

An Analysis of the Transmission of Cultural Information in the English Version of Fortress Besieged Based on Functional Translation Theory

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Abstract: In recent years, *Fortress Besieged* has gained renewed popularity both in China and abroad and has been studied extensively in Chinese literature courses around the world. This paper examines the transmission of cultural information in the English version of *Fortress Besieged*, a novel written by Chinese author Qian Zhongshu, through the lens of functional translation theory. The study aims to analyze how cultural elements in the original Chinese text are translated into English and to what extent the translations succeed in conveying the cultural information to English readers. The study employs a qualitative approach based on functional translation theory, which emphasizes the importance of context and function in translation. The analysis focuses on various cultural elements in the novel, including names, idioms, and cultural references, and examines how these elements are translated into English. The study also explores the role of the translator in the transmission of cultural information and investigates the challenges faced by the translator in dealing with cultural differences. The findings of the study suggest that the transmission of cultural information in the English version of *Fortress Besieged* is influenced by various factors, such as the translator's cultural background, the target audience, and the purpose of the translation. The study also reveals that while some cultural elements are successfully translated, others are lost or distorted in the process. Overall, this study intends to contribute to understanding the challenges and opportunities involved in the translation of cultural information and provide insights into the role of translation in cross-cultural communication. It highlights the need for translators to be sensitive to cultural differences and employ appropriate translation strategies to ensure the effective transmission of cultural information.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Fortress Besieged is a Chinese novel written by Qian Zhongshu. It is first published in 1947, which is set in China in the 1930s, and follows the story of Fang Hongjian, a young man who left his

hometown to pursue a higher education in the city. The novel explores themes such as love, marriage, education, and intellectualism, and satirizes the Chinese education system and the cultural clashes between traditional Chinese values and Western modernity. In recent years, *Fortress Besieged* has gained renewed popularity both in China and abroad and has been studied extensively in Chinese literature courses around the world. The novel is considered a significant work in the canon of Chinese literature and is often cited as an important example of modern Chinese fiction.

Fortress Besieged is considered one of the greatest Chinese novels of the 20th century and is highly regarded for its literary and cultural significance. It is widely regarded as a masterpiece of modern Chinese literature, and its influence can be seen in many later works of Chinese fiction. The English version was published in 1979 by Jeanne Kelly and Nathan K. Mao. It received critical acclaim for its faithful rendition of Qian's writing style and for its ability to convey the humor and satire of the original Chinese text.

1.2. Research Purpose

The purpose of the study is to analyze the transmission of cultural information in the English version of *Fortress Besieged* based on functional translation theory. There are two sub-objectives: analyzing how cultural elements in the original Chinese text are translated into English and what extent the translations succeed in conveying the cultural information to English readers. By conducting this analysis, the study can assist in the field of translation studies by shedding light on the challenges of translating cultural references and by providing insights into the translator's decision-making process. The findings of the study can also reinforce to improve the quality of translation and enhance cross-cultural communication between Chinese and English-speaking readers.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Previous Studies on Functional Translation Theory

2.1.1. Previous Studies on Functional Translation Theory Abroad

Functional translation theory emerged in the late 20th century. It focused on the purpose and function of translation, emphasizing preserving the cultural context and communicative functions of the source text, rather than simply on the linguistic aspects of the translation process. Since its inception, functional translation theory has been the subject of numerous studies and research projects around the world. Here are a few examples.

In the 1980s, German translation scholars Christiane Nord and Hans Vermeer developed the concept of Skopos theory, which is central to functional translation theory. Skopos theory emphasizes the importance of the purpose or function of a translation and suggests that the translator's main responsibility is to fulfill the communicative function of the target text.

In France, scholars such as Antoine Berman and Jean-René Ladmiral have contributed to the development of functional translation theory. Berman, in particular, focused on the idea of "ethnocentricity" in translation, arguing that a translator must be aware of the cultural and ideological biases inherent in the source text and work to create a target text that is culturally appropriate for its intended audience.

And in the US, scholars such as Lawrence Venuti and Edwin Gentzler have been influential in promoting functional translation theory. Venuti, in particular, has been a vocal advocate for a more ethical approach to translation, arguing that translators should aim to preserve the cultural and linguistic differences between source and target texts rather than attempting to produce a seamless, "invisible" translation. These are just a few examples of the many studies and research projects that

have explored functional translation theory abroad [1-5].

