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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## Study on the Translation of Culture-loaded Words in *The File No.113*

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**ABSTRACT**

All nations in the world have generated many culture-loaded words full of cultural origin and emotional attachment in the evolution of social life. Due to the huge differences between Chinese and Western cultures, it is difficult for translators to find the equivalent expression when translating culture-loaded words. Chen Hongbi is an outstanding female translator in modern times, and her translation of the English detective novel *Le Dossier No.113* was very popular in the late Qing Dynasty. From the perspective of eco-translatology, this study takes Chen Hongbi's *The File No. 113* (《第一百十三案》) as an example and analyzes the translation of culture-loaded words in the text. In the late Qing Dynasty, the social demand for female intellectuals, the academic demand for detective novels and the interest demand of publishing houses formed a sound ecological environment for Chen's translation of foreign detective novels. Chen adapted himself to this ecological environment with his translation ability and love for detective novels, thus choosing to translate *Le Dossier No.113*. In the process of translation, Chen reaches the adaptation and transformation of culture-loaded words from three dimensions linguistic dimension, cultural dimension and communicative dimension. This study describes how Chen Hongbi accurately conveys the meaning of culture-loaded words to the target readers based on the ecological environment of translation through the mechanism of "selection" and "adaptation", which is helpful to understand and explain the choices made by the translators in order to realize the communicative intention and adapt to the context of the late Qing Dynasty. By analyzing Chen's successful translation of the detective novel, this study hopes to make readers realize the value of her translation as well as her adaptation and selection in translation so as to provide references for future translators to consider deep adaptation and selection when translating culture-loaded words.

**KEYWORDS**

Chen Hongbi; *The File No.113*; Culture-loaded Words; Adaptation; Selection

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### 1. Introduction

With the prosperity of translation in the late Qing Dynasty, a large number of female translators gradually appeared on the stage of history. As the representatives of new and intellectual women, they had broken the traditional taboo on women and made outstanding contributions. Their participation in social, cultural, economic and political life not only brought Chinese women's literature into a new stage but also marked the modern evolution of Chinese women's consciousness (Guo Yanli, 2002: 65). Among these female translators, Chen Hongbi was not only a productive translator but also the most active female translator in the realm of translation at that time. *The File No. 113* was a masterpiece of Chen Hongbi's translation of detective novels, and it was serialized in *Xiao Shuo Lin* (《小说林》), an important periodical that had great social influence at that time. Chen Hongbi's translations were published many times in *Xiao Shuo Lin*, which showed the popularity of her works and also confirmed her superb translation art, so some scholars even questioned Chen Hongbi's gender. Tadayuki Nakamura, a Japanese scholar of translated literature in the late Qing Dynasty, once put forward, "Chen Hongbi is a man under the guise of a female translator"(Guo Yanli, 2009: 60). The reason was that it was hard to believe that Chen hongbi had made such remarkable achievements at a time when women's status was generally low and they were rarely seen in public. No matter in the old days or in the present modernized society, male

translators can always intrigue scholars, but the study and introduction of female translators are relatively scarce. Therefore, taking *The File No.113* for example, this study analyzes the culture-loaded words in Chen Hongbi's translation from the perspective of Eco-translatology to explore how Chen Hongbi adapts to the translation ecological environment and makes her translation stand out in the male-dominated society and competes with the translations of many detective novels. The study of Chen Hongbi's translation is not only conducive to further understanding of Chen's translation practice but also of practical significance to the historical study of the acceptance and dissemination of feminist translation in China. Only by clarifying the history and influence of feminist translation and exploring the social motivation of feminist translation can we find the proper way to promote the development of feminist translation in contemporary China.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 The Translation of Detective Novels in the Late Qing Dynasty

The detective novel was a variety of Western vernacular literature. In ancient China, there were only case novels and no detective novels in the modern sense, so detective novels were equivalent to an exotic product in China. In the literary translation tide of the late Qing Dynasty, the translation of detective novels was among the best in terms of the number, scope and speed of translation. A large number of foreign detective novels flooded into China in the late Qing Dynasty, which was the result of the collision between Chinese and Western cultures. Its occurrence is closely connected with the changes in Chinese society, culture and literary concepts in the 20th century.

