RESEARCH ARTICLE

ON GILES' APPROACHES TO ALLUSION TRANSLATION IN STRANGE STORIES FROM A CHINESE STUDIO
---FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF RELEVANCE THEORY

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ABSTRACT

This paper is aimed at making a tentative research about Herbert Allen Giles' allusion translation of *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*, which is a collection of short stories written by a famous Chinese writer called Pu Songling. We classify Giles' approaches to allusion translation into several categories and analyze them in detail using the Relevance Theory. After the analysis we can safely draw the conclusion that Giles' translation is of high academic value on the whole because of his in-depth insight into ancient Chinese history and culture. Nevertheless, his work has abandoned the essential principle of faithfulness and we can hardly revivify the original text by merely reading the translated version, so it offers much room for improvement.

Keywords: Giles; allusion; Relevance Theory

1.   Introduction of Relevance Theory and Its Interpretation of Translation

Relevance Theory belongs to the category of cognitive pragmatics. In 1986, Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson put forward the Relevance Theory in their book *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, in which they proposed the Ostensive-Inferential Communication Model. They argue that all Gricean maxims, including the CP itself, should be reduced to a single principle of relevance, which is defined as: Every act of ostensive communication communicates the presumption of its own optimal relevance. (Sperber & Wilson, 1986/2003) They agree with Grice that communication is not simply a matter of encoding and decoding. It also involves inference, which, in their mind, only has to do with the hearer. In terms of the communicator or speaker, communication should be seen as an act of making manifest to an audience one's intention to make manifest a basic layer of information, this "basic layer of information" being the communicator's informative intention. (Sperber & Wilson, 1986/2003)

Based on the Relevance Theory, Wilson's student, Ernst-August Gutt (1991) proposed the Relevance-Theoretical Approach in his book *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context.* Translation, as one means of verbal communication, is a double process of ostentation and inference and it follows the general principle for communication---the Relevance Theory. The translator thus should "determine in what respects the

translation should resemble the original---only in those respects that can be expected to make it adequately relevant to the receptor language audience. They determine also that the translation should be clear and natural in expression in the sense that it should not be unnecessarily difficult to understand."(Gutt, 1991:107)

2.   Introduction of *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* by Pu Songling

The classic work *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* has long been held to be one of the greatest short story collections of the world and its author Pu Songling has naturally been regarded as a great short story writer. It is a collection of 431 weird stories in classical Chinese and was first circulated in manuscripts before it was published posthumously. The stories he wrote cover a wide range of subjects, such as foxes and fish spirits, ghosts and monsters that are personified. Generally speaking, the stories feature fox spirits, flower spirits, fairies and ghosts. Just like human beings, they have feelings of good and evil, beauty and ugliness, love and hatred as well as happiness and discontent. For instance, one spirit may change into a beautiful woman and marries the poor young scholar to repay his former favor; a greedy Taoist does evil things to get what he wants; even the Bodhisattva turns into an ordinary mother to help the kind-hearted young man, etc. These mystical stories reflect the social life of the time in which they were written.

3.   Allusions and Their Translation Strategies

As for the definition of allusion, different dictionaries have given different versions. In this paper, we assume that allusion is equal to the Chinese words "典故", which can also be supported by the examples given below. Let's see some typical definitions. In *Oxford Advanced Learner's English---Chinese Dictionary*, allusion means "indirect reference 间接提及；暗指；典故". *A Chinese-English Dictionary* chief-edited by Wei Dongya interprets "典故" as "allusion; literary quotation"; *A New Modern Chinese-English Dictionary* by Xie Zhenqing gives the definition of "quotation from classics, allusion"; *A New Practical Chinese-English Dictionary* by Liang Shiqiu defines it as "allusion (from history, old classics, etc.)" From the above, we can find the word "allusion" is almost equivalent to "典故" but there are also some subtle differences. When we mention allusions, we lay more emphasis on "indirectness and implicitness" whereas the Chinese words "典故" pay more attention to "historical facts and provenance". Of course, there is one significant similarity, that is, both of them can donate the historical facts or words quoted in literary works.

