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Embarking on International Publicity: A Case Study of Translating China Time-honoured Brands in Guangdong from an Eco-translatological Perspective

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Abstract

Endowed with profound Chinese traditions, “China Time-honoured Brands” are embodiment of the products, techniques, services or craftsmanship passed down from one generation to the next which have long been cherished and well received by the public. Translation of “China Time-honoured Brands” facilitates cross-cultural communications and enables Chinese culture to have a greater say in global context by enhancing the world’s understanding of Chinese culture. From the perspective of eco-translatology and within its theoretical framework of “translation as adaptation and selection”, this paper probes into translation of “China Time-honoured Brands” in Guangdong by examining how the three-dimensional transformations are achieved during Chinese-English translation process, namely linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions. Exploration in this paper is expected to help shed light on how to translate Chinese culture-loaded elements for better international publicity.

Keywords

China Time-honoured Brand; brand name translation; eco-translatology; international publicity; Chinese culture translation

Introduction

Endowed with profound Chinese traditions, “China Time-honoured Brands” are embodiment of the products, techniques, services or craftsmanship passed down from one generation to the next which have long been cherished and well received by the public. As a forerunner of enhancing the world’s understanding of Chinese culture, translation of “China Time-honoured Brands” is worth close attention as it serves as a window to showcase these intangible cultural heritages, which facilitates cross-cultural communications and enables Chinese culture to have a greater say in global context.

Literature Review

Compared with localization of international brands, profound research on introducing Chinese time-honoured brands overseas is far from enough. Apart from several thought-provoking studies (Schmitt & Zhang, 2012;

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Zhang & Schmitt, 2001; Kum, Lee, & Qiu, 2013), the number of in-depth studies on translating Chinese time-honoured brand names is greatly dwarfed by that of research into localizing overseas brands. Specifically, studies on translating Chinese time-honoured brand names have been conducted from the perspectives of Skopos Theory (Zhan, 2008), Theory of Adaptation (Yu, 2010), Integrated Marketing Communication (Hu, 2013), Cultural Communication (Feng, 2018), Functional Equivalence Theory (Xu, 2010), and Eco-translatology (Lv, 2016). China Time-honoured Brands from only a few provinces and cities have been examined, including Beijing (Zhan, 2008), Baoding (Tian, Li, & Zhang, 2013), Tianjin (Hu, 2015; Zuo, 2015), Hubei (Chen, 2015), Changsha (Xu & Wang, 2016), Heilongjiang (Jing, 2017) and Hebei (Zuo & Han, 2019). Accordingly, with an attempt to take a further step in this field, this paper probes into translation of China Time-honoured Brands in Guangdong by applying eco-translatology and its theoretical framework of "translation as adaptation and selection", to examine how the three-dimensional transformations are achieved during Chinese-English translation process, namely linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions.

Theoretical Framework

Eco-translatology is an interdisciplinary theoretical framework for translation studies put forward by Mr Hu Gengshen, an eminent translation expert in China. As an "ecological approach to translation studies" (Hu, 2008), eco-translatology holds that the source text, the source language and the target language constitute a systematic "translation ecological environment". In this ecological environment composed of language, communication, culture, society, author, reader and client, the translators make "multi-dimensional adaptation and adaptive selection" (Hu, 2008, 2011). To be specific, on the one hand, the translator should first adapt to this eco-system, and on the other hand, under the guidance of "multi-dimensional adaptive selection" principle, the translator should employ "three-dimensional transformation", namely linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions, to produce translation with an optimal degree of "comprehensive adaptation and selection" (Hu, 2008), so as to properly deliver and interpret the language form, the cultural connotation and the communicative intention of the source language.

Methodology

This study investigates 57 "China Time-honoured Brands" according to the official list announced by the Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China. The original brand names and their translation are collected from corresponding products, company webpages (if available), social media pages (if available), and famous e-commerce platforms (e.g., JD, Tmall). For those brands which are not available on the Internet, field research in local supermarkets and stores is conducted.

