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**A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE TRANSLATION OF CULTURE-  
LOADED WORDS IN THE *JOY LUCK CLUB* FROM THE PERSPECTIVE  
OF FUNCTIONAL TRANSLATION THEORY**

*The functionalist translation theory takes skopos theory and loyalty principle as the core. It emphasizes that the purpose of the translator plays a decisive role in the whole act of translation, and considers that it is necessary to consider the changeable relations among the original author, translator and target reader, and adopt appropriate translation strategies to achieve different translation purposes. Therefore, translation is not merely a linguistic transformation, but also a cross-cultural communication behavior. The Joy Luck Club is the debut novel of the Chinese-American writer Amy Tan. Since Chinese American writers have both Chinese and American cultural background and language ability, Chinese American literature also presents the characteristics of cross-cultural writing. The social cultural elements of The Joy Luck Club are fully displayed through a large number of culture-loaded words, highlighting the unique Chinese culture that has been preserved in a foreign country, and also demonstrating the important role of culture-loaded words in the exchange and dissemination of civilizations. However, it can be difficult to translate culture-loaded words in the process of language transfer. In the process of translation, how to translate the multi-cultural fusion language and how to present the literary works under the collision of Chinese and American cultures to the Chinese readers is undoubtedly a major challenge for translators. Given this, this paper will explore the different translation styles of Li*

*Jun, Zhang Li and Cheng Naishan as well as the specific application of functional translation theory in literary translation by comparing and analyzing the two Chinese versions.*

**Keywords:** *functionalist translation theories, culture-loaded words.*

The translation community has long debated the two translation strategies of domestication and foreignization. Some scholars believe that domestication can better promote cultural exchange and understanding, while some critics believe that foreignization can enable the target readers to better understand and feel the exotic and cultural characteristics of the original text by retaining the cultural characteristics of the original text. Despite their different opinions, scholars have reached a consensus to some extent that these two methods are not opposites, and that each of the two methods has its own rationality and can be complementary to each other. However, they did not give a definite answer to the question of how to correctly translate with the help of domestication and foreignization. The functional translation theory has developed from the 1970s to the present, through the development of Katharina Reiss, Hans J. Vermeer, Justa Holz-Mänttari and Christiane Nord. Their theory of translation has been developed and refined by a number of scholars, and advocates that translation methods should be chosen flexibly according to a specific purpose and actual needs of translation.

Hans J. Vermeer developed the “Skopos Theory”. Vermeer deeply discusses the purpose of translation, the relationship between the original and the target text, the role of the translator and translation methods. Skopos theory holds that translation is “an activity carried out in the target culture to meet the needs of the target readers” (王红成, 2002). The ultimate goal of translation should be determined by the intended use of the target text, and the translator should flexibly adopt his/her own translation strategies and methods from the perspective of the target readers.

In contrast to Vermeer, Nord does not believe that the translator should have the freedom to determine the purpose of the translation, which is still determined

by the author. “Nord argues that free rewriting does not fall under the category of translation: without the original, there is no translation. The translator should be responsible for both the source text and the target environment, the sender of the source text information and the target reader. She called this duty ‘loyalty’.”(张美芳, 2005) The principle of loyalty contains two aspects. On the one hand, translation cannot meet the needs of all readers. In this context, Nord believes that the translator has a moral responsibility to the reader and has a responsibility to explain to the reader why the translation choices were made (仲伟合, 1999). On the other hand, the principle of loyalty requires that the translator should remain loyal to the original author. When there is a conflict between the purpose of translation and the intention of the original text, the translator should respect the intention of the original text author and try to balance the purpose of translation and the original intention of the author (仲伟合, 1999).

*The Joy Luck Club* is created by Amy Tan, a Chinese American author. This novel centers on the complex relationships between four Chinese mothers who immigrated to the United States from China and their four daughters who were born and raised in the United States. Through several interwoven stories, it presents the conflicts and integration of two generations in terms of culture, emotions and values, reflecting the collision between Chinese-American culture and mainstream American culture. “The creation of Chinese-American writers assumes the function of cultural translation. For Chinese-American writers, they are constructing the subject with their creations, and their creations not only need to go through language translation, but also cultural translation.” (王光林:152) *The Joy Luck Club* depicts the image of China from the perspective of the ethnic Chinese by showing the collision between the Chinese culture and the heterogeneous culture, and the work contains a large number of Chinese narrative elements. The author intends to construct the cultural identity of ethnic Chinese and highlight ethnic characteristics through a large number of Chinese cultural narratives. Since its publication, *The Joy Luck Club* has attracted the attention of

Chinese translators. However, due to the different translators' cultural awareness of the target language and the reader's awareness, this has led to a large difference in the standards of translator subjectivity and fidelity in the translation of *The Joy Luck Club*. By using the functional translation theory, this paper analyzes the two translations of *The Joy Luck Club* by Cheng Naishan et al. and Li Jun and Zhang Li. This paper also explores how the translators can flexibly use these strategies in different contexts to achieve the most appropriate translation effect by comparing the translators' different translation methods used for translating the culturally loaded words.

