

# On the Translation Strategies of Culture-loaded Words Based on Thick Translation: A Case Analysis of The Grand Scribes Records (Selected Chapters)

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**Abstract:** Culture-loaded words (hereinafter referred to briefly as CLWs), as their names imply, are expressions that mostly present the uniqueness of culture. The translation of CLWs has always been one of the core issues in translation, and the dilemma of translation adequacy and readers' acceptability has also bothered translators for centuries. Thick Translation Theory, stressing that translation is not so much a literal work than a process of cultural transmission, attaches great importance to cultural differences. Under such theory, this study takes CLWs in Nienhauser's translation of *Shih Chi: Po-Chi* as a study object, attempting to find out how thick translation can be realized concerning translating CLWs. Generally speaking, literal translation, sense-for-sense translation, a combination of different strategies, translation with the footnote, and transliteration are widely adopted in Nienhauser's translation. When it comes to specific kinds of CLWs, even a certain kind of translation strategy is likely to be realized by many different methods. This variation can be explained by three elements: the translator's subjectivity, the degree of cultural difference, and the degree of contextual default. The translator's subjectivity is the dominant factor for it determines translation purpose, while the other two factors affect the "thickness" of an individual word's translation.

**Key words:** thick translation, culture-loaded words, *Shi Ji*, translation strategies

## 1. Introduction

Culture-loaded words are words, phrases, and idioms that signify things specific to a culture, reflecting the unique ways of doing things that a certain group of people has gradually accumulated over the course of history and that set them apart from other people (Liao, 2000). *Shih Chi*, as one of the most monumental historic records, reveals almost every facet of ancient society, and thus contains nearly every kinds of words manifesting Chinese history and culture, i.e. culture-loaded words. Amidst all the translation of *Shih Chi*, *The Grand Scribes Records* places most attention on the academic value and the transmission of source-language cultural information (Li, 2015). Being loyal to the original text earns Nienhauser's translation a great deal of credits, and thus widely recognized as an ideal object for studying Chinese history. Therefore, this study will take Nienhauser's translation as an example to examine how thick translation can be realized.

According to Thick Translation, the interpretation of culture rather than the transformation of literal meaning becomes the foremost question in the translation, which makes Thick Translation a valuable perspective to study translation. Even though many scholars have taken initiative and adopted this theory to study the translation of Chinese classics in recent years, few researchers have studied the translation of *Shih Chi* from this account. In addition, despite much theoretical work on Thick Translation, there is no determined guidance when it comes to the practice of translation, notably the translation of historical records like *Shih Chi*. Therefore, this study will take culture-loaded words—hereinafter referred to briefly as CLWs—in Nienhauser's *The Grand Scribes Records: Basic Annals of Pre-Han China* as an example to examine how Nienhauser and his team realize thick translation. Owing to the limitation of time and space, not terms in all chapters in Nienhauser's translation are examined, instead of which CLWs in *The Five Emperors*, *Basic Annals One*, *The Chou*, *Basic Annals Four*, *The Ch'in*, *Basic Annals Five*, and *Hsiang Yü*, *Basic Annals Seven* these four symbolic chapters are selected as the research sample.

## 2. Previous Studies on Thick Translation

In 1993, Kwame Anthony Appiah borrowed the term “thick description” from an Anthropologist called Geertz and proposed a mode of “academic translation”, a translation that contains numerous notes, commentaries, or prefaces where a rich “cultural and linguistic” context is embedded (Appiah, 1993: 817). Inspired by Appiah, Theo Hermans (2003) made further discussions on this matter in his work: Thick Translation is a “line worth pursuing” when it comes to the translation across culture and language. Despite all the theoretical strides of Thick Translation, neither Appiah nor Hermans gave any specific guidance on how thick translation should be realized or to what degree a translation can be dismissed as thick translation. Martha P.Y. Cheung illustrated that thick translation should “identify itself as a problematics of cultural representation” (Cheung, 2007: 32).

