СТРАТЕГИИ КУЛЬТУРНОЙ АДАПТАЦИИ ПРИ ПЕРЕВОДЕ ЭТНИЧЕСКОЙ ЛЕКСИКИ: СРАВНИТЕЛЬНЫЙ АНАЛИЗ НЕСКОЛЬКИХ КИТАЙСКИХ ПЕРЕВОДОВ РОМАНА «МАРТИН ИДЕН»

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Аннотация: В условиях всё более частого межкультурного общения в эпоху глобализации проблема передачи этнической и культурной лексики в художественном переводе становится важным вопросом переводоведения. Этническая и культурная лексика несёт в себе глубокие культурные коннотации, и то, как сохранить культурные особенности исходного языка, обеспечивая при этом эффективную межкультурную передачу на языке перевода, составляет основную задачу для переводчиков. В данном исследовании в качестве объекта изучения взяты несколько китайских переводов романа Джека Лондона «Мартин Иден», систематически рассматриваются стратегии культурной адаптации, применяемые переводчиками при работе с этнической и культурной лексикой. Результаты показывают, что разные переводчики демонстрируют различные стратегические подходы: перевод Чжоу Сина тяготеет к стратегии форенизации, делая акцент на точной передаче языкового стиля и культурных коннотаций оригинала, включая сохранение диалектов, просторечий, грамматических ошибок и пунктуации; перевод У Лао, напротив, чаще использует стратегию доместикации, ориентируясь на гладкость текста и восприятие читателем, с большей степенью локализации культурных элементов оригинала. Исследование также показывает, что переводческие концепции глубоко влияют на выбор стратегий: Чжоу Син выступает против идеи о том, что «гладкость должна быть важнее точности», подчёркивая обогащение современного китайского языка через перевод; У Лао предлагает заменить традиционные критерии «точность, выразительность, изящество» на «прецизионность», однако на практике демонстрирует более самостоятельные модификации. В работе

предлагается аналитическая рамка «культурной адаптации» для перевода этнической и культурной лексики, что даёт теоретическую опору для работы с культурными элементами в художественном переводе и имеет практическое значение для достижения баланса между сохранением культурной аутентичности и восприятием текста читателем в межкультурной коммуникации.

Ключевые слова: этническая и культурная лексика, культурная адаптация, стратегии перевода, «Мартин Иден»; доместикация и форенизация.

STRATEGIES FOR CULTURAL ADAPTATION IN TRANSLATING ETHNIC VOCABULARY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MULTIPLE CHINESE TRANSLATIONS OF MARTIN EDEN

Zhang Xiang

Abstract: Against the backdrop of increasingly frequent cross-cultural communication in the era of globalization, the treatment of ethnic and cultural vocabulary in literary translation has become an important issue in translation studies. Ethnic and cultural vocabulary carries profound cultural connotations, and how to preserve the source language's cultural characteristics while achieving effective cross-cultural transmission in the target language constitutes a core challenge for translators. This study takes multiple Chinese translations of Jack London's novel *Martin Eden* as its research object, systematically examining the cultural adaptation strategies employed by translators in handling ethnic and cultural vocabulary. The findings reveal that different translators demonstrate differentiated strategic choices in translating ethnic and cultural vocabulary: Zhou Xing's translation tends to adopt foreignization strategies, emphasizing faithful reproduction of the original text's linguistic style and cultural connotations, including the retention of dialects, slang, grammatical errors, and punctuation; Wu Lao's translation, by contrast, more frequently employs domestication strategies, focusing on fluency and reader acceptance, with greater localization of cultural elements from the original text. The study further reveals that translators' philosophical perspectives profoundly influence their strategic choices — Zhou Xing argues against the notion that "fluency should be prioritized over fidelity," emphasizing the enrichment of modern Chinese through translation; Wu Lao proposes replacing "faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance" with "precision," yet demonstrates more autonomous modifications in practice.

This study proposes an analytical framework of “cultural adaptability” for translating ethnic and cultural vocabulary, providing theoretical reference for handling cultural elements in literary translation and offering practical significance for balancing cultural authenticity with reader reception in cross-cultural communication.