Findings and Discussion

Table 1 English Translation of Guangdong "China Time-honoured Brands"

Table 1 English Translation of Guangdong "China Time-honoured Brand"

Original Brand Names	Translation	Notes	Translation strategy	Total (57)
王老吉	Wanglaoji	/	Pinyin transliteration	22
群星/星群	Xingqun	/		
莲香楼	LIANXIANGLOU	/		
趣香	Quxiang	/		
泮塘	Pan Tang	/		
奇星	QIXING	/		
明兴	Ming xing	/		
新以泰	XIN YI TAI	/		
冯了性	Fengliaoxing	/		
东古	DONGGU	/		
沙溪	SHAXI	/		
广德泰	GUANGDETAI	/		
咀香园	JU XIANG YUAN	/		
应记	YING JI	/		
盲公	MANG GONG	/		
红狮/美陶	MEI TAO	/		
大有	DAYOU	/		
岐江桥牌	QI JIANG QIAO PAI	/		
红荔	HONGLI	/		
老山合	LAOSHANHE	/		
安宁/德众	DEZHONG	/		
红棉/立康	Likang			
广州酒家	GUANGZHOU RESTAURANT	/	Pinyin transliteration with a generic term	6
泮溪酒家	PANXI RESTAURANT	/		
爱群大酒店	AIQUN HOTEL	Cantonese transliteration "OI KWAN" remains on hotel signboard and bus stop boards		
新华大酒店	XIN HUA HOTEL	/		
健民医药	JIANMIN PHARMACY	/		
陈太吉酒庄	Chen Tai Ji Chateau	/		
北园酒家	BEIYUAN CUISINE	/	Pinyin transliteration with free translation	1
新亚大酒店	NEW ASIA HOTEL	/	Literal translation	5
鹰金钱	Eagle-Coin	/		
珍珠红	PEARL RED	/		
双狮牌	DOUBLE LION BRAND	/		
皇上皇	King of Kings	/		
虎头牌	TIGER HEAD	/	Literal translation with generic term omitted	1
宝生园	EDEN	/	Free translation	1
李占记	LI JIM KEE	/	Dialect transliteration	2
远航/九江	KIU KIANG	/		
致美斋	JAMMY CHAI	/	Making use of words with similar sounds	2
海天	Haday	/		
敬修堂	/	/	/	17
潘高寿	/	/		
采芝林	/	/		
何济公牌	/	/		
陶陶居	/	/		
陈李济	/	/		
禾穗牌	/	/		
生茂泰	/	/		
利工民	/	/		
第一福	/	/		
中一	/	/		
鹤鸣	/	closed		
琳琅	/	/		
宏兴	/	/		
徐其修	/	/		
口衣记	/	/		
萧广丰泰	/	/		

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The above results reveal that Pinyin transliteration, accounting for approximately 39% of total brand names in the data source, is the most favoured method in translating these Guangdong“China Time-honoured Brands”. Pinyin transliteration with a generic term takes up about 11%, literal translation 9%, dialect transliteration 4%, translating by making use of words with similar sounds 4%, free translation 2%, Pinyin transliteration with free translation 2%, and literal translation with generic term omitted 2%. Besides, no English translation can be found for the rest 17 brand names.

Translators' Adaptive Selection and Transformation in Linguistic Dimension

With bilingual conversion as its core, translation involves a transformation of language forms, so translators need to carefully take into account the ecology of the source language and the target language by paying attention to language rules and characteristics of the source language and the target language respectively, in order to realise “Adaptive Selection and Transformation in Linguistic Dimension” (Hu, 2008). English translation of China Time-honoured Brands reflects the different strategies adopted by translators in linguistic dimension.

No matter Pinyin transliteration or dialect transliteration, no matter literal translation or free translation, no matter whether generic terms are added or not, the translator's adaptive selection and transformation in linguistic dimension are embodied when translating Chinese time-honoured brands.

