

Translation of Culture-loaded Words in *Su Wen*

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Abstract: A difficulty of cross-cultural translation lies in the language, which reflects and carries specific and unique cultural implications. Cultural-loaded words in *Su Wen* reflect the thinking mode and special TCM culture which is abstruse and hard for target readers to understand, thus the proper and correct translation could somewhat help target readers perceive TCM culture with ease and better appreciate the unique Chinese TCM culture. This essay is intended to illustrate the translation of two types of representative culture-loaded words in *Su Wen*.

1. Introduction

Hu Zhuanglin [1] gives four definitions to culture: 1. culture is a semiotic system; 2. culture is a communication system; 3. culture is a history of achievements and types of civilization produced; 4. culture is an epitome of values, beliefs, knowledge, behavioral patterns, ways of thinking, etc. members of a speech community share. It is a shared recognition that language and culture are closely integrated. Language helps mould our way of thinking and meanwhile culture has effect on language. In other words, language is the tool that humans use to express their thoughts and also an important part of culture. Due to the differences in culture, such as thinking mode, customs, and living environment etc., there are differences in language, among them the cultural-loaded words are the most typical language phenomena.

Cultural-loaded words refer to words and phrases that normally reflect the unique and peculiar cultural phenomena that find no equivalents in another culture. As to culture-loaded words in *Su Wen*, one of the four great TCM literature works in China, they reflect thinking mode and particular TCM culture different from western medicine. The following is the discussion on three types of culture-loaded words, name those on Zangxiang and diseases.

2. Culture-loaded words on Zangxiang

The normal view in TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine) mainly includes the theories of Zangxiang (visceral manifestation), meridians and body constitutions. The theory of visceral manifestation, though based on ancient anatomy, was established mainly by means of observaton according to the idea that “viscera inside the body must manifest themselves externally.” Zang (viscera) is a collective term for internal organs which, according to their physiological functions, can be calssified into three major categories: the five zang-organs, including the heart, liver, spleen, lungs and kidneys; the six fu-organs, including the gallbladder, stomach, small intestine, large intestine, bladder and triple energizer; and the extraordinary fu-organ, including the brain, marrow, bone, vessel, glallbladder and uterus. Xiang (manifestation) means the outer signs and images reflected by the physiological and pathological changes of the internal organs, so the main content of visceral manifestation is based on the viscera to interpret the shape and the structure, physiological functions, pathological changes of the internal organs, their relations with essence, qi, blood and mental activities, as well as the mutual relations among the organs or between the organs and body orifices.

In Chapter 8 of *Su Wen* [2], the five zang-organs and six fu-organs are compared to different

officials in the government in order to vividly illustrate their respective physiological functions. For example, “心者，君主之官” (the heart is the organ similar to a monarch), “肺者，相傳之官” (the lung is the organ similar to a prime minister), “肝者，將軍之官” (the liver is the organ similar to a general), “胆者，中正之官” (the gallbladder is the organ similar to an official of justice), “膻中者，臣使之官” (the pericardium is the organ similar to an envoy), “脾胃者，倉廩之官” (the spleen and stomach is the organ similar to a granary official), “大腸者，傳道之官” (the large intestine is the organ similar to an official in charge of change and transformation), “小腸者，受盛之官” (the small intestine is the organ similar to an official in charge of reception), “腎者，作強之官” (the kidney is the organ similar to an official with great power), “三焦者，決瀆之官” [the Sanjiao (triple energizer) is the organ similar to an official in charge of dredging], “膀胱者，州都之” (the bladder is the organ similar to an official in charge of reservoir).

In Chapter 9 [2], there are words on Zangxiang illustrating the outer reflection of five zang-organs on different parts of the external body. For example, “心者，其華在面” [the heart demonstrates its Hua (splendor) on the face], “肺者，其華在毛” [the lung demonstrates its Hua on the body hair], “腎者，其華在髮” (the kidney demonstrates its Hua on the hair), “肝者，其華在爪” (the liver demonstrates its Hua on the nails).