From the definitions of allusion, we can see one of the features of allusion is its indirectness. It means that what is really under description is not mentioned directly, but is made known by the substitution of other persons or things that have appeared earlier in written or oral form, and are more well-known than the actually mentioned object or person. The second feature of allusion is marked by its cultural restraints, which is mainly due to the uniqueness of its source.

In dealing with allusion translation, as is the case with translation of all other cultural elements, we should take into account both the surface meaning and in-depth meaning and try to strike the best balance between them. What we should do first is to dedicate our heart into the source language and obtain a thorough understanding. This is the step of inference (as the hearer).Without understanding there would be little appreciation. Only when we have truly understood the source language ---not only the language but also the cultural elements it tries to convey ---can we make a sound judgment about the author's intentions. If the form and the meaning can both be retained to a great extent, that's perfect. If not, it is our choice to make. Generally speaking, there are five approaches when dealing with Chinese allusion translation: literal translation, literal translation plus footnotes, liberal translation plus footnotes, liberal translation by substituting images, and finally liberal translation by omitting images. The following are specific examples of different allusion translation approaches, each with one or more examples taken from *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*.

4. Allusion Translation in *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* from the Perspective of Relevance Theory

Generally speaking, the allusions contained in *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* can be divided into 5 types, namely allusions of literary works, of ancient myths, of historical events, of folk legends and

customs, and of religions and superstition. Now we will comment on the concrete translation strategies of allusions in *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* from the perspective of Relevance Theory.

4.1 Literal Translation

We adopt this approach when the cultural connotations of allusions in the two languages are the same or almost the same, and those allusions have similar expressions; or there exist no such set expression in the target language but there do exist similar cultural concepts, which means there would be no misunderstanding caused by literal translation.

遂飘忽自壁而下，<u>灰心木立</u>,目瞪足爽（《画壁》）

…immediately Mr. Chu descended from the wall, <u>standing transfixed like a block of wood</u>, with startled eye-balls and trembling legs. （*"The Painted Wall"*）

This allusion is a flexible use of the original literary work. "灰心" means one's heart is dead like that of ashes, while "木立" describes the posture of standing, like that of an inanimate wood. The article *"Qi Wu Lun"* (《庄子·齐物论》) says, "形固可使如槁木，而心固可使如死灰乎！" We can see that the translator adopts the approach of literal translation by keeping the image of "木立" while abandoning that of "灰心". This is well dealt with, for the Chinese language favors tautology while the English language abstains from it and holds "brevity is the soul of the wit". (Yu Lisan, 1985:114) "木立" and *"standing transfixed like a block of wood"* have similar connotations in the two cultures and the translation is so clear and natural that the TL readers can have adequate contextual effects without gratuitous processing effort.

4.2 Literal Translation plus Footnotes

Because of linguistic and cultural untranslatability, sometimes adding footnotes is unavoidable. Adding footnotes (in the case of literal translation) can keep the integrity of the original form. However, readers have to stop to refer to the footnotes while reading, which interrupts the continuity of reading and increase the readers' reading load and processing efforts. Those translators who regard fluency of the target language as a top priority will perhaps try to avoid the use of footnotes, just as Hawkes, the great translator of *The Story of the Stone* (one of China's four classical novels) once said, "Adding footnotes is like playing tennis with foot chains." Evidently, the fluency of TL text is closely connected to the acceptability with intended readers. Still, it is our choice to make to strike the best balance between form and meaning, readability and faithfulness.

"请君以<u>张飞</u>见宰相,宰相必乐用之,厚禄不难至"（《罗刹海市》）

…at which his host was so delighted that he begged him to appear before the Prime Minister in the character of <u>Chang Fei.</u>

Footnote: [Chang Fei was] a famous General who played a leading part in the wars of the Three Kingdoms; a cross-reference is provided about the historical fact of the celebrated oath of confederation sworn in the Peach Garden between Kuan Yu, Chang Fei, Liu Pei and Chu-ko Liang. ("The Lo-cha Sea Market")

When the images are too important to be eliminated and also a few simple words cannot fully demonstrate the profound meaning of the allusion, which especially is the case with allusions containing historical events or figures or anecdotes, we resort to this approach. It is especially welcome to those lovers and researchers of literary works who can't read the original text. By adding footnote, we can introduce the background knowledge explicitly and at length, fully convey the author's intentions and disseminate the source language culture to the full. The drawback of this approach is that it may interrupt the smoothness of the TL text, for the readers have to switch their attention to the footnotes for thorough understanding.