Key words: ethnic and cultural vocabulary, cultural adaptability, translation strategies, *Martin Eden*, domestication and foreignization.

Introduction. Research Background. Ethnic and cultural vocabulary in literary works represents the linguistic crystallization of a particular nation’s historical traditions, ways of life, and value systems, carrying profound cultural connotations. Jack London’s semi-autobiographical novel *Martin Eden*, written in the early 20th century and set in San Francisco, vividly depicts the protagonist’s journey from a working-class sailor to a writer. The novel is replete with rich ethnic and cultural elements—from linguistic differences across social classes to the collision of immigrant cultures, from dialects and slang to grammatical errors, from culture-specific terms to expressions embedded in particular historical contexts — all of which pose significant challenges for translation practice.

Since its publication, *Martin Eden* has produced multiple Chinese translations. Among them, Zhou Xing’s translation (1955, Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House) and Wu Lao’s translation (1983, Shanghai Translation Publishing House) represent two representative versions that have exerted extensive influence in the field of translation. The notable differences in how these translators handle ethnic and cultural vocabulary provide rich textual material for comparative study.

Literature Review. Translation studies have accumulated substantial findings regarding strategies for handling ethnic and cultural vocabulary. Li from the perspective of domestication and foreignization, explored strategies for translating Uyghur idioms into Chinese, pointing out that the key to appropriately handling cultural characteristics in translation lies in finding a balance between the cultural differences of the source and target languages, employing suitable translation methods, and reproducing the cultural information of the source language as faithfully as possible[1, p. 123]. Research on ethnically marked vocabulary from a cross-cultural perspective further indicates that translation requires balancing cultural adaptability with linguistic fidelity to enhance the intelligibility and acceptability of ethnic culture in global contexts [2, p. 221].

In terms of *Martin Eden* translation studies, Huang conducted a systematic comparison of the two Chinese translations by Zhou Xing and Wu Lao, undertaking a detailed analysis at the lexical level (compound words, vulgar expressions, culture-specific terms, modal particles, interrogative words), syntactic level (parallel structures, subordinate clauses, word order and sentence order), and stylistic level (dialects and slang, long and short sentences, punctuation). The study found that Zhou Xing's translation remains more faithful to the original text's linguistic style and cultural connotations, while Wu Lao's translation places greater emphasis on fluency and readability [3, p. 24].

Research from the perspective of descriptive translation studies further indicates that employing corpus-based methods to describe and interpret multiple translations can more objectively reveal the translational features of different versions at the lexical level [4, p. 74]. Ma's study on the translatability limits and translation strategies of folk-cultural terms identified specific translation methods including literal translation, free translation, amplification, division, combination, and idiomatic translation, providing methodological reference for research on translating ethnic and cultural vocabulary [2009, p. 109].

This study aims to systematically examine the cultural adaptation strategies employed by multiple Chinese translations of *Martin Eden* in handling ethnic and cultural vocabulary, addressing three core questions:

1) What translation strategies do different translators adopt in handling ethnic and cultural vocabulary in *Martin Eden*, and what characteristics do these strategies exhibit?

2) How do translators' philosophical perspectives influence their choices of cultural adaptation strategies, and what cultural stances do different strategic choices reflect?

3) How can the translation of ethnic and cultural vocabulary achieve a balance between cultural authenticity and reader acceptance, and what constitutes the ideal path of cultural adaptability?

The scientific significance of this study lies in: first, situating the study of ethnic and cultural vocabulary translation within the theoretical framework of domestication and foreignization to reveal the cultural logic underlying different strategic choices; second, deepening understanding of the patterns governing the handling of cultural elements in literary translation through comparative analysis of multiple translations of *Martin Eden*; third, integrating perspectives from translation studies, cultural studies, and linguistics to construct an analytical framework for translating ethnic and cultural vocabulary.

The practical significance lies in providing strategic reference for literary translation practice, assisting translators in making appropriate choices when handling ethnic and cultural elements; offering case resources for translation teaching to cultivate students' sensitivity to cultural differences and their ability to manage them; and providing methodological guidance for balancing cultural authenticity with effective communication in cross-cultural contexts.

