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A Study on the Different Translations of the Culture-Loaded Words Related to "Horse" in Chinese Culture

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Abstract: *As a typical Chinese cultural image, the "horse" plays an important role in the process of international publicity. There are many idioms and slangs related to "horse" in Chinese culture, which contain a rich connotation of positive, negative, and neutral meanings. How to accurately translate these culture-loaded words is important for English readers to understand Chinese culture. This thesis illustrates the characteristics of different translations of the culture-loaded words related to "horse" in Chinese cultural publicity from three perspectives: positive, neutral, and derogatory, and analyses the advantages and disadvantages of some translation strategies in it, such as literal translation and free translation, domestication and foreignization. The research finding may shed some light on the publicity of the cultural imagery of the "horse".*

Keywords: *Culture-loaded words; Horse; Chinese cultural publicity; Free translation; Domestication*

1. Introduction

Culture-loaded words are words, phrases, and idioms that signify something specific to a culture, reflecting the distinctive ways in which a particular nationality has accumulated over a long period of history and is different from other nations [1]. Chinese culture-loaded words are the most central external expression of traditional culture. Therefore, the translation of these culture-loaded words is of great importance for the spread of Chinese culture and the international readership of Chinese culture.

The "horse", as a typical Chinese cultural image, is of great significance to cultural promotion. There are many idioms and slangs related to "horse" in Chinese culture. From three perspectives: positive, derogatory, and neutral, this thesis focuses on the characteristics of different translations of the culture-loaded words related to "horse" in Chinese cultural publicity, and analyses the advantages and disadvantages of some translation strategies in it, such as literal translation and free translation, domestication and foreignization.

2. Positive idioms

There are many positive words related to horses in Chinese culture, and in the process of translation, depending on the translation strategy used, different cultural communication effects can be achieved.

In this chapter, the author will use two highly positive Chinese idioms - "Ma Dao Cheng Gong" and "Yi Yan Ji Chu, Si Ma Nan Zhui" - as examples.

2.1 "Ma Dao Cheng Gong"

The Chinese idiom "Ma Dao Cheng Gong" is from a sentence in *The Little Yuchi* of the Yuan Dynasty, "That old Yuchi on horseback made it a success as soon as he arrived." In ancient times, the idiom meant that victory was achieved as soon as the horses arrived for battle, but now it means that success is achieved quickly and smoothly.

This idiom, which has a strong Chinese cultural appeal and positive overtones, has been translated in different ways in the course of cultural publicity. The first translation is "with success the moment one arrives". In this version, the original context of this idiom is preserved through the word "arrives". In ancient China, the horse was a very important means of transport, so the phrase "Ma Dao Cheng Gong" means that the rider will succeed as soon as he arrives at his destination. In this translation, "the moment

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one arrives" is a kind of foreignization, which conveys Chinese traditional culture better, but may be difficult for English readers to understand, as they may not understand this ancient Chinese way of warfare.

The second translation is "immediate success", such as the sentence "I wish you immediate success" in Jenny Kelly's English translation of *The Siege* written by Qian Zhongshu [2]. In contrast to the first translation, the second one applies free translation, using two simple words to express the essence of this idiom, which is easy for foreign readers to understand and communicate in the process of cultural publicity, but at the same time, it lacks a unique flavor of Chinese culture.

2.2 "Yi Yan Ji Chu, Si Ma Nan Zhui"

The idiom "Yi Yan Ji Chu, Si Ma Nan Zhui" is one of the most common idioms used by the Chinese in colloquial conversation, indicating that once a word is spoken, it is difficult to catch up even if a four-horse-drawn cart is put on it, describing a person who is worthy of others' trust in his words. The idiom is first taken from a dialogue between Jing Zicheng, a hierarch of the State of Wei, and Zigong, a disciple of Confucius, in *The Analects of Confucius*, about the relationship between a gentleman's literary skills and his qualities. Zi Gong compares speech to a team of horses, describing a gentleman's words as being so weighty that once spoken, even the fastest team of horses cannot catch up. In the Spring and Autumn period, a car drawn by four horses was the fastest means of transport at the time.

This idiom, which has strong Chinese cultural characteristics, has been translated into a number of versions, with different versions bringing different levels of feeling to foreigners. If we follow the translation strategy of literal translation, we can translate it as "Even four horses cannot take back what one has said". Although this version retains the typical cultural imagery of ancient China, it places a high demand on the foreigner's Chinese cultural background. Foreigners who are not familiar with ancient Chinese transportation may be confused by the imagery of four horses, which may not be conducive to their communication with the people of China.

