

# Application of Functional Equivalence Theory in English Translation of Chinese Idioms

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**Abstract**—Eugene A. Nida's theory of functional equivalence has been highly valued and has influenced the practice of translation in general. It can be applied as a guiding criterion in Chinese idiom translation. This paper attempts to apply the functional equivalence theory to the English translation of Chinese idioms so as to overcome the difficulties encountered by translation practitioners. After the study on literal, free translation and other feasible translating methods, the author believes that it is only the equivalence in both meaning and function that the essence of Chinese idiom translation counts on. In other words, after reading the translation, the target language readers should react the same as the source language readers do to the biggest degree.

**Index Terms**—Chinese idiom, functional equivalence, translation methods

## I. INTRODUCTION

Idioms are usually vivid and forceful. They have been described as the crystallization of language. Without idioms our language would become dull and dry. For one thing, most idioms contain an extremely profound and rich meaning. For another, most idioms carry a vivid image. Idioms mirror the national characteristics in a language and thus always rich in cultural connotation and national flavor. All this is true of Chinese idioms. What is idiom indeed? According to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2003, p.741), idiom is defined as “a phrase which means something different from the meanings of the separate words; the way of statement typical of a person or a people in their use of language.” But in 《辞海》(Cihai, 1999, p.117), a Chinese dictionary, idiom is defined as set phrases or sentences, whose structure is often established and can not be easily changed, including set phrase, proverb, maxim, Chinese common saying, and a two-part allegorical saying (语言中定型的词组或句子。使用时一般不能任意改变其组织。包括成语, 谚语, 格言, 惯用语, 歇后语等).

In a word, idioms are set phrases and sentences. They are peculiar not only in their grammatical constructions and established collocations, but also in their specific meanings. When used, their structures and meanings can't be changed at random. Idioms in this study can be roughly divided into set phrases, common sayings, proverbs, two-part allegorical sayings. Set phrases are generally composed of four Chinese characters. A small number of set phrases in Chinese consist of more or less than four characters; but they are so few that people would regard set phrases as four-character phrases. “能者多劳(An able man has more work)” and “空中楼阁(a pavilion in the air)” are two of the examples. Chinese common sayings are widely used in the colloquial language. Compared with set phrases, they are looser in syntax and there is no set number of characters. A typical example is “巧妇难为无米之炊(Even the cleverest housewife can't cook a meal without rice)”. A proverb is a traditional or a popular short saying, with the purpose of advice or warning. Some proverbs are open statements, whose meaning is straight-forward; but most proverbs are metaphorical. Quite often it is both informative and instructive. For instance, “少壮不努力, 老大徒悲伤(If a man doesn't work hard when young, he will be sorry for it when old.)” A two-part allegorical saying consists of two phrases, with the first being a simple and concrete analogy, and the second an abstract interpretation. For instance, “八仙过海--各显神通(The Eight Immortals soaring over the ocean, each of them showing their true talent)”.

The English translation of Chinese idioms remains as a hard nut to crack for translators since the way a language chooses to express meaning or concepts may only to a certain degree match the meaning in the other language. Chinese idioms reflect the ancient civilization and modern achievements of China. To translate Chinese idioms is not only a good choice to introduce the Chinese culture to the world but also a good help to further the communication between China and the world. With the purpose of finding an effective theory to guide the translation of Chinese idioms, the paper does an analysis of some examples. This will be carried out from a functional equivalence perspective.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this part, the author will first review previous studies on the English translation of Chinese idioms, and then

identify some problems in the translation practice.