Materials and Methods. This study employs a combination of comparative case analysis and textual analysis. The research follows the logical progression of "textual comparison-strategy identification-causal analysis-theoretical construction." First, multiple Chinese translations of *Martin Eden* are selected, focusing on their handling of ethnic and cultural vocabulary. Second, specific strategies adopted by different translators in processing ethnic and cultural vocabulary are identified. Third, the underlying reasons for strategic choices are analyzed in light of translators' philosophical perspectives and historical contexts. Finally, a cultural adaptability analytical framework for translating ethnic and cultural vocabulary is constructed based on the research findings.

The data sources for this study primarily include two aspects:

1) Translation Materials: Zhou Xing's translation (1955, Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House) and Wu Lao's translation (1983, Shanghai Translation Publishing House) are selected as the core objects of analysis. These two translations have exerted extensive influence in the field of translation, and the translators explicitly articulated their respective philosophical perspectives, providing ideal materials for comparative study. Additionally, other translations are referenced as supplementary analytical materials.

2) Academic Literature: Core literature on ethnic and cultural vocabulary translation, domestication and foreignization theories, and *Martin Eden* translation studies is systematically retrieved from both domestic and international sources. Particular reference is made to Huang comparative study of the two Chinese translations, Li theoretical analysis of domestication and foreignization, and Hahaliezi Saileke's synthesis of translation methods for folk-custom terms.

This study employs a combination of qualitative textual analysis and comparative analysis. First, close reading of the translated texts is conducted to identify the handling of ethnic and cultural vocabulary. Second, classification and coding are performed according to vocabulary categories (dialects and slang, culture-specific terms, grammatical errors, modal particles, etc.). Third, strategic differences among different translators in processing each category of vocabulary

are compared. Finally, the underlying logic of strategic choices is analyzed in light of the translators' philosophical perspectives.

Results. Based on textual analysis of the original work, the ethnic and cultural vocabulary in *Martin Eden* can be categorized into the following types:

1) Dialects and Slang: The novel extensively employs dialects and slang to reflect the linguistic characteristics of different social classes. Martin Eden, who comes from a working-class background, exhibits language with distinct working-class features, while characters from the bourgeois class display standardized language characteristics. Jack London uses linguistic differences to depict social class stratification.

2) Culture-Specific Terms: The novel contains numerous cultural terms embedded in specific historical contexts, including terminology related to the publishing industry, political terms, and expressions of social etiquette prevalent at the time. These terms carry the cultural memory of early 20th-century American society and lack direct equivalents in the Chinese context.

3) Grammatical Errors and Pronunciation Irregularities: To shape character portrayals, Jack London deliberately employs grammatical errors and pronunciation irregularities, reflecting Martin's early lack of educational background. These linguistic "errors" serve as an important means of characterization.

4) Modal Particles and Colloquial Expressions: The novel extensively uses English-specific modal particles and colloquial expressions to convey characters' emotions and the atmosphere of dialogues.

Comparison of Translators' Philosophical Perspectives:

1) Zhou Xing's Translation Philosophy. Zhou Xing explicitly stated that he "absolutely does not believe in the nonsense that 'fluency should be prioritized over fidelity,'" emphasizing the importance of faithfulness to the original text. He believed that translation should preserve the original work's linguistic style and sentence structure, enriching modern Chinese modes of expression through translation. Zhou advocated for retaining the original text's parts of speech and sentence patterns, avoiding arbitrary splitting of sentences, and maintaining the original word order and sentence order.

2) Wu Lao's Translation Philosophy. Wu Lao proposed replacing the traditional criteria of "faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance" with "precision," emphasizing accurate conveyance of the original content. However, in actual translation practice, Wu Lao demonstrated more autonomous modifications, making considerable adjustments to the original text's long and short sentences and

punctuation, using fluent and standardized expressions to convey the original content. This stance is somewhat distant from his own proposed philosophy of "precision."

