

# The Application of the Domestication and Foreignization Translation Strategies in the Context of the Dissemination of Chinese Culture: A Case Study of the English Translation of Long

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## ABSTRACT

In January 2024, the Chinese Year of the Loong, how to translate the Chinese character *Long* went viral on the Internet. Taking the English translation of *Long* as an example, this study tends to make a tentative analysis of the application of translation strategies in the macro context of the dissemination of Chinese culture. Moreover, it probes into the phenomenon of Chinese cultural aphasia by analyzing the domestication and foreignization of *Long* in three aspects. The three attitudes provided ought to be addressed in the Chinese-English translations. This study emphasizes enhancing translators' cultural awareness and their cultural confidence in the process of translating the source language to the target language.

## 1. Introduction

As the Internet grows by leaps and bounds, cultural exchanges between countries and regions are becoming increasingly frequent. Therefore, the importance and influence of culture are rising. Recently, the Chinese voice in international discourse has been developing significantly, so it is imperative to present the world a true, multi-dimensional and panoramic view of China. In this way, how to improve the influence of international communication, the attraction of Chinese culture and the persuasiveness of Chinese discourse with the help of the translation strate-

gies mentioned are issues that need to be discussed.

Taking the English translation of *Long* for instance, this paper analyzes the historical origins and mainstream translations of the Chinese Loong culture according to the principle of using translation strategies in cultural dissemination and provides the attitudes that should be adopted in Chinese-English translations when dealing with Chinese cultural aphasia.

## 2. Translation strategies

Since Lawrence Venuti<sup>[1]</sup>, an well-known American translation theorist, put forward the translation strategies

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of domestication and foreignization in *The Translator's Invisibility A History of Translation*, the heated debate on domestication and foreignization has been raised in the Chinese community of translators. Advocates for domestication mainly hold the view that “the method of translation should be based on domestication<sup>[2]</sup>”, while supporters of foreignization argue that “domestication: wrong way to translation<sup>[3]</sup>.”

Compared with literal and free translation, which are thought over at the linguistic level, the debate between domestication and foreignization translation strategies takes the macro-cultural level into account, and it sparks the illumination and inspiration of translation theories. It concludes that there is a general consensus in academic circles that translation should be based on foreignization, supplemented by domestication.

## 2.1 Domestication

Domestication, Venuti suggests, is to localize the source language, to take the target language or the readership as the destination, and to use the expressions that they are accustomed to convey the content of the original text. The main purpose of using the domestication strategy is to have a direct dialogue with the readership. Also, translations must be turned into authentic target languages, which will help the readers understand the scripts better and enhance their apprehension and appreciation of them.

## 2.2 Foreignization

Foreignization, Venuti claims, is the translators' attempt not to change original texts as much as possible in order to bring readers closer to the author. It is required that translators accept the differences of the target language in both linguistic and cultural aspects. The primary aim is to take into consideration the characteristics of the source language, differentiation of national culture, and exoticism for the readers.

## 2.3 The vital principle in translation strategies

At the entirely linguistic level, domestication can be carried out when necessary, while at the cultural level, foreignization ought to be pursued as much as possible. In the process of translation, especially for culture-specific terms, the original cultural imagery should be retained. However, proper substitute words may be put on the stage if it is difficult to clearly and naturally reveal the meaning of the texts using foreignization. What's more, it is of great significance that the replacements themselves should not carry specific customs, places or persons of the source

language. Otherwise, it is more likely to lead to cultural distortion.

## 3. The correlation between Chinese Loong culture and translation strategies

### 3.1 Chinese Loong Culture

In anthropology, Chinese Loong Culture is a term that reflects the fact that *Long* is extremely essential and inseparable from Chinese culture. The history of *Long*, its symbolism, and the development and spread of its culture vividly reveal the uniqueness of Chinese Loong Culture, conveying the importance of *Long* as a symbol in Chinese history, society and culture.