#### A. *Previous Studies on the English Translation of Chinese Idioms*

The English translation of Chinese idioms is an old topic in translation studies. There are many relevant researches. In his works entitled *Studies of Chinese Idiom Translation*, Zhang Peiji(1979) proposed a lot of practical methods to solve the problems in translating Chinese idiom into English. Chen Wenbo(2005) explored how to interpret English idioms correctly and translate Chinese idioms into English appropriately as well. Many reserchers (Li Lu,2000; Lv Shiyuan,2003; Li Yunxia, 2003; Shi Yanfang,2004; Ou Jin,2006; Chen Shujiao,Wu Huizhong,2007; Ren Li,Yan Jinbo,2009; Chen Nan,2009) summarized the methods and techniques to translate Chinese idioms on the basis of a great number of specific examples. Xie Xiaolan(2006) argued that translation should reflect cultural and ethnic characteristics of the source language. Zong Zhaorong(2006) analyzed the thinking patterns in Chinese idioms and further put forward the four corresponding translating strategies. Based on the different images idioms arise in the readers' minds, and the various ways translators employ in their translated works, Du Juan & Lu Hao (2009) summarized some strategies of Chinese idiom translation.

However, compared with the thriving practical studies on Chinese idioms, theoretical studies on the English translation of Chinese idioms leg far behind. Only a few researchers (Zeng Qi, 2001;Zhang Jinhua,Jin Hansheng,2003; Guo Xunming,2007; Zhao Dequan, Zhang Shuan,2008;Zhou Xin, YangYiqiu,2009) discussed Chinese idiom translation from different perspectives of cultural translation theory, relevance theory, skopos theory, information theory and pragmatics, and drew their own conclusions accordingly.

#### B. *Existing Problems*

Because of the unique characteristics of Chinese idioms, many researchers believe that idiom translation is the most difficult part. Although translation researchers have accumulated a lot of experience in Chinese idiom translation, there are still a lot of problems in the translation. First, some translators only focus on the surface meaning of the idioms. The translators might only use the word-for-word translation method but ignore the figurative meaning. For instance, the Chinese idiom “铁杵成针” literally means that “to grind steel rods into needles” and figuratively means that “with assiduous attention or effort, one can accomplish what appeared at first to be impossible”. However, without the knowledge on Chinese culture and metaphor, the translation is unacceptable to the target language readers. So translators should adopt the appropriate method to convey the real meanings of Chinese idioms. Second, due to the different culture and history, there are some idioms that have no corresponding translations in the target language both in literal and pragmatic implication, which will bring difficulty to translators. In this case, if the translators don't understand Chinese culture or history, they could not adopt the right method to transfer the real meaning of the Chinese idioms. Take “塞翁失马” as an example, this set phrase is created in ancient time of China. Its literal meaning is that an old man in the frontier lost his horse. But in a few days, the lost horse came with another horse. Obviously, its figurative meaning is that blessing may come in the shape of a loss. If translators do not know the origin of the idiom, they can not translate it well.

In brief, there are still some problems in the English translation of Chinese idioms. These problems appear mainly because the translators ignore the functional equivalence between the original and the translated works. Nida's functional equivalence theory is the best choice for Chinese idiom translation. The use of functional equivalence theory can minimize errors in translation and achieve the coherence in function and form between the source and the target languages.

### III. FUNCTIONAL EQUIVALENCE THEORY

Functional Equivalence Theory put forward by Nida is different from most of the early theories that focus on the verbal comparison between the SL and TL. Nida attempts to offer a new way to produce an equivalent, taking the relationship of the receptor to the text into account. It is believed that “the relationship of the target language receptors to the target language text should be roughly equivalent to the relationship between the original receptors and the original text.” (Nida, 1993, p.112) The basic ideas of Nida's Functional Equivalence Theory lie in the following three aspects.

#### A. *The Notion of Equivalence*

One way of defining functional equivalence in translation is to describe it as “the closest natural equivalent to the source-language message” (Nida, 1964, p.166). There are three essential terms in this definition deserving our attention: closest, natural and equivalent. Here “equivalence” should not be understood in the meaning of “identity” but only in terms of “proximity”. A functional-equivalence translation is mainly concerned on the equivalence of receptors' response rather than the equivalence of language forms. Using the term of “equivalent”, Nida suggests trying to make the response from target language receptors as proximate as possible to that from the source language receptors.

