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Translation Strategies Selection in the Perspective of Translator Behavior Criticism: A Case Study of the Chinese Translation of The Joy Luck Club

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Abstract

The Joy Luck Club, written by the American-born Chinese author Amy Tan, is her breakout novel that garnered attention from both general readers and scholars upon its publication. In terms of Chinese translation, there have been seven versions so far, and various scholars have used multiple theories to compare and analyze the translations of different translators. However, studies that analyze the translation strategies of the earliest translation version (translated by Cheng Naishan) and the latest translation version (translated by Li Jun and Zhang Li) from the perspective of translator behavior criticism are rare. This paper finds that Cheng Naishan tends to use domestication strategies, while Li Jun and Zhang Li adopt a combination of foreignization and domestication strategies in their translation. This is reflected in their actual actions within the "truth-seeking-pragmatism" translator behavior continuum. Li Jun and Zhang Li's translator behavior is higher in both truth-seeking and pragmatism than Cheng Naishan's, showing greater rationality.

Keywords

Translator's behavior criticism; Asian American literature; Translation strategies; The Joy Luck Club.

1. Introduction

The Joy Luck Club is the breakout work of Chinese-American author Amy Tan. Upon its publication, it quickly garnered attention from both the public and scholars, staying on the New York Times bestseller list for nine months. It was also adapted into a film, paving new ground for Chinese-American literature. The book tells the story of four Chinese immigrant mothers and their Chinese-American daughters, who experience conflicts due to the differences between Chinese and American cultures, but ultimately achieve mutual understanding.

So far, China has published seven Chinese translations of The Joy Luck Club and has reprinted it 11 times, which is considered a miracle in the translation and publishing history of Chinese-American works. The first to translate Amy Tan's novel The Joy Luck Club was the Shanghai writer Cheng Naishan. She completed the translation work in 1990, but due to copyright issues, it could not be published immediately. It was not until 1992 that Zhejiang Literature and Art Publishing House published the joint translation by Cheng Naishan and Yan Yingwei under the title The Happiness Club. In 1999 and 2006, the versions translated by these two co-translators were reprinted, with the 1999 edition being handled by Zhejiang Literature and Art Publishing House and the 2006 edition by Shanghai Translation Publishing House.Cheng Naishan's retranslation was republished in 2010, marking the fourth reprint of her translation work[7], indicating the sustained interest and widespread attention from readers. Cheng Naishan was not satisfied with her first translation, "I was very tired when I translated it, and now I realize that it might be because I hadn't deeply understood the feelings of that generation of Chinese people at the time"[5]. For the second translation, as Cheng Naishan put it, "I adopted literal

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translation while also boldly engaging in free translation, making the writing smoother and the language more beautiful"[5]. "The translation of the entire book was rewritten word by word, sentence by sentence, compared with the original text, and was carefully reconsidered and deliberated"[9], and she invited He Peihua to assist with the translation. Given this, this article selects Cheng Naishan's 2006 retranslation of The Joy Luck Club as the research subject.

The latest version of The Joy Luck Club was published in 2016 by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (FLTRP). The translators for this version are Li Jun and Zhang Li. This translation of The Joy Luck Club does not employ excessive prefaces or postscripts as supplementary texts to explain the work but adopts a direct and concise approach to present the textual content. Despite the limited additional textual information, it cleverly uses the limited space to highlight the classic aspects of the work. Furthermore, the style of this version's translation is fresh and significantly different from previous versions[6]. The two versions have a significant stylistic difference and a large time span between them. By comparing these two versions of The Joy Luck Club, one can delve into the strategies chosen by translators in cross-cultural communication, the effectiveness of text transmission, and the evolution of readers' understanding of the work. This provides valuable theoretical and empirical analysis for the fields of translation studies and literary studies.

As of June 2024, there are 68 academic journal articles and 49 dissertations on the Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure(CNKI) using the keywords The Joy Luck Club and translation. The theories involved include Skopos theory, feminist criticism theory, ecological translation theory, translation ethics theory, multimodal theory, semiotic translation theory, hermeneutics theory, inter-subjectivity theory, polysystem theory, intertextuality theory, functional equivalence theory, relevance theory, and more. Most of the studies focus on the translation by Cheng Naishan or a comparison between Cheng Naishan's translation and that of Tian Qing. One master's thesis, "A Study on the Linguistic Conversion Strategies of Amy Tan's Translation of 'The Joy Luck Club' from the Perspective of Translator's Behavior," by Chen Lan from Yangzhou University, explores the translator's behavior perspective, but comparative studies of different versions of The Joy Luck Club under this theoretical framework are rare. Therefore, this paper analyzes the intra- and extra-translation behaviors of the translators of the Cheng Naishan translation (referred to as Cheng's version) and the Li Jun and Zhang Li's translation (referred to as Li's version) from the perspective of translator's behavior, aiming to contribute to the translation of Chinese American literature.

