

# A Review of Studies on the English Translation of Shanghanlun

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## Abstract

**This paper mainly uses the methods of big data and statistical analysis to explore the current research status of the English translation of Shanghanlun, finding that there are a total of 69 pieces of literatures related to the book in China in the past decade, including 41 researches on the translation strategies, 21 on the comparison of the translations, 3 on the translation history, 2 corpus-based researches on the translations and 2 researches on the dissemination of the translations. The first two types of researches are more popular, and the research contents are mostly have something in common. In addition, the translation objects that have been mainly studied are the translation of Luo Xiwen, the translation of Nigel Wiseman and the translation of Li Zhaoguo, only accounting for a small number of existing translations. By contrast, the three aspects of research on the translation history, corpus-based research and research on the dissemination of the translations need to be further studied.**

## Keywords

**Shanghanlun; English translation; Research review.**

## 1. Introduction

Shanghanlun, one of the four classic works of traditional Chinese medicine, is a clinical masterpiece written by Zhang Zhongjing in the Eastern Han Dynasty. It is of great significance in the history of the development of traditional Chinese medicine and has great research value for both ancient and modern Chinese medicine. Since the strategy about the spreading abroad of Chinese culture was put forward in the early 21st century, more and more experts and scholars have focused on the revival of traditional Chinese culture, especially the translation and dissemination of relevant classics. Under this background, the importance of studying the English translation of Shanghanlun is self-evident. This paper mainly adopts the methods of big data and statistical analysis to explore the current research status of the English translation of the book, and also provides some references for future researches on translating classics of traditional Chinese medicine.

## 2. The English Translation of Shanghanlun

The English translation of the book can be traced back to the 1980s, when Hong-yen Hsu took the lead in translating and publishing it. In the following 30 years, many scholars at home and abroad have completed the translation. According to the common idea of the academic field, the English translation history of the book is generally divided into three stages. The first stage is from 1981 to 1991, the second stage is from 1992 to 2007, and the third stage is from 2008 to the present[1].

In the first stage, the translations principally consisted of abridged translation. As the translation of Shanghanlun was at its initial stage, the purpose of the translators in translating this work was to better disseminate basic knowledge of traditional Chinese medicine and arouse the interest of English readers, so the translation strategy was reader-oriented[2]. After

entering the second stage, due to the unification of terms and the standardization of English translation, most of the translations at this stage were complete versions, which paid attention to conforming to the original expression and ensuring the completeness, authenticity and accuracy of the knowledge presented in the translation<sup>[3]</sup>. In the third stage, the unification of terms in the field of traditional Chinese medicine and the standardization of English translation have been basically completed, and the English translation of Shanghanlun is gradually becoming mature. On the basis of the previous stage's emphasis on the connotation of the original text and the presentation of basic knowledge, the translations at this stage have increased the understanding and dissemination of traditional Chinese medicine. These translations focus on the display and interpretation of excellent Chinese culture, while emphasizing the adaptability of traditional Chinese medicine to modern society. In other words, the translations of Shanghanlun have changed to be oriented towards clinical application<sup>[4]</sup>.

Although there are English translations of Shanghanlun published both at home and abroad, studies on these translations are relatively few in foreign countries and regions. When searching on CNKI(China National Knowledge Infrastructure) with the words "Shanghanlun translation" as the theme, a total of 69 relevant literatures in China in the past ten years are retrieved, including 1 doctoral dissertation, 13 master's theses and 55 journal papers. After data analysis, it is found that the number of literatures studying the English translation of Shanghanlun increased significantly in 2016, 2019 and 2021 respectively, which is related to the policies and situation at that time.