Researches on Thick Translation have shown a rapid upward trend in China over the years. When Thick Translation was newly introduced into China, scholars mainly focused on the evaluation of this translation theory and many of them also appreciated its significance (Duan, 2006; Sun, 2010; Xia, 2008; Song, 2014). Amongst all these researches, Wang (2020) had systematically summarized three values brought by the thick translation—highlight on translators’ subjectivity, providing cultural representation and readers options, giving many credits to this translation theory. However, they didn’t explain how translators—as they said—“accept or refuse the cultural information” and when in translation practice. Thus, this study will go into detail to see what exactly influences the translators’ decision in translation based on a highly praised translation version of *Shih Chi*. This question somehow resonances with another unsettled problem: when numerous extratextual notes should be added into translation as Appiah suggests? Many scholars have discussed the influence of translators’ subjectivity and how the translators “filter” cultural information, via doing comparative studies between different translations or in-depth observation on single translation (Zhong, 2017; Zhao, 2010). Zhou and Qiang (2016), for example, successfully divided the “thickness” of translation into six levels and discussed the relationship between the subjectivity of translators and Thick Translation in detail. Despite all of their contributions, influencing factors other than translators’ subjectivity appear to be less discussed, so this study will continue to explore this question based on *The Grand Scribes Records*.

Chinese scholars also put forward different views on the practice of Thick Translation. Based on the theory of annotation and subtext, Wang and Yang (2012), taking the *Anthology of English Translation of Chinese Translated Discourse* as an example, classified explanatory notes on the basis of their functions into six major types. Their findings provide a valuable window on how translators make translation thick in the explanatory notes, so this study also borrows this classification when analyzing the notes in Nienhauser’s translation. In addition, in a comparative study of three Chinese versions of *On Rumours*, Cao exposed the drawbacks brought by numerous annotations included in the translation and appealed for adopting implicit Thick Translation strategy, which refers to adding explanatory words in the translation text without changing its original meaning (Cao, 2013: 3). Following his work, Wan and Hu (2020) proposed that translation strategy can be divided into Explicit translation and Implicit translation these two types of translation.

For all the progress made in the previous studies, the translation strategies identified appears to be not enough to cover all kinds of CLWs in historical records like *Shih Chi*, while the application scope of some similar translation strategies also show a clear distinction. Take the intext-bracketing mentioned in Wan and Hu’s article as an example, Pietro adopted this kind of translation method when approaching the names of the famous historical figure, while Nienhauer used a similar method to deal with the words without equivalent expression in English. *Shih Chi*, other than classic novels such as *A Dream of Red Mansions* or *A Floating Life*, covers more ancient political events, warfare in particular, and thus could be harder for scholars to understand. Therefore, focusing on CLWs, this study attempts to find out the translation strategies used in Nienhauser’s English translation, hopefully making some contributions to the application of Thick Translation.

### 3. Translation Strategies of CLWs based on Thick Translation

To analyze translation strategies more carefully, this paper adopts Chen Xiaodan’s classification of CLWs and is ambitious to find out the translation strategies applied in the translation of each kind. Chen (2010) furthered Deng Yanchang’s (1989) classification, sorting them into two categories: absolute sense-vacant CLWs and semi sense-vacant CLWs. Semi-sense-vacant CLWs refer to the expressions that have partially equivalent concepts in the culture of another language. It is the nonequivalent part that causes the vacuum of sense. In general, these kinds of words can be further divided into three categories: CLWs with multiple meanings, CLWs with cultural connotations, and pragmatic-sense nonequivalent CLWs. Within CLWs with multiple meanings, the content specified may have only one expression in the source language, while several expressions are representing a similar content in the target language. For example, the word “cousin” is used to describe all children of aunts or uncles, while Chinese usually use “表弟 *biǎo dì*” “堂妹 *táng mèi*” to distinguish the sex and blood relationship. In addition, CLWs with cultural connotation refers to terms which contain different implicit meanings in the sphere of different cultural background. For instance, the term “龙 *lóng*” symbolizes majesty and omens in Chinese culture, while it could be regarded as the representation of evilness in English culture. Furthermore, some expressions have their pragmatic meaning in one certain language, but few corresponding expression in another language function the same way. For instance, while terms like “贵 *guì*” “您 *nín*” can be used to call the opposite side in conversation politely, only the term “you” shares the same meaning. Such kind of CLWs is defined as pragmatic-sense nonequivalent CLWs.

In *The Grand Scribes Records*, there have generally identified five kinds of translation strategies: transliteration, literal

translation, sense-for-sense translation, translation with footnote and a combination of different strategies. When it comes to a certain kind of translation strategy, it may involve more precise translation methods in practice. What's more, some of those translation methods have been applied to all kinds of CLWs, while the others tend to have certain application scope.

