

Translation and Transmission of Chinese Cultural Terms from the Perspective of Horizon of Expectations: Taking the Translation of the Word *Love* as an Example

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Abstract

Chinese cultural terms serve as crucial channels for the dissemination of Chinese culture, characterized by distinct cultural and linguistic features. Therefore, the translation of cultural terms has become a significant gateway for cultural communication and international publicity. Directed expectations, starting from the audience's perspective, provide a unique viewpoint for external promotional translation. This study on the translation of the term “爱” within cultural terms reveals that directed expectations are predominantly employed, effectively meeting readers' anticipated requirements and reinforcing the inherent impression of Chinese culture. Innovative expectations, by challenging receivers' expectations, offer a more comprehensive and vivid cultural portrayal, prompting deeper reflection on the terms and facilitating a more holistic understanding of China. In summary, the selection of horizon of expectations plays a crucial role in cultural term translation, influencing how the complexity and richness of Chinese culture are effectively conveyed and understood, ensuring translations are not only accurate but also showcase the diversity and depth of Chinese culture, thereby fostering further development in cross-cultural communication and understanding.

Keywords

Horizon of Expectations, Chinese Cultural Terms, Translation

1. Introduction

Love is one of the most profound human emotions, capable of fully showcasing a nation's culture, emotions, and humanistic ideals. It also constitutes an important

component of Confucianism, which guides the development of Chinese society. Benevolence is the cornerstone of Confucian thought. Effectively conveying the national understanding of love to the world is an important aspect of embodying China's responsibilities and aspirations as a major country. The characteristics of publicity material dictate that its translation should give a vividly China as a major country, providing lively and concrete descriptions, and presenting a comprehensive China to the world (Li et al., 2023).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Reception Aesthetics

In the second half of the 20th century, influenced by hermeneutics and phenomenology, the German Kantian school, represented by Jaus and Iser, proposed the theory of reception aesthetics, emphasizing that the meaning of literary works is generated in the reader's reading, highlighting the reader's subjectivity and role, and focusing on the reader's interpretation and aesthetic feelings of the text (Kemp et al., 1998). Iser once pointed out that "the key to literary works being different from other texts is the existence of uncertainty and gaps in their structure," which "summons" readers to create in the process of interpretation, filling the "gaps" and obtaining reading pleasure (Liu et al., 2023).

Reception aesthetics shifts the focus of criticism onto the recipient of literary works, namely the reader, conceptualizing literary history as "the history of readership". It posits that literary works are fundamentally created for such recipients, asserting that only when readers (or listeners) engage with written or oral language carrying literary content in a literary manner, do these works truly exist as literature and attain a real literary life. While emphasizing the centrality of the reader, reception aesthetics elucidates "why the reader should be central and how to achieve and underscore the reader's central position". Ultimately, it deduces that literary history should not solely be about the history of authors or works but should also encompass the history of reader reception. Consequently, reception aesthetics bridges aesthetics and history from the perspective of the recipient, comprehensively and dialectically grasping the essence of literary art.

2.2. Horizon of Expectations

Jaus's study of reception aesthetics begins with the concept of "horizon of expectations" (Chen et al., 2010). The role of the readers within this framework is manifested through directed expectations and innovative expectations. Directed expectations refer to the psychological anticipation created by the reader's own knowledge, life experiences, social background, etc., which guide and shape the reader's selection, assimilation, and orientation during the act of reading and reception. In other words, to some extent, the horizon of expectations derived from the reader's aesthetic experiences predetermined their reading outcomes. Directed expectations have effectively become habitual and unconscious processes. When encountering new works, readers may imaginatively compare them with their past experiences

and current perspectives, or they may adjust and transform their original perspectives and intentions by filling gaps and enhancing understanding with new perspectives, thereby potentially reconstructing or even recreating their viewpoints and intentions.