Here transliteration (in a wider sense, considered to belong to the category of literal translation) plus footnote is used. "张飞" is a very well-known general during the period of Three Kingdoms in Chinese history. He was known for his braveness and dark-complexion. Giles transliterated the name and added a footnote in his translation to provide concise background information. If Giles had omitted the footnotes, the readers would have been at a loss about Chang Fei's connotations for lack of relevant knowledge. By adding additional

information, the translation interpretively resembles the original and the TL readers can obtain adequate contextual effects with necessary processing efforts.

面壁吟曰："曾经沧海难为水，除却巫山不是云。"（《娇娜》）

Then turning his face to the wall, he repeated these lines: Speak not of lakes and streams to him who once has seen the sea; the clouds that circle Wu' s peak are the only clouds for me.

Footnote: By a famous poet, named Yuan Chen, A.D. 779-831. （"Miss Chiao-No"）

This is a typical example for literal translation plus footnote. This is an excerpt from the poem of Yuan Chen in the Tang Dynasty. The poem is meant to mourn his dead wife. By comparing his own wife to the water in the sea and the clouds that circle Wu's peak, Yuan Chen thought he could not find such true love in his life again just as the water and clouds elsewhere could not match that in "沧海" and "巫山". The poem is so popular among Chinese that the translator deems it necessary to render it literally and then gives a footnote below to introduce its background, which makes the readers know more about Chinese culture. By making the necessary processing efforts, the TL readers can have similar literature experience and contextual effects, which is worthwhile to a true lover of literary works.

4.3 Liberal Translation plus Footnotes

Not all the allusions can be understood if translated in a literal way. In such cases, translators can hardly expect English readers to respond with ease and comfort to a word-for-word translation of the Chinese terms. (Li Yunxing，2000：194) In this case the translator can directly render the hidden meaning of the allusion to the TL reader. When this still proves to be inadequate, the readers may resort to footnotes for more information.

公子命弹湘妃。（《娇娜》）

The young man bade her to play the Death of Shun;…

Footnote: One of the two celebrated but legendary rulers of China in the golden ages of antiquity. Yao---who abdicated in 2357 B.C.---nominated as his successor a young and virtuous husbandman named Shun, giving him both his daughters in marriage. At the death of Shun, these ladies are said to have wept so much that their tears literally drenched the bamboos which grew beside their husband's grave; and the speckled bamboo is now commonly known as the bamboo of Shun's wives. ("Miss Chiao-No"）

In my view, the rendering of "湘妃" into the Death of Shun is somewhat farfetched. Still, the footnote doesn't provide enough information on the relationship between "湘妃" and the Death of Shun. Here is additional information: when Shun dies in Cangwu (苍梧, a place name), his two wives are so heartbroken that they throw themselves to Xiang River (湘江), thus becoming the goddesses of Xiang River ("湘妃"). In this case, the translator didn't provide enough ostensive information for the readers to infer. Because of cognitive differences, the readers could not find the optimal relevance between the TL text and their cognitive context, and thus couldn't understand the author's real intentions.

4.4 Liberal Translation by Substituting Images

When choosing the specific equivalent of a SL term, we tend to choose a cultural word or phrase in the target language, for it will provoke better resonance among the TL readers. Just as Newmark says, "For impact and for neatness, but not for accuracy, a TL cultural equivalent of a SL cultural term is always more effective than a culturally free functional equivalent." (Newmark, 2001) This approach applies to the situation when there exist similar cultural concepts but different expression forms or images. When translated, the images of allusions must be substituted in order to cater for the TL readers, for it can yield better resonance among them.

