

The English translation research of the culture-loaded words "形" and "神" from the perspective of eco-translatology in *Huangdi Neijing*

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Abstract: *Huangdi Neijing* is the earliest existing medical classic in our country. This article mainly takes Li Zhaoguo's English translation of *Huangdi Neijing* and the English translation version completed by Paul Ulrich Unschuld and Hermann Tessenow as a blueprint to analyze the translation of culture-loaded words in the English translation of *Huangdi Neijing* from the perspective of eco-translatology. Studying the translation of culture-loaded words in *Huangdi Neijing* can promote the overseas dissemination of traditional Chinese medicine classics and build cultural confidence.

Key words: *Huangdi Neijing*; eco-translatology; culture-loaded words

1 Introduction

Eco-translatology proposed by Professor Hu Gengshen is a translation theory that takes ecology as a starting point to comprehensively study translation. Its core principle is three-dimensional transformation, conducting translation practices from the three different dimensions of language, culture, and communication, embodying an ecological paradigm and research field of translation as adaptation and selection [1]. Translators adapt to different ecological environments and selectively reconstruct the translated text to provide an overview of the text that aligns with ecological principles in the ongoing process of adaptation and selection.

2 The current translation situation of *Huangdi Neijing*

There are different versions of translation, coupled with the fact that there are many different expressions in *Huangdi Neijing*, which increases the difficulty of translation. These concepts basically don't have exact equivalents in the English language. It is impossible to fully express the original meanings clearly. If some scholars translate "形" as body, "神" as spirit, this kind of translation actually only expresses part of the connotation of the Chinese concept.

3 The analysis of the culture-loaded words "形" and "神"

3.1 The translation of "形"

In *Huangdi Neijing*, there is a phenomenon of polysemy. Based on its semantic characteristics, they can be divided into two categories: the unity of heaven, earth, and human, and the changes in material movement.

3.11 The "形" of the unity of heaven, earth, and human

Huangdi Neijing records a significant amount of theory for us to understand the correlation between human

physiological activities and disease development.

Example 1: 至其月郭空，则海水东盛，人气血虚，其卫气去，形独居。

Li's version: When the moon wanes, the sea in the east will rise greatly. [And accordingly in the human body] Qi and blood will be deficient, the Wei qi (Defensive-Qi) will decline, the body may appear physically unchanged [2].

Unschuld's version: By the time of new moon, the water in the sea in the East is plentiful. Man's qi and blood are depleted. The guard qi have left. The physical appearance resides alone.[3]

Li's version is literally translated as "body". It accurately and concisely explains the meaning, succinctly conveying the essence of traditional Chinese medicine. Unschuld's version is "physical appearance", although expanding the connotation of "形", it is not concise enough. The meaning is too narrow, leading to a lack of correspondence in the target language and a deviation in understanding, seemingly unable to convey the connotation of "形独居" as a part within the whole. Therefore, the author recommends Li's translation.

3.1.2 The "形" of the changes in material movement

In *Huangdi Neijing*, "形" has a material nature manifested in the transformation of the essence of heaven and earth into human beings.

Example 2: 君王众庶，尽欲全形，形之疾病，莫知其情，留淫日深，著于骨髓。

Li's version: No matter kings or ordinary people, desire to preserve physical health. [However, they have frequently contracted] diseases without awareness. [As a result,] the pathogenic factors have retained [in their body] and [gradually] deepened into [their] bone marrow [4].

Unschuld's version: Rulers and common people, they all wish to preserve [their] physical appearance. [As far as] the diseases of the physical appearance [are concerned, though,] no one knows their nature. Excessive [qi]] staying [in the body] move deeper day by day. They attach themselves to the bones and the marrow [3].

Li translates "形" as physical health, applying a transliteration method, which extracts the concept of physical health from Western medicine, using terms with similar or identical meanings to express the health of the body here. Unschuld's version renders "形" as physical appearance without adhering to the principle of specific analysis, resulting in a relatively generalized translation. Therefore, the author combines the Chinese medical terminology translation given by WFCMS and integrates content aimed at transforming cross-cultural information, which can also be translated as physique.

3.2 The translation of "神"

The expression of "神" in *Huangdi Neijing* is quite abundant: the duality and materiality of "神".

3.2.1 The duality of "神"

The Ming Dynasty medical doctor Zhang Jingyue's "体用" theory is the powerful support to show the representation of duality [5].

Example 3: 故物生谓之化，物极谓之变，阴阳不测谓之神，神用无方谓之圣。

Li's version: The beginning of things is called Hua (transbodyation), the extreme [development of] things is called Bian (change), undetectable [changes of] Yin and Yang is called Shen (subtle changes) and [those who can master and control such a] Shen (subtle changes) is called Sheng (sage) [4].

Unschuld's version: When a being comes to life, this is called transformation. When a being reaches the extreme point [in its development], this is called [the point of] change. That which cannot be fathomed in [the alternation of] yin and yang, it is called spirit. Where the operation of the spirit follows no prescribed method, this is called sagehood.

Li adopted the transliteration method to translate it as Shen, which combined the specific context and analyzed the similarities and differences of terms in different language environments. Unschuld's handling of the literary translation is relatively rough, directly translating it into spirit. It requires deep consideration of the underlying traditional Chinese medicine culture. Therefore, in the translation of the duality, to demonstrate the concept of communicative dimension, it is necessary to explore the connotations, recommending the use of a direct translation with annotation method to translate it as Shen.

3.2.2 The materiality of "神"

The "神" in the West is generally a spiritual sustenance and a concept of faith, which differs from the concept of "神" in Eastern culture.

Example 4: 以母为基, 以父为楯, 失神者死, 得神者生也。

Li's version: The base [of life] is [the Yin-blood of] the mother; the defense [of life] is [the Yang-essence of] the father. Loss of the Shen (Spirit) [which is produced by mixture of the mother's Yin-blood and the father's Yang-essence] will lead to death and preservation of the Shen (Spirit) [inside the body] will guarantee life.

Unschuld's version: The [qi of one's] mother constitute the basis. Those of the father serve as shield. Loss of the spirit results in death. Those who keep the spirit, they survive.

The Li Zhaoguo's translation renders it as "Shen", clearly noting that the divine in traditional Chinese medicine is not equivalent to the Western "god". The former "神" annotated as spirit is the essence that distinguishes living from non-living entities. The latter "神" is the sum of all life activities indicating a higher level of consciousness stored within the heart and expressed outwardly. However, Unschuld translates "神" as spirit, which can't express the health meaning contained in "神". Here, the author recommends the translation of Shen to realize the in-depth interpretation of the cultural dimension.

4 Conclusion

The translation of traditional Chinese medicine classics is directly related to the international dissemination of traditional Chinese medicine [6]. In order to avoid distortion and filtering of traditional Chinese medicine culture, translators should apply the theory of ecological translation in specific contexts and construct a professionally standardized communication model, which is crucial for promoting the spiritual identity of traditional Chinese medicine culture.

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Conflicts of interest

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

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