation. In the second part, he divides Li Sao into fourteen sections. For some poems, he changes the poem into a narration just as what he does with the eleventh section, which can be viewed as a translated narration. For some sections, he does not only analyze the main contents of them but also provides a great deal of new information. For example, after his translation of the first stanza of the first section, he verifies the statements in that stanza and then talks a lot about other relevant information such as the ten stems and twelve branches in the Chinese cycle of time, which is definitely translation-writing. After the introduction of all the sections, he gives a commentary after the translation of Li Sao as a whole, pointing out his disappreciation of this poem while expressing his admiration of the poet, which is translation and commentary. In the third part, Legge adds information to many lines of the poem and puts it in parentheses. This can be regarded as an explanatory translation.

Ph.D. and M.A. Theses

Theses are another significant mode of Chu Ci’s global communication. Many scholars have included poems of the anthology in their theses because of the research value of those poems, their interest in Qu Yuan, or the mythological and religious elements in those poems. Selective translation, explanatory translation, translation-writing, and reference translation are used in these theses.

Kirkova includes Yuan You in her research because the theme of her research is immortality and relevant elements can be found in Yuan You, which can be seen as a selective translation. But there are many Chinese terms with which foreign readers may be unfamiliar, so she employs footnotes to explain them as she does with the term “六气” (liu qi). And her use of footnotes can be regarded as an explanatory translation. Translation-writing can also be found in her work. After her translation of the lines of Yuan You, she discusses the contents of them, compares the descriptions in them with those from other Chinese classics, or contrasts Yuan You with other poems in Chu Ci, such as Li Sao.

Waters has also written a doctoral dissertation on Chu Ci, entitled Three Elegies of Ch’u: An Introduction to the Traditional Interpretation of the Ch’u Tz’u. Selective translation and translation-writing can be found in it as well. He only chooses to translate the first three poems of the chapter, Jiu Ge, from Chu Ci. After the translation, he presents other scholars’ commentaries on the lines of those three poems and adds a great deal of relevant information after that. But there is also reference translation in his dissertation. Ancient Chinese, Archaic Chinese, Modern Standard Chinese, Grammata Serica Recensa, morpheme, and paraphrase have been used to illustrate the two Chinese characters, “九歌” (jiu ge), for the readers in various ways.

Conference Proceedings

Qu Yuan and Chu Ci are the themes of some conferences, such as The Annual Qu Yuan Studies Conference. Just like conferences of other subjects, such conferences also provide opportunities for scholars to show and spread their academic ideas. And in order to achieve the purpose, the scholars will quote some words, sentences, or even entire poems from Chu Ci to illustrate or prove their ideas. If the paper is not written in Chinese or the Chinese paper involves the translation texts of the quoted contents, which is not unusual, reference translation can be found. Thus, reference translation is widely employed in the papers of the scholars who attend the conference.

For example, there is “屈心而抑志兮” quoted from Li Sao in “Benjamin and the Translation of the ‘Li Sao’: A Case Study of the Southern Song”, which is a paper presented in Chinese by Xiong Ying in the Qu Yuan and Miluo Summit Culture Forum and Third Annual Hunan Province Qu Yuan Studies Conference. But Xiong is only the translator of the paper whose author is a foreign scholar named Monica McLellan, which means the original paper is not written in Chinese. Thus, the original paper involves the translation of that sentence in Li Sao. McLellan refers to the stanza beginning with this sentence and uses Zhu Xi’s explanation of it as an example to prove her idea that Zhu has revealed the admonishing aim of the stanzas and pointed out the internal logical connection among them. Her quotation is certainly reference translation.

3.4 The Inclusive Relation between Translation and Communication in Classics Translation

Based on the above case study, it is obvious that Chu Ci’s dissemination is not only due to its translation but also other translation-related modes, literary anthologies, works of literary history, scholarly monographs, journal articles, Ph.D. and M.A. theses, sinological textbooks, and conference proceedings. Thus, an inclusive relation can be found between translation and communication (see Figure 2).
It’s easy to see that there are various means to spread the classics to the world and translation is only one of them. Translation is just one mode of communication.

4. Discussion

In this study, a theoretical analysis model for the study of the translation and dissemination of Chinese classics has been constructed. According to this model, “translation” and “communication” cannot be defined in the same way. “Translation” only refers to pure translations which basically consist of complete translations and abridged translations. “Communication” includes all the modes of translation-related dissemination, such as literary anthologies, works of literary history, scholarly monographs and journal articles, Ph.D. and M.A. theses, sinological textbooks, and conference proceedings are indispensable study objects as well. Translation variations are widely employed in these modes. How and why these variations are being used are worth discussing. Thus, it will be meaningful to study these modes with TVT. In other words, research can be done on these communication modes from the perspective of translation.

5. Conclusions

Judging from the current unsatisfactory situation of the communication of Chinese classics, it is clear that it is impractical to discuss translation without communication. As Chu Ci is a treasure of Chinese culture and is of extraordinary importance in the entire Chinese cultural system, this article probes into the relationship between translation and communication in classics translation through a case study of it. And an inclusive relation has been found. This research also contributes to the establishment of communication studies of translation by pointing out the study objects and research directions.

Author Contributions

Zhang Junchi is a teacher at the School of Foreign Languages of Jingzhou University. The whole writing process from drafting to revising is completed by her.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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