

A Contrastive Analysis of *Legend of Zhen Huan* and *Empress in the Palace* on Impact of Differences Between Chinese and Western Thinking Mode on Translation

Yuehong Wei*, Yuanyuan Du

English Department, North China Electric Power University, Baoding, China 071003

Corresponding Author: Yuehong Wei, E-mail: lilywei231@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: January 19, 2019

Accepted: March 26, 2019

Published: April 30, 2019

Volume: 7 Issue: 2

Conflicts of interest: None

Funding: None

Keywords:

Thinking modes, Chinese-English Translation, Comparative Analysis, Legend of Zhenhuan and Empires in the Palace

ABSTRACT

Translation is not only a language activity, but also a conceptual work. The differences between Chinese and western thinking modes lead to different expressions. It is the key point to realize the differences between Chinese and western thinking modes and then learn to transform them appropriately in translation. This paper takes *Legend of Zhen Huan* and *Empress in the Palace* as an example to explore the impact of differences between Chinese and Western thinking modes on translation. The embodiment of thinking modes was analyzed from five aspects, which are ethical and cognitive thinking modes, comprehension and rationality thinking modes, fuzzy and precise thinking modes, subjective and objective thinking modes as well as inductive and deductive thinking modes. The comparison between the above five aspects illustrates the importance of thinking modes in translation and the proper translation strategies so as to improve translation quality.

INTRODUCTION

Legend of Zhen Huan aroused great response after its first broadcast in China in 2011, and then quickly swept the whole country, even abroad like Japan, South Korea and Southeast Asia. In 2015, the American version of *Empress in the Palace*, which was reedited and translated by the translators, was broadcast on the mainstream media video website *Netflix* in the United States. It is the first domestic TV series which enters the mainstream market in the United States.^[1] (Zheng Xiaolong, 2015). However, unlike the popularity of *Legend of Zhen Huan* in China and Southeast Asia, the American versions met with a cold shoulder in the United States. In addition to the piecemeal plot reedited, the unsatisfactory translation of the lines also made this old-dress palace struggling drama look a bit disagreeable. To find out the reason of the unsatisfactory phenomenon, most of the studies about the TV series focus on the analysis of its external communication and the characteristics of line translation from a cross-cultural point of view^[2,3,4] (Liang Kun, 2018; Liu Xiaohui, Zhang Liang, 2017; Luo an, 2016), little attention has been paid to on the unsuccessful line translations from the perspective of cultural differences, especially of the differences between Chinese and Western ways of thinking.

It is the translation of lines that is the biggest problem for the export of *Legend of Zhen Huan*. Yao Jinshu^[5] (2015) analyzed the subtitle translation of *Legend of Zhen Huan* and *Empress in the Palace* from the perspective of culture. In his findings, language originates from culture. And Yao believed that the reason why the translated version of *Empress in the Palace* was not universally accepted was, to a large extent, that there were cultural differences between China and the United States. Indeed, when it comes to cultural differences, the most fundamental thing is to look for differences in the way of thinking between the two cultures. The processes of translation is not only the transformation of language forms, but also the transformation of mode of thinking. The difficulty of translation is greatly caused by the great differences in the way of thinking between China and the West. In other words, in order to explore the language characteristics and its transformation, the mode of thinking which is closely related to language should be seriously take into consideration. (Lian Shuneng, 2010) This paper takes the Chinese and American versions of *Legend of Zhen Huan* and *Empress in the Palace* as examples to reveal the differences between Chinese and English thinking modes and their impacts on translation for the purpose of exploring effective ways of translation and then improving translation quality.

LANGUAGE AND THINKING MODE

For half a century, linguistics, psychology and other fields have been devoted to the relationship between language and thinking. Language is closely related to thinking. Thinking is the internal director of language, while language is the external manifestation of thinking. The German philosopher Hegel once proposed that “the form of thinking is first expressed and recorded in people’s language.” Dewey, the famous American philosopher, also held that thinking can not exist without language. In addition, Li Ruihua, a Chinese scholar, once said in his book, “Without language, there is no way to define thinking, no way to reduce it, and no evidence to prove it.” The most famous research on the relationship between language and thinking is The Sapir-Wolf hypothesis proposed by American linguist Sapir and his disciples, and the strong version holds that language determines the mode of thinking, and the weak one thinks that language affects the mode of thinking (Lucy, 1997). Despite the controversy, it is undeniable that there is indeed a crucial relationship between language and thinking. The different characteristics between the lines of two versions as well as the ineffective translation such as the failure in transformation of the complicated appellation and the poetic lines are all good examples to illustrate the strong relationship between language and thinking mode.

