

# On Culture Transmission in Chinese-English Literary Translation

—Based on *Weicheng's* English Version

Lizhen Chen

Xiamen University Tan Kah Kee College, Zhangzhou, China

Email: lzchen@jgxy.com

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## Abstract

The present thesis aims at the possibility and limitation of culture transmission in Chinese-English literary translation, that is, whether culture can be successfully transmitted in this process. Meanwhile, under related theories, a systemic study will be conducted into *Fortress Besieged* (*Weicheng's* English version) concerning cultural translation. To achieve the set goal of our study, the present thesis first gives an overview of *Weicheng* (《围城》) and its English version *Fortress Besieged*, and then based on culture's universal and open characteristics, cultural translatability is demonstrated and then the limits of cultural translatability demonstrated based on culture's national and epochal characteristics. Finally, the present thesis looks into *Fortress Besieged* in terms of cultural translation and analyses the translation strategies and methods it takes. Some sparkling translations are displayed, as well as a number of awkward or inadequate translations. This thesis is intended, with the combination of theories and practices, to give a reasonable judgment to the problem of translatability and its limits through a systematic and comprehensive analysis.

## Keywords

Culture, Transmitting, *Weicheng's Fortress Besieged*, Translation Strategies

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## 1. Introduction

Chinese culture, as one part of Oriental culture is quite different from its Western counterpart, in such aspects as language, history, customs, religions, beliefs and so on. These differences constrain the communication between the Eastern

and Western world. Especially in the literary field, cultural distinctions are always the great obstacles for translators. Despite all the difficulties, communication and exchange between different nations still go on, and a great number of literary works have been translated to entertain readers from different cultures. The great Chinese traditional work *The Dream of Red Mansions* (*Hongloumeng*) is a good example, having been translated into many languages.

Since different translators represent different cultures, they tend to adopt different translation strategies: those from source culture tend to take foreignization (alienation) while those from target culture domesticization (adaptation), though both cases are not absolutely correct.

In most translation works, the two strategies are alternatively utilized while one overweighs the other. For instance, *A Dream of Red Mansions* by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, the English version of *Hongloumeng* saw more foreignization whereas the British translator David Hawkes adopted more domesticization in his version *The Story of a Stone*. As *Fortress Besieged* is the co-effort of a source language speaker and a target language speaker, what then is the main translation strategy, and to what extent do translators transmit the source culture into target culture?

As is known to all, cultural masterpieces represent the most challenging task for translators, because of the ways in which they utilize the full metaphorical and linguistic capacity of meaning—form and function—to generate multifaceted, multilayered and aesthetically pleasing works. Besides, in literary works, not just language playing but also cultural codes can be found anywhere. The exceeding difficulty of translating a masterpiece means that something is always lost in translation. Then, to what degree and by what means can translators transmit the cultural message in literary translation, especially for those genuinely great works?

This thesis is intended, with the combination of theories and practices, to give a reasonable judgment to the problem of translatability and its limits through a systematic and comprehensive analysis, hoping to be referential to those who are engaged in the field of translation.

## **2. A Survey of *Weicheng* and Its English Translation**

### **2.1. A Brief Introduction to Qian Zhongshu**

Qian Zhongshu, author of *Weicheng*, is said to be a major literary figure of twentieth-century China. Qian is one of the most well-known Chinese scholars to the Western world. As an outstanding product of early 20th-century China's internationalistic Cultural Revolution, Qian was fluent in both Chinese and European literatures. British scholar and translator Julia Lovell, in one of her articles [1], states "Qian Zhongshu could be termed a scurrilously Chinese Evelyn Waugh". The translations of his works are widely available both at home and abroad. Qian also wrote elaborate notes on Chinese classics, showing his erudition and insight into a comparative study of different cultures.

## 2.2. An Overview of *Weicheng*

Qian's most well-known novel and his only one full-length novel, *Weicheng* (《围城》), published in 1947, has been translated into English, French, German, Russian, Japanese and Spanish. This novel has long been famous for its widely-spread punch line "Marriage is like a *fortress besieged*: those who are outside want to get in, and those who are inside want to get out" [2], which is taken as a classic metaphor of marriage. Qian's erudition of Chinese classics and Western literature makes the novel an interesting read. It is peppered with allusions, both eastern and western. The hefty novel is intended as a satire, featuring scores of colorful, all too recognizable characters of intellectuals, the rich, those who put on Western air, those who put on Chinese air, and just about everyone else from the early days of the Sino-Japanese war. As time goes on, *Weicheng* is not forgotten by people; contrarily it is more and more popular and embraced by all walks of life. In 1990, it was adapted into a TV series in China.

*Weicheng* tells the story that took place at the time when the Sino-Japanese War was about to break out. Fang Hung-chien, a feckless young man just returned from his studies in Europe with a phony American degree. Born in an old-styled family with feudal traditions, Fang, a mediocre young man with no much good luck, always yielded to his old man's will, and his life was somewhat a fiasco: phony diploma, unrequited love, dead-end jobs, lousy interpersonal relationships and disappointing marriage. He was ineffectual in both love and work, and washed up teaching at a recently-establishing university in the interior Hunan Province away from the war, where he was once again less than effective, and got engaged to be married largely by accident. And finally he returned to Shanghai and watched his marriage fall apart. The ending of *Fortress Besieged* is a bit melancholic, but by and large the tone of the book is humorous and witty [3].

In the introduction to this translation of *Fortress Besieged*, Nathan K. Mao describes the book as "a comedy of manners with much picaresque humor, as well as a scholar's novel, a satire, a commentary on courtship and marriage, and a study of one contemporary man" [2]. Although it focuses on the Chinese intellectual or pseudo intellectual class, especially sham academicians with shallow Western pretensions, it also deals with the broad spectrum of Chinese society permeated with ignorance, corruption, and hypocrisy during the early stages of the War of Resistance against Japan [4].

## 2.3. The English Version of *Weicheng* (*Fortress Besieged*) and Relevant Critiques

The English version of *Weicheng* published by American Indiana University Press in 1979 was the cooperative effort of Jeanne Kelly and Nathan K. Mao. Whereas Jeanne Kelly did the first draft of the translation, Nathan K. Mao revised it. In addition, Mao wrote the introduction, refined the footnotes, and prepared the manuscript for publication.