As far as the linguistic aspect is concerned, the term “natural” implies that the rendering must be readable (related to the language form) and understandable (related to the content) to the target receptors, since different languages have different features of grammar and lexicon. As to the cultural aspect, functional equivalence holds that the rendering

should adopt the culture patterns familiar to the target receptors and a translator should domesticate those foreign culture patterns. It is allowable to make some adjustments in the form and even in the content in order to reach the aim of the functional-equivalent effect.

Nida uses the term “closest” to describe the degrees of proximity between the source language and the target language. Functional-equivalence requires the highest degree of proximity. Personally, the writer holds that here the term “closest” should be analyzed from two different aspects: language form and utterance in meaning. The ideal situation is to make the version “closest” to the original message both in form and meaning. No aspect should be especially emphasized at the expense of the other, but, actually, in the practice of translation, the problem between language form and utterance meaning will always occur, especially when culturally-loaded words or expressions are involved. Transferred information directly determines target receptors’ response, so in most cases, language forms are forced to give way to transferred information in order to get the result of closest response between receptors in two different cultures.

#### B. *The Notion of Receptor’s Response*

“It is essential that functional equivalence be stated primarily in terms of a comparison of the way in which the original receptors understood and appreciated the text and the way in which receptors of translated text understand and appreciate the translated text” (Nida, 1993, p.116). From this point, we can see that what Nida emphasizes is different receptors’ responses that source language and target language cause, i.e., language function, rather than language forms.

Functional-equivalence translation is receptor-oriented and pays great attention to target receptors’ response. Nida puts receptors in a very important place when judging a version. Traditionally, translations are always judged by the comparison between the original text and the translated text. In contrast with formal equivalence translation, functional equivalence translation pays more attention to the receptor’s response and the naturalness of the target language than language forms.

#### C. *The Notion of Diversity*

Functional Equivalence Theory offers different degrees of adequacy for a qualified translation from the minimal to the maximal, rather than a fixed standard. With the minimal and maximal levels given, all those translations between the two levels are considered acceptable.

Nida points out the great many different factors that the adequacy of a translation depends on “the reliability of the text itself, the discourse type, the intended audience, the manner in which the translated text is to be used, and the purpose for which the translation has been made” (Nida, 1993, p.127). All of these factors work in the production of an adequate translation. A range of varying degrees of equivalence, as a matter of fact, is understandable and reasonable.

Thus, Functional Equivalence Theory provides more freedom for translators in order to deal with problems of specific situations. Compared with many other translation theories, which attempt to work out a single standard, Functional Equivalence Theory not only sets up an ideal definition for translation and have the lowest standard, but also allows a wide range of diversity in translating as well.

### IV. APPLICATION OF FUNCTIONAL EQUIVALENCE THEORY IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF CHINESE IDIOMS

In this part, the author will focus on the methods in the English translation of Chinese idioms. The author will give concrete illustrations with some typical examples under the guidance of Functional Equivalence Theory.

#### A. *Literal Translation*

Literal translation is one of the basic methods in translation process. It requires that the translation should be loyal to the source language and keep the same form as the source language. Literal translation can be subdivided into the following kinds:

##### a. Direct translation

Direct translation can be used under two conditions. Firstly, the original images and figurative meanings of Chinese idioms coincide with those in English. Secondly, an idiom of the original language does not lead to cultural distortion in literal translation and can be accepted by readers of the target language. Direct translation deserves our first consideration in the process of idiom translation if it is functionally equivalent in both designated and associative meanings. Furthermore, if translators use this method in Chinese idiom translation, China’s culture can be fully introduced to the world. The following are some examples to illustrate the direct translation method.

