

A Translation and Communication Study on Li Zhaoguo's Translation of the *Huangdi Neijing*

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ABSTRACT

As an important medium of cultural communication, the ancient books on Chinese medicine and their translation should receive more attention and research. This paper will take the *Huangdi Neijing*, which is the earliest and highest surviving classic on Chinese medicine, and has been listed in the Memory of the World Register as an example to study the translation and communication of the English translation of the *Huangdi Neijing* by Professor Li Zhaoguo from the perspective of five aspects of communication, including subject, object, medium, audience, and influence. It is hoped that this study will not only help people have a clearer understanding of the current situation of translation and communication of the *Huangdi Neijing*, but also have significance for proposing better communication strategies for TCM classics.

Keywords: *Huangdi Neijing*, Li Zhaoguo, Translation and communication study.

1. INTRODUCTION

As General Secretary Xi Jinping stressed in his speech at the National Conference on Health and Wellness, “we must strengthen the protection, rescue and collation of ancient Chinese medical books, and enhance the exchange and cooperation of Chinese medicine with foreign countries”. The study of the *Huangdi Neijing*'s translation is of great importance for its dissemination and communication. Thus, this paper will focus on Li Zhaoguo's translation of the *Huangdi Neijing* from the perspective of Lasswell's communication theory, and it will be divided into three parts. In the first part, the reasons and purposes for writing this paper will be introduced. In the second part, Li Zhaoguo's translation of the *Huangdi Neijing* from five aspects will be studied. And in the final part, some conclusions will be proposed.

2. ANALYSIS OF LI ZHAOGUO'S TRANSLATION ON THE HUANGDI NEIJING FROM COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE

Communication is the study of governing the occurrence and development of human

communication behaviors and processes, as well as the relationship between communication and people and society. In this part, the translation of the *Huangdi Neijing* will be studied by using a comparative analysis from the five dimensions of communication, namely subject, object, medium, audience, and effect.

2.1 Communication Subject

“The subject of translation communication is the initiator of the act of communication and has a direct impact on the final communication effect” (Yin Feizhou, 2021: 62). To a certain extent, the subject of communication determines the content of communication, which means the credibility and professionalism of the subject has a great influence on the effect of communication.

Due to the influence of historical environment, the translation of ancient Chinese medical texts not only requires contemporary translators to have a certain knowledge base of Chinese medicine, but also poses a great challenge to their translation ability and translation skills. Since 1925, only 29 translators have translated the *Huangdi Neijing*, the most famous of which are the foreign translator Paul Ulrich Unschuld and the domestic translator Li Zhaoguo. As a native with the knowledge of

Chinese medicine, Professor Li Zhaoguo's translation of the *Huangdi Neijing* has received widespread attention at home and abroad.

Firstly, Li Zhaoguo adopts a translation strategy of dissimulation. When translating, he gives more consideration to the context and humanities of the original language, hoping that the readers move closer to the original language, so that they can understand the stylistic features of the original language more truly and directly.

Secondly, for more than 30 years, Li Zhaoguo has devoted himself to the translation of Chinese medicine into English and the development of standardized translations of Chinese medicine terms. In the course of his continuous study and translation, he has gradually developed his own style and ideology of translation, which is "phonetic translation is the main focus, and interpretation is supplementary". For example, when translating the Chinese medicine term "虚邪贼风" in the *Su Wen*, he not only used the phonetic translation method to translate the term as "Xuxie (Deficiency-Evil) and Zeifeng (Thief-Wind)", but also added a note "all abnormal climatic changes and exogenous pathogenic factors" after the translation, so that the readers can understand the meaning of the original text more accurately. At the same time, in order to prove the accuracy of his translation and increase the conviction of his translated text, he also quoted additional notes by Gao Shizong and Wang Bing for clarification. This translation method not only improves the translator's translation efficiency, preserves the linguistic features of the original text, but also greatly improves the accuracy and acceptability of the translated text. Moreover, this translation method is also a significant development and advancement in the translation of Chinese medicine, and may provide certain inspiration and reference for future translations of other Chinese medical texts.

2.2 Communication Object

"When the translated text enters the transmission process, its object is the translated message until the final link" (Yin Feizhou, 2021: 110-113). Owing to the different cultural backgrounds and cultural needs of communication subjects and audiences, communication objects can be divided into different messages with different communication effects. Analyzed from the perspective of the field and use of communication, the object of the *Huangdi Neijing*'s translation can

be divided into three main aspects, namely: scholarly research, clinical application, and cultural popularization. In this section, the three main forms will be presented, compared and analyzed.