A number of scholars of Western world spoke highly of the English translation when it came out. Someone even pointed out that *Fortress Besieged* would rapidly change the view of the Western world towards modern Chinese literature though some sharp criticisms still followed as to the translation's competence. British scholar and translator Julia Lovell wrote on June 11, 2005 in *Guardian*, expressing *Weicheng's* entering into Penguin Classics, the first time a work of 20th-century Chinese fiction allowed on to its list as Great Leap Forward. But she called the translation by Jeanne Kelly and Nathan K Mao "old and uninspired" and "It is, for the most part, competent, but hardly reproduces the dazzling, spiked wit for which the original is renowned. Dialogue, in particular, is wooden and unidiomatic, and littered with empty filler adverbs ("really", "simply") and literally translated Chinese proverbs with explanatory footnotes bolted on. Descriptive prose, while more serviceable, also contains the occasional puzzler..."

In his review of the translation work, the American scholar Dennis T. Hu, first approves of the achievement of this translation and cites a number of admirable examples to show the excellent techniques of the authors. He displays many awkward or unsuitable occasions in the translation. He concludes: the translation, not without an occasional sparkle, is at best mediocre, when taken as a whole. A great deal of the wit, irony, and sarcasm of the original is absent. Qian's artful manipulation of language, because it is not well preserved, has lost its literary forcefulness. He also points out that whereas the reader of the original Chinese may choose to check his pace to savor the exuberance of the novelist's craft, the English version forces one to halt from time to time, bewildered, unsure as to what the author's real intent is. He says that the translation betrays unsure control of both SL and TL. He criticizes on some translations as "read like a first, tentative effort; and it could be improved upon through heavier investment of time, care, sensitivity, and thoughtfulness [5]."

One can surely find many translation problems from the English version. Nevertheless, the truth is that no a single translation that has ever existed can be called perfect, especially for *Weicheng*, such a great work filled with rich cultural codes and tricky language plays, then how can we expect the translator to provide us one? Some critics even propose that Qian, the author was himself a master in both Chinese and Chinese language, so maybe the author is the most suitable translator for his own works. That is probably correct, but the author has left us and we will never know if translated by the author himself, how those language and cultural tricks would be dealt with. What is more important for us here is to find out: to what degree the existing translation is satisfactory, especially for those challenging cultural codes, and in what way, can it be done better?

### 3. Cultural Translatability and Its Limits

Translation is the reproduction in one language of what has been expressed in another language. It concerns two languages, or two different patterned systems.

Thus argument between translatability and untranslatability unavoidably arises.

Today, the problem of translatability and untranslatability has been controversial in translation studies for a long time. There are many disagreements on whether languages are translatable or untranslatable. Those who dealt with, and those who are dealing with translatability, from their different points of view on the issue, can be divided into three groups. The first group holds that translation is impossible. The second group holds that all translation is possible and totally denies the existence of untranslatability. A third attitude, which holds that any two languages can be intertranslated in principle, but that any translation can be done only to some extent, is accepted by more people.

It is generally believed that due to linguistic and cultural barriers, in the process of translation, loss (to different degree) of meaning cannot be avoided, hence the limits of translatability. In the present thesis, we will look into cultural translatability and its limits. Here, “culture” in broad sense, must include linguistic cultural factors.

### **3.1. Cultural Translatability**

Translatability aims at comprehension, whereas encounters between cultures or interactions between different cultures involve either assimilation or appropriation by making inroads into one another.

A culture always appears to be a multi-layered phenomenon in that it consists of diversified levels, all of which map out a cultural realm, which constrains translation activities to certain degree.

The problem of translatability or untranslatability is closely related to man’s understanding of the nature of language, meaning and translation. In a larger sense, the problem of translatability is one of degrees: the higher the linguistic levels the source language signs carry meaning(s) at, the higher the degree of translatability these signs may display; the lower the levels they carry meaning(s) at, the lower the degree of translatability they may register

The author discusses the theoretical foundations of translatability and the limits of translatability respectively from cultural perspective so as to verify the fact that the translating activities are possible but the limits of translatability inevitably exist in the process of translating. This chapter analyzes the translatability and its theoretical foundations first, then the limits of translatability and its foundations.

#### **3.1.1. Definition and Degree of Translatability**

According to Dictionary of Translation Studies, translatability is a term used, along with its opposite, untranslatability, to discuss the extent to which it is possible to translate either individual words and phrases or entire texts from one language to another [6]. In some other cases, translatability is considered as a measurement of the time and effort it takes to translate a text. It is based on the complexity of the text, as described through parameters (like sentence length, homographs, abbreviations), and the breadth or limitation of features of the

translation means.

Another topic which is often talked about is the different degrees of translatability. What seems undeniable is that some texts are more easily translatable than others. In general, it can be asserted that a text with an aesthetic function will contain elements which will make its reproduction in a different language difficult, whereas a text with a merely informative function will be easier to translate. The use of language with an aesthetic function is more self-conscious and will presuppose a greater degree of elaboration than language with a merely communicative function. In this sense, we learn that literary translation is much more challenging and calls for more striving and struggling.

### **3.1.2. Demonstration of Translatability**

#### **1) Culture's Universal Characteristic and Translatability**

Culture carries some universal characteristics beyond regional limitation. The humankind who live on the same planet do share a great deal in common, such as some physical properties, needs for survival, ways of living and thinking, etc. People who represent different cultures all have to undergo the process of birth, maturity, marriage, age and death, though different from society to society in some way. For instance, to most nations, death is a kind of taboo. So in every language, one can always find some euphemisms for death. For example, in Chinese, we have “去世(qu shi), 逝世(shi shi), 谢世(xie shi), 过世(guo shi), 下世(xia shi), 与世长辞(yu shi chang ci), 走了(zou le), 过去了(guo qu le)” while in English we correspondingly have “to leave this world, to be gone, to pass away, to pass on...”

The universal characteristic of culture and language are the premise of cultural translatability, which determines the transmission between different cultures. Looking back to translation history, we may find that different nations did exchange and communicate with each other through translation. Despite of all the different structures and expressions of language, translation is still possible and feasible. The truth is that all languages, primitive language included, have the potential power of conveying the similar meaning.