### 3.1 Transliteration

Transliteration generally refers to transmission from the source language to the target language with a similar pronunciation. According to Nienhauser (1994), a simplified version of Wade-Giles' Romanization is adopted in *The Grand Scribes Records*. This translation strategy is found to be used to approach absolute sense-vacant CLWs only. However, the cultural information can hardly be transferred to the target language context using this kind of translation strategy. For this reason, transliteration is normally supplemented with other extratextual notes such as footnotes or supplementary materials. By providing cultural information in the paratext, the readers are able to have a systematic understanding of the CLWs. However, on the negative side, this translation strategy brings more obstacles in reading.

#### Example 1

SL (Source Language): 项籍者，下相人也，字羽。（《史记笺证：贰，本纪·项羽本纪》，第 559 页）

SL in pinyin: xiàng jí zhě, xià xiàng rén yě, zì yǔ.

TL (Target Language): Hsiang Chi 项籍 was a native of Hsia-hsiang 下相<sup>3</sup> (by Nienhauser, *Hsiang Yü, Basic Annals seven: 179*).

Footnote: <sup>3</sup> Located just west of modern Su-ch'ien 宿遷 in Kiangsu (T'an Ch'i-hsiang, 2:8). It was also only a few miles east of the confluence of the Ssui (四) and Sui (唯) rivers. As will be seen below, much of the early activity in this chapter takes place along the Ssu River north and west of Hsiang Yu's hometown. For one account of the origin of the name Hsia Hsiang see "So-yin", but this place is over 50 miles north west of these events and is therefore probably in error (by Nienhauser, *Hsiang Yü: Basic Annals seven: 179*).

As Example 1 indicates, the translator transliterates the terms “下相 xià xiàng” based on the Wade-Giles romanization with its original Chinese characters attached. May the quotations of original text slow down the reading speed of target readers in comparison to traditional translation, yet it is a direct reflection of Chinese culture, bringing the readers a visual impression (Li, 2015). Here, the translators exquisitely interpret the meaning of the term “下相 xià xiàng”: first of all, the translator indicates the modern location of Hsia-hsiang; then by relating this place to other frequently mentioned places, the translator actually explains a warfare situation happened in the historical event to the readers so that they are able to create a more comprehensive picture in their minds when learning those events in the translated text. At last, the translator also introduces a different account of interpretation as reference and make critical comments on this interpretation.

### 3.2 Literal Translation

Literal translation can not only reflect the aesthetic value of the author to a large extent but can also convey the information that sense-for-sense translation may not be possible to achieve (Chen, 1998). Here, literal translation, including several translation methods, should be understood as a translation strategy from a broad sense. Generally, literal translation as a strategy of translation refers to translation containing some “tracks” of the original text, which places great attention to the equivalence in form between the source language and target language (Huang, 2009).

#### 3.2.1 Literal Translation: Literal Correspondence

Literal translation is an effective way to represent the source-language culture as much as possible, so this translation method has been widely adopted to approach all kinds of CLWs. When using this translation method, the translator translates the original text based on its literal meaning. Chinese word, as one kind of ideograph, carries meaning in every single character, for which the advantages of literal correspondence could be maximized. Still, literal correspondence without footnotes there might be some missing cultural default becoming invisible to the readers, while the readers find these terms easy to the reader and easy to understand. Here, a case will be analyzed to explain how this translation strategy works practically.

#### Example 2

SL: 项王按剑而跽曰：“客何为者？”（《史记笺证：贰，本纪·项羽本纪》，第 587 页）

SL in pinyin: xiàng wáng àn jiàn ér jì yuē: “kè hé wéi zhě?”

TL: King Hsiang rested his hand on his sword, raised himself to his knees, and said: "Who is this guest (by Nienhauser, *Hsiang Yü, Basic Annals seven: 192*)?"

In Example 2, one's understanding of the culture-loaded term “跽 jì” is built based on the knowledge that ancient Chinese sat on their calves in the daily life. When they removed their hips from their calves and kept their upper bodies straight, this act was called “跽 jì”. In this context, this act suggested that King Hsiang was alerted when he saw Fan Kuai was trying to break in (Han, 2004). However, the emphasis of this sentence should fall on the act “按剑 àn jiàn”, i.e. “rested his hand on his sword” in English translation, which shows that King Hsiang was ready to defend himself anytime. The act “跽 jì” just makes his act more complete to the readers and highlights this attitude. As a result, the translator's simply translating it to “raised himself to his knees” doesn't cause much trouble for the readers to understand this situation. Likewise, words such as “社稷 shè jì” “司马门 sī mǎ mén” “白璧 bái bì” “玉斗 yù dòu” “黄屋车 huáng wū chē” “衰经 shuāi jīng” “素服 sù fú” adopted the same

translation strategy. Despite all the advantages of this, it also makes the readers less possible to understand CLWs thoroughly as they do with the help of annotation.