The rise of detective novel translation in the late Qing Dynasty also attracted many scholars; however, before the 1980s, detective novels were regarded as inelegant and dismissed from academic fields, and the introduction to detective stories was numbered. In 1937, A Ying once mentioned in *The Brief History of Fictions in the Late Qing Dynasty* (《晚清小说史》) about the prosperity of detective novel translation in the late Qing Dynasty and the reasons for its rise for the first time, which laid a foundation for the study of Chinese detective novels. Cheng Xiaoqing, known as the greatest modern Chinese detective novelist, published many theories and articles about detective novels, striving to elevate the status of detective novels in the literary arena. He had made a relatively comprehensive and pioneering contribution to the theoretical construction of Chinese detective novels in the early 20th century. It was not until the 1980s that Chinese detective novels entered the period of systematic scientific research. The research on the translation of detective novels in the late Qing Dynasty could be roughly divided into the following aspects:

1) Introduction to the translation history of detective novels. For example, Guo Yanli(1996) introduced in detail the situation and social causes of the translation of modern detective novels. Based on the historical background of Chinese detective novels, Ren Xiang (2011) analyzed the generation, characteristics and significance of this genre. Miao Huaiming (2001) described the evolution of crime novels to detective novels in the late Qing Dynasty.

2) Comments and analysis of translators and their translations of detective novels. For example, Ma Yufen(2007) studied the influence of Cheng Xiaoqing's *The Complete Works of Sherlock Holmes*(《福尔摩斯探案全集》) on the creation of Modern Chinese detective novels. Zhao Xifang(2012), based on the translation and comments of Zhou Guisheng and Wu Jianren on *The Trick of Poisonous Snake*(《毒蛇圈》), analyzed the introduction of modern ideas and cultural negotiation in the late Qing Dynasty.

3) Systematic and in-depth theoretical study. For example, Li Shixin(2006) studied Chinese detective novels from a comparative perspective, making a comparative study with ancient Chinese case novels and foreign detective novels to break the closed pattern of Chinese detective novel research. Zhu Quanding(2015) sorted out the creation modes and distinctive content features of Chinese detective novels by using prototype theory, narratology theory, story morphology theory and relevant theories and analysis methods of popular culture. Some scholars also take detective novels as independent research objects for theoretical construction. For example, Huang Zexin and Song Anna (1997) sketched the theoretical framework of "detective fiction" for the first time and tried to construct detective fiction as a discipline. Cao Zhengwen (1998), for the first time, systematically outlined the historical context of the development of detective novels in the world and, on this basis, discussed the theoretical issues such as mode, genre, style, literary style and art of detective novels.

### 2.2 Studies on Chen Hongbi

Chen Hongbi is one of the earliest independent female translators in The history of Chinese translation. Her influence on modern society is great, but academic research on her is extremely scarce. In recent years, scholars have gradually realized the value of Chen's research, and a series of related studies have been slowly carried out. However, due to the lack of research data and the late start, the research on Chen is still very imperfect. The current research on Chen is mainly divided into three parts: Collecting information about Chen's life history and activities. For example, Guo Yanli (2002) published "The Emergence of Modern Female Translators in the First Twenty Years of the 20th Century"(《二十世纪第一个二十年近代女性翻译家群体的脱颍》), which promoted Chen to the translation status of the most outstanding female translators, thus bringing Chen into the research field. Then Li Yong

(2007) introduced Chen from multiple perspectives of her translations, teaching experience and participation in the women's movement, and supplemented Chen's contributions and influences outside of translated literature with relatively detailed historical materials.