No matter what language they speak, human beings share the similar forms of thought *i.e.*, analysis, synthesis, and generalization. Any normal activities of thought cannot be free from these forms. They also have similar logic of thought: conception, judgment and reasoning. Thus we can say that there exists a bilingual channel for message transferring.

Language is the immediate reality of thought. Language is also the material medium of thought. Without the tool of language it would be impossible to communicate with each other. Languages are different from one another in grammar structure, and their structures are also open to change. But the law of thought is always constant. The identity of forms of thought ensures the possibility of interlingual transferring.

#### **2) Culture's Open Characteristic and Translatability**

Culture's universal characteristic determines the translatability of cultural

translation and possibility of cultural exchange, whereas its open characteristic makes it easier for different cultures to adapt into each other, and meanwhile accelerates the degree of translatability.

As we learnt above, culture is not a close system; on the contrary, it is a rather adaptive one, which can successfully adopt and assimilate new content from each other. Only by keeping in touch with other cultures can a certain culture develop constantly. It is in no way that one culture can evolve without linking to a certain age and certain area. To explain a new and unfamiliar environment is one feature of a certain language, which helps the very language to describe the particular situation of its own.

Cultural has the feature of super-regionalism, which reflects on the communication and convergence of different cultures. That is to say, some culture first comes into being in a certain region or area and becomes mature with the time. Then it is transmitted into another culture and accepted, absorbed and assimilated finally. The accepted culture then is the super-regional culture and even the culture of human being. It reflects in the absorption and assimilation of different languages and the development of each of them. And this development of different cultures toward the sameness has made the obstacles of cross-cultural communication fewer and fewer, hence it becomes easier and easier to communicate between different cultures [7].

As human culture and language develop constantly and human's knowledge horizon broadens day by day, the degree of translatability will rise and the limits of it may decrease in some way, with cultural gap between different nations narrower and narrower.

### **3) Culture's Epochal Characteristic and Translatability**

Cultural epochal characteristic influences translatability in two ways. On one hand, every aspect of cultural structure may change over time and this adds to difficulties of translating. On the other hand, cultural epochal characteristic shows that everything is changeable and developing constantly, so it challenges the conclusion of some untranslatable cases. To put it more concrete, some untranslatable cases presently may turn into translatable some other day.

Language is functional to reflect and store the nation's cultural information. As a result, a language must have a large quantity of words, which reflect the cultural reality specific to the nation, and are untranslatable at first glance when these words are to be transferred word by word. In this case new linguistic signs must be coined or created in the target language to refer to the cultural reality.

Sometimes notes are used for the purpose of more accurate understanding. The new signs, at first, seem strange to the native speakers and are reluctant to be accepted by the language community. It is often the case that we come across at the same time with many signs to refer to the same thing or idea. But with time going and cultural communication deepening, the one which has been chosen as the appropriate and best, would be widely accepted and thus be rooted in the target language. Thus the thing or idea, which was taken for granted at first to be untranslatable, becomes translatable. As a matter of fact, loanwords of



any language have been through this stage from untranslatability to translatability.

### 3.1.3. Creativity of Translators and Translatability

We do not deny the existence of untranslatability, or the limits of translatability, but what deserves to be noted is that “untranslatable” cases are not absolute. Through translators’ creation, some of the “untranslatable” can turn to be translatable.

For example, in Li Shangyin’ poem “春蚕到死丝方尽，蜡炬成灰泪始干” (chun can dao si si fang jin, la ju cheng hui lei shi gan), “丝” (si) silk not only represents the endless love with its endless silk form, it is also homophone for “思” (to love or miss someone), so the poem is once thought as untranslatable. However, the translation from Xu Yuanchong “The silkworm till its death spins silk from love-sick heart” is good enough if not perfect. In English culture, there is no direct connection between silkworm and love, whereas in Chinese language and culture there is. Here, Xu craftily contrives “silk” and “love-sick”, which do transfer the meaning and the rhetoric beauty as well [8].

From the case above, we can come to such a conclusion: Untranslatability is relative, dynamic rather than absolute and static. Under certain conditions, some impossible, untranslatable situation can turn possible, translatable and the limits of translatability can be surpassed through the translator’s effort and creativity.

It should be recognized that no matter how skillful bilingual translators are, untranslatable examples still always exist, which cannot be solved totally, hence the limits of translatability.

## 3.2. Limits of Cultural Translatability

The problem of untranslatability is always a disputed issue. Nowadays, it is well accepted that translation is a possible and feasible task. However, there are still some language points that are difficult to translate, which is called the phenomenon of untranslatability, or limits of translatability.

### 3.2.1. Introduction to Limits of Cultural Translatability

Catford pioneered in translation studies a rationalization of this issue. He proposes the following definitions in *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*: “Translatability appears to be a cline rather than a clear-cut dichotomy. Source language texts and items are more or less translatable rather than absolutely translatable or untranslatable.” [9]. Broadly speaking, failure of translation falls into two categories: linguistic and cultural.

By linguistic untranslatability we mean “failure to find a TL equivalent due to entirely the differences between the source language and the target language.” [9]. On the linguistic level, untranslatability occurs when there is no lexical or syntactical substitute in the target language for a source language item. Some examples of this type of untranslatability would be ambiguity, plays on words, etc. For example, the English “What makes a road broad?—The letter B.” is lin-



guistically untranslatable because the word-to-word translation of this dialogue makes no sense to people who do not know English (There is a word play, when we put a letter “b” before the word “road”, we will get the word “broad”) Cultural untranslatability arises “when a situational feature, functionally relevant for the SL text, is completely absent from the culture of which the TL is a part” (ibid.). For instance, the names of some institutions, and abstract concepts are hard to translate if there do not exist the corresponding expressions in the TL. We cannot find an English equivalence for Chinese “秀才” (xiu cai), “武术” (wu shu) which are particular to Chinese culture.

As to the limits of translatability, or even untranslatability, we hold that the larger the differences between source language and target language in their language structures and cultures, the more the untranslatable factors are produced. As we explore culture in a broad sense, we see linguistic untranslatability as part of cultural untranslatability, which is different from what Catford proposed.