Innovative expectations, in contrast to directed expectations, imply that readers don't just receive the information conveyed by a work; rather, they continuously break away from habitual modes of thinking, adjust their own perceptual structures, and adopt an open attitude to accept elements in the text that diverge from or even contradict their existing perspectives. This inclination represents a more intrinsic, deeper-rooted natural tendency. Readers do not favor formulaic works. They possess a desire for novelty and variation to avoid aesthetic fatigue. When reading a work, readers may encounter frustration due to differences from their anticipated expectations. However, as individuals accumulate experiences, knowledge, and encounter changes in their environment, the distance between the reader and the work may diminish, leading to unique discoveries about the work and an expansion of their perspectives. Simultaneously, this process assists the work in enhancing its vitality beyond the constraints of time.

As a bridge between the original work and the readers, the translators should consider the cognitive gaps of the target language readers and adjust translation strategies appropriately. Due to the influence of historical background, past experience, and fixed thinking patterns, readers have varying aesthetic expectations for their works. Therefore, translators should start from the perspective of the readers, combine their language proficiency and cognitive habits, and flexibly use translation strategies to meet their expectations and perspectives. The horizon of expectation determines the criteria by which readers judge the content and form of the text. Zou Xiaowei believes that the translation process is the process of original author-translator-translator-reader, and the translator, as a special reader, acts as a "bridge" between the original work and the translated work ought to make the translation meet the expectations of the readers. It is necessary to preset the reader's expectations. In order to do so, the translator, as a special reader and a "bridge" between the original work and the translated work, needs to anticipate the common expectations of the readers, consider the readers' aesthetic taste and acceptance, and integrate the readers' expectations into the translated work.

The study of foreign publicity translation with an expectancy horizon is to extrapolate forward with the results and to analyze them from the audience's point of view. Unlike literary works, foreign publicity translations have higher requirements for readers to expect results. It has to be objective, comprehensive and true, and has to present a more favorable image of China's development to the international society. Therefore, the expectation horizon is an indispensable part of foreign publicity translation research.

2.3. Key Concepts in Chinese Thought and Culture

Terminology translation is different from general textual translation, in which the symbolic space limitation of linguistic form conversion and the cultural divide of

conceptual meaning regeneration often coexist, and the practice is more difficult. Especially for those culturebound terms which are born from specific national culture. as the genes of national thought, they bear a deep brand of “lifeworld”, embodying specific national cultural traditions, cognitive thinking and core values, with distinctive cultural heterogeneity, and their translation practice is more challenging. However, the translation of these cultural terms is an indispensable and important part of intercultural communication, which is the essence and soul of human cultural diversity, and is of great practical significance (Dou et al., 2016). The “Chinese Thought and Culture Terminology Dissemination Project” launched by China in 2014 aims to “collate and translate those thought terms that can reflect the discourse system and core values of Chinese people, and disseminate them widely at home and abroad through various social organisations of the government and civil society, media organisations and various media means”. It is a cross-cultural communication activity with the help of large-scale terminology translation practice, which is of contemporary significance (Wu et al., 2014). So far, according to the data published on the website of the Project, hundreds of Chinese thought and culture terminologies have been translated and formally released to the public through printing and publication as well as publication on the website (Chinese Cultural Thought Terminology, 2024).

3. Data Analysis

The case study in this paper selected 14 entries containing the word “爱” in the search of “all libraries” in the database. The word “爱” is explained in the Xinhua Dictionary as: to have a deep affection for, to prefer, to be easy on, to value, to protect, or to be stingy with. The Oxford Chinese-English Dictionary translates the word as “love” or “lurve”. Directed expectations in expectancy theory suggests that readers already have certain expected outcomes for a text based on the knowledge and skills they possess. Accordingly, it can be judged that the translation of “爱” into “love” in the translation meets the directed expectations of the readers. There is a total of 10 results for the translation of 爱 in the terminology database, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Results for the translation of 爱 in the terminology database.

爱而知其恶， 憎而知其善	In Love, Acknowledge Faults; in Hatred, Recognize Virtues.
爱人深者求贤急	Those Who Most Love the People Will Eagerly Seek Talent.
爱国如家	Love the Country as One Loves One’s Family.
泛爱	Broad Love Extending to All.
爱人以德	Love the People in Accordance with Rules of Moral Conduct.
爱民	Love the People.
仁者爱人	A Benevolent Person Loves Others.
兼爱	Universal Love.
爱类	Loving One’s Own Kind.
法者所以爱民也	Law Is a Means of Loving the People.