Furthermore, literal correspondence is also used to translate CLWs with cultural connotations. However, in those situations, literal correspondence plays the role of presenting a word's basic sense while neglecting its hidden cultural information. Given this fact, literal correspondence is also called Omission, when it comes to words with cultural connotation.

### 3.2.2 Literal Translation: Chinese Word-building Imitation

According to the theory of Realia<sup>2</sup>, there are generally five kinds of translation strategies: calque, approximate translation, transcription, descriptive translation, contextual translation (Mark & Moira, 2004). Among these translation strategies, "calque" means translating the CLWs based on the source language's grammatical rule. Chinese word-building Imitation follows a similar logic to the calque strategy—the translators recreate a similar expression in the target language based on the word structure of the source language. This translation strategy is found to be used to approach CLWs with cultural connotation only, notably official titles.

#### Example 3

SL: 闻陈王败走，秦兵又且至，乃渡江矫陈王命，拜梁为楚王上柱国。（《史记笺证：贰，本纪·项羽本纪》，第562页）

SL in pinyin: wén chén wáng bài zǒu, qín bīng yòu qiě zhì, nǎi dù jiāng jiǎo chén wáng mìng, bài liáng wéi chǔ wáng shàng zhù guó.

TL: When he heard that the King of Ch'en had been routed<sup>28</sup> and that Ch'in's troops were about to arrive, he crossed the Chiang, forged an order from the King of Ch'en appointing Hsiang Liang as the King of Ch'u's Supreme Pillar of State,<sup>29</sup> and said: "The land east of the Chiang has already been pacified (by Nienhauser, *Hsiang Yi, Basic Annals seven*: 181).

Footnote: <sup>29</sup> Shang Chu-kuo 上柱國; "Chi-chieh" notes this was equivalent to the post of Minister of State (by Nienhauser, *Hsiang Yi, Basic Annals seven*: 181).

In Example 3, "上柱国 shàng zhù guó" is an official title in Ch'u during the Warring States period, the status of which is approximate to a prime minister in ancient China; but after the Warring States period, this position is normally designed as an honorific title instead of a formal job title with power (Han, 2004). In Nienhauser's translation, the expression "Supreme Pillar of State" is adopted, which is reproduced in correspondence with the word structure of "上柱国 shàng zhù guó": "Supreme" means "most important, or most powerful" according to the Macmillan English Dictionary, similar to the meaning of "上"; parallel to the term "上柱国 shàng zhù guó", "Pillar of State" means someone powerful and respected within the country. Besides, in the footnote, the translators explain the duties or status of this position with the reference source attached. Unlike literal correspondence, this translation presents the basic sense of this word in a more implicit way like what this position is supposed to do. However, this translation method can remind the readers of the fact that this position is designed in another culture, avoiding them falling into the fallacy of "easy tolerance" brought by masking the cultural differences (Appiah, 1993: 818).

### 3.2.3 Literal Translation with Intertextual Notes or Addition

This kind of translation can not only preserve cultural information but can also complement the cultural vacuum of sense without sacrificing the textual fluency (Wang, 1997). However, owing to the limitation of textual space, the complemented information that can be added into the translation text is also rather limited. This translation strategy is found to be used to approach absolute sense-vacant CLWs and interchangeable words of Pragmatic-sense nonequivalent CLWs.

#### Example 4

SL: 遂见东方君长，合时月正日，同律度量衡，脩五礼五玉三帛二生一死为挚，如五器，卒乃复。（《史记笺证：壹，本纪·五帝本纪》，第16页）

SL in pinyin: suì jiàn dōng fāng jūn zhǎng, hé shí yuè zhèng rì, tóng lǜ dù liàng héng, yǒu wǔ lǐ wǔ yù sān bó èr shēng yī sǐ wéi zhì, rú wǔ qì, zú nǎi fù.

TL: He used five pieces of jade, three kinds of silk, and two live animals and one dead animal as presents. [This was done] in correspondence with [the rank symbolized by] the five kinds of tokens (by Nienhauser, *The Five Emperors, Basic Annals one*: 9).