What should be kept in mind all the time is that limitations of translatability, or even untranslatability, which is the extreme of such limitations, are not contradictory to the translatability of language as a whole, because they are said of particular aspects of language, not of language as a whole. For example, when poetry is said to be untranslatable, it does not mean that translation of poetry as a whole is impossible, but that if the criterion used to evaluate the translation is whether beauty of form is transferred or not, translation of poetry is difficult or sometimes even impossible because of poetry’s indispensable dependability on form; when idioms are said to be untranslatable, it does not mean that translation of idioms in no way can be done, but that it is very difficult or sometimes even impossible to find in the target language the idioms in which the linguistic forms, the syntax, the semantic meanings, the figures of speech, etc, are equivalent or corresponding.

### 3.2.2. Demonstration of Limits of Cultural Translatability

#### 1) Culture’s National Characteristic and the Limits of Translatability

Language is part of culture and meanwhile the carrier of national culture, so culture’s national characteristic well explains the national cultures distinct from nation to nation, languages different from nation to nation, which results in untranslatable factors, hence the limits of translatability.

National characteristic of culture does bring about difficulties to translation; for to certain degree, TL readers are intended to acknowledge their own national culture while rejecting foreign culture. Fortunately, exchange and communication between different cultures still go on again and again, which brings different cultures into a broad frame of commonness.

#### 2) Culture’s Epochal Characteristic and the Limits of Translatability

Culture changes and evolves with time, but this does not mean that former cultures will just vanish without leaving any trace. As a matter of fact, human culture is developing while inheriting the essence of former cultures. Culture is a complicated system and develops mainly by way of accumulating.

In addition to the substantial heritage, culture also memorizes and accumulates mainly through language form. Translation as a cross-culture and cross-time activity is inevitably constrained by epochal characteristic of culture. Certain text is the product of certain era and shows the very characteristic of the time, so is different from those of other times. Meanwhile, it is also the combination of cultural heritage from different times. Those materials, values, beliefs, customs outdated from today are surely more difficult to capture than those existing at present.

Readers of different times render the same text in different way, let alone readers of different times from different regional backgrounds who have to just predict the text based on their own knowledge horizon.

### **3) Cultural and Language Distinction between English and Chinese**

*The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (1995) gives such an explanation of culture: the customs, beliefs, art, music, and all the other products of human thought made by a particular group of people at a particular time. Though we think the definition is narrow sense and not inclusive enough for our study, we are impressed by the ending part of this explanation "...by a particular group of people at a particular time". So, a particular culture is particular to a particular group of people.

Generally, different nations hold different cultures. For instance, "full moon" symbolizes jubilation and reunion in China, and "a bright moon in the sky" makes people feel quiet and at leisure. Willows in Chinese culture in some cases represent the sorrow for parting, which is quite different from Western culture.

There are many different cultural differences in language, such as culture of appellation, culture of euphemism, culture of tourism, culture of colors, culture of numbers, and culture of allusions. It may influence the quality of translation, if translators are not fully aware of these cultural differences in language.

The modern linguistic study shows that language is not only a physiological but also a cultural phenomenon. Translation, as a means to exchange meanings from one language to another, is by nature an important way in the cross-cultural communication. Therefore, the purpose of translation is to introduce one culture to another by means of translating. The translating activity plays an important role in the cultural transmission, concerning both different languages and different cultures. Cultural differences always become the barrier in translation and result in untranslatabilities to certain degree.

Therefore, though things or phenomena can be expressed in one language, there may be lack of equivalents in other languages. For example, the class system left over by China's feudal society influenced the classification of words, for the difference in the social structures. The abundant kinship terminology is good evidence, which, from the other side, shows that Chinese people pay much attention to the relations among family members or relatives. Contrarily, the kinship terminology in western world is rather general and vague. For instance, words like aunt, uncle and cousin cover extensive meanings.

Consequently, we can see that the different categories in language are always the reflections of a nation's interest, custom and utility. The different processing of words may cause the lack of corresponding words and phrases across languages. Besides, English and Chinese are widely different in grammatical structure, writing system and phonological representation, which also lead to the limits of translatability.

## **4. Fortress Besieged and the Translation Strategies**

### **4.1. Translation Strategies: Foreignizing Translation vs. Domesticating Translation/Alienation vs. Adaptation**

When it comes to translation strategies, we cannot miss the argument between foreignizing translation and domesticating translation. They are the two terms created by American theorist Lawrence Venuti to describe translation strategies. In Chinese translation theories, we sometimes adopt adaptation and alienation instead of foreignizing translation and domesticating translation

#### **4.1.1. Foreignizing Translation**

Foreignizing translation intentionally keeps in the texts of the TL the exoticism in style and other aspects of the original texts. Its purpose is "to develop a translation theory and practice in order to resist the trend that the culture of the TL takes the leading part, hence to highlight the language and cultural difference between the two texts." [10].

It has the following features:

- 1) To obey incompletely the language and discourse norms of the TL;
- 2) To choose, at a proper time, the texts that are not smooth and difficult to be understood;
- 3) To keep the exoticism of the SL;
- 4) In order to provide an "unprecedented reading experience" for the readers of the TL [10].

#### **4.1.2. Domesticating Translation**

Domesticating translation aims at reducing as much exoticism in the version as possible to provide the readers of the TL with natural fluency versions. It usually contains the following procedures:

- 1) To choose cautiously the version that is domesticating translation;
- 2) To take intentionally the version that is natural and fluent;
- 3) To change the version into the one whose style is of the TL;
- 4) To insert explaining material;
- 5) To coordinate the concepts and characteristics of the original text and those of the version.

According to Lawrence Venuti, a domesticating method is an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to the target-language cultural values bringing the author back home, and a foreignizing method, an ethnodeviant pressure on those values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text

sending the reader abroad [10].

#### **4.1.3. Options between Foreignizing Translation and Domesticating Translation**

Foreignizing translation and domesticating translation are complementary instead of contradictory. The transplanting of culture needs various ways and models rather than one single approach. Therefore, translators can adopt either domesticating methods or foreignizing methods, depending on the given situation.

What is important to translators is to have a deep sense of culture in the process of translation, that is, to realize the difference and similarity between two cultures. When it is possible to use either foreignizing translation or domesticating translation, the tendency of the translators plays the decisive role. These two types of translation strategies cannot be used at will. They should, however, be restricted. In some cases, using foreignizing or domesticating translation improperly even will lead to misunderstanding and destroy the transplanting of culture. Take the following translation as an example:

The translator might think that he well conveyed the meaning to TL readers through providing TL readers with western “bread”, whereas taking domestication here largely destroys the typical flavor of the original text particular to Chinese culture. As is known to all, bread is typically the western custom in food. Therefore, the version may lead to the misunderstanding of Chinese people in the past eating bread as well. So mistakes in time and place should be avoided by the means of domesticating translation while the obstacles of in understanding should be avoided by means of foreignizing translation. Words and phrases about names of people or places and historical allusions should be attached special importance to.