METHODOLOGY

Five Aspects of the differences between Chinese and Western thinking modes are mainly employed to analyze some typical lines the Chinese-English translation of the *Legend of Zhen Huan and Empress in the Palace* which was introduced into America from China. The definition of five aspects of the differences between Chinese and Western thinking modes are illustrated comparatively as follows.

Ethical and Cognitive Thinking Modes

Different geographical environments and philosophical traditions between China and the West have produced different ways of thinking. The small-scale peasant economy in ancient China and the social reality of Spring and Autumn and warring States nurtured Confucianism. The Confucianism philosophers attached much importance to human affairs rather than despise nature. The focus of their thinking lies in “benevolence”, “ritual” and “ethics governance”, which is to establish and demonstrate the righteousness of the monarch and the minister, the kinship of father and son, the separation of husband and wife, the order of the young and the old and the trust among friends. Politics and ethics intertwined closely with philosophy, making China’s traditional way of thinking have political and ethical characteristics. The West, which advocates ancient Greek philosophy, places more emphasis on science, cognition, epistemology and methodology. As a result of the intermingling among rationality, the tradition of pursuing knowledge and philosophy, cognitive thinking mode forms.(Lian Shuneng, 2010).

Comprehension and Rationality Thinking Modes

The philosophical background of China is the understanding of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, while the western philosophical background is Aristotle’s formal logic. Such different philosophical backgrounds have created the comprehension and rationality thinking modes between China and the West. The so-called rationality thinking mode is to explore and reveal the essence of things and internal relations with the help of logic, as well as several forms of thinking such as concepts, judgment, reasoning and others. It is characterized by logic, abstractness, objectivity, analysis and certainty. On the other hand, rationality thinking, which defined as organizing the perceptual material into coherent knowledge by using image, intuition, inspiration, association, imagination and other forms of thinking, has the characteristics of intuition, image, subjectivity, integrity and fuzziness. (Lian Shuneng, 2010)

Fuzzy and Precise Thinking Modes

Fuzziness is the common feature of ancient Chinese thinking. Lian Shuneng (2010) once pointed out that ancient Chinese regarded the universe as a chaotic whole, both the object of thinking and the subject of thinking was vague. And ancient Chinese always understood the vague whole with fuzzy thinking and grasped the overall characteristics with fuzzy method, which caused them lacking an accurate understanding of the essence of substance. While westerners, influenced by ancient Greek civilization, paid more attention to the strictness of logicity, thus the precise thinking mode formed.

Subjective and Objective Thinking Modes

The Chinese traditional thinking regards the subject itself as the center of the universe, and thinks that by knowing the subject itself, one would know the fundamental laws of nature and the universe. It holds that it is self-experience that is the starting point of all cognition process. But the western thinking tradition regards nature as the cognitive object, and thinks that only if we know and then explore nature, can we grasp as well as conquer nature^[6]. (Lian Shuneng, 2010)

Inductive and Deductive Thinking Modes

The traditional thinking of “harmony between mankind and nature” in ancient China determines that Chinese attach importance to experience in their subconsciousness. So when people are acquainted with things, they are used to summing up the universal, general characteristics from the individual, and then concluding the vague concepts and categories like “holy words” or “aphorisms” through the overall understanding, which lacks of clear definition of the concept and rigorous deductive reasoning. On the contrary, Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher, created formal logic, which had a lasting and profound influence on the way of thinking in the West. Aristotle emphasizes deductive method and regards it as a kind of advanced method which can deduce unknown

things. Since then, deductive method has not only become a means for western scholars to construct theoretical system, but also become a kind of thinking mode that westerners have been accustomed to^[6]. (Lian Shuneng, 2010)

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS ON THE CHINESE AND AMERICAN VERSIONS OF LEGEND OF ZHEN HUAN AND EMPRESS IN THE PALACE