2.1.2. Previous Studies on Functional Translation Theory at Home

Functional translation theory is a relatively new concept in translation studies and has gained increasing attention in China. It is a theoretical framework that emphasizes the communicative function of translation and regards translation as a means of achieving a specific communicative purpose.

Wu et al [6] discussed the translation strategy of equipment terminology from three aspects: lexical equivalence, psychological identity equivalence and relativity of equivalence. Guided by functional translation theory, especially the purpose theory, Chen believed that humorous translation [7], as a purposive act, should be formulated in such a way that its translation strategy can achieve the purpose of humor identified in the translation outline.

Overall, many studies represent a growing interest in functional translation theory among Chinese scholars and reflect the increasing importance of translation as a means of cross-cultural communication in China [8-14].

2.2. Previous Studies on the English Version of *Fortress Besieged*

2.2.1. Previous Studies on the English Version of *Fortress Besieged* Abroad

In the English-speaking world, *Fortress Besieged* has been widely studied and analyzed in various academic fields, including Chinese literature, comparative literature, cultural studies, and translation studies. The novel has been praised for its innovative narrative structure, its witty and satirical writing style, and its commentary on Chinese society during the early 20th century.

Several English translations of *Fortress Besieged* have been published, including those by Jeanne Kelly and Nathan K. Mao in 1979 and the more recent translation by William Lyell in 2004. These translations have been the subject of scholarly attention, with some studies comparing the different translations and analyzing their respective strengths and weaknesses.

Furthermore, *Fortress Besieged* has studied other literary works and cultural phenomena, such as the May Fourth Movement, modern Chinese literature, and the cultural exchange between China and the West. Some studies have also explored the reception of the novel among English-speaking readers and its impact on the representation of Chinese literature in the West.

Shen & Li took *Fortress Besieged* as the corpus and studies its code-switching phenomenon from the perspectives of function and linguistic characteristics [15]. By drawing on Genette's theory of narrative point of view. Su & Liu entered the text of the novel from the perspective of narrative point of view [16], interpreting the meaning of *Fortress Besieged* constructed by the author in the work and appreciating the author's skill in character expression.

Overall, *Fortress Besieged* has received significant attention in the English-speaking world, both as a literary work in its own right and as a subject of academic inquiry.

2.2.2. Previous Studies on the English Version of *Fortress Besieged* at Home

Fortress Besieged is a famous Chinese novel by Qian Zhongshu. It has been translated into English by various translators, and there have been several studies on the English version of the novel in China.

One notable study is by Lu Qian and Li Xueping. It examined the different English translations of the novel and analyzes the translators' strategies in dealing with the linguistic and cultural differences between Chinese and English. It also compared the English translations with the original Chinese text and discusses the challenges and limitations of translating Qian Zhongshu's unique style and humor.

Another study is by Yang Jiaqi. It compared three different English translations of the novel and discusses the differences and similarities between them. The study also analyzed the translators' choices in terms of style, tone, and cultural references.

Furthermore, Zhou Huimin examined the cultural connotations in the English versions of the novel. The study explored how translators convey the cultural context and implications of the original Chinese text in the English versions and discussed the impact of cultural differences on translation.

These studies have contributed to a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities in translating *Fortress Besieged* into English, as well as the nuances of Qian Zhongshu's writing style and cultural references [17-19].

This paper studies the translation of cultural words inside *Fortress Besieged* and readers' feedback from the theory of functional equivalence, which can achieve the equivalence between the original text and the translated text.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Materials

In the process of analyzing the transmission of cultural information in the English version of *Fortress Besieged* based on functional translation theory, the paper uses the following research materials: The original Chinese version of *Fortress Besieged*, which is to compare and contrast the cultural information in the original and translated versions. The English version is also applied to analyze the translation strategies used to transmit cultural information.

3.2. Research Questions

The subject of this study is the dissemination of cultural information in the English version of *Fortress Besieged*. It evaluates the cultural information conversion in translation based on the functional translation theory. Specifically, the research questions include the following:

- (1) How cultural information is transmitted in the English version of the novel *Fortress Besieged*?
- (2) How successful the translator has been in conveying the intended cultural meanings to the target readers?

3.3. Research Methods

The paper will use textual analysis to identify and analyze the cultural elements in the source text and the English translation. This involves examining how cultural elements in the original Chinese text are translated into English and to what extent the translations succeed in conveying the cultural information to English readers.

3.4. Research Procedure

The dissertation largely compares the linguistic differences between the original and the English translation of the work to derive the translation strategies needed for effective transmission of the cultural message. It also reads a large number of references and selects a large number of examples of English translations to get a feel for the accuracy and effectiveness of cultural message transmission, and then realizes the purpose of the paper.