"羁旅之人，谁作曹丘者？"（《娇娜》）

"Who will play the Macenas to a distressed wayfarer like myself ?"（"Miss Chiao-No"）

"曹丘" is the name for a person in early Han Dynasty (the full name is "曹丘生"). There is a story about him in *Records of the Historian* (《史记》) that Cao Qiusheng appreciates Ji Bu (季布) and tries to make promulgation for him and thus makes Ji Bu famous. From then on, people refer to "曹丘"or "曹丘生" to mean the recommender. In this case, the translator adopts the domestication method of liberal translation by

substituting the image, with "曹丘" changed into "Macenas", which is familiar to westerners for always being ready to help others, and therefore makes his version easier to understand for TL readers. With the help of the translator, the TL readers find an interpretation of the author's meaning that satisfies the presumption of optimal relevance. In this way, the translation is relevant to the readers (audience) when it connects with available contextual assumptions to yield positive cognitive effects.

However, there is one disadvantage. That is, it deprives the TL readers of the right to knowing more about Chinese culture and also there can be misunderstandings about the author's real intentions.

4.5 Liberal Translation by Omitting Images

As for some allusions, because of quite different historical and cultural heritage, these allusions are always peculiar to the political, economic and social phenomena of a certain community. When translated, images can be omitted, for the translation of images would become superfluous which makes no sense at all. The advantage for this approach is to insure the intelligibility and smoothness of the TL text.

"…所遗*手泽*，宜恪守，…"（《长清僧》）

"…Carefully preserve whatever <u>relics of him</u> you may have,…"（"The Buddhist Priest of Ch'ang-ch'ing"）

"手泽" originally means the trace of sweat produced by the hand. *Li Ji-Yu Zao* (《礼记·玉藻》) says, "父没而不能读父之书，手泽存焉尔。" Later on, the phrase is used to refer to the relics or calligraphy left over by one's forefather. Because of linguistic and cultural differences and the corresponding differences in the cognitive contexts between the western and eastern readers, the allusions may sound erratic and unintelligible if translated literally, thus liberal translation by abandoning the image is used here.

"河南缺一*城隍*"（《考城隍》）

"A <u>Guardian Angel</u> is wanted in Honan." （"Examination for the Post of Guardian Angel"）

"城隍" actually means the god who guards the city wall and moat, "城" refers to the wall while "隍" to the moat or water. After the Dynasty of Three Kingdoms, some places began to offer a sacrifice for "城隍" and it became quite popular after the Tang Dynasty. Giles resorts to domestication and use the simple liberal translation of "Guardian Angel", which is easy to understand.

From the translation of allusions in *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*, we find the most commonly used method of allusion translation is liberal translation, to be exact, liberal translation by omitting images. We can also say Giles mainly uses the method of domestication and that his translation is mainly target-language-readers-oriented. It seems the translator tries to cater for the TL readers, putting processing efforts, readability and intelligibility as the top priority. Whenever there is a chance to substitute the original information with western elements, he would choose to do so. There is much more cultural information that could have been conveyed if translated otherwise.

But this doesn't mean the literal translation is always the answer. Just as Newmark (2001: 111) points out when talking about metaphors, "when an eponymous metaphor becomes too recherché, or the image is classical and likely to be unfamiliar to a younger educated generation, the metaphor may be reduced to sense but this depends on the importance of the image in the SL and correspondingly the TL context."

5. Summary

It is undeniable that Giles had an in-depth insight for ancient Chinese history, culture and literature. His translations are of high academic value. When he was dealing with the classic work which is full of cultural elements such as allusions and has a strong national flavor peculiar to Chinese, he did try hard to infer the author's real intentions and to convey them to the target audience in a way he thought suitable. Luckily for him, he was a sinologist who knew so much about Chinese culture and language.

On the whole, we can say Giles' translation is outstanding. Yet from the above analysis of his allusion translation from the perspective of Relevance Theory, we find that *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* has abandoned the essential principle of faithfulness, which is demonstrated from many examples. We can hardly revivify the original text by merely reading the translated version. It's a pity that lots of Chinese elements in the original were replaced by western elements or omitted, in which case the TL readers could not achieve the

same or similar contextual effects as the SL readers. Anyhow, Herbert Allen Giles did contribute a lot in disseminating Chinese culture and literature and for that we should always respect him.

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