2. Theoretical Foundations

The Translator Behavior Criticism Theory is a constructive theory of translation criticism first proposed by scholar Zhou Lingshun. The proposal of this theory marks the entry of translation criticism into its third phase—behavioral criticism research. It combines the characteristics of the first phase, which mainly focused on the relationship between the source text and the target text, with the sociological research characteristics of the second phase. Translator Behavior Criticism has become a study of translation sociology that combines internal and external factors, exploring the linguistic and social role behaviors of translators in terms of translation quality[13].

The systematization, scientification, and objectification of the theory of Translator Behavior Criticism cannot be achieved without the construction of relevant terminology. In order to clearly define the scope of this theory, Zhou Lingshun has defined concepts such as "translator behavior research" and "translator behavior criticism," "text criticism perspective" and "behavior criticism perspective," "translator behavior" and "translation behavior" [16]. Zhou believes that translators are typical volitional entities with dual attributes of linguistics and sociality. Linguistics are reflected in the translation behavior that translators implement

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around the meaning showed by the original text in thought and action. Sociality is reflected in the social activity of translation that translators perform under their translator identity, based on the linguistic "truth-seeking" of the original meaning, and the natural behavior of being "practical" in society. Translators undergo gradual changes on the continuum between "author/original" and "reader/society" under the influence of their social roles or identities[14]. To evaluate translator behavior more specifically, Zhou Lingshun has also explained multiple concepts, such as "intra-translation behavior" and "extra-translation behavior," "intra-translation effects" and "extra-translation effects," "truth-seeking" and "practicality," etc.

The "Truth-Pragmatism" translator continuum evaluation model is the core content of this theory. "Truth" refers to the behavior of translators seeking the true meaning carried by the original text in order to achieve the goal of being pragmatic for "readers/society"; "Pragmatism" refers to the attitude and methods adopted by translators to meet pragmatic needs based on seeking the truth of the meaning carried by the original text, either in whole or in part. "Truth" and "Pragmatism" together constitute the two ends of the continuum. For translators, leaning towards the left end indicates that the translator mainly displays linguistic characteristics, while leaning towards the right end indicates that the translator mainly displays social characteristics. However, maintaining a balance between these two ends is the ideal state of translator behavior, requiring both fidelity to the original text and pragmatic actions that consider social purposes. Only in this way can the rationality of translator behavior be achieved[14]. These two ends are not mutually exclusive; "Truth" is the foundation of "Pragmatism", constraining it, but "Pragmatism" transcends "Truth"[14]. It is up to the translator to lean towards the "Truth" end or the "Pragmatism" end; translators should avoid the influence of preconceived notions and engage in descriptive rather than prescriptive translation criticism of the translator's behavior in the self-regulatory process of "Truth-Pragmatism" translation, while also analyzing the social motivations behind that behavior[15].

3. Translation Strategies Demonstrated in the Analysis of Intra-translation Behavior

According to the theory of Translator Critical Behavior, "intra-translation behavior" refers to the translator's behavior of reproducing the original meaning in the linguistic role and the behavior of social adaptation of the translated text in the social role[16]. "Chinese American literature refers to works created and published in English by Chinese Americans, including works written in Chinese about experiences in the United States or written in English about Chinese content"[11]. The Joy Luck Club belongs to the former. Due to their immigrant experiences, Chinese Americans possess a unique ethnic identity and culture; they are neither completely American nor completely Chinese, and their culture is a mix of Chinese and American cultures. Therefore, they do not fit into the mainstream American culture and are in a marginal position in society. Many Chinese American writers, in order to awaken the part of Chinese culture within themselves and to confirm their unique ethnic identity, often engage in Chinese narration in their works, which is reflected linguistically as: the content features Chinese elements, and formally there is a mix of Chinese and English and Chinglish.

3.1. Pinyin

Original text：he believed in his nengkan, his ability to do anything he put his mind to.