The State Council issued relevant strategies in 2016, and the development of traditional Chinese medicine officially rose to one of the national development strategies. The industries of this field began to provide power for the development of the national economy, and the multi-language translation and overseas dissemination of traditional Chinese medical classics began to get on the right track, taking on the mission of spreading excellent traditional Chinese culture. In 2019, the National Conference on Traditional Chinese Medicine was held. The government introduced a series of policies to promote the inheritance, innovation and development of traditional Chinese medicine, and vigorously supported the development of relevant industries. Particularly, after the outbreak of COVID-19, the government actively promoted medical knowledge and increased public confidence in traditional Chinese medicine and national medical construction. After continuous research, the Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine found that the effective rate of Lung Cleansing and Detoxifying Decoction in the treatment of COVID-19 was up to more than 90%<sup>[5]</sup>. This prescription is clearly recorded in some Chinese classics, indicating that Chinese medicine can play a rapid and efficient role in the prevention and treatment of COVID-19. Unfortunately, there are still many foreign people who doubt the authenticity and rationality of this finding. Under this background, research on the translation of traditional Chinese medical classics has gradually become a hot topic. On account of the fact that Shanghanlun is one of the outstanding cultural representatives of the classics, the number of researches related to the English translation of this book has also increased relatively, and the quantity of published literatures has also shown an upward trend in recent years.

### **3. A Review of Studies on the English Translation of Shanghanlun**

#### **3.1. Research on the Translation Strategies**

Over the past decade, there have been 41 literatures on the translation strategies of the English translation of Shanghanlun, accounting for 59.42% of the total number, of which 24 clearly point out the theoretical perspectives used in the literatures. These theoretical perspectives involve 16 theories in 4 categories, including the category of linguistics, pragmatics, translation and sociology. Among the theories, the most used ones are in the category of linguistics,

followed by translation theories. Scholars may prove the feasibility of applying a certain theory to translation studies and its guiding role in the translation process, or use the theory to make an in-depth analysis of specific translation phenomena, translation methods, and translation characteristics of translators.

For instance, Chen Chong and Zhang Miao<sup>[6]</sup> use the theory of relevance adaptation and select several typical examples to discuss the concrete embodiment of this theory in the translation process of disyllabic words. They propose that according to the theory, the cultural context and thinking habits of western readers can be taken into account at the same time, and the original meanings of the classics can be conveyed more accurately. This proposal provides different research ideas for the translation of the classics in the terms of vocabulary. Based on ecological translation theory, Yang Le<sup>[7]</sup> analyzes the translation methods and rules of the articles and prescription names of Shanghanlun in Luo Xiwen's translation and Huanghai's translation, as well as in the English version of *Moment in Peking*, the two English translations of *A Dream in Red Mansions*, the two bilingual textbooks of Chinese medicine and an English dictionary of Chinese medicine. In the process of translation, he summarizes how the translators complete the adaptive selection and conversion of Chinese and English language forms and realize the mutual transmission of the bilingual cultural connotation, and explains the choice and change of the hidden bilingual communicative intention. From the perspective of Skopos theory, Chen Zhile and Ping Wenjiang<sup>[8]</sup> select a part of the translation samples by random sampling, discuss the translation strategies of culture-loaded words in the classics from four aspects, and summarize how to flexibly select different methods in translating different types of culture-loaded words according to specific types.

The remaining 17 papers do not explicitly point out or apply theories. In this kind of researches, scholars either analyze the translator's translation strategy for a certain element or summarize the translation strategy adopted by a translator as a whole.

For example, Ding Xiaojie et al.<sup>[9]</sup> first analyze and summarize the naming rules of prescription names in Shanghanlun, then introduce the corresponding translation methods in detail from five aspects, and sum up a more general translation formula. Zhang Qiong<sup>[10]</sup> first summarizes the preconditions, common characteristics and basic functions of the anadiplosis, and then discusses the anadiplosis used in this translation and the corresponding translation strategies in combination with the text content and specific examples in Nigel Wiseman's translation, pointing out that in which cases the anadiplosis can be retained, in which cases can be abandoned, and in which cases can be modified by adding the logical words implied in the original context. This finding provides reference for translators to retain rhetoric as much as possible under the dual background of medical theory and context. Zhang Cunyu et al.<sup>[11]</sup> choose Li Zhaoguo's translation as the research object, summarize the translation methods and techniques adopted in this translation, describe the use of literal translation, free translation, transliteration and other methods and specific cases in detail, and then analyze the problems existing in the translation, such as lexical mistranslation, cultural omissions and improper editing. They provide references and suggestions for the practice of translating traditional Chinese medical classic into English.