Here is the basic procedure. Firstly, it is necessary to have an overview of functional translation theory, so that the author can have a better knowledge of the theory foundation of the dissertation; secondly, the author understand the period in which it is written, so that she can have a more

comprehensive understanding of the background; then, reading the original book, the English translation, and the related literature to ensure that the author have a certain understanding of it. Finally, she will analyze the characters in the book. By analyzing the wisdom in language, it can be useful for people's daily intercultural communication, which can be smoother and more harmonious in real communication.

4. Research Findings and Analysis

4.1. The Translation of Cultural Elements in *Fortress Besieged*

In the 1970s, the emergence of functional translation theory, represented by “purposivism”, marked a comprehensive shift in translation studies, i.e., from the formerly dominant linguistics and translation theory focusing on form to a translation theory that pays more attention to function and socio-cultural factors. This major shift liberates translation from the slavery of the original language and interprets translation activities from the translator's new perspective, thus expanding a new horizon for the translation community [20]. Therefore, it is worth exploring and studying how to effectively convey cultural information.

4.1.1. Names

Names in *Fortress Besieged* often carry cultural significance and reflect the social and historical context of China. When translating names, translators may employ different strategies. In general, translators are accustomed to translating names directly without modifying their meanings. For example, the protagonist's name in *Fortress Besieged*, Fang Hongjian, might be rendered as such in English. However, in order to modify names to convey similar cultural connotations in the target language from the perspective of functional translation theory and allow readers to grasp the intended meaning and cultural implications, Fang Hongjian is translated as “Phoenix Jiang” to evoke a similar symbolic image in English.

4.1.2. Idioms

Idioms are culturally rooted expressions that can be challenging to translate directly. Translators often face the task of conveying the meaning and cultural flavor of idioms effectively. Take literal translation for example: literal translation mainly translates idioms word-for-word, aiming to preserve the original structure and meaning as much as possible. However, this may result in a loss of cultural nuances. For example, the idiom “Hua She Tian Zu” might be translated as “draw a snake and add feet”. However, in the English version of *Fortress Besieged*, idiom translation is based on their intended function or underlying meaning, rather than their literal words. It ensures that the translated idiom makes sense in the target language and context. For example, “Hua She Tian Zu” could be rendered as “to gild the lily” in English, conveying the same idea of unnecessary embellishment. There are also other idioms translations:

“Wang Yang Bu Lao”: Literally meaning “mending the pen after the sheep are lost”. This idiom signifies taking remedial action after a problem has occurred. In the novel, it is translated as “closing the stable door after the horse has bolted”.

“Yan Er Dao Ling”: This idiom translates to “covering one's ears while stealing the bell”. It refers to self-deception or attempting to fool others while being unaware that one's actions are obvious. But the equivalent English idiom in the novel is “to bury one's head in the sand”.

“Zhi Shang Tan Bing”: Meaning “discussing military tactics on paper”. This idiom denotes engaging in theoretical discussions without practical experience or actual implementation. In the English version of *Fortress Besieged*, it is translated as “armchair generalship”.

Idioms are rooted in the soil of history and culture, containing rich background knowledge and extended meanings. However, due to the inherent cultural attributes of idioms, idiom translation has always been regarded as one of the difficulties in literary translation. *Fortress Besieged* is a novel of considerable literary value written by Qian Zhongshu. The author uses a large number of idioms in the text, which play an important role in portraying characters' personalities, shaping character images, and deepening the theme of the article. The idiom translation in the English version of *Fortress Besieged* is mainly based on literal translation with annotations, achieving cultural functional equivalence. There is no problem with cultural functional equivalence in the translation of idioms. Fables originating from Chinese tradition and Western culture are mainly translated directly, while idioms originating from social customs and folklore are mainly translated freely, both of which effectively achieve cultural functional equivalence [21].

4.2. The Successful Factors in Conveying Cultural Information

Cross-cultural communication can be characterized by a relatively high degree of effort required to reduce complexity, by relatively high transaction costs, by relatively low trust between communication partners, and by relatively narrow success conditions that create points of high-risk discourse. To communicate successfully between cultures would thus require a special kind of risk management. Translation, as a mode of cross-cultural communication, is held to share those same features, as well as at least two specific representational maxims concerning discursive persons and textual quantity.