Some translations strike an excellent balance between source language and target language in linguistic dimension. “ 致美斋 ” is one of them. As one of the renowned sauce factories in China, it was founded in the Wanli period of the Ming Dynasty (1608) with a history of more than 400 years, and it features seasoning foods such as premium soy sauce, glutinous rice sweet vinegar, oyster sauce and fermented bean curd. English translation of its trademark JAMMY CHAI is based on Cantonese transliteration. According to Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary, “jammy” means “covered with jam” and “ lucky, especially because sth good has happened to you without you making any effort”. By using “jammy” to render “ 致美 (Cantonese pronunciation: zi mei)”, phonological correspondence and semantic consistency are thus realised. Furthermore, another time-honoured brand “Tiger Head” belongs to a technology company from Guangzhou Light Industry Group, and the name of this company “ 虎辉 ” is translated as “TIGERFIRE”. As to “ 辉 ”, its Cantonese pronunciation is fai and this Chinese character means “light, brightness, radiance”. Using “FIRE” to refer to “ 辉 ”, the pronunciations are similar, and the meanings are interconnected. Therefore, this translation reaches the highest degree of “comprehensive adaptation and selection”, which serves as a good example in linguistic dimension. Another example is “ 海天 ” which is rendered as “Haday”. Making use of “heyday” which sounds similar in pronunciation to the Chinese original name, this brand name also draws upon the meaning of the word. In Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary, “heyday” refers to “the time when sb/sth had most power or success, or was most popular”. Such translations not only manifest the original pronunciation but also convey favourable semantic meaning, so they can be considered as an optimal choice to translate Chinese time-honoured brand names.

Translators' Adaptive Selection and Transformation in Cultural Dimension

In addition to transformation in linguistic dimension, translators should also take into account cultural dif-

ferences in the ecology of the source language and the target language, so as to make adaptive selection and transformation in cultural dimension (Hu, 2006). When translating brand names into English, cultural connotations can help foreign customers get accustomed to the trademarks. “ 宝生园 ” serves as an example of fulfilling the adaptive selection and transformation in cultural dimension. China Time-honoured Brand “ 宝生园 ” is well-known for its pure and excellent honey products. Its founder, Mr Liang from Nanhai County in Guangdong Province, was an art teacher and had a hobby of beekeeping. Since he was keenly interested in bees and Chinese traditional medicine, he established the first beekeeping farm in Guangdong and named it “ 宝生园 ” which means “Garden for Precious Lives” in Chinese. English version of this trademark is registered as EDEN which carries the meaning of a place of happiness and innocence. It is worth mentioning that its official website domain name is “beeden”, which is a combination of “bee” and “Eden”. Such a strategy reflects that the translator takes the cultural context of the target language into consideration when figuring out translation by making an adaptive selection and transformation in cultural dimension, which facilitates localization of brand names.

Translators' Adaptive Selection and Transformation in Communicative Dimension

Apart from transforming linguistic information and delivering cultural connotations, translators should also try their best to make adaptive selection and transformation in communicative dimension in order to convey the communicative intention attached to the source language. Translating Chinese brand names is no exception. Among the 57 China Time-honoured Brands in Guangdong, GUANGZHOU RESTAURANT, PANXI RESTAURANT, AIQUN HOTEL, XIN HUA HOTEL, JIANMIN PHARMACY and NEW ASIA HOTEL demonstrate their generic terms, and drop hints to overseas recipients about their products and services and thus fulfil communicative functions.

Besides, precise wording is also conducive to better communication. “ 北园酒家 ” is a case in point. As a national historical site in the heart of Guangzhou City, this restaurant’s space faithfully depicts the details of a Lingnan-style Chinese garden. Opened in 1928, this China Time-honoured Brand is famed not only for its palatial décor but also for such Cantonese home-style dishes as Shaoxing drunken chicken and braised fish head with mushrooms, pork and tofu. This Michelin-honoured Cantonese restaurant adopts “BEIYUAN CUISINE” as its English brand. Bearing the meaning of “a style of cooking” and “the food served in a restaurant (usually an expensive one)” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary), the word “cuisine” brings out the feature of this restaurant. This translation not only is faithful to the source language but also enriches the connotation. The translator amplifies the desired communicative effect through the adaptive selection and transformation in communicative dimension.

Reflections

With the help of eco-translatology, we can not only figure out the current situation of English translation of China Time-honoured Brands but also explore further and work out possible solutions.