The first is the scholarly research field. Firstly, compared with other translators, Li Zhaoguo, a local doctor of medicine, has more knowledge of Chinese medicine and has a better understanding of the cultural background of Chinese medicine; as a professor teaching English and translating Chinese medicine for over 30 years, Li Zhaoguo has stronger translation skills and a deeper understanding of Chinese human history. Based on these two advantages, Professor Li Zhaoguo's translation is more faithful to the original content and ideas, and the language style and logical thinking presented are more in line with the original text. Secondly, Professor Li's translation retains the linguistic form of the original text and the unique Chinese cultural characteristics of Chinese medicine by following the principle, "the translation is as ancient as it is, and the text is unadorned". Thirdly, in the translation method, Professor Li Zhaoguo adopts the method that focuses on direct translation and supplemented by free translation. Although this translation method may make the translation cumbersome to read, it can retain the writing style and main idea of the original works to the greatest extent. From this, it can also be inferred that the intended readers of Li's translation of the *Huangdi Neijing* should not be the public, but scholars who have some knowledge of Chinese medicine, or practitioners of Western or Chinese medicine that have a good command of English, and this translation will provide profound meaning for them to take scholarly research.

The second is the clinically applied field. On one hand, Li Zhaoguo has a strong foundation in Chinese medicine, and his translation greatly reflects the principle of "faithfulness". On the other hand, the *Huangdi Neijing* discusses the etiology, clinical manifestations and treatment of diseases such as fever, malaria, cough, wind, paralysis and impotence, and many of these contents and ideas are still principles that must be followed in today's clinical practice, which represents the classic itself is a practical medical treating book, and the theoretical system set out in the book can directly guide clinical practice. Under this background, Li Zhaoguo's translation of the *Huangdi Neijing* not only serves as a bridge to the cultural dissemination of Chinese medicine, but also as a clinical book with great medical value.

The third is the cultural popularization field. According to the above analysis of the characteristics of Li Zhaoguo’s translation of the *Huangdi Neijing*, it can be proved that Li Zhaoguo’s translation is more faithful to the original text, dedicated to accurately and clearly express the connotation and meaning of the original text, and the text is more straightforward and formal. Although this method also reflects the translator’s cultural confidence, it may lack a certain degree of interest. Moreover, as the main audience of his translation are professional scholars and medical professionals, it also reflects there are some shortcomings in the popularization of his translation.

Compared with Li Zhaoguo, Zhou Chuncai and Han Yazhou’s translation of the *Huangdi Neijing* is

outstanding representative of the cultural popularization. By publishing a cartoon English translation of the *Huangdi Neijing* in Dolphin Publishing House in cartoon form, they made a breakthrough and success in the *Huangdi Neijing*’s translation. This innovative translation method and presentation is referential for other cultural popularization translations.

2.3 Communication Medium

The media of communication are the channels, tools and vehicles through which content is transmitted. The WorldCat database in the Online Computer Library Centre (OCLC) is the most complete and comprehensive union catalogue of libraries worldwide. The following are the world library holdings of the *Huangdi Neijing*.

Table 1. Types and Numbers of the *Huangdi Neijing* Collections Worldwide

Type	Print books	E-books	Articles	Master’s theses and doctoral dissertations	Braille books for the blind	Audio books	Music CDs	DVD videos	...
Quantity	4.7k	490	240	47	4	3	7	16	...

Table 2. Languages and Numbers of the *Huangdi Neijing* Collections Worldwide

Language	Chinese	Japanese	Korean	English	German	Hungarian	Vietnamese
Quantity	4.9k	480	260	26	1	1	1

Table 3. Li Zhaoguo’s Translation of the *Huangdi Neijing* Collections Worldwide

Type	Language
Print books (32)	Chinese (26), Japanese (6)

By analyzing “Table 1” and “Table 2”, it can be found that the *Huangdi Neijing* has a national holding of more than 5,000. And it does not only appear in traditional media forms such as text and pictures, but also in new media forms such as music, video and audio books. The emergence of new media not only reflects the dissemination of Chinese medicine culture is no longer limited to text and pictures alone but also reflects the changing ways in which people access knowledge in the new era and presents people with the need for new ways of disseminating culture. Moreover, the emergence of various language versions and Braille versions is also a side reflection of the expanding audience for TCM culture, which has to some extent gained more and more national attention.