In Example 4, the term "五玉三帛二生一死 wǔ yù sān bó èr shēng yī sǐ" refers to several etiquette requirements that differ from level to level of the federal lords, according to Han (2004). In Chou, an era that relied on the system of rites and music to maintain the hierarchy, different ranks of federal lords were required to follow different standards of etiquette on various occasions. In Nienhauser's translation, literal translation can be recognized in the first sentence, but in the second sentence, intertextual note "the rank symbolized by" is added to the text, interacting with the word "the five kinds of tokens". Since the

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<sup>2</sup> Realia (latin, the real things ). In translation, Realia (plural noun) are words and expressions for culture-specific material elements.

etiquette requirements mentioned earlier are subject to the same rank requirement of “the five kinds of tokens” as the text indicates, this addition to the text completes the meaning of “五玉三帛二生一死 wǔ yù sān bó èr shēng yī sǐ” in translation. With intertextual notes, the readers have access to the literal meaning of this term and learn more about the core issue it embraces—the political and cultural systems in Chou as well as the social norms that shaped people’s minds and behaviors at that time.

### 3.3 Sense-for-sense Translation

Sense-for-sense translation pays more attention to recreating the images of CLWs in target-language culture, which can help the readers establish the fluency and incoherence of translation texts in a short time. Similar to literal translation mentioned above, sense-for-sense translation should also be understood as a strategy of translation, which focuses on transferring the meaning of the original text and places less attention on the equivalence in form (Huang, 2009). However, in some cases, the aesthetic value of expressing implicitly in the original text can be destroyed by this transparent translation. And most importantly, this translation strategy is possible to render an “easy tolerance” of the foreign culture and weakens its impact in turn (Appiah, 1993: 818).

#### 3.3.1 Sense-for-sense Translation: Alternative Term

When alternative terms of CLWs can be found in the target language culture, it is possible to achieve sense-for-sense translation by adopting these terms. Due to the advantages, this translation strategy is widely applied in translating all kinds of CLWs. Even though the content referred to by absolute sense-vacant CLWs is totally missing in the target-language culture, expressions similar to their literal meaning may still be found. However different these terms are, the practice of translation basically follows the same rule—define the words, then find an alternative term in the target language.

##### Example 5

SL: 吾令人望其气，皆为龙虎，成五采，此天子气也。（《史记笺证：贰，本纪·项羽本纪》，第 585 页）

SL in pinyin: wú lìng rén wàng qí qì, jiē wéi lóng hǔ, chéng wǔ cǎi, cǐ tiān zǐ qì yě.

TL: I have had a man observe his aeromantic signs, and they are always in the form of dragons or tigers appearing in all five colors (by Nienhauser, *Hsiang Yii, Basic Annals seven*: 190).

In Example 5, the culturally unique term “气 qì”, literally referring to energy or gas, origins from religion or superstition in the Warring States period, Ch’in and Han dynasties. At that time, people believed that the shape and sign of cloud revealed the fate of the individual, and the omen given by those shapes of cloud was dismissed as “气 qì” (Han, 2004). In Nienhauser’s translation, “气 qì” is translated as “aeromantic signs”. Truly that there is no concept resembling the term “气 qì” in English, but the translator adopts its basic sense and uses the alternative term “sign” to describe it. In correspondence to the position of “气 qì”, the term “aeromantic” is added to the front of “sign”, preserving the cultural information in the source-language text. Though this kind of translation makes CLWs easier to understand for the readers, other hidden cultural information might inevitably become invisible during the reconstruction of the images from the source language to the target language. Let’s return to Example 5, without the cultural background that observing the form of cloud and inferring the prophesy it implies is a religious practice in ancient China, some Western readers might be confused why the aeromantic space of one person has a sign.

#### 3.3.2 Sense-for-sense Translation: Generalization

Sense-for-sense translation can also be realized by generalizing the basic sense of CLWs, when the cultural background of these terms is not required by the context. The advantages of this translation strategy are obvious—it makes these terms easier for the readers to understand. However, this translation strategy may render the readers less possible to learn about the thick cultural background of the terms. This translation method is found to be used to approach absolute sense-vacant CLWs.

##### Example 6

SL: 项羽乃悉引兵渡河，皆沉船，破釜，烧庐舍，持三日粮，以示士卒必死，无一还心。（《史记笺证：贰，本纪·项羽本纪》，第 566 页）

SL in pinyin: xiàng yǔ nǎi xī yǐn bīng dù hé, jiē chén chuán, pò fǔ zèng, shāo lú shè, chí sān rì liáng, yǐ shì shì zú bì sǐ, wú yì hái xīn.