According to the search results of CNKI, there are only 10 periodicals and dissertations about Chen Hongbi. In recent years, scholars have gradually realized the research value of Chen's translation, and a series of related studies have been slowly carried out. However, due to the lack of research data and the late start, the research on Chen is still very imperfect. The current research on Chen is mainly divided into three parts:

1) Exploring the characteristics of Chen's translated novels. For example, Zhang Junxia (2015) called Chen's Translation style "Grace Translation". Starting with the purpose and characteristics of Chen's translations and enumerating a small number of Chen's translated works, she concluded that the purpose of Chen's translated novels was to "wake up the people and save the country", and her translation technique was "smooth and easy to understand". From the perspective of gender relations, Pan Hualing and Chen Zhijie (2016) explore the female perspective and psychological experience in Chen's translated novels and make a comparative analysis between Chen's translated passages and the original works to explain Chen's expectations for new female images in her works.

2) Studying Chen's translation from a new perspective of translation theory. At present, Wang Jian (2015) is the only one which based on previous research results, explores whether there are any characteristics in Chen's works that are incompatible with the group of female translators from the perspective of polysystem theory and seeks the relationship between Chen's translated works and the translation literature system at that time and the local literature system. However, this thesis is not sufficient and lacks strong facts and examples.

3) It can be seen from the above review that there are few studies on Chen's translations at present, and most of them are from the perspective of history or feminism, so the new field of study needs to be broadened. Therefore, based on the theory of ecological translation, this paper analyzes the adaptation and selection reflected in Chen's translation and studies Chen's translation activities from a more holistic perspective.

### **3. Chen Hongbi's Selective Adaptation in the Late Qing Dynasty**

Translation is defined by Hu Gengshen as "a selection activity of the translator's adaptation to fit the translational eco-environment". Here, the "translational eco-environment" refers to "the worlds of the source text and the source and target languages, comprising the linguistic, communicative, cultural, and social aspects of translating, as well as the author, client, and readers" (Hu Gengshen, 2003: 284). According to the natural law of "survival of the fittest", translators should be subject to and adapt to that translational eco-environment. The translational eco-environment where Chen Hongbi was living presented a new picture of the demand for female intellectuals and detective novels. Through her adaptive selection, Chen made a good adaptation to this translational eco-environment and successfully translated detective novels.

#### **3.1 Adaptation to the Social Demand for Female Intellectuals**

In the late Qing Dynasty, driven by the tide of Western learning, some progressive intellectuals believed that the lack of female intellectuals was an important reason for China's weakness at that time. Therefore, the trend of "abolishing foot binding and promoting female education" was on the rise. Emerging schools for women attached equal importance to Chinese and Western education, giving female students the opportunity to learn Western enlightened culture and instilling in students a new sense of self-reliance and self-respect. In this social environment, Chen accepted new education and Western culture and adapted well to the social demand for female intellectuals, applying what she learned to translate Western learning and consciously shouldering the responsibility of national enlightenment. As one of the few female novelists, she translated many detective stories, such as *Yinxueyi Yicong* (《印雪籟译丛》) in 1906, *Xue Huixia* (《薛蕙霞》) in 1907, *Daomian* (《盗面》) in 1911, and she also collaborated with Zhang Mojun on the translation of *Pei Naijie Qi'an* (《裴乃杰奇案》) in 1911 and *Bugui Qi'an* (《捕鬼奇案》) in 1912.

#### **3.2 Adaptation to Readers' Demand for Detective Novels**

With the continuous introduction of Western culture, detective novels came into people's sight. In fact, there were no detective novels in the strict sense in China. The arrival of Western detective novels deeply attracted Chinese readers with their unique narrative mode and twists and turns of the plot. Therefore, detective novels were widely translated and rapidly occupied most of the market. Yet, it's still not enough to satisfy readers. Wu Jianren, a novelist of the late Qing Dynasty, once said, "The number of detective stories translations are countless, but concerns about an insufficient supply to satisfy customers still remain (Wu Jianren, 1906). So, it could be seen that readers had a strong demand for the translation of detective novels, and Chen's translation of *Le Dossier No. 113* was just suitable for readers' demand for detective novels.