##### Example 1:

范进因没有盘费，走去同丈人商议，被胡屠夫一口啐在脸上，骂了个狗血喷头道：“不要失了你的时了！你现在只觉得中了个相公，就‘癞蛤蟆想吃天鹅肉’来！……这些中举老爷的都是天上的文曲星！你看不见城里张府上那些老爷，都有万贯家私，一个个方面大耳。想你这尖嘴猴腮，也该撒泡尿自己照照！不三不四，就想天鹅屁吃！趁早收了这心……”（《儒林外史》）

...he had no money for the journey. He went to ask his father-in-law to help. Butcher Hu spat in his face, and poured out a torrent of abuse. “Don’t be fool!” He roared. “Just passing one examination has turned your head completely-you’re like a toad trying to swallow a swan! They are all stars in heaven! Look at the Zhang family in the

city. All those have pots of money, dignified faces and big ears. But your mouth sticks out and you've a chin like an ape's. You should piss on the ground and look at your face in the puddle! You look like a monkey, yet you want to become an official! Come off it." (Translated by Yang Xianyi & Gladys)

In this paragraph, "癞蛤蟆想吃天鹅肉", "尖嘴猴腮", "撒泡尿自己照照" are translated "You're like a toad trying to swallow a swan", "(But) your mouth sticks out and you've a chin like an ape's", "You should piss on the ground and look at your face in the puddle" respectively. The translated versions are considerably vivid for the preservation of the images in the original. At the same time, the target text readers will not put great effort in inferring the intended meaning of the source text writer.

**Example 2:**

宝玉道: "我就是个'多愁多病的身', 你就是那'倾国倾城的貌'。" (《红楼梦》270回)

"I'm the one 'sick with longing'" Baoyu joked, "and yours is the beauty which caused 'cities and kingdoms to fall.'"

In the idiom of "倾国倾城", "国" and "城" use the same image with "city" and "kingdom", and the idiom has the same meaning with "cities and kingdoms to fall". In this Chinese idiom, the translator uses the hyperbole device to describe the beautiful girl in a more effective way. Thus, the same images and figurative meanings of the Chinese idiom are transferred, which brings no misunderstandings to the target language readers.

**Example 3:**

难道舅舅是不知道的, 还有一亩地, 两间房子, 在我手里花了不成? "巧媳妇做不出没米的饭", 叫我怎么样呢? (曹雪芹, 《红楼梦》, 第24回)

As you know better than anyone else, uncle, that I didn't have any property or land left after my father's death, which I squandered. Even the cleverest housewife can't cook a meal without rice. What do you expect me to do? (Translated by the Yangs)

In the example, the saying "巧媳妇做不出没米的饭" is literally translated as "Even the cleverest housewife can't cook a meal without rice." By doing so, it not only keeps the original form of the idioms but also transfer the original images and figurative meaning effectively. And at the same time it is acceptable to the English readers and will not cause any misunderstanding and wrong association. In addition, the full flavor of Chinese idioms is kept. In English, there is another idiom which is "One can't make bricks without straw", shares the same meaning as "巧媳妇做不出没米的饭". But this English idiom originates from the Bible, thus the idiom is filled with too strong national colorings. How can we imagine that a character in the ancient Chinese novel quoted a western idiom from the Bible? So in this case we should avoid borrowing the idiom in the target language.

More examples listed below may help us better understand the advantages of translating Chinese idioms directly into English:

**Example 4:**

画饼充饥 To draw cakes to allay hunger

画蛇添足 To draw a snake and add feet to it

牢不可破 to be so strongly built as to be indestructible

易如反掌 to be as easy as turning over one's hand

调虎离山 to lure the tiger from the mountain

望梅止渴 the sight of plums quenches one's thirst

初生牛犊不怕虎 New-born calves make little of tigers.

The above literal translations not only keep the original form of the idioms but also transfer the original image and metaphorical meaning effectively. Furthermore, it keeps the full flavor of the idioms. To sum up, by using the method of literal translation, we can establish the equivalence of the four aspects: forms, meanings, styles and image functions, thus achieving the highest degrees of functional equivalence. In our opinion, literal translation is a good and effective method to establish equivalent translation.