It is desirable that by translating literary works culture can be spread and communication between different nations broadened. Therefore, for literary translation, it’s best to adopt “foreignizing translation, or alienation as the main strategy while domesticating translation, or adaptation as complement”, through which the original flavor of the source text can be remained; the culture of the source text can be spread through translation and the TL readers’ knowledge horizon can be broadened; exchanges between two languages can be accelerated and the culture of TL will get richer by adding exotic flavor.

Since different translators represent different cultures, they always adopt different translation strategy: those from source culture tend to take foreignization while those from target culture domestcization, though not absolutely.

#### **4.1.4. Adaptation and Alienation**

The option between adaptation and alienation is actually almost the same as that between domestication and foreignization we discussed in the foregoing part.

Adaptation means adapting a text to meet the expectations of a different type of audience. Newmark states: “In order to retain in the target language the same level of impact and appeal in the original text, the translator may have to resort

to some adaptive strategies.” [11]. He maintains that the translator is permitted to adapt and make the thought and cultural content of the original more accessible to the reader in communicative translation. Vermeer, a leading exponent of the theory of translation action, advocates the use of adaptation as an alternative to meaning-based translation.

Literature is art of words, an integral part of literature. Literary language is often the combined effect of sound, vocabulary and syntax to entertain or lecture in some way. Translators of literary works are always desired to produce on the TL readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original. To achieve the cross-cultural communication by translating, translators under certain conditions need to take the adaptive approach.

However, adaptation cannot solve all the problems in translation. For instance, if the content of the message exceeds the pattern and effect in terms of importance, we prefer to preserve the former as a top priority by taking alienation strategy rather than adaptation.

#### **4.1.5. Literal Translation and Free Translation**

While studying translation strategies, one might think of another competing pair of translation approaches: literal translation and free translation. Sometimes, they are even mistaken for foreignizing translation and domesticating translation respectively. As a matter of fact, these two pairs of comparative approaches are connected with each other, but they cannot be mixed up. Simply we can distinguish in this way: Foreignization and domestication are translation strategies in a macro sense, while literal translation and free translation are the concrete methods in a micro sense.

Literal translation includes both word-for-word translation and sentence-for-sentence translation, opposite to free translation. By means of literal translation, the SL grammatical constructions are converted to their nearest TL equivalents. And some people, among whom is Lu Xun, prefer and speak in defense of it since it can show more clearly and exactly the word order of the SL. Literal translate is usually used to deal with the figurative expressions where the subjects and the references of different languages correspond to each other. It keeps, to some extent, the cultural and national features of the SL and readers of the TL can be brought into contact with the culture of the SL and accept it gradually. Literal translation is, helpful in keeping the original style, which Lu Xun calls “exoticism” and “foreign flavor”. And it helps to bring in some fresh and vivid words, syntactic constructions and expressions continually to make our language become more rich, integrity and precise. In this view, literal translation shares the same function with foreignization.

Free translation, also named liberal translation, is an alternative approach which is used mainly to convey the meaning and spirit of the original without trying to reproduce its sentence patterns or figures of speech. This approach is most frequently adopted when it is really impossible for the translator to do literal translation. Since the purpose of translation is to convey the meaning con-

tained in the SL to the readers of the TL. Therefore, many translators always pursue free translation, which is thought to be much more flexible.

It should be noted that there is no obvious distinction between literal translation and free translation, nor is it necessary to distinguish one from the other. The key point for a translator to grasp is to comprehend the original thoroughly, and then put it into idiomatic TL. In the process of translation, specific approaches such as literal or free translation may be of some help, but either one going too extreme should be avoided. The two methods may overlap in whole or in part within a text and complement one another.

## 4.2. The Cultural Translation Strategies of *Fortress Besieged*

In this part, we will explore the cultural translation strategies of Weicheng. Just as we have mentioned in Chapter Two, culture as we define in the present thesis is in broad sense, including linguistic culture, social culture, ecologic culture, religion, customs and so on. As far as our study here is concerned, we will lay stress on knowledge culture (including linguistic culture, language, historical knowledge, etc.), and common culture (including social culture, customs, national concepts, etc.). All the English translation examples are taken from *Fortress Besieged*.

### 4.2.1. Translation of Knowledge Culture

#### 1) Idioms

Idioms, as the cream of a language, are cultural-bound expressions. Chinese idioms can contain set phrases, common sayings, proverbs, allegorical sayings, etc. In their unique ways, idioms reflect culture, therefore, learning idioms means learning culture, which can also help learning idioms in return as well. Translation of idioms belongs to cultural communication which requires translators to convey the culture information which is reflected in the idioms. However, in practice loss in translation cannot be avoided to certain degree.

In the present thesis, translation of idioms is mainly done in two ways: preservation of images and preservation of implication.

#### a) Preservation of Images

Images, which are created in various idioms, can be culture or with cultural implication and association which reflect characteristics of culture that the idioms belong to. Thus preservation of images, which saves vividness of an idiom, may offer the audiences an access to exotic culture and thus convey the original meaning effectively. Such translation methods can be of great value to cultural communication. But sometimes, by way of this, some translation loss might inevitably occur. Below are some actual cases of idiom translation from *Fortress Besieged*:

① 我们新吃过女人的亏, 都是惊弓之鸟, 看见女人影子就怕了。(wo men xin chi guo nv ren de kui, dou shi jing gong zhi niao, kan jian nv ren ying zi jiu pa le) [3].

Having recently been jilted by women, we are like birds afraid of the bow;

we're frightened even by a woman's shadow.

In this case, “惊弓之鸟” (jing gong zhi niao) is translated directly into birds afraid of the bow. The idiom, rising from traditional Chinese culture, is bound up with a historical allusion, but the translation of “birds afraid of bows” adequately conveys the original meaning.