### 3.3 Adaptation to the Interest Demand of the Press

In 1904, Zeng Pu founded the Press Xiao Shuo Lin, which was specially designed to translate and introduce foreign novels. Enlightened by Western literary thought, he hoped that story writing would no longer be a political mouthpiece but would return to the standard of literature (Zhang Hanbo, 2013: 107). So, the tenet of Xiao Shuo Lin is to spread the spirit of Western literature. As mentioned above, detective novels were very popular with readers. Therefore, among the foreign novels published by Xiao Shuo Lin, detective stories account for an important proportion due to the market demand, and a publishing strategy with a focus on detective stories gradually took shape. As Xu Nianci once said, according to statistics, detective stories were the most popular among publications issued by Xiao Shuo Lin, accounting for 70 or 80 percent (1908). Chen Hongbi adapted to the interest demand of the press and translated Western detective novels, and won the praise of many readers and a good reputation for Xiao Shuo Lin through the vivid and tortuous story of *The File No.113*.

### 4. Chen Hongbi's Adaptive Selection in the Translation of Culture-loaded Words

Translators have a dynamic dual identity: on the one hand, they adapt to the selection and restriction of the translational eco-environment; on the other hand, they select and manipulate the translation in the translational eco-environment. Thus, translation is described as an alternating cycle of translator adaptation and selection. The best translation is the one with the highest integration degree of adaptation and selection. Since translation is a selective activity for translators to adapt to the translational eco-environment, translators should make adaptive selection on the basis of multi-dimensional adaptation to the translational eco-environment. The translation method of adaptive selection can be briefly summarized as the "three-dimensional transformation"; that is, under the principle of "multi-dimensional adaptation and adaptive selection", the adaptive selection transformation relatively focuses on the linguistic dimension, cultural dimension and communicative dimension. (Hu Gengshen, 2004:133) According to the theory of eco-translatology, translators can produce appropriate translations only when they truly adapt themselves to the specific translation ecological environment in a multi-dimensional way and make at least three-dimensional selection and transformation in the translation process. (Liu Yanfang, 2009: 16)

#### 4.1 Selection in Linguistic Dimension

The adaptive selection in the linguistic dimension emphasizes "the translator's adaptive selection and transformation of language form in the process of translation" (Hu Gengshen, 2009: 2). In the process of translation, due to the differences in composition, structure, expression habits between two languages, translators need to select ways to deal with these differences according to their own translation experience and willingness, so as to achieve the best expression effect they believe. In Chen's translation of *Le Dossier No.113*, the language is in classical Chinese in most cases, and she incorporated many Chinese allusions into the translation, which makes her translation more accessible to the readers.

1): "This safe, which is considered the masterpiece of the firm of Becquet, is six feet in height and four and a half in width, made entirely of wrought iron, with triple sides, and divided into isolated compartments in case of fire."

Chen: "有一大铁库。钉于墙内。坚大非常。使贫人见之知积多金。罕有不动心者。库高六尺。阔四尺半。全以熟铁为之。分三面。另分数格。以防祝融氏之劫。"

In the above example, Chen translated fire into "祝融氏之劫". "祝融" was the fire god in Chinese mythology, and Chinese people often used the allusion of "祝融之灾" to refer to fire disaster implicitly. Chen Hongbi took full account of the readers' feelings and catered to Chinese cultural preferences and aesthetic tastes. She implicitly expressed the taboos in Chinese culture, achieving the ecological balance in the linguistic dimension.

2) If there is one man in the world whom no event can move or surprise, who is always on his guard against deceptive appearances and is capable of admitting everything and explaining everything, it certainly is a Parisian commissary of police.

Chen: "世间万事万物至纷糅杂沓哉。临事而不惊。惧到处留心。不露声色。如兵法所谓守如处女。出如脱兔者。其惟巴黎之警察社会乎。"

"守如处女，出如脱兔", deriving from *The Art of War* (《孙子兵法》), was used to describe being as calm as a virgin when on the defensive in battle, and being as quick as a runaway rabbit when taking the offensive. In the original text, the author intended to praise the Paris police for their calm and alertness. Chen Hongbi added a historical allusion in the translation that was familiar to Chinese readers, which is beneficial to readers' better understanding of exotic cultures.

