



On C-E Translation of Fantasy Novels from the Perspective of Transknowletology: A Case Study of *Coiling Dragon*

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

With the boom in spreading Chinese net literature abroad, it is imperative to enhance the quality of translation for network novels. As a cornerstone of network novels disseminated in international markets, fantasy novels not only incorporate original fictional knowledge but also Chinese cultural knowledge, both of which are the secrets to attracting foreign readers and the focal points requiring special attention in translation. The translation standards of pursuing "Truth, Virtue, and Beauty" proposed by Transknowletology provide guidance for addressing the challenges in translating fantasy novels. Taking *Coiling Dragon* as an example, this paper explores how the translator conveys his genuine comprehension of the source text to the target readers, caters to them and aligns with their aesthetic standards when translating the fantasy novel. This paper aims to summarize translation methods for the English translation of fantasy novels so as to provide valuable references for improving the translation quality of network novels which are published and popular on internet.

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Keywords: Transknowletology; fantasy novel; English translation; truth; virtue; beauty.

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2014, Lai Jingping established Wuxiaworld, the earliest Chinese net literature translation website, for the popularity of *Coiling Dragon*, an English translation of the Chinese fantasy novel “盘龙” (*Panlong*), which marked the beginning of the dissemination of Chinese net literature in the English-speaking world [1]. Chinese net literature quickly attracts a large number of overseas readers due to its novelty, cultural fusion, and reading pleasure [2]. According to the 2023 Research Report on the Development of Chinese Net Literature, the size of Chinese net literature in the overseas market exceeded 4 billion yuan in 2023, with a steady improvement in its quality and a continuous increase in its number. The flourishing trend of exporting network novels undoubtedly provides an opportunity for Chinese culture to go global. Taking the international spread of net literature as a breakthrough to promote outstanding Chinese culture and tell Chinese stories, helps enhance the country's soft power and further establish an international image characterized by prosperous culture, thereby paving the way for China to stand out among the nations around the world. In the early stages of exporting network novels, fantasy novels once dominated the export [3]. Today, although net literature has expanded into various genres such as Adventure, Mystery, Thriller, Romance, Fantasy, Historical Fiction and Science Fiction, according to the Report, fantasy remains one of the top five genres in terms of novels being translated for the overseas market. Therefore, exploring the English translation of fantasy novels is of significant reference value for improving the quality of translation for network novels.

Transknowletology defines the essence of translation as knowledge and points out that the process of translation is the dissemination of knowledge transforming local knowledge into a global context, and making the diverse knowledge carried by different languages a common global asset [4]. It proposes the logical principles of “conveying genuine comprehension of the source text, catering to the target readers and aligning with their aesthetic standards” in the process of translation [5]. From the perspective of Transknowletology, the essence of translating network novels lies in its role as local knowledge of Chinese net literature, which, through translation, reaches the world, gains recognition,

and ultimately becomes universal knowledge. Knowledge does not lead to conflicts but rather fosters mutual development through sharing. The focus on knowledge in Transknowletology contributes to global harmony [6]. Exploring the translation of fantasy novels from the perspective of Transknowletology not only reflects the long-standing and inclusive culture of the Chinese nation but also corresponds to the fundamental standpoint of China in handling relationships with different countries, promoting exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations.

2. *Panlong* AND ITS KNOWLEDGE CLASSIFICATION

Panlong is a popular fantasy novel written by a network novel writer Zhu Hongzhi (pen name I Eat Tomatoes). It tells the story of Linley, a young man born into a declining aristocratic family, who embarks on a fantastical journey after discovering the Coiling Dragon ring in his ancestral home, ultimately becoming a formidable powerhouse. *Panlong* not only incorporates the knowledge of traditional Chinese culture such as “鸿蒙”, “阴阳” and “五行” but also includes Western elements like “demons”, “angels” and “hell”. In the 1990s, Western modern fantasy literature swept the globe and entered China through multi-dimensional modern media, to some extent promoting the development and prosperity of Chinese fantasy novels [7]. The influence of *The Lord of the Rings* can be seen in the core prop of *Panlong*, the Coiling Dragon ring [8]. This reflects a cultural fusion that is raised from both the Eastern and Western [7]. It is precisely this fusion that creates the conditions for the English translation of *Panlong*. As Lai Jingping said, “*Panlong* is a very Westernized work, even the characters are named in Western-style, which makes it more acceptable to readers” [9]. This is one of the reasons why fantasy novels have gained popularity among foreign readers before many classic works [10]. Essentially, the cultural fusion phenomenon is a kind of knowledge transfer that the Western culture, as local knowledge, is disseminated globally and becomes universal knowledge, followed by the mutually exchanging, benefiting and developing [11] with China's local knowledge (net literature) and then the local knowledge of China incorporates the universal knowledge as its part. Through translation, this blended knowledge, as newly formed local knowledge, undergoes