Cheng's version: He believes in his own abilities.

Li's version: But he is convinced that he is "capable", firmly believing that whatever he puts his mind to, no matter what it is, can succeed.

Analysis: In The Joy Luck Club, Amy Tan extensively used the Wade-Giles system based on the Romanization of Chinese, creating a language style with Chinese characteristics[1]. There are

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three reasons why Amy Tan did not use the Chinese Pinyin: first, the author herself is a second-generation Chinese-American. American culture is learned, while Chinese culture is studied, and therefore she is not familiar with Chinese Pinyin; second, this special bilingual code-switching language form adds an oriental color to the entire book, giving English readers a novel experience; third, the identity of Chinese-Americans is in a marginal position in society, and the use of Chinese linguistic codes is to "deconstruct centralism and promote multicultural coexistence"[8]. Therefore, these Chinese linguistic codes are not pure Chinese Pinyin, but they represent the meaning of Chinese and have the significance of cross-cultural communication. Under the ingenious arrangement of the author, it is no longer possible to simply translate back into the source language. For the term "nengkan," the Cheng's version adopts a domestication strategy and translates it directly into a sentence. However, the Li's version not only translates this Chinese code back into "neng gan" but also employs a foreignization strategy, adding quotation marks to emphasize the difference between the Chinese code and the Chinese pinyin in the text, highlighting the special language created by the special ethnic identity of Chinese Americans, and also providing Chinese readers with a novel experience of estrangement. Similar examples of pinyin treatment in the text include "hong mu" and "chang". In summary, the Li's version not only preserves the linguistic form of the original text but also makes social adjustments to the translation based on social factors, seeking both truth and practicality. The Cheng's version mostly adopts a domestication approach, although it conveys the profound meaning behind the text and meets the requirement of practicality, it is not faithful in form and lacks sufficient truth-seeking.

3.2. Chinglish

Original text: "No, this your piano,"she said firmly, "Always your piano. You only one can play."

Cheng's version: "No, this has always been your piano," she said unequivocally, "it has always been yours. Only you can play it."

Li's version: "No, this is your piano," the mother answered unequivocally, "it will always be yours, and only you can play it."

Analysis: In The Joy Luck Club, Chinglish is another prominent linguistic feature. The formation of Chinglish is related to the significant structural differences between Chinese and English. English tends to use complex subordinate clause structures (hypotaxis), which reflects the English culture's inclination towards logical analysis and detailed explanations. In contrast, Chinese places more emphasis on holistic expression and the rhythm of language, focusing more on the fluency and overall effect of the text, rather than the strictness of syntactic structures as in English. This characteristic can be traced back to the historical background of the Han nationality being influenced by holistic philosophical concepts[10]. Therefore, English tends to use long sentences, while Chinese tends to use short sentences; English uses many conjunctions, while Chinese uses fewer; English values conciseness, while Chinese favors repetition. The mothers in The Joy Luck Club, as first-generation Chinese immigrants, still recognize their native culture. They apply the thinking of Chinese to the form of English, creating a unique language to express themselves. For English readers, it is an invasion of their source language, giving them a novel reading experience. For Chinese readers or descendants of Chinese immigrants, "it is like reliving the intonation, rhythm, and understanding of the mother tongue, with the added pride" [12].

In the original text, Amy Tan cleverly uses the linguistic features of Chinese to create three English sentences, but from the perspective of standard English grammar, such sentences are incorrect because they lack a predicate verb within the sentence and a conjunction between sentences. Both translators adopted a strategy of foreignization, directly back-translating and recreating the linguistic structure of Chinese. As for the grammatical errors in Chinglish, it is actually difficult to translate them. The reason why the two translators do not adopt

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compensatory methods (such as adding notes) is that, firstly, there is a lot of occurrence of Chinglish in the text, and if each one were annotated, it would inevitably disrupt the reader's aesthetic experience. Secondly, the target audience is Chinese readers.In fact, by directly translating the structural forms of the Chinese language in these sentences, rather than using a "translationese" style, readers can already understand that the first generation of Chinese immigrants, upon arriving in the United States, remained unaffected by American culture. Therefore, by directly translating the linguistic content, the actions of mothers speaking for themselves within a foreign culture are also expressed. From these two perspectives, the translations by Cheng and Li not only seek authenticity in linguistic form, translating the structures of the Chinese language, but also take a "pragmatic" approach in conveying meaning.