Innovative expectations mean that the reader meets a part of the text that is different from the original thought in the process of reading, receives a fresh horizon of expectations with an open mind, develops a new understanding and feeling of the text, and constantly shortens the aesthetic distance between himself and the text. Thus, it was determined that the terms “爱”, which was not translated with “love”, met the Innovative expectations. A total of 4 translations met the requirements, shown as **Table 2**.

Table 2. Results for the translation of 爱 in Innovative expectations.

仁者自爱	A Benevolent Person Cherishes Himself.
爱民者强	Power Comes from Caring for the People.
爱人为大	Caring for Others is the Top Priority.
仁民爱物	Have Love for the People, and Cherish All Things.

3.1. Translations in Directed Expectations

Eg.1 爱人深者求贤急

The explanation of “Those Who Most Love the People Will Eagerly Seek Talent.” is someone who deeply cares about the people will have a strong desire to seek out talent. The term “love” as used here does not refer to personal morality or individual affection; it refers to how administrators must govern a country well so as to ensure the basic well-being and interests of its people, to spare them from suffering and unwarranted infringements, and to enable them to live stably and work happily. This statement contains two requirements. The first requirement is that those in power must love the people. It is that the administrators should have full and deep affection for the people, that is, the requirement of the word “深”; the second requirement is that on the basis of his deep love for the people, the administrators should take into full consideration the needs of the people in order to safeguard their lives and interests. Therefore, when reading this sentence, the translator first thinks of the first meaning, loving the people deeply, and then leads to the second meaning, safeguarding the interests of the people, which in turn calls for “seeking out talent”. In the layer-by-layer progression, the choice of translation meets the readers’ expectation of the administrators’ “love for people”, and can more fully demonstrate the fish and water relationship between the administrators and the people in Chinese thought. Such a translation can fully demonstrate that the government of China is wholeheartedly love the people, all from the people’s interests, all for the people’s characteristics.

Eg.2 法者所以爱民也

“Law Is a Means of Loving the People.” is a similar example of translation using directed expectations. The meaning of this phrase is that “law being a means of loving the people suggests that laws and institutions are for the benefit of the people. “Although the law is known for its severity, “loving the people” weakens its ruthlessness and coldness and makes it more rational and objective. In other words, we want a law that is more in the interest of the people, a law that is better

for the people. Such a translation can reflect the fact that Chinese law is a law with feelings, a law that serves the people, and is in accordance with the interests of the people rather than the interests of the administrators.

3.2. Translation in Innovative Expectations

Innovative expectations of “爱” are translated into “care” and “cherish”. Bilingual readers who understand Chinese culture will appreciate the freshness of this translation, attracting the interest in reading and understanding. For English readers, this translation provides further understanding of Chinese culture, effectively avoids the repetition and flat single understanding brought by the word “love”, and creates a multidimensional image of China.

Eg.3 仁者自爱

“A Benevolent Person Cherishes Himself.” is a typical example. In Chinese, “仁者自爱” is interpreted as a man of benevolence is sure to cherish himself and then extend his love to others. Although there is only one sentence, benevolent person, as the most important characteristic in Confucianism, already implies the highest standard of a person’s moral character. There is already a predetermination of a person’s virtue in this sentence, and then a further requirement for him, namely, cherish him/herself. Cherish has more meanings than “love”, such as to keep, to collect and to care (the first explanation in the Collins dictionary is: If you cherish something such as a hope or a pleasant memory, you keep it in your mind for a long period of time. If you cherish something such as a hope or a pleasant memory, you keep it in your mind for a long period of time.) In other words, benevolent person should do not only love himself, but also cherish his own character and integrity. In Confucianism, one should first achieve “self-love”, then extend oneself to others and start to “love others” in order to be loved by others, thus realizing the cycle. In this cycle, “cherishing oneself” is the first prerequisite, and the requirement is even more profound than “love”, which is not to stay at the superficial “love yourself”, but to achieve a more profound love. Instead of staying at the surface of “love yourself”, one has to realize a more recent step of maintaining one’s own thoughts and conduct. Such a translation provides readers with the space and clues to think more deeply in reading, effectively instilling in them the unique connotation and charm of Chinese culture.