**b. Literal Translation with Annotation**

Some Chinese idioms contain allusions to historical, legendary, or mythical persons or events in Chinese culture, which are culturally loaded. Translating them in a literal way will sometimes do, but not always, for many idioms can be understood only when the historical background or their origin is completely explained. Then the translators have to do the work with the help of annotation. In a word, this method will promote the target readers' understanding of the original idioms and thus the equivalence of pragmatic effect is achieved. For example:

**Example 5:**

三顾茅庐 visiting the hut for three times

Annotation: During the period of the Three Kingdoms, AD 220-280, Liu Bei called three times as an unbidden guest at the lonely hut of Zhuge Liang known as the political genius of the age.

**Example 6:**

东施效颦 Tung Shih imitating Hsi Shih

Annotation: Hsi Shih was a famous beauty in the ancient Kingdom of Yueh. Tung Shih was an ugly girl who tried to imitate her ways.

## Example 7:

守株待兔 Watching the stump and waiting for a hare

Annotation: A peasant seeing a hare run against a tree-stump and break its neck abandoned his plough and waited by the stump in the hope that another hare would do the same thing.

The examples above vividly illustrate Chinese idioms by using the specific history stories, ancient legend and customs so that foreigners can accept the meaning of Chinese idioms as well as Chinese unique culture. In brief, literal translation with annotations is not only the demand of conveying meanings but also making the target language readers to understand the culture of the source language. On one hand, it can help the readers understand the real meanings of the source language; on the other hand, it retains the national culture and the original images. Therefore, Chinese culture can be transmitted to abroad. The functional equivalence is achieved in this way.

## c. Amplification

Amplification, as a translating method, indicates adding necessary words in the translation without distorting or changing the original meaning. Amplification is used to help the target readers deepen their understanding of the translated text, thus the original meaning is represented more completely and faithfully. The purpose can be realized on the basis of accurate and full comprehension of the original by the translator, thus a prudent and considerate attitude should be held when employing this method.

## Example 8:

薛蟠喜之不尽，将此话告诉了薛姨妈。(Chapter 48 of Hong Lou Meng)

H: Xue Pan, delighted at the prospect of getting away so soon, hastened to relay this to his mother.

Here “喜之不尽” is translated into “delighted at the prospect of getting away so soon”. “The prospect of getting away so soon” is added in the rendering although such information doesn’t occur in the exact original sentence but from the context.

## B. Free Translation

Free translation not only requires restrictions in structures of source language but also advocates using different expressive forms to convey meanings in source language. There are three situations free translation should be used. First, it is impossible to render idioms by retaining the original images because it would cause misunderstanding or incomprehension among the readers.

## Example 9:

粗枝大叶 crude and perfunctory

It is not suggestive to translate it into “bulky branch and large leaf”. People seldom remember the metaphor of “branch” and “leaf”. Then in translation, it is unnecessary to introduce its lifeless image for it is no longer relevant to the meaning of the idiom. It can be translated as “crude and perfunctory”, and foreign readers can understand it in context.

## Example 10:

有鼻子有眼儿 describe a thing vividly

This idiom should not be translated as “with a nose and an eye”, it should be understood more in its implied meaning. Therefore, we’d better translate it into “to describe a thing vividly”, in which the images of “nose” and “eye” are totally lost. By translating idioms in this way, the picture, flavor and sound-effect of the original might be lost, but the sense of the idioms can be successfully communicated.

## Example 11:

此地无银三百两 A guilty person gives himself away by conspicuously protesting his innocence.

This idiom is from a fable about a man who buried 300 taels of silver underground, but he feared that it would be stolen by others. Then the man put one brand aside, on which he wrote down this idiom. It is an obvious liar. Literally, if the rendering are translated as “No 300 taels of silver buried here”, the target language readers could not understand the figurative meaning of the idiom and they would be puzzled when it appeared in the context. To convey the meaning of the idiom, free translation is a better choice.