3) Cultural Implications of Philosophical Differences. The differing philosophical perspectives of the two translators reflect distinct cultural stances: Zhou Xing tends toward cultural fidelity, emphasizing the introduction of foreign cultural elements through translation; Wu Lao, in contrast, tends toward reader orientation, placing greater emphasis on the readability and acceptability of the translated text. This difference essentially represents contrasting understandings of the cultural function of translation.

Based on comparative analysis of the two translations, the translation strategies for different categories of ethnic and cultural vocabulary exhibit the following characteristics:

1) Translation of Dialects and Slang. Zhou Xing's translation tends to preserve the heterogeneous characteristics of dialects and slang, employing literal translation or transliteration with annotations to allow readers to experience the original text's linguistic style. Wu Lao's translation, by contrast, more frequently adopts free translation, converting dialects and slang into corresponding colloquial expressions in Chinese, sacrificing some cultural specificity in exchange for reading fluency.

2) Translation of Culture-Specific Terms. In handling culture-specific terms, Zhou Xing emphasizes preserving the original text's conceptual and affective meanings, conveying cultural information through literal translation whenever possible. Wu Lao focuses more on the intelligibility of the translated text, domesticating some culture-specific terms by replacing original cultural elements with concepts familiar to Chinese readers.

3) Handling of Grammatical Errors and Pronunciation Irregularities. This represents the most significant area of difference between the two translators. Zhou Xing faithfully reproduces Martin's erroneous pronunciation and grammatical errors, preserving the original text's long and short sentence structures and punctuation, enabling Chinese readers to perceive the irregularity of Martin's early language. Wu Lao transforms these "errors" into fluent and standardized Chinese expressions, failing to reflect Martin's trajectory of linguistic growth.

4) Translation of Modal Particles and Colloquial Expressions. In translating modal particles, Zhou Xing strives to correspond to the original text's emotional coloring, conveying modal information through the preservation of punctuation and

sentence structures. Wu Lao makes adjustments according to Chinese expression habits, with some modal particles omitted or converted.

Discussion

1. Theoretical Interpretation of Cultural Adaptation Strategies

The choice between domestication and foreignization in translating ethnic and cultural vocabulary essentially reflects different understandings of cultural adaptability. Domestication strategies pursue adaptation of the translated text to the target language culture, enabling readers to understand and accept it without barriers; foreignization strategies pursue faithful presentation of the source language culture, enriching the target language's cultural expression through the introduction of foreign cultural elements.

Li research indicates that both domestication and foreignization have their respective advantages and disadvantages: domestication facilitates reader understanding but may diminish the uniqueness of the source language culture; foreignization preserves cultural characteristics but may increase the difficulty of reader comprehension. The ideal translation strategy should seek a balance between the two.

Examining the case of *Martin Eden*, Zhou Xing's translation leans closer to the foreignization end, emphasizing faithful reproduction of Jack London's linguistic style; Wu Lao's translation leans closer to the domestication end, focusing on the fluency and readability of the translated text. Both strategies have their respective value: Zhou's strategy preserves the cultural heterogeneity of the original work, injecting new modes of expression into Chinese literary language; Wu's strategy lowers the barrier to reading, expanding the readership of the work.

2. Formation Mechanisms of Cultural Adaptation Strategies

Translators' choices of cultural adaptation strategies are influenced by multiple factors:

1) Guidance of Translation Philosophy: Zhou Xing explicitly stated that "fluency should not be prioritized over fidelity," emphasizing that translation should remain faithful to the original text, even enriching modern Chinese through translation. This philosophy determined his conservative tendency in handling cultural vocabulary.

2) Influence of Historical Context: Zhou's translation emerged in the 1950s, a period when modern Chinese was still in a stage of development and refinement, and the introduction of foreign cultural elements through translation served to enrich linguistic expression. Wu's translation emerged in the 1980s, when

translation practice had matured, placing higher demands on the fluency of translated texts.

3) Consideration of Reader Acceptance: Readers' habits of accepting translated works differ across historical periods, which to some extent influenced the translators' strategic choices.