processing, reconstruction, and re-dissemination [5], facilitating the global knowledge transfer, thus enhancing the value of knowledge.

The language structure of fantasy novels is relatively simple. What attracts foreign readers is the author's imaginative creativity and the novelty brought by Chinese culture. They are not only the charm of fantasy novels but also the challenges to overcome in the process of English translation. Specifically, they refer to original fictional knowledge and Chinese cultural knowledge in fantasy novels. The original fictional knowledge in fantasy novels stems from their fantastical nature, which is the most important characteristic of the genre [12]. Fantasy novel authors often construct a world and various unique lives that differ from reality [13], which include elves, magic, personal heroism, love, RPG games, and more [14]. In the case of *Panlong*, the level system, cultivation system, and world structure are concentrated manifestations of its original fictional knowledge. Chinese characteristics serve as another major source of reading pleasure for overseas readers and pose a challenging aspect in the translation process. The more Chinese elements there are, the higher the translation difficulty and reading threshold [15]. However, solely depending on market preferences, more Chinese elements may lead to more challenges for novels to be accepted internationally [9]. The Chinese cultural knowledge in *Panlong* can be mainly categorized into three types: linguistic expressions (colloquialisms, onomatopoeic words and four-character idioms), traditional customs, and philosophical thoughts. Different types of knowledge within these two categories require corresponding treatments during the translation process so translators need to address each specific issue case by case.

3. TRANSLATION METHODS IN COILING DRAGON FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TRANSKNOWLEDOLOGY

The translation and introduction of network novels primarily rely on overseas translators who have a clear understanding of the reading preferences (wording, aesthetics, etc.) of overseas readers, making their translations more popular [2]. When assessing the translation of fantasy novels based on the translation standards of Transknowletology, overseas translators are more likely to achieve the virtue and beauty in translated works. The author of *Coiling Dragon*, Lai Jingping, is a Chinese-

American who moved to the United States with his parents at the age of three. He has been passionate about martial arts novels since childhood. Before fully dedicating himself to operating the Chinese net literature translation website Wuxiaworld, he served as a full-time diplomat at the U.S. Department of State. Therefore, he is not only proficient in English but also familiar with Chinese cultural knowledge. Compared to other overseas translators, Lai Jingping is able to achieve both the truth and virtue in his translation while maintaining the beauty of the novel. Analyzing how he conveys his genuine comprehension of *Panlong*, caters to target readers and aligns with their aesthetic standards in his English translation *Coiling Dragon* can provide valuable references for other translators to improve the English translation quality of fantasy novels.

3.1 Conveying Genuine Comprehension

Conveying genuine comprehension requires translators to faithfully deliver their most sincere understanding of the original text, while fully preserving the original characteristics of the novel for the readers [16]. Lai Jingping's translation of the level system, cultivation system, and world structure in the original fictional knowledge of *Panlong* reflects his pursuit of truth in translating fantasy novels into English.

In the level system of *Panlong*, characters' professions are divided into warrior and magus. The strength of warriors and magi is categorized into nine levels. The levels of both are expressed as "profession+of+the+ordinal number+rank". For example, "一级战士" is translated as "a warrior of the first rank", and "七级魔法师" is translated as "a magus of the seventh rank". Beyond the ninth level is "圣域" (a level in the novel), where "圣域战士" and "圣域魔法师" are respectively translated as "a Saint-level warrior" and "a Saint-level magus". In this case, the translator deviates from the previous means of expression and uses a free translation, rendering "圣域" as "Saint-level" to indicate a distinction. This divergence reflects the translator's pursuit of truth in the translation process, as the translator recognizes the significant gap between characters below the Saint-level and the powerful beings within this level. By changing the translation method, the translator helps readers vividly perceive this difference. Above the Saint-level, characters apply a new level system of gods. The translation