3.3. Chinese Elements

Original text：The servants had already packed and loaded a rickshaw with the day’s basic provisions: a woven hamper filled with zong zi—the sticky rice wrapped in lotus leaves, some filled with roasted ham, some with sweet lotus seeds;

Cheng's version: The servants loaded all the food onto the rickshaw, including a large basket of zongzi (rice dumplings).

Li's version: The servants had already loaded onto the rickshaw all the food prepared for the day, including a basket brimming with zongzi, made from sticky rice, filled with roasted ham or sweet lotus seeds, and wrapped in lotus leaves.

Analysis: The third linguistic feature in The Joy Luck Club is the extensive use of Chinese cultural symbols by the author. "The connotation of Chinese cultural symbols refers to the aggregate of cultural meanings and values embodied in things that are representative, symbolic, or metaphorical in Chinese culture"[3]. American second-generation Chinese-American writers who write about Chinese elements express respect and inheritance of their ancestral culture on one hand, and on the other hand, writing about Chinese elements helps the Chinese-American community to establish their own identity and sense of belonging. Therefore, translating and introducing Chinese symbols "can evoke similar life feelings and aesthetic experiences in readers from foreign lands, influencing whether Chinese culture can be more widely spread and accepted"[17].

In the examples above, the original text mentioned zongzi (rice dumplings), the fillings of zongzi, and the leaves used for wrapping them. In fact, the fillings of zongzi vary between the north and south in China. In the north, sweet zongzi are more common, filled with ingredients like red bean paste and dates. In the south, savory zongzi are more prevalent, filled with ingredients such as meat, egg yolks, and nuts. The leaves used for wrapping also differ by region and include various types like reed leaves, reed leaves, oak leaves, bamboo shoot shells, lotus leaves, banana leaves, corn husks, and cardamom leaves. The diversity of zongzi is also reflected in the works of Chinese-American writers.In the example, Amy Tan mentions that the zongzi are wrapped in lotus leaves, with a filling of ham and lotus seeds. In contrast, the American-Chinese writer Maxine Hong Kingston, in her work China Men, describes zongzi wrapped in ti leaves, with a filling of sausage, pork, salted duck eggs, and mung beans. Even though the fillings and leaves used by the American-Chinese writers differ, the cultural significance represented by the zongzi is the same. It includes commemorating Qu Yuan, warding off evil and disaster, and symbolizing reunion and harmony, as well as representing the continuation of Chinese culture.

Cheng's version omits the translation of the filling and leaves of the zongzi, only translating the word "zongzi," leaving readers from different regions with the space to imagine, avoiding disputes, and allowing readers to focus more on appreciating the recognition of Chinese elements and the inheritance of Chinese culture by second-generation Chinese-American writers. Although the content is not as truthful, it is pragmatic in its connotations. Li's version is faithful to the original, translating all the information in the original text, seeking truth in

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content, but it may provoke disputes among people from different regions, so it is not pragmatic enough.

4. Analyzing the Causes of Translation Strategies Outside of Translation Behavior

"Extra-translation behavior refers to the adaptation or transformation of the original meaning by the translator in response to social needs through the translation text"[16]. The translator's extra-translation behavior is caused by external factors, such as reader factors, translator factors, publisher factors, original text factors, etc. This article only discusses reader factors and translator factors.

4.1. Reader Factors

At the turn of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century, the process of copyright improvement in China's publishing industry was not yet complete. The market system for copyright transactions in our country was only established and improved in 2006 and 2010 respectively[2], and the understanding and acceptance of foreign literature were relatively limited. At this time, although the academic community had already begun extensive research on American Chinese literature, Chinese readers had limited knowledge of such literary works, lacking awareness of the profound content in the works of Chinese-American writers, and the acceptance of American Chinese literature was not high. In such a situation, the purpose of the translators was to attract readers, so the Cheng's version adopted a strategy of domestication, reducing the presence of heterogeneous elements in the original text, in the hope of clearing reading obstacles for the readers.

Nowadays, with the increasing cultural exchange within China and the rise in internationalization, the editorial perspective in China has broadened, and the translation and introduction of foreign literature has become systematic. Chinese readers' acceptance of foreign literature has significantly improved. As a part of this, Chinese American literature has also received more attention. An increasing number of Chinese American works have entered the Chinese market, and after extensive reading, readers are able to understand the ethical dilemmas of the Chinese American community. Therefore, the Li translation adopts a strategy of defamiliarization, creating a reading experience that is unfamiliar and offers a broader cultural perspective.