② 家里粗茶淡饭的苦生活, 你也应该过过; 年轻人就贪舒服, 骨头松了, 一世没有出息. (jia li cu cha dan fan de ku sheng huo, ni ye ying gai guo guo; nian qing ren jiu tan shu fu, gu tou song le, yi shi mei you chu xi.) [3]

You should put up with the hard life of “coarse tea and plain rice”; we have here at home for a while. [3]

Here, “粗茶淡饭” (cu cha dan fan) literally translated into “coarse tea and plain rice”, the implication isn't clear in English translation. Though the translator adds quotation mark here to stress, without any footnote information “coarse tea and plain rice” actually means no more than low-quality tea and rice to TL readers. So maybe simply translating it into “simple food or plain food” is even better.

③ 尺有所短, 寸有所长. (chi you suo duan, cun you suo chang) [3]

Sometimes, a foot is too short and an inch is too long.

Since the author felt it a little awkward expression in English, she consulted a native friend about this. And the friend, a native speaker of TL, he said that his first intuition in terms of this is, “It means that there needs to be a very particular measurement between these two”. It seems hard for him to understand the figurative way of this. So we suggest some plus explanation should be added here as “A foot sometimes may prove short, while an inch may prove long, every person has his weak points as well as strong points.”

#### b) Preservation of the Implication

English and Chinese idioms usually reflect their different cultures. Therefore annotations usually need to be added to reveal the implicit meaning in order to convey effectively to the audiences.

④ 你是老美国, 听她说话, 盘问她几句, 就水落石出了. (ni shi lao mei guo, ting ta shuo hua, pan wen ta ji ju, jiu shui luo shi chu le) [3]

If you'd heard her speak and put a few questions to her, the truth would have been out.

⑤ 鸿渐道: “训导长寻花问柳的榜样, 我们学不来.” (hong jian dao: “xun dao zhang xun hua wen liu de bang yang, wo men xue bu lai.”) [3]

We can't follow the dean of student's example of visiting houses of ill repute.

⑥ 这事不成, 李梅亭第一个说“侥幸”, 还说: “失马安知非福……” (zhe shi bu cheng, li meiting di yi ge shuo “jiao xing”, hai shuo: “shi ma an zhi fei fu...”) [3]

When the plan fell through, Li was the first to say, “Thank God,” adding, “It may be a blessing in disguise.”

In these examples, “水落石出” (shui luo shi chu), “寻花问柳” (xun hua wen liu), “失马” (shi ma) are all adapted into fluent and concise English while giving up the original images of “水, 石, 花, 柳, 马” (shui, shi, hua, liu, ma). We



have to admit the original literary language is affected to some degree, but in some cases where the original pattern and style are not so important as the meaning adaptation is helpful to the whole piece of translating.

## 2) Word Plays

### a) Homographic Puns

Homographic puns tend to be meta-linguistic in nature. Finding a same homographic pair of English words to convey the pun is possible, but the chance is very slim. So their translation can only be functional. Any literal, non-functional translation of homographic puns between unrelated languages is theoretically impossible.

“他不想想不靠我们周家的栽培，什么酥小姐，糖小姐会看中他!”周太太并不知道鸿渐认识唐小姐，她因为“芝麻酥糖”那现成名词，说“酥”顺口带说了“糖”;信口胡扯，而偏能一语道破，天下未卜先知的预言家都是这样的。(“ta bu xiang xiang bu kao wo men Zhou jia de zai pei, shen me su xiao jie, tang xiao jie hui kan zhong ta!” Zhou tai tai bing bu zhi dao hong jian ren shi Tang xiao jie, ta yin wei “zhi ma su tang” na xian cheng ming ci, shuo “su” shun kou dai shuo le “tang”; xin kou hu che, er pian neng yi yu dao po, tian xia wei bu xian zhi de yu yan jia dou shi zhe yang de.) [3]

It weren't for our support, what Miss Su or Miss Tang would ever take a fancy to him! Mrs. Chou had no idea Hung-chien knew a Miss Tang. Because of the given term “chih-ma su-tang” (sesame seed bar), the word “tang” follows naturally after “su”. By blurting the words as they came to her, she had hit the nail on the head. The prophets who foretell the future are all like that (*i.e.*, they hit the nail by accident).

### b) Word Splitting

Every word has its fixed phonetic form, distinctive structure and established semantic content. Generally speaking, the accepted features should be used and comprehended as a whole. In other words, they cannot be split at random; however, it does not mean that words can never be taken apart. As we all know, a polysyllabic word often consists of several morphemes. Sometimes a writer deliberately takes apart disyllabic single-morpheme words or compound words, and sometimes inserts some other elements in between.

① 掌柜写帐的桌子边坐个胖女人坦白地摊开白而不坦的胸膛，喂孩子吃奶。

(zhang gui xie zhang de zhuo zi bian zuo ge pang nv ren tan bai de tan kai bai er bu tan de xiong tang, wei hai zi chi nai.) [3]

At the cashier's counter sat a fat woman plainly and publicly displaying her fair but not so flat bosom as she nursed a child.

Here “坦白” (tan bai) is split into “坦” (tan) and “白” (bai) purposefully by the author. The word play here through its structure and meaning will surely cause some humorous effect. The given translation with “plainly” and “publicly”, “fair” and “flat” two pairs of alliteration might adequately convey the author's intent, though it is not so humorous as the original text.

Dennis Hu states that at various points, the translators have demonstrated that pleasing equivalents sometimes do exist between English and Chinese,

which we can see from the example below:

- ② 可是苏小姐觉得鲍小姐赤身露体, 伤及中国国体。(ke shi Su xiao jie jue de Bao xiao jie chi shen lu ti, shang ji zhong guo guo ti.) [3]

Miss Su felt that Miss Pao's exposed body constituted an insult to the body politic of the Chinese nation.

Here, “赤身露体” (chi shen lu ti) and “中国国体” (zhong guo tuo ti) are translated into “exposed body” and “body politic”. With the “body” and “body”, the language humor is transmitted in some way.

However, in the two cases below, the word plays are neglected while the basic message of the original text is translated. The translators' giving up does not necessarily mean that they neglect the word play randomly, whereas they chose the translation in despair. In ③, the translator gave up the trick of “纽扣” (niu kou) and “扣留不放” (kou liu bu fang) while merely conveying the functional meaning. And ④, in Chinese the word “国家” (guo jia) is made up of “国” (country) and “家” (family). From the given translation, the craftiness of word play is totally lost and we find that the translation does not make sense in English.