*Long*, as an ancient Chinese mythical creature, has a long history in China and is generally known for its auspiciousness. There were traces of them in the ancient mythological period of China, especially when Fuxi, one of the Three Sovereigns, was in power. For example, Sima Zhen of the Tang Dynasty recorded in *Annals of the Three Sovereigns* that “since *Long* appeared as an auspicious pattern, considered as a symbol, *Longshi* has been used as the name of an official position in the imperial court<sup>[4]</sup>.” Furthermore, the origin of *Long* can be traced back thousands of years--at least 5,000 years to the Neolithic Period, when images of *Long* began to appear on various vessels, murals and sculptures. As time passed, *Long* gradually became a symbol of power, closely associated with royalty and nobility. And the convincing proof of this is the remaining royal costumes and various court utensils, including ampullas, tripods and so on.

*Long*, regarded as the symbol of Chinese civilization, is the spiritual totem of the Chinese nation. The image of *Long* not only represents power and honor but also implies the spiritual qualities of courage and cooperation, as well as good wishes for luck and happiness. The Dragon Boat Race, which is an intangible cultural heritage, is a typical embodiment of this spirit of the Chinese people, or the “descendants of *Long*”. In addition, other traditional customs such as setting off firecrackers and wearing red clothes also stand for good luck and fortune, representing their desire for a better life and admiration for *Long*.

In the course of the development of Chinese culture, the folk belief system of the Chinese people centered on *Long* progressively evolved into a unique culture, which profoundly influenced the ideology and behavior of the Chinese people. During the Shang-Zhou Periods, Chinese Loong Culture was more widely spread and applied in many respects. In agricultural production, *Long* became the object of prayers for good harvests and Chinese God in rituals. In ancient literature, *Long* often appeared as a

protagonist or mythical creature. Artists such as Songling Pu displayed the values and philosophies of Chinese culture by depicting the magnificent images and magical deeds of *Long*. These works not only developed and enriched the connotation of Chinese Loong Culture, but also left a priceless cultural heritage for later generations.

### 3.2 The cornerstone of dissemination of Chinese culture are translation strategies

Translation strategies are the cornerstone of the dissemination of Chinese culture. Given the current translation context of Chinese to foreign translation and the mission of cultural dissemination that translation shoulders, the translator's choice and use of translation strategies play a crucial role in disseminating Chinese culture. Besides, in terms of dissemination, what kind of translation strategy is adopted has a direct impact on the content of translation, which has a direct impact on the translation effect and cultural dissemination.

In addition, culture is the root of the Chinese nation. It is true that we indeed need to consider the cultural level in a focused, detailed and comprehensive way during translation.

### 3.3 Domestication of *Long*

Since Marco Polo translated *Long* into "dragon" in *Le Livre de Marco Polo*<sup>[5]</sup> in the year 1298, this translation has been popularized for more than five hundred years. Around the year 1815, the English missionary Robert Morrison published the first book ever, *A Chinese-English Dictionary*<sup>[6]</sup>. In the book, the character *Long* was translated from Latin into English using "dragon". Hence, during this period, due to his reputation and influence, the majority of Chinese people started to accept his translation. The methodology of this translation, which is now called domestication.

Culturally, a dragon is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as a large, aggressive animal with wings and a long tail that can breathe out fire, explaining its image as a monster. Especially in the eyes of European Christians, dragons, which were greedy, violent and ugly, were the embodiment of evil. If *Long* is the Chinese equivalent of a dragon, the message on the surface will be contrary to the symbols and connotations of the Chinese Loong Culture mentioned above.

### 3.4 Foreignization of *Long*

In 1814, Joshua Marshman, a missionary, published a book, *Elements of Chinese Grammar: with a Preliminary Dissertation on the Characters, and the Colloquial*

*Medium of the Chinese*, and made an annotation of *Long*, "loong, a dragon"<sup>[7]</sup>. At that time, however, due to the limited influence and unsatisfactory public acceptance, it was preferred to use the dragon. As China's international influence and discourse power are progressively enhanced, foreignization is more likely to be used by an increasing number of Chinese people, that is, to translate *Long* into "loong". It led to a heated discussion in the Chinese New Year of *Long*. Simultaneously, "Chinese dragon" was included in the *Oxford English Dictionary* on the eve of the Year. Since then, most Chinese netizens have been inclined to use foreignization for *Long* as well as other culture-specific terms. The main reason is that it not only demonstrates the ethnicity and uniqueness of Chinese Loong Culture, but also opens the door of dissemination to the world to understand Chinese culture more accurately, which embodies the spreading and globalization of culture itself.