If the free translation is adopted, the essence of this idiom is retained, i.e. to praise the integrity of a gentleman, then it can be translated as "A real man never goes back on his words". This makes the original euphemism too direct and makes it seem too rigid in international communication. The author believes that the most appropriate translation technique is to retain the metaphorical rhetoric of the original idiom and replace it with a different vehicle, replacing the "four horses", which is familiar only to Chinese people, with the "arrow off the string", which is more familiar to friends from all over the world. Although both are fast in nature, the latter is clearly more inclusive of the reader. It can be translated, therefore, as "A word spoken is an arrow let fly", which not only retains the euphemism but facilitates the understanding and communication of people all over the world.

3. Neutral idioms

There are not many neutral culture-loaded words related to "horse", but almost every one of them contains the philosophy of traditional Chinese culture, and in this chapter, we use " Sai Weng Shi Ma, Yan Zhi Fei Fu " and "Dan Qiang Pi Ma" as examples to illustrate the advantages and disadvantages of different translations of them.

3.1 "Sai Weng Shi Ma, Yan Zhi Fei Fu"

The phrase "Sai Weng Shi Ma, Yan Zhi Fei Fu" is coined from an ancient Chinese fable in *Huainanzi*, "The blessing is a curse and the curse is a blessing; the transformation is unpredictable and unfathomable." It is a metaphor for the possibility of good coming out of a momentary loss. In other words, good and bad things can be transformed into each other under certain conditions. This dialectical idea is full of ancient Chinese philosophical characteristics and the idea of Zhongyong.

In the process of cultural promotion, this idiom is also treated in different ways of translation. If it is translated by foreignization, it will be "as an old man who is at the frontier lost his horse, he thought that it may be a good fortune". This translation, though retaining the imagery of the horse, has a strong Chinese cultural flavor, but foreign readers who do not understand this fable will be confused and will consider how can a man who has lost his horse still thinks that it is a good fortune [3].

If it is translated by domestication, however, it will be "all the things that happened may be a blessing in disguise". This version extrapolates the individual example of Sai Weng losing his horse to all the

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unfortunate things that happen, breaking the boundaries of the idiom itself and encompassing all unfortunate things. This expression also has an English equivalent which can be found in many famous English films, such as *Grey's Anatomy* and *Modern Family*, etc. At the same time, "blessing", which has a strong Western religious flavor, is also part of the domestication translation strategy, which not only allows the readers to appreciate its meaning but also to understand the essence of the language by bringing in the culture of their own country.

3.2 "Dan Qiang Pi Ma"

The term "Dan Qiang Pi Ma" comes from the ancient Chinese poem *Wujiang*, originally from the famous ancient Chinese story of the War between Chu and Han, describing the story of Xiang Yu, the commander of the Chu, who was surrounded by enemy troops and killed his way out of the siege single-handedly, but finally killed himself by the riverside out of shame. It is now commonly used to describe a man acting something alone. "Dan Qiang Pi Ma" has also developed different versions in the process of translation.

If the literal translation is used, the translation would be "a lonely horseman", which retains the imagery of "horse", but is too metaphorical, easily making people fail to appreciate the context of the original text and may cause misunderstanding and miscommunication.

According to Wang Jinghui (2012), "the uniqueness and complexity of culture-loaded words often make it difficult for translators to achieve full parity between the original and the translated text. Its scope covers almost all aspects of culture and is one of the most significant obstacles to interlingual and intercultural communication [2]. Therefore, when translating culture-loaded words, translators should pay attention to the reader's feelings and their use of it in real life, expanding the single context of the word to a wider range of contexts in order to maximize the usefulness and interactivity of the word. Therefore, it is easier to understand and has a broader context in everyday life if the context of war in the original word is abandoned and its current usage is expressed as "play a lone hand" or "all by oneself".

4. Derogatory idioms

There are also numerous culture-loaded words for "horse" in Chinese culture that contain derogatory connotations, mostly ironic, and are often used as slang in everyday life, while more or less the same expressions are found in countries around the world. In this chapter, we take "Hai Qun Zhi Ma" and "Pai Ma Pi" as an example to illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of different translated versions in international cultural exchange.

4.1 "Hai Qun Zhi Ma"

The idiom "Hai Qun Zhi Ma" has a distinct Chinese cultural appeal and derogatory connotation. It first appeared in an ancient story from *Zhuangzi*, which is about the Emperor seeking a way to govern the world from a shepherd boy who was herding horses. The shepherd boy replied that governing the world was like herding horses, as long as he could get rid of the things that harmed the natural growth and reproduction of horses. This idiom originally referred to a horse that harms the herd, but later it was often used as a metaphor for a person who harms the collective.