TL: Hsiang Yii led all his troops across the river; he then sank all his boats, smashed his cooking utensils, burned his cantonment, and took with him only three-days' rations, showing that his officers and soldiers would fight to death, that not even one man hoped to return (by Nienhauser, *Hsiang Yii, Basic Annals seven*: 187).

In Example 6, the word “釜 fǔ zèng” refers to two unique cooking utensils in ancient China, similar to pot and jug in the modern world. In the context, mentioning the term “釜 fǔ zèng” is just to show Hsiang Yii’s determination to beat his enemies, so here “釜 fǔ zèng” more tends to be an expression and symbolizes all the cooking tools that Hsiang Yii’s army have access to. In short, it is what “釜 fǔ zèng” stands for instead of its literal meaning matters so the translators translate “釜 fǔ zèng” to “cooking utensils” rather than the literal translation like “ancient pot and jug”.

#### 3.3.3 Sense-for-sense Translation: Contextualization

Contextualization is generally applied to those CLWs which may have different meanings in different situations. The meaning of words could change along with the development of history, notably the conversion of connotations, the expansion and reduction of extensive sense etc. (Gao, 2000). In these cases, the translation mainly varies from context to context and thus has no fixed pattern. For instance, in Example 14 and 15, “...公 gōng” contains different meanings in different conditions, it can be an official title or an honorific title. This translation method is found to be used to approach CLWs with multiple meanings.

Example 7

SL: 沛公 (《史记笺证: 贰, 本纪·项羽本纪》, 第 585 页)

SL in pinyin: pèi gōng

TL: Magistrate of P'ei (by Nienhauser, *Hsiang Yü, Basic Annals seven: 185*)

Example 8

SL: 繆公 (《史记笺证: 壹, 本纪·秦本纪》, 第 317 页)

SL in pinyin: miù gōng

TL: Duke Mu (by Nienhauser, *The Ch'in, Basic Annals six: 92*)

As the examples listed above indicates, different translations are adopted in correspondence with different contexts. In Chinese context, one character is possible to function differently, so variances can be seen in Nienhauser's translation in order to satisfy the requirement of each context. Let's explain this in the case study. In Example 7, unlike another term, the term “沛公 pèi gōng” seems more to be a pragmatic custom rather than a formal title. It is a custom in ancient China that you call someone with their position. People used “沛公 pèi gōng” to call Liu Bang because he had been the magistrate of P'ei county. In this way, “沛公 pèi gōng” is translated as “Magistrate of P'ei” instead of “lord of P'ei”. In Example 8, “公” is an honorary title, one of the five ranks of noble class which is illustrated in the footnote in Chapter 1. Thus, “繆公 miù gōng” is translated into “Duke Mu”.

### 3.3.4 Sense-for-sense Translation: Connotative Overtness

Sense-for-sense translation can be realized by translating the implicit meanings of the CLWs. This kind of translation strategy can not only contribute to uncovering cultural information in a more direct way, but also make the translation easier to understand for the readers without adding numerous annotations. For this reason, Cao (2014) defines it as an implicit thick translation. This translation method is found to be used to approach CLWs with cultural connotations.

Example 9

SL: 每吴中有大徭役及丧, 项梁常为主办, 阴以兵法部勒宾客及子弟, 以是知其能。(《史记笺证: 贰, 本纪·项羽本纪》, 第 559 页)

SL in pinyin: měi wú zhōng yǒu dà yáo yì jí sǎng, xiàng liáng cháng wéi zhǔ bàn, yīn yǐ bīng fǎ bù lè bīn kè jí zǐ dì, yǐ shì zhī néng.

TL: Secretly he organized and trained his guests, retainers and other young men in the arts of war, and in this way he came to know their abilities (by Nienhauser, *Hsiang Yü, Basic Annals seven: 179*).

In this case, the term “宾客 bīn kè” should not be simply understood as guests in English; actually, this term refers to those poor or powerless talents who are voluntarily fed by a rich and powerful family and serve them as consultants or guards in exchange (Li, 2001). And that's why Hsiang Liang trained the young men to test their abilities. In Nienhauser's translation, the expression “guests, retainers” are used. According to the Macmillan English Dictionary, the word “retainer” means “a servant, especially one who has worked for someone from a high social class for a long time”, which is very close to the original meaning of “宾客 bīn kè” in the context. Instead of simply translating the literal meaning, the translators follow the implicit meaning of this term in this context directly so that the readers could have a logical understanding of the behaviors of the historical figure and even the whole historical event. In addition to this term, phrases such as “秋毫 qiū háo” “常车 cháng chē” “士伍 shì wǔ” also adopt the same translation.