Analysis from the Aspects of Ethical and Cognitive Thinking Modes

The ethical thinking mode in China and the cognitive thinking mode in the West have different effects on their social value, and the development of the social value is then reflected in the linguistic forms. There is much evidence between the lines in the two versions of *Legend of Zhen Huan*. In ancient China, emperors had numerous wives and concubines, and they were of distinct rank. According to their family background and degree of popularity, the concubines were divided into “fei”、“ping”、“guiren”、“changzai” and so on, which embodies the strict idea of hierarchy in feudal times. However, these terms create obstacles for democratic, egalitarian westerners to understand. There are very few expressions in Western language that reflect a similar rank of identity. So the American producing team simply translated these expressions into “first attendant” or “lady”. Although this change could reflect a certain level of hierarchy, compared with the Chinese lines, it was greatly weakened in emotional effect. In addition, a large number of first-person titles, such as “Zhen”, “Aijia”, “Weichen”, “Nucai” and so on, were all translated into “I” by the translators, which did not reflect strict status hierarchy or the inherent element of self-modesty in Chinese at all. These phenomena illustrate the untranslatability of culture in translation caused by different ways of thinking. Because of differences between Chinese and western cultures, there are also different thinking modes, which in turn leads to the vacancy of Chinese-English lexical correspondence in language translation. To deal with this case, only free translation or omission can be used, which inevitably leads to the loss of cultural significance. In order to avoid it, even some explanatory notes can be added to the line on the screen to keep the plot.

Analysis from the Aspect of Comprehension and Rationality Thinking Modes

Comprehension and rationality thinking modes are embodied in language: Chinese parataxis and English hypotaxis. There are few correlated or cohesive words in Chinese sentences, which always focus on meaning instead of form with a loose structure but complete meaning. On the contrary, in English expression, to demonstrate logic, there are many correlated words or cohesive words between sentences and words. Hence, attention should be paid to the different characteristics between the two languages and then appropriate additions should be made to ensure the logical rigor and fluency of the target language.

Example 1:

余小主有什么吩咐，递了什么东西进来，便有人在墙角塞了纸条，奴婢去拿就是了。

When Miss Yu needs to pass along a message or a drug, someone place a note in that hole, and I go there to retrieve it.

In this example, the Chinese line obviously omits the time logic word of “when”, and the original sentence should read: “someone will leave a note when Yu needs it.” In order to meet English-speaking habits, the cohesive word “when” is added to ensure the strict logic of English expression.

Example

2: 我父亲当年被诬，起因也是后宫争斗，不能独善其身，一介御医尚且如此，何况妹妹如果被选中的话，会身在其中啊。

My father was once implicated due to strife in the harem. He was unable to preserve his good name. If this can befall even an imperial doctor, then a concubine will not be spared. This is what imperial physician Wen said when he used her father’s lessons to dissuade Zhen Huan from entering the palace. It is not difficult to discern that there is a progressive logical relationship between the sentences, which means “Even the medical doctors can’t avoid the conflicts, not to mention the concubines.” The addition of the relative word “if” in the English translation makes the whole sentence more logical and fluent.

The above discussion proved that some words should be added to the English version meet the target language logic and fluency

Analysis from the Aspect of Fuzzy and Precise Thinking Modes

Fuzzy thinking attaches great importance to intuitive understanding, and believes that learning depends on comprehension and understanding. It held that everything can only be perceived rather than expressed. On the contrary, both the objects and subjects of western thinking are accurate, and things in their mind are always “one or the other” and “true or not true”. They are very clear about the connotation and extension of the concept. In lines of the two versions of *Legend of Zhen Huan and Epress in the Palace*, the difference between fuzzy and precise thinking modes is mainly reflected in the translation of poems. Chinese poetry stresses the beauty on dim and mood. However, such kind of beauty is not accepted by the westerners who pay attention to the precision. Hence in Chinese-English translation, articles, prepositions and other related words are always added to satisfy the characteristics of English expression. However, compared with the Chinese version, this kind of translation lacks of concrete image, and the hazy beauty as well as the mood beauty in the ancient poetry also disappears.