In linguistic dimension, some problems in Chinese time-honoured brand name translation need to be addressed when embarking on international publicity, such as the lack of English translation, the low popularity of English translation and spelling mistakes. First, among 57 enterprises, 17 brands remain to be translated. Translation is well worth of effort because only with translation can these superb brands with superior qual-

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ity, long history and brilliant traditions be introduced to the world. Second, few products put brand names in English on the package, which may result in low popularity of those brands in overseas markets. Third, there are some misspellings in certain translated trademarks (e.g., ARTSLES should be ARTICLES on the website of 新以泰 Sporting Goods). Additionally, in communicative dimension, consistent translated versions may be more appropriate. For instance, Oi Kwan Hotel, combining the artistic characteristics of Lingnan architecture and a Western skyscraper, was once the tallest building in Southeast Asia and was known as the Crown of South China. It remained the highest building and a landmark in Guangzhou for a total of 30 years from 1937 to 1967. Cantonese transliteration OI KWAN is retained on the signboard to date. Furthermore, in a symposium attended by various government departments, an agreement was also reached to restore the name "Oi Kwan Hotel" on travel brochures and bus stop boards. Therefore, in order to minimise communication confusion, it is no longer suitable to use AIQUN on its official website and hospitality products.

Regarding translations of brand names which remain missing, eco-translatology can once again be employed to help us. For example, referring to translation practices of six Beijing China Time-honoured Brands officially announced previously, and combining the local characteristics of Guangdong, 17 trademarks can be temporarily translated as: 敬修堂 King Sau Tong Chinese Medicine – Since 1790; 潘高寿 Poon Ko Sau Chinese Medicine – Since 1890; 采芝林 Choi Chi Lam Chinese Medicine Pharmacy – Since 1806; 何济公牌 Ho Chai Kung Chinese Medicine – Since 1938; 陶陶居 To To Kui Cantonese Cuisine – Since 1880; 陈李济 Chan Li Chai Chinese Medicine – Since 1600; 禾穗牌 Wo Sui Chinese Medicine – Since 1912; 生茂泰 Sang Mau Tai Tea – Since 1862; 利工民 Lee Kung Man Cotton Textile – Since 1923; 第一福 Dai Yat Fook / DYF Cantonese Handicrafts and Jewellery – Since 1952; 中一 Chung Yat Chinese Medicine – Since 1662; 鹤鸣 Hok Ming Footwear & Headwear – Since 1948; 琳琅 Lam Long Wedding Photography – Since 1940s; 宏兴 Hong Xing Chinese Medicine – Since 1662; 徐其修 Xu Qixiu Chinese Herbal Tea – Since 1895; 口衣记 E Gi Leizhou Cuisine – Since 1935; 萧广丰泰 Siao Geng Hong Tai Chinese Medicinal Liquor – Since 1851. From the perspective of adaptive selection and transformation in linguistic dimension, local enterprises in Guangdong could adopt local dialect transliteration when translating their brand names. The reason is two-fold. First, it helps overseas consumers pronounce the original sound, which facilitates the brands to "go global". Second, it showcases more local flavour which is conducive to demonstrating the uniqueness of Chinese traditions. In terms of adaptive selection and transformation in cultural dimension, the added elements, such as "Cantonese Handicrafts", "Cantonese Cuisine" and "Chinese Herbal Tea" etc., help retain and highlight the distinctive characteristics when introducing Chinese culture to the world. Judging from the adaptive selection and transformation in communicative dimension, the explanatory generic terms (e.g. "Chinese Medicine", "Chinese Medicine Pharmacy", "Cantonese Cuisine", "Tea", "Cotton Textile", "Cantonese Handicrafts and Jewellery", "Footwear & Headwear", "Wedding Photography", "Chinese Herbal Tea", "Leizhou Cuisine", and "Chinese Medicinal Liquor") display attributes of these goods and help overseas consumers know more about various categories of Chinese time-honoured products and relative intangible cultural heritages, which thus fulfils communicative purposes. Meanwhile, marking the year out also serves the same function. These translations are for reference and one can make any corresponding adjustment according to different situations when introducing "China Time-honoured Brand". Additionally, the government can also elicit and pool ideas from the society to study how to better translate China Time-honoured Brands and help them "go global".

Conclusion

Brand name translation assumes an indispensable role in introducing Chinese marvellous culture and products to the world, and there is a pressing need for Chinese local enterprises to have a deeper understanding of how to polish their brand name translations before embarking on overseas business. This paper, based on the theory of eco-translatology, applies its "three-dimensional" adaptive selection and transformation principle to analyse the English translation of Guangdong's "China Time-honoured Brands" in linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions. Exploration in this paper is expected to help shed light on how to translate "China Time-honoured Brands" as well as Chinese culture-loaded elements for better international publicity and provide a springboard for future research in this domain.

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