Characters' Names Translation in the Story of the Stone

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Abstract: Names used in literary works are not merely symbols of characters, but reflections of cultural nuances and values. Each name in the work is carefully crafted to align with its theme and purpose. The names of characters often serve as a representation of their social status, personality, or destiny. Moreover, these names embody the author's intentions, values, and mastery of language, which add layers of depth to the literary work. To fully understand a literary work, it is essential to comprehend the significance and meanings behind the names since they provide insights into the culture being portrayed. The Story of the Stone is a classic example of a literary work that skillfully employs names to impart deeper meanings to its characters and themes. The intricate connections between the names and the character's social status, personality, and destiny offer a glimpse into the rich tapestry of Chinese culture. This paper aims to explore various translation methods for such names, providing guidelines for future translations and advancing the field of translation.

1. Introduction

The significance of a name extends beyond being a mere identifier of individuals. It also serves as a reflection of the cultural background of its bearers. In many ways, a name encapsulates the spiritual essence of human society. Using this perspective as a foundation, I have taken names from the 18th century Chinese literary masterpiece, The Story of the Stone (Hongloumeng), as "cultural keywords" that reveal the specificities of the Chinese language and culture during that era. Given the unique ways in which these names are employed and the wealth of cultural connotations they hold, it is imperative that translators pay special attention to them.

2. Features of Chinese Name

Chinese names are composed of first name and given name, with some people having compound surnames like Si Tu, Ou Yang, Nan Gong and others. The given name can be one or two words. Naming is an important carrier of culture and has a rich cultural connotation in China. A Chinese name often reflects the owner's character, wishes, emotions, and other aspects. Therefore, studying onomasiology and translating Chinese names can make significant contributions to translation theory and practice. From a literary perspective, I have identified four features of Chinese names in literary works of the Story of the Stone.

Cao Xueqin, the author of The Story of The Stone, was very skillful in creating names for his characters. He used various methods to embed deeper meanings into their names.

2.1. Homophone

Homophone means two words pronounced the same way but differ in meaning or spelling or both. Homophonic names not only acted as symbols for the characters, but also stimulated readers' imagination and associations. For instance, the protagonists of the story, Zhen Shi Yin and Jia Yu Cun, have homophonic names that represent hiding the truth and sharing a widely-known story, respectively. The four ladies in Jia Fu, Yuan Chun, Ying Chun, Tan Chun, and Xi Chun, also have homophonic names that imply their pitiful destiny [1].

2.2. Allegory or Metaphor

Another method was the use of allegories or metaphors. The novel The Story of the Stone provides numerous examples of how authors can utilize creative designs to portray their characters through their names. Cao Xueqi, with his great wisdom, summarized his characters' entire life or personalities within their names. By doing so, readers can have a solid understanding of a character's traits before they finish the entire book, lightening the burden of comprehension. Here are some examples of this technique.

One such example is "Leng Langjun," which means "cool and handsome guy." It is the byname of "Liu Xianglian," and perfectly represents this character's personality. Another example is "Jiaoxing," which sounds like the Chinese word for "fortunate," and is the name of a lucky female servant in Zhen Shiyin's family. Additionally, "Ying Lian" suggests the girl's experience is an unfortunate one, while "Ping Er" implies that the character handles everything decently and patiently. In each case, the name speaks to their destiny, personality, and the author's attitude toward them [2].

2.3. Series Method

Cao Xueqin also used a series method to name his lower-level characters like servants. He chose beautiful images from nature to create a series of names with similar features, such as flower (Yingchun), sunshine (Xinger), and bird (Yuanyan). The four close daughters in the Jia family have servants named Baoqin, Siqin, Sishu, and Ruhua, which demonstrates that they are born into nobility and are well-educated. The author's use of this technique makes these characters' qualifications vivid and brilliant, while also emphasizing their relationship to each other [3].

2.4. Status

In China, a name is not just a simple label, but rather it represents one's family culture and social standing. Family names, in particular, serve as an indication of a person's place in society, whether they belong to the upper or lower class. In The Story of the Stone, the noble families such as Jia, Wang, Shi, and Xue were all portrayed in a positive light. For example, the first generation of the Jia family included Jia Yan and Jia Yuan, both of whom had names composed of a character resembling three drops of water to indicate their generation. Conversely, those in the lower class were often named after flowers, birds, and jewelry, such as Zhenzhu (pearl), Hupo (amber), and Caiyun (rainbow-colored cloud). This practice of masters naming their servants in this manner highlights the feudal social structure of China at that time, where servants were merely seen as toys for their masters. Therefore, by examining the names of characters in this novel, it is easy to discern

their gender, generation, and social status [4].

3. Approaches to Names Translation

3.1. Transliteration

Transliteration is a form of translation that focuses on maintaining the original content and structure of the text. This approach is commonly used when there are words in the target language that convey the same meaning as those in the source language. It is particularly useful in translating names, whether from English to Chinese or vice versa. Transliteration relies heavily on the pronunciation of the source language, with the translator transcribing names into the target language using similar sounding words. This method preserves the phonetic features of the source language and adds an exotic flavor to the text. Examples of this include the translation of Jane Eyre's name into Jian Ai and The Great Gatsby's name into Gaicibi. In The Story of the Stone, the names Baoyu and Daiyu are directly translated without modification. However, it is worth noting that before the Cultural Revolution, the Wade-Giles method was used, whereas now the Pin Yin method is preferred [5].