Example 3: 逆风如解意，容易莫摧残。

If wind sees their strong will, let such ordeal cease.

Example 4: 雨潇潇兮洞庭，烟霏霏兮黄陵。望夫君兮不来，波渺渺而难升。

Raindrops fall on Dongting Lake. Fog shrouds the Imperial Mausoleum. I await my husband, but he has not arrived. The ripples in the sky are not rise.

Example 3 is that when Zhen Huan was disappointed about her entering in the palace, so she made such a wish in plum garden, using plum to describe herself, hoping that she would meet a confidant one day and then would grow

old with him. It expresses Zhen Huan's sincere hope for life. Example 4 is that Zhen Huan persuaded the emperor to accompany other concubines instead of her, but when the emperor truly went to his concubine's place, she found herself missing the emperor. Thus she played this music to show her yearning for the emperor and the helplessness of not being able to accompany him all the time. Indeed, it is poetry that has played an indispensable role for the reason that *Legend of Zhen Huan* has been well received in China. The beautiful poems in the TV series not only reveal the profound cultural background of Chinese, but also add elegance and beauty to the play. However, it is almost impossible to convey these artistic conceptions in the process of English translation. Hence the translators, taking into account the understanding and acceptance of the Western audience about these poems, mostly translated these poems by paraphrasing. But from the above examples, it can be seen that in the process of Chinese-English translation, although the meaning of those poems remains, not only the formal beauty of poetry vanishes, but also the mood and hazy beauty disappears.

It is more difficult to make the beauty involved in Chinese poems conveyed to the American audience due to the different thinking modes influenced gradually by cultural difference for a long time. But the translators can employ some similar poetic expression to convey the beauty the source language harbored.

Analysis from the Aspect of Subjective and Objective Thinking Modes

The embodiment of the subjective thinking in the Chinese language structure is active sentence, namely the person acts as the subject. In addition, for brevity, the subject ellipsis is very common in Chinese sentence, and people are prone to judge the subject omitted by context. On the contrary, what the object thinking is embodied in English language structure is that both human beings and objects can function as subjects. That is to say, there are not only active sentences in English, but also passive sentences as a result of objective thinking. Moreover, every element in English sentence can not be omitted; otherwise the sentence is regarded as being meaningless. Therefore, in English translation, we must adjust the subject and object accordingly and, if necessary, make up for the missing subject in Chinese, so as to ensure the completion of meaning and the fluency of the sentence and more importantly, in line with the way of thinking and expression of target language.

Example 7: 果然看得起我。

The perpetrator must hold me in high regard.

The Chinese line is an ellipsis of the subject. This is Zhen Huan's words when she knows that someone is trying to hurt her. In this context, the subject is self-evident, which is the perpetrator, thus it is omitted. However, in order to conform to the strict subject-predicate logic of English sentence, the implicit subject is completed, which makes the sentence meaningful.

Example 8: 我向来问心无愧。

My conscience is clear.

In this sentence, the subject was originally the personal pronoun "I", but after the English translation, the subject

became the non-personal words "my conscience". This makes English translation sentence more fluent and consistent with the target language.

Example 9:

一早得到消息, 他进入了碎玉轩就没有再出来。

Xiao Yinzi did not return to Yu's residence. This morning, I was told he entered but did not leave Suiyu Palace.

This line takes place in the concubine Hua's eunuch

Zhou ninghai reporting the poisoning failure by eunuch Xiao Yinzi. In English translation, influenced by the objective thinking mode, the translators completed the subject "I" omitted from "getting the message early in the morning" and translated the active sentence into a passive sentence. In the passive sentence, the original subject becomes the passive receiver, which can be understood as Zhou Ninghai's intention to emphasize his ignorance and shirk his responsibility.

Due to the differences of thinking modes, personal nouns are dealt with quite differently in Chinese and English. The English version should get them back to the lines to make the language clear about the relationship among people for American audience.