3. The Ideal Path of Cultural Adaptability

The cultural adaptability in translating ethnic and cultural vocabulary requires seeking a dynamic balance between cultural authenticity and reader acceptance. Based on the findings of this study, the following ideal path is proposed:

1) Layered Processing: Handle cultural vocabulary according to its level of importance. Core cultural concepts should employ foreignization strategies to preserve their cultural uniqueness; peripheral cultural elements may be appropriately domesticated to reduce reading barriers.

2) Intertextual Supplementation: Provide necessary cultural background explanations for foreignized cultural vocabulary through annotations, prefaces, postscripts, and other forms to assist reader understanding.

3) Stylistic Consistency: Translators' strategic choices should maintain overall consistency, avoiding frequent shifts in strategy within the same work that may lead to stylistic disruption.

4) Goal Orientation: Determine strategic focus according to the translation purpose and target reader positioning. Academic translations should emphasize foreignization, while popular translations may appropriately adopt domestication.

This study has the following limitations: First, it is primarily based on a comparative analysis of two translations, and the examination of more translations requires further deepening. Second, there is insufficient empirical research on reader acceptance. Third, there is a lack of quantitative indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of cultural adaptation strategies.

Future research may be expanded in the following directions: first, conducting reader surveys to examine the actual acceptance effects of different translation strategies; second, employing corpus-based methods to conduct quantitative comparisons of vocabulary translation characteristics across different translations; third, extending the research perspective to the translation of ethnic and cultural vocabulary in other literary works to explore universal patterns across texts; fourth, integrating the study of translation reception history to examine the evolution of readers' preferences for translation strategies across different periods.

Conclusion

This study systematically examined the cultural adaptation strategies employed in multiple Chinese translations of *Martin Eden* regarding the translation of ethnic and cultural vocabulary, with the main conclusions as follows:

1) Ethnic and cultural vocabulary constitutes a core difficulty in literary translation, carrying the unique connotations of the source language culture. Cultural vocabulary in *Martin Eden*, including dialects and slang, culture-specific terms, grammatical errors, and modal particles, presents significant challenges for translation practice.

2) Different translators exhibit differentiated strategic choices in handling ethnic and cultural vocabulary. Zhou Xing's translation tends toward foreignization strategies, emphasizing faithful reproduction of the original text's linguistic style and cultural connotations, including the retention of dialects and slang, grammatical errors, and punctuation; Wu Lao's translation, by contrast, more frequently employs domestication strategies, focusing on fluency and reader acceptance.

3) Translators' philosophical perspectives profoundly influence their strategic choices. Zhou Xing advocates enriching modern Chinese through translation, emphasizing the absolute priority of "faithfulness"; Wu Lao proposes the concept of "precision" in translation, yet demonstrates more autonomous modifications in practice. This difference in philosophy reflects contrasting understandings of the cultural function of translation.

4) The "cultural adaptability" in translating ethnic and cultural vocabulary requires seeking a dynamic balance between cultural authenticity and reader acceptance. The ideal translation path encompasses strategic elements including layered processing, intertextual supplementation, stylistic consistency, and goal orientation.

The theoretical contributions of this study lie in: situating the study of ethnic and cultural vocabulary translation within the theoretical framework of domestication and foreignization, revealing the cultural logic underlying different strategic choices; deepening understanding of the patterns governing the handling of cultural elements in literary translation through comparative analysis of multiple translations of *Martin Eden*; and constructing a "cultural adaptability" analytical framework for translating ethnic and cultural vocabulary.

The practical significance lies in: providing strategic reference for literary translation practice, assisting translators in making appropriate choices when handling ethnic and cultural elements; offering case resources for translation

teaching to cultivate students' sensitivity to cultural differences and their ability to manage them; and providing methodological guidance for balancing cultural authenticity with effective communication in cross-cultural contexts.

In the context of globalization, literary translation is not merely linguistic conversion but also cultural dialogue. The handling of ethnic and cultural vocabulary tests translators' cultural awareness and translation wisdom. Only by seeking a balance between cultural authenticity and reader acceptance can translation truly serve as a bridge for communication between different cultures.

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