Second, when there are no equivalent idioms to borrow.

## Example 12:

后又助着薛蟠图些银钱酒肉，一任横行霸道，他不但不去管约，反而“助纣为虐”，讨好儿。(曹雪芹，《红楼梦》，第9回)

In return for money and good meals from Hsueh Pan, he had not checked his disgraceful behavior but actually abetted him in order to curry favor. (Translated by Yang Xianyi & Gladys)

In the example, “助纣为虐” is an allusion. “纣” is a cruel tyrant in the Shang Dynasty. And when people use this idiom they only pay attention to its metaphorical meaning “to help the evil person to do bad things”, showing no interest in knowing who on earth “纣” is. If we translate literally as “to help Zhou to do cruel deeds” without making annotation to explain the historical background, the target readers will be puzzled. Hence it is rendered literally as “abetted”.

## Example 13:

杞人忧天 unnecessary anxiety

This is a fable from Lei Zi about a man in the Kingdom of Qi in Spring and Autumn Periods of ancient China. He was groundlessly haunted by the fear all day that the sky would crash down. So he could not sleep well at night and eat much less than before. From the context, apparently, it is not necessary to explain “who is that man in Kingdom of Qi” and “why he worried that sky would crash down”. The rendering of “unnecessary anxiety” is obviously better than a lengthy explanation which might exhaust readers.

Third, literal meaning and figurative meaning in the SL text are hard to be kept in the translated text. If the image of the SL text cannot be remained in idiom translation, a translator should change the image into the one that is more familiar to the reader of the TL. Only by doing so, the implicated meaning in the SL text can be fully understood by the target readers. Therefore the functional equivalence can be achieved.

Example 14:

天有不测风云，人有旦夕祸福 Sudden storms spring up in nature, and the fortunes of men may change overnight.

After read the Chinese idioms “天有不测风云，人有旦夕祸福”， it is difficult for target language readers to understand the relations between “wind”, “cloud” and “people’s fortunes”. If the translator changes the image into “storm”, which is on rushing when it happens and can destroy all the fortunes, the meaning of this idiom will be fully expressed to achieve the maximum equivalence between the source language and the target language. The translator here chooses the same image shared by the two languages to transfer the misfortunes overnight under the guidance of free translation, and it’s a better way to achieve the functional equivalence.

In a word, free translation is by far the most common way of translating idioms when a match cannot be found in the target language or when it seems inappropriate to use idiomatic language in the target text because of differences in stylistic preferences of the source and target languages. This is done on the expense of a neglect of style. In this case, there is always some loss of the rhetorical features, sometimes part of the meaning. The translator attempts to reduce the loss to a minimum by providing supplementary notes so as to provide reader with information necessary for appreciating the idioms.

### C. Other Feasible Methods

Apart from the methods mentioned above, there are other feasible methods to be applied in the English translation of Chinese idioms, such as combination, omission, borrowing, and so on. In the following sections, the author will give a brief introduction to five methods connected with functional equivalence effect in Chinese idiom translation into English.

#### a. Combination

Combination is to use both literal and free translation. As stated above, both literal and free translations have their own merits and demerits. Literal translation stresses the faithfulness to the source language, which can help retain the styles and images by keeping the original forms. But in some cases the mere literal translation will lead to the possible misunderstanding. At this time it is necessary to take the advantage of free translation since it can erase the misunderstanding and make the translated version easily understood. But on the other hand, the vivid images and the exotic flavor in the original text are lost. So in this case, it is necessary to take advantages of the two methods to better transfer the source language meanings to achieve the equivalence both in linguistics and culture. Note how the method is used in the following example:

Example 15:

那薛老大也是“吃着碗里的瞧着锅里的。”(曹雪芹,《红楼梦》,第16回)

Hsueh Pan is another of those greedy-guts who “keep one eye on the bowl and the other on the pan” (Translated by Yang Xianyi & Gladys.)

