

Translation of Culture-loaded Words on Philosophy in *Su Wen*

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Key words: Huangdi Neijing; *Su Wen*, translation; culture-loaded words; philosophy

Abstract: *Su Wen* (Yellow Emperor's Canon of Medicine• Plain Conversation) is hailed as one the four great classics of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). There are in this book countless special words which reflect the abstruse TCM theory and culture, and the translation of these words proves to be challenging. This paper probes into the translation strategies of culture-loaded words on philosophy in *Su Wen*, which would serve as reference for future translation work of TCM classics.

1. Introduction

As stated by American linguist E. Sapir, “A language cannot live without culture which, in fact, is the generalization of habits and social beliefs passed down from past generations.”[1] So, language is the part of and the carrier of a given culture. Culturally speaking, the implications of words contain both linguistic and cultural meanings, and words loaded with unique and specific cultural implications of a nation are referred to as culture-loaded words.

Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), with a history of thousands of years, unique and integrated theoretical system, rich practical experience and good clinical effect, has been making great contribution to Chinese people's health and the development of China nation. *Su Wen*, hailed one of the four classical works of traditional Chinese medicine, sums up the medical experience and theory accumulated from the Pre-Qin period to Western Han dynasty. The correct translation of culture-loaded words in this book is essential to the target readers' unbiased understanding of TCM, thus making the research work valuable.

2. Classification of Culture-loaded Words and the Significance of the Research on Them

It is believed that “culture is membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and a common system of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating and acting”. [2] Culture-loaded words are words, phrases and idioms that mark something unique in a culture.[3] These vocabularies reflect the unique way of life that a particular nation has accumulated over a long period of time, which is different from other nations. Each nation has its own unique history and living environment which in turn gives birth to culture-loaded words.

According to the correspondence between the source language and the target language, the culture-loaded words are divided into four categories: First, the source words have no corresponding words in the target language. Such as Yin and Yang (two basic concepts in TCM, signifying the two opposite properties of everything in the universe) . Second, the superficial meaning is the same but the connotative meaning is different. For example, in China, “dragon” is regarded as the symbol of the Chinese nation, the indomitable and courageous spiritual pillar of the Chinese descendants, and the symbol of nobility and success. In feudal society, “dragon” was used to refer to the emperor. The descendants of the imperial clan were called “Dragon's Sons”. However, the corresponding word “dragon” in English is an evil monster with a tail and wings, and

can spit fire. Thirdly, words in one language have many counterparts in another language, but none of them are completely equivalent. The word “cadre” overlaps with “official”, “functional” and “administrator” in meaning, but there is no complete equivalence. Fourthly, the basic meaning of words is roughly equivalent, while the second meaning or additional meaning is different.

3. Culture-loaded words on philosophy

TCM is a subject based on the experience of natural science and philosophy that people perceived through their observation of life and living environment, which is different from western medicine – a systematic recognition over humans themselves. The three philosophical concepts are holism, dialects and fractal theory.

“The unity of qi, the yin-yang theory and five-element theory are worldviews and methodologies that Chinese ancients used to understand and explain the relationship between humans and nature”[5]. Thus, the culture-loaded words concerning philosophy in Su Wen can be divided into those about Yin and Yang and Five Elements.

“The yin-yang theory is a plain dialectical thought based on materialism. It is also a unique worldview and methodology to understand and explain the origin and changes of the universe. “yin yang zhe, wan wu zhi neng shi ye.” (Yin and Yang are the source of everything).[6] According to this theory, the world is a material unity which continuously develops and changes under the interaction of yin Qi and yang Qi. The concept of yin-yang theory finds its source in Yi Jing (The Book of Changes), and it is of great importance to everything in the universe. As quoted from chapter 5 of Su Wen, “yin yang zhe, tain di zhi dao ye, wan wu zhi gang ji, bian hua zhi fu mu, sheng sha zhi ben shi, shen ming zhi fu ye. Zhi bing bi qiu yu ben.”[4] [Yin and Yang serve as the Dao (law) of the heavens and the earth, the fundamental principle of all things, the parents of change, the beginning of birth and death and the storehouse of Shenming. The treatment of disease must follow this law.] Yin-yang theory is used to clarify and explain the origin of life, physiological and pathological changes of human body as well as to guide diagnosis, treatment and prevention of diseases.

Yin and Yang are a pair of interrelated and opposite things. To be specific, the relationships between Yin and Yang are opposition and restriction, interdependence waxing and waning, and transformation of Yin and Yang.

Volume 2 of Su Wen includes three chapters illustrating the characteristics of both Yin and Yang. For example, Yin is static and Yang dynamic; Yin is turbid and yang lucid. Besides, the terms below also disclose the interaction and relationship of Yin and Yang.

yin jing yang zao, yin ping yang mi: When yin is at peace and Yang is compact yin Zhong you yang, yang Zhong you yin: There is Yin within Yang and Yang within Yin

qing yang: The Lucid-Yang

zhuo yin: The Turbid-Yin

yin sheg ze yang bing, yang sheng ze yin bing: predominance of Yin results in the disease of Yang while predominance of Yang leads to the disease of Yin

chong yin bi yang: extreme Yin turns into Yang and extreme Yang changes into Yin

yin yang geng sheng: alternative predominance of Yin and Yang

The Five-element theory (called Wu Xing in Chinese) is an ancient philosophic thought which studies the connotations, characteristics, classification, and relationships of generation, restriction, subjugation and counter-restriction of the five elements of wood, fire, earth, metal and water. It is used to explain the occurrence, development, change and interrelation of the universe. Through observation, the ancient Chinese discovered the respective features of the five elements: water moistens and flows downward, fire flares upwards; wood can be bent and straightened; metal can be moulded, earth ensures sowing, growing and reaping. The Five-element theory holds that everything in the universe is composed of the five basic matters of wood, fire, earth, metal and water, and the ceaseless motion and interaction of these five matters brings the development and changes for all objects and phenomena in the nature.

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 translation strategies based on the right understanding of each word and the perception of cultural differences.

Acknowledgements

The work was financially supported by National Innovation and Entrepreneurship Project (Project No: 201710412019).

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