## 4. Chinese cultural aphasia

As mentioned above, before using the translation strategies of domestication and foreignization, the translation of culture-specific terms should be based on the principle of transmitting culture and retaining its regional characteristics. So, there is no denying that there is a high risk of cultural aphasia if it is not well thought out, especially when we meet with obvious cultural differences over the same culture-specific terms to a certain degree.

From the perspective of Chinese cultural dissemination, conveying the cultural connotation and historical stories behind it is the essence and top priority. In this case, it is advocating that foreignization is the main focus, with domestication as a supplement. As an illustration, if the readers are mostly from foreign countries or regions, it is supportive to home in on the target language. Nevertheless, to a certain extent, if the translation strategy of domestication is given priority, it may result in a misunderstanding of Chinese culture and a failure of cultural dissemination.

## 5. Attitude towards the dissemination of Chinese culture in C-E translation

### 5.1 Discreet

In the process of promoting stories with Chinese characteristics abroad, Chinese-English translators need to think rationally about the current situation of Chinese cultural communication and its tendency towards dissemination. It is a universally acknowledged fact that translation is a good medium of cultural communication. Chinese-English translation is the key to opening the door

to Chinese cultural dissemination. Based on this, Chinese-English translators are more than the introducers of advanced Western culture. They serve as the introducers of Chinese culture. It is a better choice to carefully observe and investigate the text to be translated and then appropriately employ the translation strategies, embellished with their own translation experience and skills, in order to present various translations with interpretations that are in line with the macro-trend of cultural dissemination. Incidentally, factors such as public acceptance and expectation need to be reckoned with.

## 5.2 Proactive

In translation, Chinese-English translators need to uphold a proactive attitude. Cultivating and establishing cultural confidence rooted in translators' minds is the key to solving this problem. Among young generations, it is important to realize that one's own culture is not inferior and that only by doing so positively can one revitalize and motivate the dissemination of Chinese culture and spread it while making Chinese voices heard in authentic versions and telling Chinese stories well.

## 5.3 Inclusive

### 5.3.1 No absolute right or wrong

Technically speaking, there is no such thing as absolute right or wrong between different translations, only how good or bad they are. The so-called "winners" or "losers" and other labels do not have to be given to every scholar or amateur who makes efforts to translate and hopes to enrich the translation systems for academic circles through the versions he or she provides. The main reason lies in the fact that a single translation is fragmented, subjective and narrow. However, in terms of several translations, they contain different interpretations of understanding, tendency and delivery. Therefore, an attempt to observe different versions of Chinese-English translations inclusively and speculatively is a wonderful footnote to the dissemination of Chinese culture in a macro context.

### 5.3.2 Create a cultural milieu

The Chinese-English translations available today, especially on the Internet, are a mixed bag. In light of cultural dissemination, there is an urgent need for a harmonious and inclusive atmosphere to nurture the seeds of Chinese culture. For those authoritative Chinese-English translations that are considered to be roughly equivalent to the target language, integrating each translation's merits and analyzing the weak points together is a welcome move to some extent. In this way, after obtaining improved translations, they will enter into a cycle of development with

continuous further improvement. Additionally, for those translations that distort or discredit Chinese culture, instead of being rejected completely, they can be explained and revised in some way. Because this is not conducive to improving the enthusiasm and participation of Chinese-English translation amateurs. Furthermore, there is no doubt that it provides less help to create an inclusive cultural milieu.

## 6. Conclusion

In the context of the dissemination of Chinese culture, applying translation strategies, especially for culture-specific terms such as *Long* or other words with regional features that may have multiple meanings, is crucial to comprehensively understanding the deeper meanings behind them in a discreet, proactive and inclusive manner. Because the application of translation strategies is not inflexible but rather dynamic and changing with the times. In light of this, translators ought to take into account the current trend, urgency and importance of actively disseminating Chinese culture and building Chinese cultural confidence. Other factors such as readership, the translator's intervention in cultural stance, national policies and so forth also need to be taken into consideration. Due to space constraints, this study, using the English translation of *Long* as a case, solely discusses the pertinent ideas of the use of translation strategies on the cultural level and what attitude should be kept in the context of the dissemination of Chinese culture, not addressing other fields. As a result, some limitations require in-depth research and welcome further discussion and criticism from scholars in various fields.

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