In the process of cultural outreach, if adopting literal translation and foreignization, the idiom will be translated as "harmful horse", which retains the typical Chinese imagery of "horse" and helps to enrich the target language by introducing new expressions and sentence structures, but is difficult for English readers to understand [2]. This is because, for them, the image of the horse is not as rich as in Chinese culture which both has positive and negative connotations. In English culture, the animal of strength and speed is mostly associated with positive idioms, such as "as strong as a horse" and "A horse is never of an ill color" [4].

Therefore, it is better to adopt the translation method of conversion, i.e. to transform the source idiom or idiomatic image into the target idiom or idiomatic image, in order to maximize the equivalence between the target language and the source language. This method is similar to the translation strategy of domestication, starting from the original meaning of the idiom and searching for the equivalent in English culture, and translating it as "black sheep" [5]. This is because, in former English culture, black sheep were considered to be of low value as their wool was not easily bleached and dyed. Besides, in the 16th century, black was a symbol of bad luck. This is why Xu Mengxiong, in his translation of *Midnight*

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written by Mao Dun, translated "Hai Qun Zhi Ma" as "black sheep", which not only accurately translates the connotation of the idiom itself, but also facilitates the understanding of the readers from their perspective, thus achieving a very good effect of Chinese cultural publicity [6].

4.2 "Pai Ma Pi"

The term "Pai Ma Pi" is a derogatory term often used in Chinese spoken language to satirize the act of flattering and pleasing others, especially superiors, without regard to objective reality. The term originates from the Mongolian culture of the Yuan Dynasty in China. Horses often played a vital role in the homes of the Mongolian people, acting as transporters, so herders were often proud to have steeds. Sometimes when people met each other with their horses, they would pat the buttocks of their horses, touch the fat and give them a few compliments in order to please their owners. At first, people were practical and said good things about good horses, but after a long time, some people just said flattering things about other people's horses, regardless of whether they were truly good or bad, strong or weak, and described even bad horses as good horses. In addition, most officials in the Yuan Dynasty were military generals, and horses were often a symbol of a general's power and status. The best compliment a subordinate could give to his superior was to pat his horse and compliment him on how good his horse was. Over time, the term "Pai Ma Pi" became a slang expression in the everyday life of the Chinese people.

When translating the slang term "Pai Ma Pi", it is important to translate it according to the specific context and degree. If translated in a more formal written context, the most accurate connotation of the word should be taken and translated into more formal words such as "flatter" and "adulate", but this translation loses the original irony and humor.

If used in informal contexts such as the oral world, the Western cultural equivalent can be found in colloquial informal expressions such as "kiss ass", "lick one's boots" and "butter up", which retain the irony and humor of the original word and convey an effect closer to that of the original, especially in the case of "polish the apple" and "brown-nose". The former arises from the old North American practice of students inviting their teachers to eat apples in return for attention, while the latter is of American military origin and is based on the slavish gesture of sticking one's nose into one's anus. Both are almost equivalent to "Pai Ma Pi" in terms of context, occasion, and the effect they convey. Therefore, when translating culture-loaded words, it is also very important to find equivalents in the culture of the target language that have the same connotation in terms of meaning, as it is inherently rooted in the other culture and is, therefore, more easily understood and accepted by the target audience.

5. Conclusions

Eugene Nida argues that without a good understanding of the cultural context, the translator will not be able to understand the usage of the text and convey the message of the whole text well [7]. Therefore, in translating culture-loaded words, it is essential to understand the culture of both the source language and the target language. The translation of Chinese culture-loaded words should reflect Chinese characteristics and retain the uniqueness and complexity of them as far as possible so that foreign readers can truly appreciate the charm of Chinese culture, which will help Chinese culture gradually stand firmly on the world stage [1]. However, it is also undesirable to retain too much Chinese elements without regard to the cultural background and reading experience of foreign readers.

On the whole, the culture-loaded words related to the imagery of "horse" are concentrated in the four-character idiom, and through the research, the author is inclined to adopt the translation strategies of free translation, domestication and finding equivalents, and if necessary, literal translation with annotation, so as to retain Chinese characteristics as far as possible while facilitating foreign readers' understanding. However, the richness of the imagery of the "horse" in Chinese culture requires that these culture-loaded words be translated according to the specific context so that they can be more easily understood by foreign readers and thus better promote Chinese culture and international communication.

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