Despite its usefulness, transliteration has its limitations, particularly when it comes to literary works or names with special meanings. This approach cannot fully convey the underlying meaning and the author's original intentions. For instance, in Yang Xianyi's version of A Story of Red Mansion, the names Huo Qi and Feng Yuan are transliterated as Huo Chi and Feng Yuan. However, these names have deeper meanings that cannot be fully understood by target language readers unless they are familiar with standard Chinese and Chinese homophones. For example, Huo Qi is a homophone with the meaning of "the course of disaster." Huo Qi is the servant who caused the loss of his master's daughter, which ultimately changed her life. Similarly, Feng Yuan is a homophone with the meaning of "unfortunate." Therefore, unless the readers understand these Chinese homophones, they will miss out on the author's intended meaning. In conclusion, while transliteration is a useful approach to translation, it has its limitations and cannot fully convey the author's original intentions [6].

3.2. Paraphrase

Paraphrasing, also known as free translation, does not necessarily require a word in one language to be translated into the same part of speech in another language. Instead, it aims to convey the same content as the original language while using different words and expressions. Paraphrasing involves expressing someone's written or spoken words in a different way. Unlike transliteration, which focuses on the form of names, paraphrasing emphasizes meaning. A successful translation requires careful attention to the effects of language on the reader. To achieve equivalence, translators must carefully select appropriate words that produce the desired effect. When translating Wu Chengen's Pilgrimage to the West (xiyouji), he used a free translation approach to translate names semantically, such as Tripitaka to Tangsanzang, Sunwukong to Monkey, Zhubajie to Pigsy, and Shawujing to Sandy. However, while paraphrasing can be useful, it can also be dangerous. Names are important signifiers of people and their intentions. Therefore, translators must understand the original author's intention and translate accordingly. Paraphrasing is not freestyle; translators cannot translate at random. Reckless translation can lead to meaningless name translations [7].

3.3. Transliteration plus Annotation

The author's objective is to create name implications using puns, homophonic and sound, morphology, and semantics of language. However, due to the differences in language construction between Chinese and English, it is difficult to find an equivalent form in the target language. Choosing a form may result in losing the meaning, and vice versa. To address this issue, some translators use transliteration with annotations to preserve the original wholeness. Annotations can take various forms such as in brackets, footnotes, or appositives. It is common for every country to have its own specific meaning names that are well-known locally but not understandable by foreigners. For instance, in the quote "There is not a finer fellow in the service," Osborne said. "Not a better officer, though he is not Adonis, certainly," Adonis is a handsome youth loved by both Aphrodite and Persephone in Greek mythology, and nowadays, it symbolizes a handsome young man in English culture. Transliterating it as "aduonisi" alone would not convey who Adonis is unless the reader has read the story about him. However, as a proper noun, Adonis would lose a lot of color translated through paraphrasing. In this case, transliteration with annotations is a good choice [8].

However, this approach has its advantages and disadvantages. In Yang's A Dream of the Mansions, Mr. Yang translated "zhenshiyin" as Chen Shih-yin, "xifeng" as Hsi-feng, and "huoqi" as Huo Ch'i while annotating a footnote that explains the name connotations. For instance, Chen Shih-yin is a homophone for "true facts concealed," Hsi-feng is a homophone for splendid phoenix, and Huo Ch'i is a homophone for "trouble begins." This method effectively conveys the name connotation, but it fails to capture the author's intention of irony, hatred, or expectation towards the protagonists. Moreover, too many notes can distract readers from the content, and lengthy explanations can test their patience.

4. Conclusion

As China gradually becomes more international, an increasing number of people from other countries are drawn to its fascinating culture and history. This has led to a growing interest in translating famous works of Chinese literature, such as Hong Lou Meng, in order to share their cultural significance with readers in other languages. One particularly noteworthy aspect of Hong Lou Meng is its use of naming conventions, which offer valuable insights into Chinese culture and are worth exploring.

In this work of literature, the names of literary figures are not simply arbitrary labels but rather serve to reveal important information about their owners. Some names may hint at the personality of the character or symbolize the story's theme. As a result, translators must carefully consider the author's intention, writing style, and other contextual factors when translating these names. In order to fully understand the meaning behind the names, translators must conduct thorough research and analysis before beginning the translation process.

Western translator Hawks, who is also a master of Chinese culture, has translated the names of characters in Hong Lou Meng for Western readers. He uses both transliteration and paraphrasing to convey the meaning of the names, but other translators may choose to use annotation or translation additions. Each approach has its own strengths and weaknesses, and the choice of method depends on the unique features of the original work.

When translating a passage, it is important to strive for functional equivalence, meaning that the target language should be as close as possible to the source language in terms of meaning and form. If there is no direct equivalent in the target language, translators may need to use paraphrasing to compensate. Ultimately, the most important consideration is to translate in the context of the story, as the meaning of the names is closely intertwined with the overall narrative. By taking these

factors into account, translators can create versions of the work that accurately convey its cultural significance.

Acknowledgements

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