

## Translation Strategies and Overseas Dissemination of Chinese Drama Titles in the Context of Functional Purpose Theory

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**Abstract:** In recent years, there has been an increase in the variety of themes in Chinese film and television dramas. While offering a cultural feast to Chinese audiences, it has also gradually accelerated its pace of dissemination and delivery overseas. The translation of titles is an important part of the overseas promotion of Chinese dramas, and an important way of spreading traditional Chinese culture. This article summarizes the English translation techniques and characteristics of the titles of Chinese dramas from the three principles of functional purposivism. Different purpose requirements can influence the choice of techniques for film and television productions, the writer points out that the translation process of film and television drama titles generally adopts direct translation, paraphrase, phonetic translation in order to provide a reference for the translation of the titles of future domestic dramas and to promote the overseas dissemination of traditional Chinese culture.

### 1. Introduction

As a vehicle for cultural export, film and television dramas have a major mission to spread culture. With increased national policy support, there has been a definite increase in the number of Chinese films and TV dramas being exported overseas, and the number of Chinese film and TV fans overseas is also increasing.

Despite this, there are still many obstacles to the foreign dissemination of Chinese films and TV dramas, and the space for foreign dissemination is far from being opened up; there are too many questions to be explored. According to data from the State Administration of Publication, Radio, Film and Television, the national box office revenue in 2016 was RMB 45.712 billion, of which domestic films accounted for 58.33% of the total box office and overseas revenue from domestic films accounted for approximately 8% of the total box office. In 2017, the total national box office was RMB 55.911 billion, with domestic films accounting for 53.84% of the total box office and overseas revenue from domestic films accounting for approximately 7% of the total box office. According to data from the Beijing Business News, China's TV programme imports 2.099 billion yuan and exports 369 million yuan for the year 2016, leaving a trade deficit of 1.73 billion yuan. From the above data, we can see that domestic films and TV dramas are too dependent on the domestic market, the overseas box office of films has been less than 10%, there is a big gap between the overseas income of domestic films and TV dramas and domestic income, there is still a long way to go for domestic films and TV dramas to develop the overseas market. It has been more than thirty years since the overseas development of domestic dramas relied on dramas such as *Journey to the West* and *Return of the Pearl* to start going abroad in the 1980s. In March 2015, the American version of "Donnie Darko" was released on Netflix, the world's largest online movie rental platform. As of now, the Netflix real rating has been rated by tens of thousands of users, with an average score of 3.8 out of 5. On the American taxable alphabet website VIKI, there are numerous foreign fans who love Chinese TV dramas. Like Chinese fans waiting for updates on American dramas, they are also eagerly awaiting updates on Chinese TV episodes. Looking at the

influence of Chinese TV dramas in the world, there is still quite a gap between them and popular European and American dramas.

Apart from the technical factors of drama production, cultural differences are the biggest obstacle. The translation of a national drama begins with a good English title. A good English title has the effect of opening the door to the audience and can arouse great interest in the drama among Western audiences, and has both cultural and commercial value. The appropriateness of the translation of the title is crucial to the international impact of the drama and the cultural connotations to be conveyed. It is therefore necessary and significant to study the translation techniques of Chinese drama titles for overseas dissemination.

## **2. Organization of the Text**

### **2.1 Literature Reviews**

The popularity of Chinese TV dramas overseas is inextricably linked to the translation of their titles. A good translation of the title of a Chinese drama not only adds to the drama and increases its ratings, but also spreads the good traditional Chinese culture. As there are differences in many aspects between Chinese and English, the translation of drama titles will follow certain principles and use appropriate translation techniques, and the functional purpose theory provides a good guide for the translation of domestic drama titles. After a period of recovery in the 1980s, China's television drama industry began to follow the trend towards external communication. With this, domestic research on the subject began to emerge. From the 1980s to the end of the century, there were many studies on the development of Chinese television dramas and the foreign dissemination of Chinese culture, but very few studied the impact of the English translation of the titles of Chinese dramas on their dissemination abroad from the perspective of the functional teleology of translation.

### **2.2 Research Design**

#### **2.2.1 Functional Purpose Translation Theory**

The theory of functional purpose translation can be traced back as far as Katharina Reiss's 1971 book *The Possibilities and Limits of Translation Criticism*. In this book, she refers to "the particular purpose of the act of translation" as a new model of translation evaluation. She argues that priority should be given to the functional characteristics of the translation rather than to the principle of reciprocity.