Analysis from the Aspect of Inductive and Deductive Thinking Modes

The great differences between inductive and deductive thinking modes also affect the sentence structure of the two respective languages. According to the inductive thinking mode, the Chinese sentence structure presents the characteristics of "inductive type". In other words, in Chinese sentences, the unimportant information, such as background information and subsidiary elements, usually lie in front of the main components. On the contrary, as a result of deductive thinking mode, English sentence presents the characteristics of deductive mode, and the sentence structure is represented as that the more important information are put at the beginning, and then other information are shown in the following part. Therefore, in Chinese-English translation, we should follow the deductive thinking mode of westerners should be used to adjust the important part appropriately, so as to ensure the target language meaningful, which facilitates the target language readers to better understand the plot of show.

Example 10: 家父松阳县丞, 安比槐。

My father is An Bihuai, deputy magistrate of Songyang County.

This line is the words An Lingrong introduced her family to Xia Dongchun who insult her at the audition. From this example, it can be seen that Chinese people are accustomed to introduce people from general to specific, in other words, they tend to introduce the subsidiary information of the character firstly, and then highlighting his name. This is very different from the Western introduction. From the translation, we can see that westerners tend to introduce the names of people first, and then other information about him.

Example 11: 既然她戴着花了, 就别再赏花了。

No need to bestow a flower, since she already wears one in her hair.

When the emperor was about to refuse to give An Lingrong by awarding her a flower, a butterfly flew into An

Lingong's hair, and the emperor was attracted by the scene and decided to leave her. It is not difficult to see that this is a causal sentence. "Because" she wears flowers, "so" she needs no more flowers. The word order in Chinese is results after reasons, and in the English translation, the results appears before the reasons.

This part shows different languages pay different attention to the order of information being present. So in the Chinese-English translation, language orders should be presented in the target language orders instead of source language orders in order to convey meaning appropriately.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, human language promotes the development of human thinking, which in turn influences human language. This paper makes a comparative study between the lines of *Legend of Zhen Huan* and *Empress in the Palace* from five perspectives of the differences between Chinese and Western thinking modes. It can be seen that the ethical, comprehension, fuzzy, subjective and inductive thinking modes embodied in Chinese sentences while the embodiment of cognitive, rationality, precise, objective and deductive thinking modes are in English language. From the above analysis, the impact caused by the differences on their respective languages is clearly shown and some suggestions had been made in the discussion. Therefore, to deal with translation of lines in TV series, great importance should be attached to the explanatory notes showing the meanings which are absent in target culture, words which shows logical or time order, some poetic expression in target language understood by audience, personal nouns showing the clear relationship for the characters and the sentence order accepted in target language. By recognizing the characteristics of thinking modes in different languages, and then using proper translation methods, meanings can be conveyed properly and meaningfully avoiding the interference caused by thinking differences between the source language and the target language, so the style and

accuracy of the source language can be maintained in the target language and it is more importantly conducive to the wide acceptance to the target language readers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This paper is supported by the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities (#2019MS140) and Social Science Development Project(#201803050215).

REFERENCE

- Zheng, X. (2015, April 1), (2018, April 17). *The United States recognizes the anti-feudal theme of "Legend of Zhen Huan"*. [EB/OL]. <http://ent.163.com/15/0401/08/AM3P5T9N00031GVS.html>.
- Liang, K. (2018). A study on the problems and Countermeasures of the overseas Communication of domestic Historical Drama: a case study of Legend of Zhen Zhuan. *Media*, (01):37-39.
- Liu, X., & Zhang, L. (2017). Subtitle Translation and Intercultural Communication of Film and Television Drama: a case study of the American version of Empress in Palace. *Published wide Angle*, (06): 64/66.
- Luo an. (2016). An Analysis of overseas Communication in Empress in Palace (American Edition). *Television Research*, (04): 75/77.
- Yao, Y. & Wang, T. & Zhou, F. (2016). The Influence of Chinese and Western Cultural Differences on English Translation--Taking the English version of Empress in the Palace as example. *Science and Technology View*, (20):48,40.
- Lian S. (2010). *Contrastive studies of English and Chinese*. Beijing: Higher Education Press.
- Hegel, G. (1963). *History Philosophy[M]*. Beijing: Commercial Press.
- Dewey. (1933). *Brainstorming*. Beijing: Chinese Book Bureau.
- Ruihua, L. (1996). *A Contrastive study of English and Chinese languages and cultures*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press. pp348.
- Lucy, J. A. (1997). *linguistic relativity*. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, (26):291-312.