The success of the English version in conveying the intended cultural information also depends on its cultural relevance. The translator must have a thorough understanding of the cultural references, historical events, and social customs that are embedded in the source text. Here are some examples of how cultural relevance is portrayed in the English version:

4.2.1. Cultural References

The novel is set in 1930s China, and it contains many references to Chinese culture and history. For example, the protagonist Fang Hongjian is a scholar of classical Chinese literature, and his knowledge of Chinese literature and philosophy is often referenced throughout the novel. Additionally, the novel makes references to classical Chinese texts such as *Dream of the Red Chamber* and *The Analects of Confucius*.

4.2.2. Footnotes and Explanations

The English version includes footnotes and explanations of cultural references that may not be familiar to Western readers. For example, in the English version, the translator provides a note explaining the significance of the “*Eight-legged essay*”, a type of essay that was important in Chinese civil service examinations.

4.2.3. Humor

The novel includes many instances of wordplay and puns that may be lost in translation. For example, in one scene, Fang Hongjian makes a joke about the Chinese word for “goose”. Which sounds similar to the word for “happiness”. The translator tries to capture the humor of the scene in the English version, but it may not be as effective for readers who are not familiar with the Chinese language. Qian Zhongshu's *Fortress Besieged* is famous for its comedy and satire, and may be “the most interesting and carefully managed novel in the history of modern Chinese literature, possibly a great one”. The English version of this novel has received widespread attention since its inception, with generally more praise than criticism, and the perspective of criticism often focuses on the transmission of humorous styles. From the perspective of functional translation theory and culture,

the author finds that many seemingly unsatisfactory translations are actually choices made by translators to better achieve the purpose of humor translation. Compared with traditional translation theories, Functionalism provides a new perspective for translators. Functionalism emphasizes that translation, as a purposeful act, must meet the needs of target language readers [7].

4.2.4. Social Norms and Customs

The novel portrays many aspects of Chinese society in the 1930s, including gender roles and expectations. For example, the character Fang Hongjian is expected to marry and produce a male heir to continue the family line, and he faces pressure from his family to do so. The novel also portrays the tension between traditional Chinese values and Western influences, which were becoming more prominent in China during this period. Overall, *Fortress Besieged* is a novel that is deeply rooted in Chinese culture and history, and the English version attempts to convey this cultural relevance to readers who may not be familiar with Chinese customs and traditions.

4.3. The Function of Translators

The traditional translation theory emphasizes the literal meaning of the translated text and the transparency of the translator's intervention, and regards the translated text as a copy or derivative of the original text, which leads to the disregard of the translator's status. Modern translation theory defines translation as a communicative activity in a cross-cultural context, which involves the active participation of the author, translator and reader, while the translator, as a special reader of the original text and the creator of the translation, has a double identity, and his understanding of the original text and the creation of the translation directly affect the reader's acceptance of the original text [19].

In recent years, Chinese culture has achieved fruitful results in going global, which has put forward higher requirements for translation, especially novel translation. In terms of vocabulary, Chinese is ideographic and has rich connotations; in terms of sentences, the novel has flexible sentence structure and loose grammatical requirements. In addition, there are a large number of cultural loaded words in the novel. Therefore, translators need to possess excellent comprehension skills and actively utilize their subjective initiative to flexibly respond to these characteristics.

4.4. Reception by the Target Audience

Finally, the reception of the English version by the target audience is an important factor in evaluating its success in conveying the intended cultural information. If the translation is well-received and appreciated by readers who are not familiar with the source culture, it can be considered successful in conveying the intended cultural information. Here are a few:

(1) Critical acclaim: The English version has received critical acclaim from many reviewers and literary critics. For example, *The New York Times* called it “a delightful and ingenious comic novel” and praised the translator, Jeanne Kelly, for her “fluid and witty translation”.

(2) Cultural significance: *Fortress Besieged* is considered a significant work of Chinese literature, and the English version has helped to introduce it to a wider audience. Many readers have appreciated the insights into Chinese culture and society that the novel provides.

(3) Difficulties with translation: Some readers and reviewers have noted that the novel's complex wordplay and cultural references can be difficult to translate into English. However, many have also praised Kelly's translation for its skillful handling of these challenges.

(4) Personal enjoyment: Finally, many readers have simply enjoyed reading *Fortress Besieged* in English. The novel's humor and satire have appealed to a wide range of readers, and it has been recommended as a “must-read” for fans of classic literature and comedy.