3. Culture-loaded words on diseases

In TCM, the naming of diseases is different from that in western medicine. Generally, there are various ways to give names to diseases in TCM. Some diseases are named by using “疾” [Ji (illness)], such as “痢疾” (dysentery) and “疟疾” (malaria); some are named by using “症” (disease) to name disease, such as “淋症” (stranguria) and “癔症” (hysteria); some by “病” (sickness), such as “狂病” (manic psychosis); some by the symptoms of the disease, such as “咳嗽” (coughing) and “心絞痛” (stenocardia). The number of names for diseases in TCM are more than those in western medicine. Some names of diseases refer to the same disease in both TCM and western medicine, such as “cold”, “cough” and “stomachache”, and they are easy to translate; some names of diseases in TCM find no equivalents in western medicine, and the translation of these diseases causes trouble for translators. There are generally several strategies. Transliteration would retain the sound features of diseases in Chinese, but it is actually meaningless for target readers; literal translation can retain the image information of diseases in the source language, which helps the cross-cultural communication; paraphrasing gives the utmost convenience to target readers, but it would unavoidably sacrifice the image value of source language; the combination of different translation strategies could achieve better delivering effect but it would slow down the reading process of target readers. For example, the following names of diseases in TCM find no counterparts in English, and the translation method employs both transliteration and literal translation.

“五不女” [Wubunv (five types of sterility)] refers to five kinds of congenital physical defects resulting in fertility of women. [4]

“关格” [Guange (dysuria and frequent vomiting)] refers to urinary stoppage and frequent vomiting caused by, based on TCM interpretation, asthenia of both kidneys and spleen and the dysfunction of qi movement, and it is the late presentation of diseases like edema, uroschisis and stranguria. [4]

“消渴” Xiaoke (wasting thirst), refers to the disease characterized by polyphagia, polyuria, body wasting, or sweet urine [4]

The following group of disease names are collected from *Su Wen*. The translator Li Zhaoguo from Shanghai Normal University translated them by using various methods.

(1) Transliteration plus equivalent terms in western medicine.

痃疟 Jienue (malaria)

肠澼 Changpi (dysentery)

洞泄 Dongxie (acute diarrhea)

风消 Fengxiao (emaciation)

痈肿 Yongzhong (carbuncle and swelling or dropsy)

偏枯 Pianku (hemiplegia)

(2) Paraphrasing

不月 no menstruation in women

阳痿 impotence

(3) Transliteration plus paraphrasing

痿厥 Weijue (dysfunction, weakness and coldness of the limbs)

痿厥 Weijue (weakness of the limbs)

息贲 Xiben (rapid and asthmatic breath)

索泽 Suoze (exhaustion of blood and dryness of skin)

心掣 Xince (dragging pain of the heart and chest)

萎易 Weiyi (weakness and flaccidity of sinews and muscles)

(4) transliteration plus literal translation

内格 Neige (internal conflict)

风疟 Fengnüe (Wind-Malaria Syndrome)

温病(warm disease or seasonal febrile disease)

死阴 Siyin (Dead-Yin)

生阳 Shengyang (Live-Yang)

(5) Combined methods with annotation

煎厥 Jianjue marked by blurred vision and loss of hearing.

Note: Jianjue means syncope caused by hyperactive Yang that acorches Yin fluid.

薄厥 Bojue

Note: Bojue means syncope caused by disorder of Qi and blood due to rage.

二阳之病 Disease of double Yang (the stomach)

Note: "Double Yang" (阳) refers to Yangming Jing (阳明经, Yang-ming Channels), including the Large Intestine Channel of Hand-Yangming and the Stomach Channel of Foot-Yangming. But here it mainly refers to the stomach.

石水 Shishui (edema marked by sinking pulse, abdominal fullness and no asthma)

心痹 Xinbi (Heart-Bi Syndrome)

Note: Xinbi (心痹): Bi (痹) in this paragraph simply means stagnation or obstruction. For example, Xinbi (心痹) means the obstruction or stagnation of the heart; Ganbi (肝痹) means the obstruction or stagnation of the liver.

4. Conclusion

Correct and proper translation of culture-loaded words in *Su Wen* is of vital importance for target readers to understand this oriental medical masterpiece. While it is, in most cases, difficult to maintain both the image information and connotations of unique culture-loaded words in *Su Wen*, it is advisable to employ flexible and comprehensive translation strategies based on the right understanding of original text and the proper awareness of cultural differences.

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