From “Table 3”, it can be seen that the global holdings of Li Zhaoguo’s translation of the *Huangdi Neijing* are relatively few, and Li Zhaoguo’s translation is only available as the printed books in two languages, Chinese and Japanese. According to Yin Li’s research, the translation of the *Su Wen* by the famous German sinologist and historian of Chinese medicine, Paul Unschuld, is the most widely collected book in the world. The reasons of why local translators’ editions are not as widely read as those translated by foreign translators are worthy of people’s consideration.

2.4 Communication Audience

The audience is the final link in the communication of translations, and is the recipient

of the information in the translated language. Two types of audiences will be discussed in this paper, namely professional and general audiences.

For a survey of overseas' audiences of the *Huangdi Neijing*, Li Jing and Wu Te designed a questionnaire covering 70 audiences from more than 20 countries, including Australia, the United States, and Malaysia, who were proficient in English. The survey results showed that whoever the translator of the *Huangdi Neijing* was, there were only 23 people who were aware of the English translation of the *Huangdi Neijing*, of which 22 were professional audiences, while only 1 was a general audience. Although the sample size of this questionnaire is not quite large, it showed from this data that the *Huangdi Neijing* is more widespread among professional audiences than general audiences.

According to the results of the survey, it can be seen that the professional audience does not require a high degree of specialization in the English translation, and they can accept either the free or the direct translation (Li Jing, 2020: 149). The general audience, on the other hand, prefers free translation, where specialized terms are expressed in a more understandable way and the translated texts are more readable.

2.5 Communication Effect

The effect of dissemination is also an important indicator of the quality of a translation. In this part, the dissemination effects of different translations will be briefly described by comparing the reviews of different audiences on the websites of Amazon and the online reading community Goodreads. By combining the results of the surveys studied by Xie Wenxin, Yin Li and Li Jing, it can be found that in 2020 "only 60% of the 70 overseas survey respondents had heard of the *Huangdi Neijing*, and even fewer, 32.86%, had heard of its English translation" (2020: 148). The dissemination of the different versions of the translation was really mixed. Firstly, by comparing the translations of the *Huangdi Neijing* by American clinical herbalist, Maoshing Ni and Chinese medical Professor Li Zhaoguo, it showed that 73.53% of the general audience favored the version by Maoshing Ning, while they felt that although Professor Li's translation was more professional, it was more difficult to read and understand for people without TCM knowledge. In contrast, there was no significant difference in the acceptability of the two versions by TCM professionals (Li Jing, 2020: 148-

149). In fact, by looking at individual readers' comments on platforms such as Amazon, it can be seen that for Maoshing Ning's translation, there are the highest number of reviews, but only two reviews of Li Zhaoguo's translation (Yin Li, 2017: 36). Although most of Professor Li's reviews are positive, it can be seen from the number of reviews that Li's translation is not as popular overseas as the other two foreign translators. Thus, it can be inferred that it is the difference in the purpose, strategy of translation, cultural background of the audience and the means of communication that have led to the different dissemination effects.

3. CONCLUSION

By focusing on Li Zhaoguo's translation of the *Huangdi Neijing* from five aspects of communication and using WorldCat to conduct a simple comparative analysis of its dissemination status, this paper draws the following two conclusions. Firstly, the translation of the *Huangdi Neijing* by Professor Li Zhaoguo is more appropriate to the characteristics of the Chinese medicine era and faithful to the original text. Secondly, the *Huangdi Neijing*'s translation communication forms have changed in the global collection and tend to be more new media-oriented, but Li Zhaoguo's translation communication form is relatively fewer, and the overall dissemination effect still needs some improvement. Moreover, there are still some shortcomings in the research of this paper, such as insufficient investigation of Li Zhaoguo's translation and difficulty in conducting a global field study. However, the innovative research perspective of this paper does provide richer information and different directions for the study of Li Zhaoguo's translation of the *Huangdi Neijing*, and will, to a certain extent, promote the study of the translation and communication of other TCM books from different perspectives. Finally, the post-epidemic era provides an opportunity for the dissemination of Chinese medicine culture, and it is hoped that Chinese medicine culture can be better developed and disseminated in this context.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Humin Zuo wrote the manuscript, Ya Liu contributed to revising and editing.

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