Eg.4 爱人为大

“Caring for Others is the Top Priority.” is also an example of innovative expectations translation. The meaning of this sentence is that being friendly and caring for others is most important. As a guide to personal behavior, the translation of “love” as care provides a more specific behavioral requirement. The ancient Chinese believed that human beings were the most precious thing in heaven and earth, so “loving people” was the most important thing, which was extended to the national level as “loving the people”. Compared with love, care is more feasible, setting standards for the behavior of love. This translation gives the reader a refreshing sense of stepping out of the traditional emotional need to “love the

others” and down to specific personal behaviors.

Eg.5 仁民爱物

Another example of innovative expectations translation is “Have Love for the People, and Cherish All Things”. This is a unique example because in it the word “benevolence” is translated as “love” (in other translations “仁” is benevolence) while “爱” is translated as “cherish”. This provides the reader with a relative understanding: to provide the emotion of “love” to those who have feelings, and to be “cherish” to those who have no feelings. Since ancient times, China has had the philosophy of “unity of heaven and mankind”. The protection of the environment has always been an important part of our social development. This comparison not only avoids the repetition of patterns, but also provides different treatment conditions for different individuals. As mentioned above, the word “cherish” also means to keep for a long time, which further demonstrates China’s long-term commitment to the sustainable development of nature.

3.3. Summary

The study of translating cultural terms has been enriched by directed and innovative expectations, offering fresh theoretical insights. Generally, most translations of cultural terms adopt a directed expectations approach. This approach meets readers’ anticipated requirements for cultural understanding and effectively reinforces existing impressions of Chinese culture in their minds. Such reinforcement further facilitates the dissemination of Chinese culture, characterized by its unique style.

Conversely, innovative expectations in cultural term translation provide readers with a novel understanding. The application of innovative expectations in cultural translation remains limited. These translations diverge from readers’ inherent expectations of Chinese culture, offering them a new mode of understanding that encourages a richer, more vivid appreciation of cultural meanings, thereby shaping a more comprehensive and three-dimensional image of Chinese culture.

4. Conclusion

The translations of “爱” in Key Concepts in Chinese Thought and Culture show a more vivid and lively image of China from multiple perspectives and levels. These translations do not stick to the fixed meanings of the words, but consider the needs of the context and development, and the specific requirements of Chinese society and development, and carry out more targeted translations. In the translation of cultural terms, the primary approach employed is directed expectations. This translation perspective effectively helps readers reinforce their impressions of Chinese culture. Directed expectations meet readers’ anticipated requirements, further enhancing their impressions of Chinese culture and bolstering the dissemination of cultural terms. The use of innovative expectations is relatively limited. When applied, innovative expectations aim to highlight the unique meanings embedded in cultural terms. Cultural terms translated using innovative

expectations often contain deeper cultural connotations, requiring readers to engage in further reflection to fully grasp their meanings. Thus, translations are expected to aid readers in forming a more comprehensive and nuanced image of Chinese culture.

But there are still some problems. The first is that the number of translated terms is too small. As the base of Confucianism, “仁爱” is an important part of the development of Chinese philosophical thought. Since the international community attaches more and more importance to the development of humanism and human rights, the translation of “love” can be the most intuitive expression of China’s attitude towards its people and the international community. Too few translations may lead to errors or incompleteness when translators deal with other terms that cover similar ideas. The second problem is that translators are still confined to direct translation, which may bring stereotypes of Chinese culture to some English readers who do not understand Chinese culture. The third problem is that the construction of the thesaurus is that there are mistakes, for example, the case of “Law Is a Means of Loving the People” creates problems. As an important window of the country’s cultural communication to the outside world, this kind of error very much affects the readers’ image building of China. Finally, there is a lack of attention to gender equality in the process of translation, with the use of “he” or “him” in person references and a lack of feminist awareness.

In general, the reader’s horizon of expectations is a very important consideration in the process of translating Chinese culture to foreign countries. This requires us to strengthen the international readers’ inherent impression of China’s fine qualities by correctly dealing with two different expectations in translation, while at the same time making use of different translation styles and vocabulary variations to provide readers with a more creative and Chinese-orientated cultural input, and to bring a new-age vigor and distinctiveness to China’s image.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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