After finishing the translation, Cheng Naishan said in her post on the translation that she “tried to conform to the reading habits of Chinese readers, and deleted some notes that were originally made to accommodate foreign readers who did not understand Chinese customs.” In this translation, Cheng Naishan mainly chooses domestication as the main translation strategy. In their translation, Li Jun and Zhang Li pay attention to fidelity to the plot and theme of the original text, while carefully preserving its cultural characteristics. For example, many traditional Chinese customs, language and family values are covered in the book, and through accurate cultural explanations and annotations, Chinese readers can understand and feel these cultural elements without feeling unfamiliar or misunderstood.

(1) “She and Auntie An-mei were dressed up in funny Chinese dresses with stiff stand-up collars and blooming branches of embroidered silk sewn over their breasts. These clothes were too fancy for real Chinese people, I thought, and too strange for American parties”.

程译本：“而她和安梅阿姨，则穿着领子硬邦邦地竖着紧箍着头颈、前襟绣花的旗袍，样子十分好笑——中国人日常这样穿似太过华丽隆重，如果在宴会上如此穿，却又显得很古怪”。

李译本：“母亲和安梅阿姨会穿上有几分可笑的中式衣衫：硬邦邦的立领，前襟用丝线绣上盛开的花枝。我觉得，这些衣服对于真正的中国人来说

太华贵了，对于美国式的聚会来说又太古怪了”。

In the original text, Cheng Naishan translates “Chinese dresses” as “旗袍”, while Li Jun and Zhang Li translate it as “中式衣衫”. According to the details of the dress, it has a stand-up collar, is embroidered on the chest, and is a dress that Chinese women would wear to an American banquet to show their importance, but it is also slightly strange. From a comprehensive point of view, this kind of clothes must be women’s clothes with Chinese characteristics. Combined with the background of the time, this kind of clothes is exactly “旗袍”. In order to let the Chinese readers understand it better, Cheng’s translation adopts the strategy of nationalization as “旗袍” directly. Li’s translation, on the other hand, is a direct translation of “Chinese clothes”, which will cause trouble to the Chinese readers, who will not be able to visualize what “Chinese clothes” are at first sight.

As for “stiff stand-up collars”, Li translates it as “硬邦邦的立领”, while Cheng translates it as “领子硬邦邦地竖着紧箍着头颈”. The Cheng translation translates it as “the collar stood stiffly and tightly around the head and neck”. According to the original text, it can be understood that this passage is Jing-Mei Woo’s recollection of attending the Joy Luck Club with her parents when she was a child, and it is meant to show that the daughter, who had received American culture, is puzzled and resistant to Chinese distinctive clothing and culture. Cheng’s translation adds the description of the state of a stiff collar around the head and neck which further deepens Jing-Mei Woo’s puzzlement and resistance to Chinese culture in her point of view.

And for the culturally loaded word “blooming branches of embroidered silk”, Li’s translation also adopts the strategy of direct translation, translating word by word, and the phrase “丝线绣着的盛开的花枝” explains Jing-Mei Woo’s thoughts that it is “too fancy” and “too strange for American parties”. Cheng’s translation, however, translates it as “绣花”, omitting the translation of the two words “blooming” and “silk”, which is in line with the Chinese readers’ perception, but it

cannot better convey the emotion that the original text intends to express.

To sum up, considering the cultural background of Chinese people, Cheng's translation basically adopts the strategy of domestication, omitting the redundant words in the original text that can be understood, and corresponding to the terminology that Chinese people are familiar with, so as to be more in line with the reading habits of Chinese people. Li's translation, on the other hand, corresponds almost exactly to the original text, fully demonstrating the style of the original text, which adds certain difficulties to the reading process of Chinese readers, but also makes it more convenient for Chinese readers to experience the author's feelings as a Chinese immigrant to the United States.

(2) The matchmaker bragged about me: "An earth horse for an earth sheep. This is the best marriage combination."