of the gods level also follows certain rules: Demigod (下位神), God (中位神), Highgod (上位神), and Overgod (至高神). The translator directly translates “神” as “God” and, based on this, combines “High” and “Over” with “god” by using compounding (a type of word formation) to form the translations of different levels of gods, making it clear to readers when they see this strange level system at the first glance. For longer novels, as the story progresses, the protagonist continuously ventures into a wider realm, and their levels continue to rise. This forces the author to constantly create new levels to expand the existing level system, resulting in complex level divisions. Therefore, it is particularly important to accurately translate the numerous level names in fantasy novels. The translation of levels in *Coiling Dragon* fully preserves the clear and systematic expression features of the original novel, reproducing its real meaning.

With regard to the cultivation system, the author employs a large number of original terms, which to some extent increases the difficulty of translating the novel into English. Lai Jingping mostly adopts literal translation for these terms, such as “精神力” (Mental Energy), “魔法力” (Mageforce), and incantation-related terms like “火蛇之舞” (Dance of the Fire Serpents), “绝对零度” (Absolute Zero), and “毁灭风暴” (Annihilating Tempest). The advantage of literal translation is that it reduces the difficulty of understanding and allows readers to experience the authentic flavor of the novel while maintaining reading speed. In addition to literal translation, some exceptional cases demonstrate the translator’s ingenious thinking and can provide inspiration for the translation of similar terms, such as translating “斗气” as “battle-qi”. In the field of knowledge translation, one of the conditions for seeking truth is to distinguish between unique knowledge and shared knowledge [6]. If “斗气” is transliterated as “dou qi”, it may be unclear to readers, and a free translation such as “battle energy” would also lose its exotic characteristics. In fact, “斗气” can be divided into “斗” and “气”. “斗” represents the concept of fighting, which is a shared concept between Chinese and English and can be translated literally as “battle”. On the other hand, “气” belongs to the unique knowledge derived from the Chinese culture spanning thousands of years. Therefore, it is transliterated as “qi” to retain its Eastern flavor. The English translation process of “斗气” reflects the translator’s endeavour in pursuing truth.

As for the world structure, *Panlong* establishes the foundation of its fantasy world with a unique concept of time and space and diverse life forms. The novel adopts the “玉兰历” for dating events. The translator uses a combination of transliteration and prepositional phrases, translating “玉兰历” as “the year+number+of the Yulan calendar”. For example, “玉兰历 4690 年” is translated as “the year 4690 of the Yulan calendar”. Additionally, the author creates a vast world centered around “位面” which includes kingdoms, mountains, continents, and more, and countless “位面” make up the universe. The translator translates “位面” as “Plane”, vividly presenting this virtual scenario in readers’ minds. Diverse life forms are an important component of *Panlong*, and when translating such terms, the translator mainly applies a literal translation approach. For example, “血睛鬃毛狮” is translated as “Bloody-eyed Maned Lion”, “深渊刀魔” as “Abyssal Blade Demon”, and “火焰君主” as “Flame Tyrant”. Both transliteration and literal translation fall under the foreignization strategy, allowing target language readers to fully appreciate and experience the exotic charm [17], staying true to the original work and conveying the translator’s genuine understanding of the original novel.

3.2 Catering to Target Readers

Catering to target readers requires translators to approach the translation process with a friendly heart, considering the audience and facilitating communication [6]. Some colloquialisms and expressions concerning traditional customs and philosophy in *Panlong* contain rich knowledge of Chinese culture. In the corresponding translations, the translator adheres to the principle of transferring knowledge, fully considering the receptiveness of target readers, and helping them bridge cultural differences to achieve the virtue of the translation.

Coiling Dragon incorporates many translations of Chinese colloquialisms that are unique to Chinese culture. The translation of them primarily relies on free translation. For example, in the novel, it is written, “哈哈，林雷，真聪明。”德林柯沃特笑开了花。” The phrase “笑开了花” describes someone laughing joyfully, without any direct connection to “flowers”. A literal translation might cause confusion, so the translator chooses free translation to convey the meaning effectively. The translated sentence, “‘Haha, Linley, you are very smart,’ Doehring Cowart was laughing happily”, is clear and straightforward, allowing

readers to understand without difficulty and facilitating the transmission of knowledge.