### 3.4 Footnote

Footnote refers to the added explanatory at the end of each page, which is usually adopted when the culture-loaded terms embrace great differences between the source language culture and the target language culture, or when the context requires so. This translation strategy is seldom used alone, the translator usually combines with other translation methods. Through this translation strategy, the translator is able to preserve the exotic charms of CLWs to a large extent, even though the readers may feel a bit inconvenient to search for cultural information of the terms. This translation strategy is found to be used to approach all kinds of CLWs.

Example 10

SL: 三年, 王冠。(《史记笺证: 壹, 本纪·秦本纪》, 第 360 页)

SL in pinyin: sān nián, wáng guān.

TL: In the third year (335 B.C.), the King [Hui-wen] was capped<sup>248</sup> (by Nienhauser, *The Ch'in, Basic Annals five: 110*).

Footnote: <sup>248</sup> This was a ceremony, performed when a young noble reached twenty, which symbolized his coming of age (by Nienhauser, *The Ch'in, Basic Annals five*: 110).

Footnote plus other translation strategy is suitable for CLWs with huge intercultural gap. In Example 10, the term “冠 guàn” is translated as “cap” according to its literal meaning, which reveals that the coming-of-age ceremony in Ch'in dynasty is symbolized by cap. Beyond that, the translators further deepen the interpretation of this term in the annotation by explaining its cultural background. The intertextual relationship between the text and annotation provides the readers with a rich cultural interpretation where source-language culture is effectively represented. In addition, phrases such as “初伏 chū fú” “三尸 sān hù” “金鼓 jīn gǔ” “阡陌 qiān mò” also use the same translation strategy.

### 3.5 Combination of Different Strategies

This translation strategy does not have a regular pattern of practice, and it is found to be used to approach all kinds of CLWs. The translation usually depends on the requirement of the terms themselves or the context. For example, the term in *The Grand Scribes Records* “土德 tǔ dé” is closely related to the theory of Wu Xing and the theory of Five Virtues, and origins from some legendary stories associated with the earth that occurred at the time of Huang-ti as Lu-shih Ch'un-ch'iu records (Han, 2004). For this reason, people recognized Huang-ti as a king that was blessed by the earth. In the book, the translator uses the expression “an auspicious omen” to describe the term “德 dé” according to its core sense, and the expression “related to earth's power” to describe the term “土 tǔ” according to its literal meaning. Meanwhile, the translators quote the explanation of Lu-shih Ch'un-ch'iu as intertextual reference and put it into note, enriching the cultural background of the term “土德 tǔ dé”.

To put it in nutshell, thick translation follows no pattern. In fact, the definition of thick translation remains controversial till today. According to Appiah's definition, only translations with annotations or extratextual texts can be defined as thick translation, but many scholars have shown in their research that there should be various categories of thick translation strategies (Cheung, 2007; Cao, 2016; Wen & Wang, 2016). At the same time, some scholars have pointed out that the theory of thick translation is lacking in guarantees from methodology to results (Wu & Zhu, 2019). Therefore, this study should clarify that the so-called “Thick Translation Strategy” here should be considered as a translation strategy that helps translators to achieve deep translation with the premise of not obscuring source-language culture. As for the definition of translation text with thickness, it should be judged from the degree of cultural interpretation that the whole book presents. Generally, considering the loyalty to source-language culture, literal translation, transliteration or other translation with notes should be the first concern in translation.

## 4. Influencing Factors of Translation Strategies

So far, the translation strategies used by Nienhauser and other translators have been explained in detail via case studies. With so many translation strategies, how the translators decide to adopt one translation strategy for these words and another one for other words? In this part, three potential influencing factors are identified based on the Context Theory: the translators' subjectivity, the degree of cultural differences and the degree of cultural default.

### 4.1 The Translators' Subjectivity

Regardless of all the different opinions on Thick Translation, there is one thing that many scholars agree about Thick Translation: translation is always related to the translator's research purpose.