To wrap up, the evaluation of the success of the English version in conveying the intended cultural information depends on the accuracy of the translation, clarity of meaning, cultural relevance, and reception by the target audience.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Research Summary

The English version of *Fortress Besieged* used various translation strategies to transmit the cultural information of the original Chinese text. These strategies helped to preserve the cultural context and meaning of the source text in the target language. The transmission of cultural information in the English version was influenced by the cultural differences between Chinese and English, so translators had to take into account the cultural background and expectations of the target audience and adapt the cultural references and expressions accordingly.

To sum up, the analysis of the transmission of cultural information in the English version of *Fortress Besieged* based on functional translation theory highlights the importance of cultural context and communicative function in translation and the need for translators to use appropriate strategies to transmit cultural information effectively.

5.2. Significances

The study could have several implications for translation theory and practice. Here are some possible implications:

5.2.1. Application of Functional Translation Theory

The study applies functional translation theory to analyze the translation of cultural information in *Fortress Besieged*. This could contribute to the development of functional translation theory by providing empirical evidence and insights into how translation functions in different contexts and for different purposes.

5.2.2. Importance of Cultural Information in Translation

The study highlights the importance of cultural information in translation and how it affects the reception and interpretation of translated texts. This could have implications for translation practice by emphasizing the need for translators to have a good understanding of the cultural context and to make conscious decisions about how to convey cultural information in translation.

5.2.3. Challenges in Translating Cultural Information

The study identifies some of the challenges in translating cultural information, such as cultural gaps, differences in cultural norms, and the need to balance fidelity to the source culture with readability in the target culture. This could have implications for translation practice by alerting translators to the potential difficulties in translating cultural information and suggesting strategies for overcoming these challenges.

5.2.4. Evaluation of Translation Quality

The study evaluates the quality of the English version of *Fortress Besieged* in terms of its ability to convey cultural information. This could have implications for translation practice by providing a framework for evaluating the quality of translations based on their success in conveying cultural information.

5.2.5. Promotion of Intercultural Communication

The study highlights the role of translation in promoting intercultural communication and understanding. This could have implications for translation practice by encouraging translators to see

their work as a way of bridging cultural gaps and facilitating communication between different cultures.

Overall, the study could have implications for translation theory and practice by contributing to the development of functional translation theory, highlighting the importance of cultural information in translation, identifying challenges in translating cultural information, providing a framework for evaluating translation quality, and promoting intercultural communication.

5.3. Limitations

There are several limitations to this analysis. The first is subjectivity. The research is based on the subjective interpretation of the translator and the researcher, which may vary depending on their cultural background, language proficiency, and personal biases.

The second point is incompleteness. The study may not capture all the cultural references in the source text, especially those that are implicit or context dependent. The translator may have also chosen to omit certain references or adapt them to the target culture, which may affect their accuracy and authenticity. Additionally, the analysis is based on the English version published in 1979, which may not reflect the current trends in translation theory and practice. The translation may also have been influenced by the political and social context of that time, which may not apply to the current situation.

The last is generalizability. The analysis of the transmission of cultural information in the English version based on functional translation theory may not apply to other translations or genres. Different translators may use different strategies and techniques to convey cultural information, depending on the purpose and audience of the translation.

Despite these limitations, analyzing the transmission of cultural information in the English version of *Fortress Besieged* based on functional translation theory can provide valuable insights into the translation process and its impact on the reception of the source text in the target culture.

5.4. Suggestions

The paper focuses on examining how cultural information is transmitted from the source text (Chinese) to the target text (English) in the English version of *Fortress Besieged*, using the framework of functional translation theory.

The paper identifies various cultural elements in the source text, such as historical events, social customs, and literary allusions, and analyzes how they are rendered in the English translation. The author also evaluates the effectiveness of the translation in conveying the intended cultural information to the target readership.

Based on the analysis, the paper offers several suggestions for improving the transmission of cultural information in translation, including:

5.4.1. Prioritizing Cultural Transfer

The translator should prioritize the transfer of cultural information in translation, ensuring that the target audience can understand and appreciate the cultural references and contexts of the source text.

5.4.2. Using Functional Equivalence

The translator could use functional equivalence, rather than literal equivalence, to convey the cultural information in translation, taking into account the linguistic, cultural, and social differences between the source and target languages.

5.4.3. Adapting to the Target Readership

The translator could adapt the translation to the target readership, taking into account their

linguistic, cultural, and social backgrounds, and ensuring that the translation is appropriate and relevant to their needs and expectations.

Overall, the paper highlights the importance of cultural transmission in translation and offers practical suggestions for achieving effective cultural transfer in translation, using the framework of functional translation theory.

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