The knowledge containing Chinese traditional customs is primarily reflected in vocabulary that originated from Chinese culture. The translation of such vocabulary relies mainly on free translation. For example, “府邸” is translated as “manor”. In Chinese, “府邸” refers to the residence of officials, nobles, or landlords in ancient times. The term “manor”, in the Collins Dictionary, is defined as “(in medieval Europe) the manor house of a lord and the lands attached to it”. The two have similar meanings, helping readers in the target language understand and appreciate the intended meaning of the original text. However, free translation is not the only approach and can be combined with other translation methods. For instance, the translator combines literal and free translation to translate “夜壶” as “toilet chamber pot”. The Collins Dictionary defines “chamber pot” as “a round container shaped like a very large cup. Chamber pots used to be kept in bedrooms so that people could urinate in them instead of having to leave their room during the night”. This indicates that English-speaking countries had similar objects in the past. However, as times have changed, such objects have faded from view. A literal translation as “chamber pot” may not fully convey the meaning of “夜壶” to modern English readers. Therefore, the translator employs free translation to supplement the word “toilet”, helping readers understand that it is a utensil related to the toilet. This application of combining translation methods facilitates knowledge communication and shows the thoughtful consideration of the translator for the readers, fulfilling the virtue of the translation.

Chinese culture has a long history that fosters a profound and unique philosophy. Fantasy novels often draw inspiration from these philosophical ideas. *Panlong* is an example where traditional philosophical concepts are incorporated. For instance, in the novel, it is written, “我让其鸿蒙化为金木水火土五行能量，五行能量为那主宇宙的基础，而后诞生阴阳两种力量，以及雷电为判罚之力。” The translator’s rendition is, “I allowed part of the Grandmist to transform into the Five Elements of metal, wood, water, fire, and earth. These five types of energy served as the foundation for the primary Cosmos, and then gave birth to Yin and Yang, two opposing types of energy, as well as the tribulation power of lightning.” From the translation, it can be

observed that when translating “鸿蒙”, the translator uses a word formation method, compounding, rendering it as “Grandmist”. When translating “金、木、水、火、土”, the translator employs a combination of literal and free translation, translating them as “metal, wood, water, fire, earth” respectively. Additionally, in the translation of “阴阳”, the translator applies both transliteration and amplification, translating it as “Yin Yang, two opposing types of energy” to facilitate cultural exchange and help readers better understand the original text, achieving effective communication.

3.3 Aligning with Certain Aesthetic Standards

From the perspective of Transknowletology, a fundamental level of “beauty” of translation lies in the figure of speech. However, it should also embody the exotic charm of foreign languages and adhere to their dynamic aesthetic standards [6]. The differences between Chinese and English reflect significant aesthetic disparities between China and English-speaking countries, which need the careful consideration of translators. In *Coiling Dragon*, the translation of onomatopoeic words and four-character idioms vividly demonstrates how the beauty is achieved in rendering fantasy novels.

The use of onomatopoeic words implies the subjective aesthetic experience of their creator [18]. In the novel *Panlong*, a large number of onomatopoeic words are employed, which not only make the descriptions more vivid but also provide readers with a sense of immersion, enriching the reading experience. The translation of onomatopoeic words primarily adopts the domestication translation strategy to create a familiar context for readers. For example, in the novel, the word “扑通” (pu tong) is used to describe the sound of someone suddenly falling to the ground. The translator applies the domestication strategy and uses idiomatic translation to render it as “Thud”. According to the Collins Dictionary, “Thud” is defined as “a dull sound, such as that which a heavy object makes when it hits something soft”, which conveys a similar meaning to “扑通”. Although their pronunciations are different, both terms represent the same concept of describing the sound produced when a heavy object lands. Similarly, the exclamation “咦?” (yi) indicating surprise is translated as “Hmm?” and the sound of a creaking door, “吱呀” (zhi ya), is translated

as “Clack”. The translation methods of domestication allow the translation to cater to the aesthetic preferences of the target readers.