Besides the above examples, a large number of words with Chinese cultural characteristics can be found in Chen Hongbi's translation. There are many historical allusions in the translation, such as “暗喜其已入彀”、“其庐山真面目”、“邻人只知罗敷有夫者”, and many Chinese traditional nouns such as “约知天命”、“龙钟老叟”、“不惑”、“粟麦不分”、“莫逆友”、“莲花之舌”、“悬河之目”. Chen uses Chinese culture-loaded words and skillfully adds some Oriental embellishments to the Western story plots, making it easier for Chinese readers to understand and accept. Due to the differences in lifestyle and way of thinking, the linguistic expressions of China and the West are distinctive. Chen selects to take readers-oriented in linguistic dimension and adopts many culture-loaded words to reduce the strangeness of the target text caused by language gaps.

#### **4.2 Selection in Cultural Dimension**

The so-called adaptive selection in the cultural dimension means that translators should have cultural awareness in the process of translation, realize that translation is a process of communication across languages and cultures, and pay attention to overcoming the obstacles caused by cultural differences to ensure the smooth realization of information exchange. (Hu Gengshen, 2004:137) In terms of cultural differences, Chen selects to transform some culture-loaded words to cater to Chinese readers' cultural habits, which reflects her adaptive selection in the cultural dimension.

3): "That will do," interrupted Mr. Lecoq. "If I choose to lend you a helping hand, it is because it suits my fancy to do so. It pleases me to be the head and let you be the hand. Unassisted, with your preconceived ideas, you never would have found the culprit; if we two together don't find him, my name is not Lecoq."

Chen: “吾非欲伸手助子。吾喜为首。而以汝为支体。为手足。不将汝指遵。则汝永不能寻出真犯。然吾二人合办。而尚不得之者。则吾誓不姓刘。”

In the original text, the detective Liu Gu swore in his own name, but Chen translated it as “誓不姓刘”, directly transforming the name into the surname. This is because, in traditional Chinese culture, people are used to taking the surname rather than the given name as the bet when swearing. Chen transformed the expression to go with the cultural habits of Chinese readers, which could produce the same communication effects as the original text.

4) A large glass door opens into a spacious vestibule where three or four office-boys are always waiting.

Chen: “有大玻璃门一扇。通至前庑。仆从三五辈。常立于此以候命。”

It's said in the original text that there were “three or four” servants. While in the target text, it was translated as “仆从三五辈”. Chen changed the number from four to five, which seems to be unfaithful to the original text, but it is to conform to the reader's cultural expression habits. In traditional Chinese culture, it is customary to use “三五” instead of “三四” when expressing uncertain quantities, such as “三五成群、三番五次、三令五申”. So Chen selected to transform the text into a common expression in Chinese culture.

When dealing with the translation of the culture-loaded words in *The File No.113*, Chen takes into account the cultural differences between the source language and the target language, adapts to the cultural system of the target language, and thus interprets and accurately conveys the cultural connotation. According to the above analysis, we can see that Chen was very meticulous in translating the culture-loaded words. She selected to transform the original text to adapt to the culture of the target language, achieving adaptive transformation in the cultural dimension.

#### **4.3 Selection in Communicative Dimension**

As the name implies, the adaptive selection of communicative intention in translation means that the translator, in addition to the transformation of linguistic information and cultural connotation, focuses on the communicative level and pays attention to whether the communicative intention in the original text is reflected in the translation. (Hu Gengshen, 2004:137-138)