According to translation background and translation purpose illustrated in the paratext in *The Grand Scribes Records*, translation project of the entire *Shih Chi* started from 1970s to 1980s, when there still were thirty chapters of *Shih Chi* without thorough English translation and the most complete translation then was the translation of Burton Watson (Nienhauser et al, 1994; Nienhauser, 1996). Burton Watson's translation is generally recognized as a reader-friendly book with great aesthetic value, but he still sacrifices the scientific rigor of translation by simplifying academic terms, Chinese personal names or titles (Klein, 2010; Nylan, 1996; Bodde, 1995). In this case, to provide an “academic translation” has become a historical task. For this reason, Nienhauser sets “a faithfully, carefully annotated translation which is as literate and consistent as possible” as their purpose of translation (Nienhauser et al, 1994: xvii). During the interview with Wei Hong in 2018, he restated that accuracy was the priority of their translation, and their translation is for scholars and specialists instead of regular readers. Therefore, in his translation, foreignizing translation is mainly adopted: extensive annotations are added in the book and literal translation works as the main translation strategy.

### 4.2 The Degree of Cultural Difference

The degree of cultural difference also plays an important role in the translation. Here the degree of cultural difference should be understood vertically and horizontally, that is, both the wideness and depth of cultural difference should be taken into consideration. The depth of cultural difference largely impacts the difficulty of understanding words originated in an alien culture. According to the Context Theory, the translators normally start from the literal meaning of exclusive terms representing different human civilizations, and find out the general meaning based on the context; after that, the meaning of words should be reaffirmed in the social-cultural context; next, the meaning of words should be recreated in the target-

language culture based on the cultural information of both source-language culture and target-language culture; at last, the meaning of words will be expressed in the target language (Chen, 1998; Liu, 2001). In this process, the cultural differences between target-language and source-language function as the key element for understanding. If the cultural void is large, meaning that alternative concepts are hard to be found in another culture, then understanding such words could take more effort for the targeted readers. Such shared and implicit knowledge in two different cultures, defined as situational default, is normally expected to build the foundation of conversation (Wang, 1997). Thus, for absolute culture-vacant CLWs, one kind of term which cannot find any alternative term in another culture, foreignizing translation strategies such as transliteration, annotation or combination could be adopted more frequently. The depth of cultural differences decides the difficulty of representing an image of words in another culture. If words naturally embrace rich cultural information, with or without alternative terms in another culture, to represent such expression is bound to take more effort as well.

#### 4.3 The Degree of Contextual Default

As the Context Theory indicates above, the context of the original text is the key factor during the translation. According to Ge (2001), context is supposed to complement an expression's cultural connotation. Likewise, the translation of CLWs should also relate to the cultural void of context. As Wang (1997) indicates, shared background knowledge or pragmatic presupposition is required in conservation in order to reach an expected communication purpose. Therefore, when to reproduce the image of one word from source-language culture to the target-language culture, the cultural connotations embedded in the source-language should also be represented in the target-language culture; otherwise, the targeted readers could hardly understand the text even if the literal meaning of culturally unique terms is perfectly translated. However, when the extended meanings could be easily inferred from the context, an additional explanation is also not necessary. In conclusion, the translation of CLWs is subject to the need of context, which means that the translation strategies rely on how many efforts the intended readers would take to understand the whole context originated in the source language culture.

### 5. Conclusion

This study has observed how the translators approach each kind of CLWs and conclude five kinds of translation strategies applied in *The Grand Scribes Records* and their application scope: transliteration, literal translation, sense-for-sense translation, the combination of both and translation with footnote. Furthermore, this study has identified three factors that may influence the choice of translation strategies: translators' subjectivity, the degree of cultural difference and the degree of contextual default. Given all these findings, this study has many limitations. Firstly, this study only focuses on CLWs in selected chapters in *The Grand Scribes Records: Basic Annal of Pre-Han China*, so more cases in the entire *Shih Chi* still remain to be studied. Secondly, this paper only analyzes the translation of CLWs, neglecting the translation of the sentence, paragraph or even chapters.

The greatest advantage of in-depth translation is to resist the ideological impact or even erasure of the source language culture by increasing the degree of alienation of the translated text. In translation practice, although the translator's subjectivity has a great positive influence on the translation, his or her own personal emotion will inevitably affect the translation, which is difficult to be avoided. In this case, it seems a bit risky to leave it to the translator to decide the "depth" of the translation alone. Therefore, this study suggest that a principle or mechanism to define the "thickness" of translation results could be an alternative of improvement.

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