### **3.2. Research on the Comparison of the Translations**

In the 21 literatures of the second category of research on the comparison of the translations, scholars either choose two translations for comparative analysis in certain aspects, or choose multiple translations for comparative study. The angles of comparison are different, but on the whole, they are inseparable from the problem of translation. The first category of research on the translation strategies also involves more or less comparative studies between different translations. At present, there are a total of 10 English translations of Shanghanlun. Among all the papers and literatures with clear research objects, the translations being studied are only

part of the ten versions. According to statistics, a total of 7 versions have been selected as research objects in the past decade, but only 3 versions have been paid more attention to, namely Luo Xiwen's translation (37 times), Nigel Wiseman's translation (22 times) and Li Zhaoguo's translation (9 times), while the other versions have been rarely studied or even mentioned.

For instance, Sheng Jie and Yao Xin<sup>[12]</sup> choose Luo Xiwen's translation and Nigel Wiseman's translation, and compare the differences between the two versions in terms of terminology and sentence structure based on the Skopos theory and loyalty principle of functional translation theory. They point out that when translating traditional Chinese medical classics, it is necessary to first make sure that the translation purpose does not violate the intention of the original text, then follow the principle of fidelity to the original text, and rationally use different translation methods, so that the translator can endow the translated text with the role and significance of cross-cultural communication, and coordinate the relationship between the translator, the original author and the readers of the translated text. Fan Yanni<sup>[13]</sup> selects the translation of Luo Xiwen and the translation of Li Zhaoguo, two famous translators in China, and makes a comparative analysis of their different understandings and interpretations of Chinese medical culture and knowledge from three aspects. She believes that translators should not only be reader-oriented when translating culture-loaded words of traditional Chinese medicine, but also choose words and sentences that are conducive to audience's understanding and acceptance. It is also necessary to maintain the characteristics of excellent Chinese culture and meet the requirements of spreading Chinese culture. Chen Zinuo et al.<sup>[14]</sup> choose Luo Xiwen's translation, Li Zhaoguo's translation and Huang Hai's translation as the research objects, and conduct a comprehensive analysis from the perspective of five culture-loaded words with guizhi decoction as the access point. They out that it is necessary for translators to attach importance to the textual interpretation based on the annotated classics, and strengthen the cooperation between the experts in the field of traditional Chinese medicine and translation teams. It adds a new way of thinking for the translation of culture-loaded words in the field of traditional Chinese medicine.

### 3.3. Research on the Translation History

There are 3 researches on the translation history among the relevant literatures retrieved in the past decade, either involving the description and evaluation of the English translation history of Shanghanlun, or analyzing the characteristics of the English translation from a diachronic perspective.

For example, Chen Ji et al.<sup>[1]</sup> describe the English translation history of the classic work of Chinese medicine, sort out the publication and characteristics of the translations of this work in different periods, and expound the current situation of researches on the English translation. They also summarize that the difficulties in the English translation of this book are chiefly reflected in the particularity of the language used in the original text, the complexity of the expression when translating the terminology of traditional Chinese medicine into another language, and the differences between Chinese and English languages and cultures. It is pointed out in their research that there are two major problems in the English translation of Shanghanlun, providing a systematic reference for future research and exploration on how to express the medical value and cultural connotation of Chinese medicine. Zhang Cunyu<sup>[2]</sup> combs through the translation history and briefly comments on the nine English translations from 1981 to 2017, mainly describing the translator's identity, translation background, changes of reprint and republication, translation structure and content, translation strategies, translation characteristics and other aspects of each English translation in the three stages. This study provides background reference and selection convenience for academic sector to pay attention to and conduct researches on different translations. From a diachronic perspective, Xu Zhe and

Zhao Hailei<sup>[15]</sup>, focusing on the study of the English translation of *Shanghanlun*, collect a great deal of statistical information about relevant literatures up to 2022 and divide these literatures into three levels. They find that most of the domestic researches on the English translation of the classic work at the macro level focus on sorting out the development process of English translation, and lack in-depth analysis of the macro impacts of the translations in different periods at home and abroad. At the middle level, most of these literatures carry out a study on the characteristics of the translations themselves, compare and analyze the advantages and disadvantages of different translations especially after the research objects are selected. By contrast, the number of literatures studying the translators, the biggest variable, is far less than that of literatures studying the translations. At the micro level, these literatures generally focus on the translation methods and strategies of words, but almost no literature changes the scope of research from words or phrases to longer sentences.