Chen's translation of the novel is very close to the original's style. She tries to match the original text to get a translation that conforms to the reading effect of the original text. (Zhang Junxia, 2015(3): 71) The comparison between the original text and the translated version of *Le Dossier No.113* shows that Chen attaches great importance to the expression of the emotional color and style of the original work. This effort to reproduce the effect of the original work is mainly reflected in her translation of emotional words. When Chen translated *Le Dossier No.113*, she could not only translate the meaning of the emotive words in the original text but also pay attention to the communicative intention in the original text, which was mainly reflected in her translation of derogatory words. There are a lot of derogatory words in the original text, and Chen completely reproduces their semantic and

emotional color. The word “fellow” in the original text has both derogatory and positive meanings in emotional color. Chen accurately grasped and reproduced the derogatory meaning of this word on the basis of the context and translated it into “此伧”. “伧” is used to express vulgarity, contemptuousness, and irony. It not only translates the meaning of the original word but also perfectly reproduces the communicative intention. The word “wretch” was used in many places in the original text, while Chen translated it into different expressions. When Beru’s father, who cared for his reputation, reviled Beru after hearing of Beru’s theft, Chen translated it as “棍徒”; When Gypsy scolds Andrew for his reckless and ignorant and ridiculous accusations, the word “wretch” is translated by Chen into “匹夫”; When Beru thought Andrew was guilty of theft and scapegoated others, the word was translated into “狡徒”. These expressions are subtly different, but Chen’s translation shows an accurate grasp of the communicative intention of the original work.

Chen’s adaptive selection in the communicative dimension is also reflected in the translation of appellation terms. Except for a small amount of “我” and “你”, most of the appellation terms in the translation are traditional Chinese appellations like “余、吾、子、汝、君、伊、卿、公”. Besides, she modifies most names based on transliteration, which adapts to the taste of Chinese readers on the basis of maximum respect for the original work. For example, “梅娘(Madeleine)、高百美(Palmyre Chocareille)、莲娘节西(Nina Gypsy)、范兰卿(La Verbrie Valentine)”, These words like “娘、美、梅、兰” have obviously classic Chinese charm, unique to Chinese names. In the case that transliteration and Chinese tradition can’t be met at the same time, Chen Hongbi preferentially chooses to reach the communicative intention and accords with the Chinese tradition, such as “骨丽仙(Crescenzi)、林玉(Mile. Wilson)”, such translation deviates from the original text, but conveys the same communicative effect as the original work and is more accessible to Chinese readers. She avoided the cultural misinterpretation caused by the unequal language expressions and realized/ the unimpeded transmission of culture.

## 5. Conclusion

In the late Qing Dynasty, a period of social transformation, certain novel translations retained the narrative features of Chinese classical novels, while some gradually accepted and absorbed the new elements in Western novels, showing typical transitional characteristics, which is also the unique feature of modern literature, being of great significance to the overall development of Chinese literature. Chen Hongbi was one of the main translators of Xiao Shuo Lin, one of the four major novel newspapers and magazines in the late Qing Dynasty. Her translations were quite popular at that time and also reflected the transitional characteristics. A study of Chen’s translations can not only explore and summarize Chen’s translation characteristics but also provide a deeper understanding and grasp of the situation of the translation circle at that time.

Chen’s translation of *Le Dossier No.113* was highly artistic and popular at that time. Taking this translation as an example, this paper interprets Chen’s translation of culture-loaded words from the perspective of Eco-translatology, and it can be found that her translation activities are adaptive selection to the translational eco-environment, which leads to the popularity of *The File No.113*. In Chen’s era, the translational eco-environment showed a benign and inclusive development trend, and the social demand for female intellectuals and secular literature such as detective novels appeared. Chen’s translation of *Le Dossier No.113* was in line with the translational eco-environment at that time. In addition, in the process of translation, she made adaptive selection in three dimensions of linguistics, culture and communication, thus achieving a translation work that was widely acclaimed and far-reaching at that time.

This paper is a tentative study of Chen Hongbi’s translation. Inevitably, there are limitations that need to be acknowledged. This paper is somewhat subjective in the selection of examples, and more suitable and representative examples need to be given to make the conclusion more persuasive and credible. Besides, many idioms and classical Chinese are analyzed, which may not be explained properly and accurately enough due to the author’s limited knowledge. So, this paper hopes to provide some useful enlightenment for the follow-up research on Chen Hongbi’s translation.

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