程译本：那媒婆不住地向洪太太夸耀着我：“看呀，就好比骏马配上金马鞍，多般配，真个应着门当户对这句话了。”

李译本：那个媒婆替我吹嘘起来：“土马配土羊，这可是绝配啊！”（注释：按照中国的传统习俗和五行学说（金木水火土），每个年份都有各自对应的属性，再配上十二生肖，就会出现“土马”“土羊”的说法。）

In the original, this is the story of the matchmaking experience of her mother, Lindo Jong, when she was a young girl in China. The matchmaker invokes the traditional Chinese Five Elements and the Chinese Zodiac to illustrate the suited relationship of Lindo Jong and Tian Yu. The words “horse” and “goat” appear in the original text, and Amy Tan adds the modifier “earth” in front of these two nouns. This cultural background has deep roots in the Chinese context and is familiar to most Chinese readers. It can be seen that Cheng's translation has totally modified this sentence by omitting all references to the Chinese Five Elements and the Chinese Zodiac in the original text. She uses the metaphor of “骏马配上金马鞍” to emphasize that the two are as good a match as if they were born as a pair. Although this translation can help Chinese readers understand the meaning of the original text more directly to some extent, it is a mistranslation in terms of fidelity

to the original text.

In contrast, Li's translation accurately conveys the meaning of the original text. In the translation, the phrases "earth horse" and "earth sheep" are directly retained, the expressions "土马" and "土羊" are used, and the cultural background information of the Chinese Five Elements and the Chinese Zodiac is explained in detail in the annotation. By explaining through the annotations, this way of translation fully respects the original text, and more importantly, it provides a window for readers to understand the Chinese culture written and interpreted by Chinese American writers.

(3) The matchmaker lighted both ends and announced, "The marriage has begun."

程译本：媒人点燃了蜡烛两头后，宣布道：“拜堂！”

李译本：媒婆将红烛的两端都点燃，然后宣布：“二人成亲！”

This text is taken from Lindo Jong's recollection of her first arranged marriage. The phrase "the marriage has begun" refers to the beginning of the wedding ceremony. Both Cheng's version and the Li's version have carried out domestication. The word "拜堂" is used in traditional Chinese weddings to refer to the ceremony in which the bride and groom pay homage to heaven and earth, their ancestors, and their parents. The couples are considered to be formally married only after the ceremony is completed. Amy Tan uses the expression "the marriage has begun" in order to accommodate English readers and to ensure that they understand the fact that the wedding has begun. Considering that Lindo Jong's first marriage took place in a small village in old China, the society at that time was not yet fully enlightened, and the backward countryside still retained its primitive customs and traditions. Therefore, Cheng's translation is fully in line with the cultural and social background of the time. Cheng's ingenious adjustment in the dimension of communication effectively meets the requirements of cross-cultural communication while conveying the message of the original text. In contrast, Li's domestication of "二人成亲" is not quite coordinate with the formal phrases of

wedding ceremony in the old society, and fails to accurately reflect the cultural and ritual details of the original text.

(4) She has a Chinese saying for what she knows. Chunwang chihan: If the lips are gone, the teeth will be cold. Which means, I suppose, one thing is always the result of another.

程译本：直到今天我还相信，妈持有那种先知先觉的功能。对此，妈总以一句中国成语来解释：“唇亡齿寒”，假如嘴唇不复存在，牙齿当然就会觉得冷了。我想，那意思就是：一件事物的发生，常常会导致另一件事的到来，世上万物，彼此依附，互相牵连。

李译本：直至今日，我依然相信母亲具有某种神奇的力量能预知未来。对此，他用一个中国成语来解释，叫做“唇亡齿寒”。我猜他的意思就是，事物之间总存在某种因果关系。

Lena believes that her mother has an insight beyond the norm and can see how things will develop in the future. In the article, Amy Tan provides a cultural translation of the idiom “唇亡齿寒”. She first introduced the term in pinyin, and interpreted it both literally and deeply. Both versions have successfully translated the meaning of this idiom, and in the subsequent interpretive translation, they have not copied the original sentence pattern, but carried out appropriate adjustment. However, it is worth noting that there are still slight differences in the way the two translations are handled. Cheng adds “世上万物，彼此依附，互相牵连” in translation, which means “All things in the world are dependent on each other and related to each other”. It is the translator’s additional interpretation based on the context and her own thinking. However, Li’s translation is strictly faithful to the original text, without additional translation or rewriting, but he integrates the word “唇亡齿寒” into the whole sentence, and transforms the last sentence into “因果关系”, which makes the text more smooth on the basis of respecting the original. It can be seen that Li’s translation here not only reflects the foreignization technique, but also has the domestication characteristics of Cheng’s translation, which restores



the context of the original text while ensuring the fluency of the translation.