In 1984, Rice co-authored with Hans Vermer (the *Grundlegung einer allgemeinen Translation theories*) and mentioned that "the translator's frame of reference throughout the translation process should not be the original text and its functions as focused on by the theory of reciprocity, but The translator's frame of reference throughout the translation process should not be the original text and its functions, which is the focus of reciprocity theory, but one or several functions called communicative functions that the translation is expected to achieve in the cultural context of the translated language.

Translation is a purposeful act to achieve cross-cultural exchange of information, according to purposivism. According to Vermer, "translation means translating for a specific recipient in a specific context and for a specific purpose". The purpose theory asserts that translation is based on three principles: the principle of purpose, the principle of coherence and the principle of fidelity. The primary principle to be followed in translation activities is: the principle of purpose, i.e. the translation must meet the intended purpose.

#### **2.2.2 The Special Functions and Translation Requirements of Film and Television Drama Titles**

The titles of television dramas have their own specific functions and purposes: informational, cultural, aesthetic and commercial. The above functions are combined with the characteristics of overseas audiences, and in order to achieve these functions, the translation of the titles of domestic dramas is guided by specific principles.

(1) To fulfill an informative function: the title of a play is the label of a play and needs to give the audience a quick idea of the main plot, because, the translation should be concise and powerful, but not too general.

(2) To fulfill a cultural function: domestic dramas are designed to spread Chinese culture, to reflect the lives of Chinese people and to build a bridge of communication between people from different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the translation should preserve the local cultural characteristics while avoiding misinterpretation by overseas audiences caused by cultural differences.

(3) To achieve aesthetic function: film and television dramas are a form of popular art, and the translation of their titles needs to take into account the aesthetic sensibilities of overseas audiences and give them a beautiful experience. In contrast to the East's main ball of misty beauty, the West's focus on logic places new demands on the translation. Therefore, the translation should focus on the spirit of the play rather than the form.

(4) To achieve the commercial function: domestic dramas are exported overseas as a kind of commodity, in order to pursue economic benefits and attract overseas audiences, therefore, their titles should be translated into a form that English-speaking audiences are happy to accept, bearing in mind that they are raw and awkward to avoid causing psychological resistance.

### **2.2.3 Analyzing the English Translation Skills of the Titles of Chinese Dramas with Practical Examples**

The teleological principle is the highest principle of functional teleology. A successful translation of the title of a film or television drama has to fit the cultural environment and viewing habits of the target language audience, and ultimately succeed in the exchange of information. The following is an analysis of the titles of Chinese dramas from a teleological perspective, with a brief introduction to their English translation techniques.

#### **(1) Literal translation**

If a direct translation can achieve the effect that the Chinese title has on the local audience, then a direct translation is used. For example, ‘欢乐颂’ is translated as Ode to Joy, ‘亲爱的翻译官’ is translated as Dear Translator, ‘芈月传’ is translated as The Legend, and ‘伪装者’ is translated as The Disguiser.

#### **(2) Free translation**

If a literal translation does not have the same effect on the target language audience, the title can be adapted to the plot of the play to create a stronger reaction from the audience. For example, The Story Of Minglan is a translation of ‘知否知否应是绿肥红瘦’, because the Western audiences cannot understand the meaning of this poem. Another example: ‘香蜜沉 沉烬如霜’ is translated as Ashes of Love, which is in line with the original title and also expresses the love-hate relationship in a meaningful way, if we use the direct translation “The Honey Sank Like Frost “, Western audiences would not know what to make of it. In a similar vein, ‘东邪西毒’ translates as Ashes of Time.

#### **(3) Phonetic translation**

Phonetic translation is a method of converting the source language text into the phonetic form of the target language. That is, the Mandarin pronunciation of the title of a domestic drama is translated directly into English. For example: 曹操 is translated as Cao Cao, for example ‘周恩来’ is translated as Zhou Enlai.

#### **(4) Simplified translation**

A simplified translation is one that cuts out parts of the original text to make the translation more concise and clearer. For example, ‘七月与安生’ is a story about two girls named July and Anson respectively, translated as Soulmate, one word achieves the purpose of conveying the message and reveals the content of the film.

## **3. Summary**

The English translation of the title of a Chinese drama is definitely not a copy of the original text. The translator must deeply study the theme, emotion and cultural message of the drama to make the translation of the title harmonious with the plot. The translation of titles from a purposive translation perspective is intended to conform to the viewing habits of overseas audiences, thus achieving the spread of Chinese culture.

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