4.2. Translator Factors

Cheng Naishan came from a well-off family with good education background. She graduated from the English department of Shanghai Education College in 1965 and taught in middle schools for over 10 years, possessing a solid foundation in the English language. Additionally, Cheng Naishan was a renowned "Shanghai School" writer with elegant writing style, and her works have won awards multiple times. Most of her writings focus on women, depicting their independence and strength. After moving to Hong Kong, her creations reflected the multicultural intersection in Hong Kong, overlapping to some extent with the themes of Amy Tan's works, and therefore, she is able to understand their writings.In addition, Cheng later moved to the United States, and years of American life gave her a new understanding of cultural conflicts between China and America[4]. With the dual status of writer and translator, Cheng Naishan paid more attention to the expression of writing and the acceptance of readers, so she chose the naturalization strategy to "take care of the reading habits of Chinese readers"[9].

Li Jun obtained a Master's degree in Applied Linguistics and Literature in English from the University of International Business and Economics in 2002 and a Ph.D. in English Literature from the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2013. He currently serves as an associate professor and master's supervisor at the School of English at the University of International

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Business and Economics. His research focuses on English literature, European and American drama, and Shakespeare. As a translator, Professor Li has served as the primary translator for The Joy Luck Club (2016), The Tenth Man (2016), and as the second translator for Where the Past Begins - An autobiography of Amy Tan (2020) and The Luminous Heart of Jonah S. (2021). He possesses outstanding English translation skills. Li Jun's version of The Joy Luck Club is the latest Chinese translation, and scholars have conducted profound analyses of previous translations. Moreover, research on Amy Tan and The Joy Luck Club has become increasingly comprehensive. Li Jun's translation can be said to stand on the shoulders of giants, allowing him to adopt a strategy of foreignization to more vividly showcase the real lives of Chinese Americans and to represent the ethical dilemmas faced by Chinese Americans.

5. Conclusion

This paper, using the framework of Translator Behavior Criticism theory, comparatively analyzes the translations of The Joy Luck Club by Cheng and Li, exploring the translators' intra- and extra-linguistic behaviors. From the perspective of intra-linguistic behavior, the article compares the translations of the two translators at three levels: pinyin, Chinglish, and Chinese elements. The paper finds that, in most cases, when balancing between "truth-seeking" and "pragmatism," translators Li Jun and Zhang Li are more capable of achieving equilibrium than translator Cheng Naishan, thus their translation behaviors are more reasonable. From the perspective of extra-linguistic behavior, the paper mainly explains the factors of readers and translators, summarizing the causes for the two translators, as "social beings," to adopt domestication and foreignization strategies respectively. In terms of reader factors, since the readers at the time were relatively unfamiliar with Chinese American literary works, translator Cheng Naishan adopted a domestication strategy to clear reading obstacles for the readers. With the advent of globalization and the need for readers to expand their horizons, translators Li Jun and Zhang Li adopted a foreignization strategy, which helps to preserve the unique cultural features and linguistic style of the original work, aiding readers in better understanding the cultural background and social context behind the original.

In the context of globalization, cultural exchange is no longer just a simple process of information transmission, but a process of deep understanding and intercultural dialogue. For contemporary Chinese readers, reading works of Asian American literature presented through translation is not only about catching a glimpse of a cultural other, but also about deeply perceiving and understanding the lives, values, and challenges of the Asian American community through the narrative and emotional experiences of literature. This experience not only enriches an individual's cultural perspective but also promotes emotional resonance and understanding across cultures.

The translation of Asian American literary works is not just a reproduction of the works themselves, but also a form of cross-cultural communication and understanding. In the process of translation, translators need to have an open perspective and a keen cultural perception to ensure that the deep-seated information and cultural connotations of the original works are conveyed to the readers of the target language. Even in the expression of language, the diversity and richness of the original works should be preserved. A simplistic approach to translation may weaken the complexity and diversity of the original works. Therefore, translators should adopt a variety of translation strategies. This not only shows respect for differences and reflects cultural diversity, but also injects new momentum and possibilities into the exchange and development of global literature and culture. Therefore, the translation of Asian American literature is not just an act of cultural transmission, but also a bridge for cultural dialogue and understanding, contributing to the richness and diversity of global literature and culture.

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