(5) The servants had already packed and loaded a rickshaw with the day's basic provisions: a woven hamper filled with zong zi – the sticky rice wrapped in lotus leaves, some filled with roasted ham, some with sweet lotus seeds...sleeping mats for our afternoon nap.

程译本：用人们把吃食都装上黄包车，一大篮粽子...连午睡用的席子也带上了。

李译本：用人们早已将为这天预备的吃食都装上黄包车，有满满一篮粽子，用糯米制成，内裹炙烤过的火腿或香甜的莲子，外面包着荷叶...当然，我们午休用的睡垫也都齐备了。

Zongzi is a traditional food familiar to Chinese readers, but for Amy Tan, it exists only in her mother's narrative. Amy Tan attracts English readers who are unfamiliar with the Mid-Autumn Festival culture through the detailed description of its stuffing, while subtly creates a festive atmosphere. On the other hand, it shows the wealth of Ying-Ying's family - zong zi stuffed with ham and stuffed with sweet lotus seeds, which is in contrast of the miserable life of Ying-Ying after suffering a painful marriage. Li's translation focuses on restoring the cultural significance of festival food, making appropriate adjustments in terms of language fluency and readability, and conveying these contents more faithfully, while Cheng's translation omits this part, resulting in the loss of this cultural value in the translation. Therefore, this paper holds a negative attitude towards the omission of Cheng translation.

In the process of writing, Amy Tan transforms Chinese cultural elements, historical backgrounds and folk traditions through English to make them more in line with the cognitive and receptive habits of English readers. The Chinese stories and cultures told by the author are creative interpretations and reproductions of the Chinese culture in the English context. It is even more complicated and challenging for the translator to try to translate these cultural items back into the Chinese context. In dealing with the proprietary items of Chinese culture,

translators need to handle the delicate balance between domestication and foreignization, transformation and fidelity.

The special interpretations of traditional Chinese culture given by American Chinese writers through the English language may differ in their expressions and interpretations from the traditional Chinese cultural understanding. If proprietary items of Chinese culture are translated exactly according to their original meaning in Chinese culture, although the connotation of the original culture can be faithfully reflected, this practice often deviates from the original author's creative intent. On the contrary, if the translator does not make any adjustments to these culturally proprietary items in the translation process, it may lead to readers' misunderstanding of the Chinese culture, or even ambiguity about the cultural meanings in the original text, and fail to reflect the deeper cultural connotations in the culturally loaded words.

There are major differences between these two translations in translating culture-loaded words. Cheng's translation suffers from problems of mistranslation, omission, and amplification, and fails to effectively convey the Chinese cultural background and details embedded in English context. The Li's translation, on the other hand, strives to restore the cultural essence of the original work in its translation. Sometimes, the Li translation even points out possible misinterpretations or deviations from the Chinese culture in the original work through annotation, and explains and corrects them. This kind of translation may break the traditional translation method of "invisibility in the text", but it effectively avoids misunderstanding or neglecting the cultural connotations. This approach enhances the readers' understanding of cultural differences and contexts, which is of some significance.

Overall, Li's translation appears to be more careful and thoughtful in the translation of culture-loaded words, and doing its best to avoid the translation flaws present in Cheng's translation. It not only embodies the foreignization method but also pays attention to fidelity. This practice provides useful ideas for dealing with

complex cultural issues in the translation of Chinese-American literature.

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### 功能翻译理论视角下对《喜福会》中译本文化负载词的翻译对比研究

功能主义翻译理论以目的论和忠诚原则为核心, 强调译者的翻译目的在整个翻译行为中起着决定性作用, 并且认为必须考虑原作者、译者与目标读者之间存在的翻译关系, 采取适当的翻译策略来实现不同的翻译目的。因此, 翻译不仅是一种语言的转换, 也是一种跨文化的交流行为。《喜福会》是美国华裔作家谭恩美的处女作。由于美国华裔作家同时具有中美文化背景和语言能力, 其文学也表现出跨文化写作的特点。《喜福会》中的社会文化元素通过大量文化负载词得以充分展现, 彰显了在异国他乡得以保留的独特的中华文化, 也展示了文化负载词对文明交流与传播的重要作用。然而, 在翻译过程中, 文化负载词在语言转换过程中有较大难度, 如何翻译多元文化融合的语言, 以及如何向中国读者呈现中美文化冲突下的文学作品, 无疑是译者面临的一大挑战。鉴于此, 本文将通过对李军、章力和程乃珊两译本的比较分析, 探讨其不同的翻译风格以及功能翻译理论在文学翻译中的具体应用。

**关键词:** 功能主义翻译理论, 文化负载词