Section Two — Literary Translation

Strategies of Cultural Translation: A Contrastive Analysis of the Two English Versions of *Hong Lou Meng*

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Abstract
This paper intends to explore strategies of cultural translation and their conditioning factors based on the contrastive study of the two English versions of *Hong Lou Meng*, Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang’s *A Dream of Red Mansions* and David Hawkes’ *The Story of the Stone*. Part 1 presents the two versions’ different treatment of the original cultural messages in the novel such as the colour word 紅 (red), the animal words 龍 (dragon) and 凤 (phoenix), the religious word 神仙 (immortal), the culinary words 米 (rice), 飯 (meal), 碗 (bowl) and 鍋 (pan), the ethical expressions 三从四德 (three obediences and four virtues), 恃才侮上 (arrogance and insolence), 贤惠 (wifeliness), rhetorical devices and aesthetic concepts. Part 2 analyses their distinct translating strategies and the factors conditioning them. The Yangs’ version prefers literal translation while the Hawkes’ free translation; the former emphasises the rendition of meaning and the latter the production of effect; the former prioritises ‘cultural facsimile’ and the latter ‘cultural adaptation’. The translator’s cultural background, his purpose of translating and the target readership are the main factors conditioning the adoption of strategies. Part 3 expounds on the implications of the contrastive study on cultural translation. As a cultural mediator, the translator must develop a high sensitivity to cross-cultural communication, and take full account of the translating purpose, the target readership and the textual type when adopting a translating strategy.

Keywords
cultural translation, strategy, facsimile, adaptation, purpose, readership

Just as David Katan (2004: 14) points out, translation theorists are beginning to see the translator as a mediator between cultures. Actually, ‘cultural translation’ is a popular term now and in the broad sense, it refers to any translation which is sensitive to cultural as well as to linguistic factors. Translation is regarded by many theorists and practitioners as ‘cross-cultural transfer’, ‘cross-cultural communication’ or as a ‘cross-cultural event’. Snell-Hornby (1995: 40) says, “The translation process can no longer be envisaged as being between two languages but between two cultures”. The translator is often regarded as a ‘cross-cultural specialist’, a ‘cultural operator’ or a ‘cultural mediator’. Hatim and Mason (1990: 223) emphasise the importance of the role of the translator as “a mediator between two parties for whom
mutual communication might otherwise be problematic". Taft (1981: 12) defines the cultural mediator as “a person who facilitates communication, understanding, and action between persons or groups who differ with respect to language and culture”. The ‘cultural turn’ in 1980s can be said to be a far-reaching reform in the international circles of translation (Gentzler 1993: 77). As early as in 1930s, some Chinese translators like Qu Qiubai and Lu Xun already entertained the idea of cultural translation though they did not use the term. Qu Qiubai (1931: 216) advocated that new cultural expressions should be introduced to the public through translation, and Lu Xun (1935: 246) placed emphasis on ‘exotic flavor’ in translation. In addition to the ever-increasing research on the theory of cultural translation, many practitioners have employed its principle in their translating practice. This paper intends to explore strategies of cultural translation and their conditioning factors based on the contrastive study of the two English versions of Hong Lou Meng, Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang’s A Dream of Red Mansions and David Hawkes’ The Story of the Stone.

1. A contrastive analysis of the different ways of treating cultural messages in the source language text

Except for scientific and technological treatises, all texts, especially literary ones, necessarily contain some messages of a particular ethnic culture. Those messages are mainly carried by words, but may also be manifested in such forms as linguistic styles and rhetorical devices. Therefore, the translator has to deal with those cultural messages in one way or another, and his treatment is conditioned and influenced by his own cultural background and other relevant factors. Hong Lou Meng, an enduring masterpiece in Chinese literature, is a comprehensive agglomeration of traditional Chinese culture, which accommodates abundant cultural messages involving wide areas like medicine, gardening, architecture, calligraphy, painting, poetry, drama, cuisine, costume, antiques, etc. Both the Yangs and Hawkes attach great importance to the conveyance of those cultural messages in their respective versions and each displays his own ingenuity and exquisiteness in translation. The analysis of the difference between the two versions in terms of reproducing cultural messages is based on selected examples. Because of the limited length of the article, we have chosen only those remarkably different ways they adopt in treating such cultural messages as colour associations, totem images, culinary habits, ethical concepts, religious terms, literary devices, etc., so as to acquire certain enlightenment concerning cultural translation.