- ③ 假使订婚戒指是落入圈套的象征, 纽扣也是扣留不放的预兆。(ji shi ding hun jie zhi shi luo ru quan tao de xiang zheng, niu kou ye shi kou liu bu fang de yu zhao.) [3]

If the engagement ring were a symbol of the trap one had fallen into, button-sewing was likewise an omen of being tied down.

- ④ 国家, 国家, 国即是家! (guo jia, guo jia, guo ji shi jia!) [3]

The country, the country belongs to the family!

### c) Allusions

Qian Zhongshu, seen as the greatest contemporary writer in China, is a master of both Chinese and English language and culture. In Weicheng, apart from the excellent language skills worth our admiration, innumerable allusions and historical anecdotes are brought in to help create the wonder of literature. .

- ① 董斜川道: “好, 好, 虽然‘马前泼水’, 居然‘破镜重圆’, 慎明兄将来的婚姻一定离合悲欢, 大有可观。” (Dong Xie chuan dao: “hao, hao, sui ran ‘ma qian po shui’, ju ran ‘po jing chong yuan’, Shen ming xiong jiang lai de hun yin yi ding li he bei huan, da you ke guan.”) [3]

Dong Xiechuan said, “Well, now. Though ‘water was poured before the horse,’ still, the ‘broken mirror was made round again.’ Shen-ming's future marriage will certainly be full of vicissitudes. It should be worth watching.”

For “Water was poured before the horse,” the translator adds note as “From the story of Chu Mai-chen of the Han dynasty...” to explain the seemingly unreadable words and for “broken mirror was made round again.” the note “An expression meaning to retie a loose marriage knot, used to refer to a divorcee who marries the same person again.” Even though TL readers can get some vague idea of the story behind the literal translation, it still seems quite hard for them to catch the cultural annotation.

② 这就是孟尝君结交鸡鸣狗盗的用意。(zhe jiu shi meng chang jun jie jiao ji ming gou dao de yong yi.) [3]

That's what Meng Changjun had in mind when he befriended men who could crow like a cock or steal like a dog.

③ “不食周粟”的伯夷叔齐(“bu shi zhou su” de bo yi shu qi) [3]

Fang Tun-weng added an entry to his diary poking fun at his son for trying to imitate the Chou dynasty recluses Po Yi and Shu Chi by “not eating the grain of Chou.”

Reading through the whole translation, one will find it not uncommon that such loss of allusion translation occurs and occurs. For instance, “春秋笔法” (chun qiu bi fa) is barely put into “in the manner of Spring and Autumn Chronicles”, and “空城计” (kong cheng ji) into “empty-town bluff” without any back-up information for TL readers.

#### 4.2.2. Translation of Common Culture

##### 1) Names

In Chinese, names composed of one or two characters always carry some deliberately cultural or historical meaning. Especially in literary works, names are usually utilized as a means of transmitting literary or cultural message by authors. In some sense, a name is a linguistic cultural element, and an author uses it for its associative value.

For the great work Weicheng, names are said to be allusion-bound and meaningful. According to Dr Zhao Yifan, almost all the names of Weicheng, Zhao Xinmei, Tang Xiaofu, Fang Hongjian, Sun Roujia, etc, are meaningful and carrying some cultural messages hidden. Zhao states that both Zhao Xinmei (赵辛楣) and Tang Xiaofu (唐晓芙) are from Qu Yuan's Nine Songs (九歌) “桂栋兮兰皋, 辛夷楣兮药房。” (“gui dong xi lan liao, xin yi mei xi yao fang”) Xinmei represents noble, elegant and promising which is the case of Zhao Xinmei from the work. Xiaofu, as said from “采薜荔兮水中, 搴芙蓉兮木末” (“cai xue li xi shui zhong, qing fu rong xi mu mo”) also predestinates the failure of Tang and Fang Hongjian's romance.

Fang (方) means in Chinese “square”, sometimes “rigid, not flexible enough” and Hongjian from I Ching (Yijing) predestines Fang's life and fate. Sun Roujia, who is the most important heroine of the work, carries a name from The Book of Songs (Shijing) “质尔人民, 谨尔侯度. 用戒不虞, 慎尔生活, 敬尔威仪, 无不柔嘉.” (“zhi er ren min, jin er hou du. Yong jie bu yu, shen er sheng huo, jing er wei yi, wu bu rou jia.”) and “中山甫之德, 柔嘉维则. 令但令仪, 小心翼翼.” (“zhong shan fu zhi de, rou jia wei ze. Ling dan lang yi, xiao xin yi yi.”) Rou jia (柔嘉) in Chinese is the most tender but powerful way of ruling and managing, which coincident to Sun's personalities in the novel. It is possible that Zhao Yifan's research does not reveal exactly the author's intention, but it stills points out the fact that the Chinese names are more than a meaningless two-character sign. The translation neglects all the hidden messages and transliterate all the names as other translators do to other works, which we have to say is a real big

loss during the translation [12].

## 2) Customs and Concepts

In Chinese, people hold some concepts quite different from that of English speaking countries.

### Colors: red/ “红” (hong)

① 人家一对对谈情说爱, 好不眼红. (ren jia yi dui dui tan qing shuo ai, hao bu yan hong) [3]

The English version we get here is

Seeing couple after couple in love, he grew red-eyed with envy.

It is true that in Chinese language, “眼红” (yan hong) expresses the feeling of envy, whereas in English red-eyed implies anger which is totally different. “To see red” means “to get mad, angry”. In English, the corresponding expression for envy is “green-eyed”, which is undoubtedly the better translation here so as not to bring misunderstanding.

Another example concerning color:

② 门口桌子上, 一叠饭碗, 大碟子里几块半生不熟的肥肉, 原是红烧, 现在像红人倒运, 又冷又黑. (men kou zhuo zi shang, yi die fan wan, da die zi li ji kuai ban sheng bu shu de fei rou, yuan shi hong shao, xian zai xiang hong ren dao yun, you leng you hei.) [3]

Rice bowls were piled on a table at the entrance along with a few pieces of half-cooked fat meat on a large plate, meat which turned out to be red-cooked pork. Now cold and black, the pork was like a once prosperous man who was down on his luck and had lost his formerly ruddy complexion.