Four-character idioms are a distinctive expression in the Chinese language, and translators have relative flexibility in selecting their translation methods. They can either translate them directly, such as rendering “春风化雨” as “like how the spring wind imparted life-giving rain”, or opt for the omission, such as translating “‘好小子!’希尔曼心里赞叹一声, 年仅六岁, 就能够在‘蕴气式’上赶上十岁左右的孩子, 这资质, 管中窥豹, 可见一斑。” as “‘Good kid!’ Hillman secretly praised. Despite being just six years old, the kid could maintain the ‘Qi Building Stance’ for as long as the ten-year-old kids.” This translation omits the two four-character idioms “管中窥豹, 可见一斑” (The idioms literally means that looking at a leopard through a small hole in a bamboo tube, one can only see a single spot on the leopard’s body. They are used metaphorically to suggest that one can infer the whole by observing a part). There are two advantages to the translator’s choice to omit the four-character idioms in the case. If the source text is divided into two parts, “‘好小子!’希尔曼心里赞叹一声, 年仅六岁, 就能够在‘蕴气式’上赶上十岁左右的孩子” can be seen as Part 1, while “这资质, 管中窥豹, 可见一斑” is Part 2. Part 2 is essentially a repetition of Part 1, both describing the protagonist’s exceptional aptitude. The difference lies in Part 1 being a specific description, while Part 2 serves as a supplementary comment, aiming to echo and connect with Part 1. Omitting Part 2 does not affect the overall meaning of the sentence while translating it would make the sentence lengthy. Therefore, omitting Part 2 allows for a more concise translation, which is considered to be the first advantage. The second advantage is the contentment of aesthetic preferences. As mentioned earlier, the purpose of Part 2 is to echo and connect with Part 1, this writing style is rooted in the aesthetic concept of “Everything has a beginning and an end, just like a circle that is complete and perfect” in Chinese culture. It aims to create a sense of order and harmony in sentence structure, resembling the cyclical nature of a circle [19]. However, the English language values fluidity and novelty and does not deliberately seek to create a sense of perfection in sentences [19,20]. Therefore, the translator’s omission of Part 2 disrupts the sense of completeness in the original text, aligning more closely with the aesthetic preferences of

target readers so as to achieve beauty in translation.

4. CONCLUSION

The allure of fantasy novels resides in the incorporation of original fictional knowledge and Chinese cultural knowledge. Translating these two types of knowledge effectively poses a challenge in the English translation of fantasy novels. Transknowledgeology proposes the translation criteria of pursuing truth, virtue, and beauty, which can serve as guidance for the English translation of fantasy novels.

The original fictional knowledge in fantasy novels is often reflected in the level system, cultivation system, and world structure. The progression of character levels can be seen as the thread of the story, and a clear and consistent translation of levels helps readers grasp the main plots and enhances their sense of immersion. To obtain this effect, translators can employ specific prepositional structures and word formation in the translation to highlight the regularity in expressions of the level system, thus capturing the feature of clearness in the original text. The cultivation system includes a variety of original vocabulary. Translators can use a combination of literal translation and transliteration to convey the real meaning of the source text while considering the receptivity of target readers, thereby reducing the difficulty of comprehension and allowing readers to directly experience the author’s imagination. The translation of world structure can be approached using the strategy of foreignization, which involves conveying authentic knowledge to readers through transliteration or literal translation, enabling them to appreciate exotic cultures. Chinese cultural knowledge primarily encompasses linguistic expressions, traditional customs, and philosophical thoughts. In the translation of linguistic expressions, it is commonly seen that the translator renders colloquialisms through free translation and four-character idioms by literal translation or omission. Furthermore, the idiomatic translation of onomatopoeic words falls under the domestication strategy allowing the translated text to conform to the aesthetic preferences of the target readers and facilitates communication between different cultures, thus achieving the beauty in translation. For vocabulary bearing traditional customs, free translation is widely adopted. Expressions containing Chinese philosophical concepts can be appropriately expanded upon through

amplification so target readers could better understand Chinese culture and enhance their reading experience. Transknowletology advocates that translators should pursue truth, virtue, and beauty in translation, which provides beneficial guidance for improving the quality of fantasy novel translation. Translators are suggested to consider how to convey genuine comprehension of the source text, cater to target readers and align with their aesthetic standards, ultimately achieving the transfer of knowledge.

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc) and text-to-image generators have been used during writing or editing of manuscripts.

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Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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