### 3.4. Corpus-based Research on the Translations

With regard to corpus-based research on the translations of *Shanghanlun*, there are only two research papers, mainly using corpus-based tools to compare and analyze the translation methods and language features of different translations. Hai Xia and Ding Dong<sup>[16]</sup> take prescription terms as keywords in their research. Based on the self-built mini-bilingual corpus and the corpus tool of LancsBox 3.0, they select the translation of Luo Xiwen, the translation of Nigel Wiseman and the translation of Huang Hai for comparative analysis, compare the similarities and differences among the three versions of translation primarily from two aspects, and find a translation mode that could better adapt to the habits of English readers. At the same time, for the translation of prescription names, they compare with the expression in the official terminology database of WHO, summarize the rules of structural collocation that are commonly used and the skills of choosing idiomatic expressions. They also point out that as far as word selection is concerned, translators need to choose appropriate translation methods based on factors such as the cognitive level and knowledge background of the target audience. If the target audience is professionals, the translator can translate medicinal plants directly into Latin; If the audience is common readers, the translator is better to use common words in the process of translating medicinal plants. Compared with the previous study, Pu Yusa et al.<sup>[17]</sup> choose Luo Xiwen's translation and Li Zhaoguo's translation as their research objects, and analyze the contents of the two translations directly with the help of corpus research tools, along with eliminating the step of building a corpus by themselves. From the theoretical perspective of ecological translatology, they make a comparative analysis of words and sentences. The former is subdivided into type/token ratio, high-frequency words, and keywords, while the latter is subdivided into the number and the average length of sentences. By combining the data results from different perspectives, they discuss the translation styles of the two translators and the linguistic characteristics of the two translations, and try to find a balance between the attention to the translator and the attention to the translation..

### 3.5. Research on the Dissemination of the Translations

During the past ten years, there have been only two literatures on the dissemination of the translations, which mostly explains the details and impacts of the dissemination and spread of the English translations of *Shanghanlun* in the English speaking countries and regions. Tang Lu and Chen Ji<sup>[18]</sup> take the translation of Luo Xiwen as an example to discuss the translation strategies of culture-loaded words in the field of Chinese medicine. They emphasize that in the process of translation, translators should not only be oriented towards the original text to ensure the complete and accurate dissemination of basic knowledge of Chinese medicine, but also reasonably consider the influence of literary, historical and philosophical factors on the language of Chinese medicine so as to avoid the unconscious deletion of the cultural connotation when translating the classics of traditional Chinese medicine. In short, they use the

single translation as a typical example to explain the favorable influence and positive role of the translation of Chinese medical classics on the spread of Chinese medical culture around the world. Zhang Chenchen and Tan Yesheng<sup>[19]</sup> sort out the publishing process of each English translation of the classic work, including initial publication, reprint and republication, collect data of each translation such as the volume of library collection, the number of citations by scholars and the bestseller ranking for comprehensive analysis in various aspects, and basically analyze the reasons for the formation of specific data of each translation. The dissemination and acceptance of the Chinese medical classic in overseas are investigated as a whole in their research.

## 4. Conclusion

As one of the four classic works of traditional Chinese medicine, Shanghanlun is of great significance in the history of the development of Chinese medicine. Its English translation history can be traced back to the 1980s, and it has been translated by many scholars in the following decades. Although there are English translations of the classic work published both at home and abroad, relatively few studies on these translations exist in foreign academic sector. Sixty nine papers related to the English translation of this book are found in the search on CNKI during the time range of the past ten years. These papers include 1 doctoral dissertation, 13 master's theses and 55 journal papers. The 69 literatures can be roughly divided into five categories, that is research on the translation strategies, research on the comparison of the translations, research on the translation history, corpus-based research on the translations and research on the dissemination of the translations. Among them, research on the translation strategies and research on the comparison of the translations are more popular, accounting for about 59.42% and 30.43% of the total literatures respectively, and the research contents of these two categories have the same parts more or less. In addition, the translation objects that are compared and discussed with emphasis are Luo Xiwen's translation, Nigel Wiseman's translation and Li Zhaoguo's translation. The three editions of translations account for only a small number of the existing translations. By contrast, the three aspects of research on the translation history, corpus-based research on the translations and research on the dissemination of the translations need to be further studied, and one of them can be selected for deeper research in the future.

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