The idiom “吃着碗里的瞧着锅里的” is used to depict a greedy person. In the rendering “keep one eye on the bowl and the other on the pan”, “keep one eye on” is the free translation of “吃着” and the rest is literally translated. At the same time “greedy-guts” is used to reveal the connotation of this idiom. This rendering employs the combination of literal translation and free translation. Through this we can keep the original images and cultural characteristics. It is also a flexible and efficient way to achieve functional equivalence.

Example 16:

一个碗不响，两个碗叮当 One bowl is quiet, two bowls make a row.

The idiom figuratively implies that one person can not quarrel with himself or herself, but two persons together are not harmonious. The first part of the Chinese idiom literally means that one bowl can not make a sound. In the second part, the rendering transfers the real meaning of the idiom by the method of free translation.

Based on the above examples, we can conclude that Chinese idioms can be translated using the combination of literal and free translation methods to achieve the equivalence effect. In this way, the Chinese cultural flavor in the idioms can be preserved and a brief interpretation of the idiom connotation is provided in the target language readers’ favor as well.

#### b. Omission

Omission does not mean subtracting any meaning from the original at random but deals with the redundant wording in order to achieve a succinct and idiomatic rendering. Sometimes, if the images of the Chinese idioms can not be retained or transferred in the translation, we usually leave out the images. Sometimes, if the repeated part in the idiom is translated, the translation is somewhat redundant. In this case, the best method for a translator is to choose omission, for

example:

Example 17:

取之不尽，用之不竭 inexhaustible

The idiom is quite nice in the eyes of Chinese speakers, for it is balanced, which conforms to the Chinese culture and the feeling of the Chinese people. But to English readers, who are used to being brief, a feeling of being wordy and strange will be caused if they are translated as the Chinese words. Then the better way for a skillful translator to choose is omission, that is, to be translated as “inexhaustible”.

Omission can be employed in another situation: considering the coherence of the meaning in the context. Let us see an example by Hawkes.

Example 18:

鸳鸯喜之不尽，拉了他嫂子，到贾母跟前跪下。(Chapter 46 of Hong Lou Meng)

Faithful led her sister-in-law through their midst, knelt down at her mistress's feet.

Faithful is the close servant of Grandmother Jia, who is forced to be Jia She's concubine, she strongly opposes to this and feels angry about it. So when the opportunity favors her for her asking help from Grandmother Jia to change the situation, she is happy, but the stronger mood she is experiencing all the time is anger and sadness, for the purpose of avoiding undermining the main clue of the mood, in Hawkes's translation, “喜之不尽” is omitted.

c. Borrowing

Borrowing, which is realized by finding an equivalent idiom in the target language, is the most idealistic way for idiom-rendering. If the translator may find an English idiom which is close to a Chinese idiom in meaning, form, image and association, he may adopt it without hesitation for the rendering. English idioms are ready and familiar to target language readers, adopting them in translation may be helpful for them to read the translated version more fluently and understand the new content more easily, as a result, their response to the text will be “natural”. Some examples are provided here.

Example 19:

贾芸喜不自禁，来至绮霞斋打听宝玉，谁知宝玉一早便往北静王府里去了。(Chapter 24 of Hong Lou Meng)

H: Beside himself with joy, Jia-Yun now continued on his way to Sunset Studio to look for Bao-yu. In point of fact Bao-yu had gone off first thing that morning to call on the Prince of Bei-jing.

English idiom “beside oneself with joy” is borrowed to render “喜不自禁”. Although full equivalent idioms are almost beyond our reach, we may borrow some idioms holding the closest implicated meanings with the original for rendering.

Example 20:

但是朱吟秋在旁边冷冷地给周仲伟的一团高兴上浇了一勺冷水;他说.....(茅盾:《子夜》,第16章)

But Chu Yin-chiu threw cold water on his rising spirits when he said gloomily...