In original text, “红烧” (hong shao) and “红人” (hong ren) have some connections with “红” while turned into English the connection is gone for “红人” is translated into prosperous man. Though the translation conveys the literal information well, the original humor cannot be found any more, which is unavoidable.

### Consumption of Vinegar/ “吃醋” (chi cu)

In Chinese, when people say someone “吃醋”, they mean he or she is getting jealous, while this use is not acceptable in English language.

In *Fortress Besieged*,

① “辛楣一肚皮的酒, 几乎全成酸醋” (Xin mei yi du pi de jiu, ji hu quan cheng suan cu) [3] is translated into

“The wine in Hsin-mei’s stomach turned to sour vinegar in his jealousy.”

I wonder whether TL readers would understand it even the translator added “in his jealousy” to get the meaning through. So I asked one of American friends what he thought about this sentence. To my surprise, the friend told me “It means the wine, which was good, tastes terrible because of his emotions.” So we can see that the translator’s effort to convey the unique Chinese culture to TL readers is in vain. It is so hard for them to understand it since they do not have the concept of “vinegar” the same with Chinese. After I explained the Chinese way of expressing jealousy with “vinegar”, the friend criticized, “It is clear that the translator is trying to translate an analogy or a turn of phrase, but it comes

off poorly.

Below is another case of “vinegar” saying.

- ② 你这人真不爽快! 我会吃这种隔了年的陈醋么? (ni zhe ren zhen bu shuang kuai! Wo hui chi zhe zhong ge le nian de chen cu me?) [3]

You think I could be jealous over something that old and stale?

Here the translator gives up the “vinegar” but just free-translates it and get the meaning successfully transmitted.

#### **The Measurement Units: “千里” (qian li) “……块钱” (...kuai qian)**

In original book *Weicheng*, the author refers to “千里” (a thousand li or thousands of li) again and again. In the translation, “千里” is translated literally in some case into a thousand li, as “有缘千里来相会” (you yuan qian li lai xiang hui) is translated into “Fate brings people together from a thousand li away.” However, in some cases, domestication strategy is adopted and “li” is translated into “mile”, the English measurement unit.

- ① 吾不惜重资, 命汝千里负笈 (wu bu xi zhong zi, ming ru qian li fu ji) I did not begrudge the expense of sending you hundreds of miles away to study.
- ② 他父亲收到这封信, 证明自己的威严远及于几千里外. (Ta fu qin shou dao zhe feng xin, zheng ming zi ji de weiyan yuan ji yu ji qian li wai.) [3]

When his father received the letter, which proved that the father’s authority had reached across several hundred miles.

Though “千里” in the examples above does not represent the exact number of length, it is still recommended to take foreignization strategy and keep Li here. Since Li is a measurement unit unique to Chinese culture, remaining it will help to make the overall atmosphere of the story more Chinese-like.

Below is the similar case of measurement unit:

- ③ 加上方家聘金为女儿做生意所得利息, 一共两万块钱, 折合外汇一千三百镑. (jia shang fang jia pin jin wei nv er zuo sheng yi suo de li xi, yi gong liang wan kuai qian, zhe he wai hui yi qian san bai bang) [3]

…… Altogether a sum of over twenty thousand dollars or one thousand three hundred British pounds

Here “两万块钱” (liang wan kuai qian) is translated into “twenty thousand dollars”. But there is never a “dollar time” in Chinese history, and we are sure that the time when the story took place it is not dollar time either.

#### **Rice bowl/饭碗**

In China, rice bowl not only refers to the bowl that fills rice. Sometimes when people refer “rice bowl” (“饭碗”) to the job one lives on. In *Weicheng*, “rice bowl” comes up 12 times at different situations. For those refer to the food container, the translators put it into rice bowl without any suspense, for those with figurative meaning the translation sometimes has it as “job” by way of free translation while sometimes not. We see the example here:

- “你不要饭碗, 饭碗不会发霉.” (ni bu yao fan wan, fan wan bu hui fa mei) [3]

“If you don’t want the rice bowl, it won’t get moldy.”

Sun Yifeng, a famous literary critic points out that here “饭碗” (fan wan) lit-

erally translated into “rice bowl” is hard for TL readers, for in western culture, rice bowl does in no way compare to “job”. He proposes the translation “If you want to quarrel with your bread and butter, go ahead.” since “quarrel with one’s bread and butter” is surely easier for TL readers to understand. Indeed, “bread and butter” are the common food in western custom, and the saying is acceptable in TL. However, the problem is that in the given period of time in Chinese history, “bread and butter” talking is unbelievable, particularly for Sun Roujia, who has not been educated overseas like Fang or Zhao.

From all the discussion above, we can see that in *Fortress Besieged*, *Weicheng’s* English translation, adaptation and alienation strategies are utilized alternatively. As to concrete methods, literal and free translation, and also other approaches are complementary to each other. In it, some sparkles of translation examples do exist, whereas the problems of improper translating are also in need of our attention.

## 5. Conclusions

With the aim of exploring the possibility and limitation of cultural transference in Chinese-English literary translation, the present thesis manages to reveal the cultural nature of literary translation and highlights the impact of culture on translation strategies, which will surely help to provide a new perspective for translation study. It is stressed that translation is not just a bilingual activity; it is also a bicultural one. To successfully exceed the language and cultural barriers, translators are called to strive for a most acceptable and appropriate way during the process of translation. The study on cultural translatability and its limits, especially demonstration of them based on characteristics of culture, is convincing, and enriches translation theory. The thorough study into *Fortress Besieged* in cultural perceptive by way of analyzing a large quantity of actual cultural translation cases offers researchers in this field a rich resource for reference.

Despite all the achievements, the present research still has a handful of limitations and shortcomings. They include: 1) Although the author proposes that the very culture that the translator roots in may influence the translation strategies s/he adopts during the translation process, in the present thesis, the relationship between the translators and the translation strategies is not clearly studied. Also, the factors that determine the translators’ options of translation strategies are not revealed here. 2) In the present thesis, a number of sparkling translations are displayed as well as plenty of awkward or inadequate translations. Unfortunately, the author is incapable of offering a better translation for all the unsatisfactory cases, some owing to time saving while some owing to her own limits of qualification.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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