Both “浇了一勺冷水” and “to throw cold water on” use the same image to vividly show the metaphorical meaning “to discourage somebody”, so it's the overlapped part of Chinese and English culture and to borrow the English corresponding idiom is an ideal way of translation in this condition.

Example 21:

以牙还牙 a tooth for a tooth

The translator borrows the English idiom to achieve the functional equivalence. It is much closer to the original version than other English translation versions.

In these Chinese idioms, the translated versions are easy to be remembered. They have similar images with English expressions. In this case, borrowing is the first concern in the process of Chinese idiom translation in order to achieve the functional equivalence. Since idioms are usually rather culture-specific, more often, no two idioms in English and Chinese are totally identical. We can hardly find the absolute equivalent as far as Chinese idioms are concerned, thus if a synonymous English idiom is borrowed in the rendering, it is regarded that borrowing is adopted. Some loss of meaning, form, image and association in intercultural communication is unavoidable.

d. Transposition

Transposition is a seldom-adopted translation method, with which the translation of certain part is transferred to another place in the text for the convenience of the overall arrangement of the sentences, yet the meaning is guaranteed or conveyed in a general sense to the target readers.

Example 22:

太太还说老爷才来家，每日欢天喜地的说骨肉完聚。(Chapter 72 of Hong Lou Meng)

But Lady Wang said that Sir Zheng was so happy to be home again with his family all around him---she says he's hardly stopped talking about “family togetherness” since the day he got back.

In the original text, “欢天喜地” is used to modify the verb “说” as an adverbial, it is transposed after “Sir Zheng” as predicative in the translated text.

e. Integration

Integration means the meaning of the idiom to be translated is integrated with the meaning of some other part in the text as a whole. Integration is helpful in forming terse structure, getting rid of redundant wording as well as keeping a

natural style of the text. Thus the readers may feel the text is easily understood without weakening or distorting the original meaning.

Example 23:

一见是宝玉，又惊又喜，又悲又痛，忙一把死攥住他的手。(Chapter 77 of Hong Lou Meng)

What surprise, delight, sorrow and anguish all mixed in one when she saw who it was. She gripped his hand tightly in hers.

The meaning of “又惊又喜” is integrated with that of “又悲又痛” in a whole as “what surprise, delight, sorrow, anguish all mixed in one” for sake of avoiding repetition and redundancy.

## V. CONCLUSION

As the cream of the language, Chinese idioms possess their own unique features. Most of them have fixed structures and regular forms. They are heavily culturally loaded phrases and sentences, which are mainly from history, mystical legends, allegories, religions and so on. In addition, figures of speech and phonological features are frequently employed in Chinese idioms. With such unique characteristics, it is quite a tough and fascinating job to translate Chinese idioms into English.

Based on the relevant survey of Chinese idioms, the literature review of functional equivalence theory, the author puts forward nine translating methods, including literal translation, free translation, borrowing, combination, omission, literal translation plus annotation, integration, transposition and amplification. Among them literal translation can achieve the highest degree of functional equivalence, which emphasizes not only context equivalence but also form equivalence. The other methods are flexible ones to achieve the functional equivalence in certain aspects.

The applying of Nida's functional equivalence theory to the methods on Chinese idiom translation is testified to have some implications both in theoretical and practical aspects. Theoretically, it provides a theoretical framework for this paper. When translating idioms, we should take three notions into consideration, namely, equivalence, receptor's response and diversity. Practically, applicable solutions with examples are suggested.

Admittedly, the methods mentioned here are not always ideal and there may be better methods to be found. But after all, they can serve as reference for translators. At least under the guidance of this, firstly, the translation of Chinese idiom translation will help promote cultural exchange between China and English speaking countries; and secondly, we understand that there is no total equivalence, but only equivalence to some degree. What translators seek is the maximum equivalence for the target reader.

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