

# ***On the Translation of English Book Titles from the Perspective of Intercultural Communication: A Case Study of Translations of “Educated: A Memoir” in Mainland China and Taiwan***

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**Abstract:** This paper offers an intercultural communication perspective on the translation of book titles. Through a comparative analysis of two Chinese translations of Tara Westover’s *Educated: A Memoir* by Ren Aihong and the Taiwanese version it investigates the utilization of domestication and foreignization strategies in book title translation. This study bridges the gap between intercultural communication theory and translation practice. By scrutinizing these distinct translated versions, the research elucidates the effectiveness of employing appropriate translation strategies. It underscores that when chosen thoughtfully, these strategies facilitate the transmission of cultural nuances and linguistic styles encapsulated in the original titles. This, in turn, enhances the allure of the book titles to potential readers. In conclusion, this analysis underscores the significance of a well-balanced application of domestication and foreignization strategies in book title translation, shedding light on their role in preserving the essence of the original work while appealing to diverse linguistic and cultural contexts.

**Keywords:** intercultural communication, domestication, foreignization, cultural differences, linguistic differences

## **1. Introduction**

As the saying goes, choosing a book title is difficult, and translating a book title is even more challenging. A book title serves as the symbol and soul of a book, showcasing its central ideas. It conveys the main content to readers and plays a role in attracting their attention. A renowned Chinese translator, Yan Fu, emphasized the importance of determining translated titles. In 1911, after completing his translation activities, Yan Fu discussed the significance of book titles and pointed out that without the right title, the entire translation work would lose its foundation and fail to express the original intention. Yan Fu’s translation and criticism in ‘Evolution and Ethics’ reveal the complexity of translating book titles. It requires translators to possess strong skills in both the source and target languages and a deep understanding of the cultural contexts of these languages. Translators can accurately render book titles by conscientiously considering word choices and employing appropriate translation methods [1].

On the one hand, existing research on translating English literary book titles mainly adopts perspectives such as functional equivalence theory, skopos theory, and aesthetic viewpoints, with less focus on the perspective of intercultural communication. On the other, considering *Educated: A Memoir* is a newly-born best-selling book published in 2018, both researchers and the scope of the study are relatively limited compared to Western classic literary works. Currently, scholars mainly concentrate on the educational, literary, and aesthetic values of Chinese translations, with minimal research from the perspective of intercultural communication and translation studies focusing on the English book title translation. Therefore, further research in this field needs to be supplemented. This paper aims to explore the semantic and cultural differences between the English and Chinese languages, elucidate the relationship between intercultural communication theory and translation, analyze and compare the translations of *Educated: A Memoir* by Ren Aihong and the Taiwanese version, and examine the application of domestication and foreignization strategies in book title translation, providing insights for the theoretical and practical research of book title translation.

## 2. Introduction to the Author and the Original Work

### 2.1. Author Introduction

The book *Educated: A Memoir* was authored by Tara Westover, an American historian and writer born in a remote mountainous region of Idaho in 1986. Prior to the age of seventeen, she had not undergone any formal education. However, she embarked on a self-directed learning journey, ultimately gaining admission to Brigham Young University, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in 2008. Subsequently, she pursued higher education, achieving a master's degree in philosophy from the University of Cambridge in 2009 and securing a scholarship to Harvard University in 2010. In 2014, she successfully completed her doctoral studies, obtaining a PhD in History from the University of Cambridge. Her inaugural memoir, *Educated: A Memoir*, was published in 2018, and in recognition of this literary work, Time magazine acknowledged her as one of the "100 Most Influential People" in 2019.

In a Forbes magazine interview, Tara Westover offered a profound perspective on education, "Education signifies the acquisition of diverse viewpoints and an understanding of various individuals, experiences, and histories. It entails receiving an education while refraining from allowing it to stagnate into hubris. Education should expand one's intellectual horizons, deepen empathy, and broaden perspectives, rather than solidify preconceived biases. Educated individuals should exhibit increased humility, prioritizing listening over speaking, approaching differences with enthusiasm, and embracing ideas that deviate from their own" [2].

### 2.2. Brief Summary of the Original Work

*Educated: A Memoir* portrays the life of the protagonist, Tara Westover, the author herself, as she escapes poverty and ignorance in the mountains and completes her undergraduate studies at Brigham Young University. With the recommendation of her professors and mentors, she entered prestigious institutions for further education, ultimately earning her Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge. Before seventeen, Tara grew up in a deeply patriarchal and religiously strict family embedded with domestic violence. The distorted beliefs and habits instilled in her by her father during those seventeen years did not dissipate with her acquisition of a good education. Instead, they lingered like ghosts in every aspect of her life, obstructing her from pursuing her education and subjecting her to self-imposed mental captivity. Luckily, with the help of her teachers, classmates, friends, and brother, Tyler, Tara gradually breaks free from the chains of physical and mental bondage, embarking on a true journey of life education. The most significant factors in her liberation are her resilience, independent thinking, and the courage to sever ties with her past. Through her personal experiences,

Tara conveys to readers the importance of education. Education enables individuals to acquire fundamental survival concepts and perspectives on approaching matters, gaining different viewpoints, and understanding different people, their experiences and history. Tara highlights the contrast between the rationality she developed after acquiring formal knowledge and the limited perspectives resulting from her previous closed-off upbringing, emphasizing that education is the golden key that unlocks numerous doors in people's lives. When one spreads their wings with education, much like a bird, they will eventually reach the summit of their mountain [3].

### **3. Overview of Intercultural Communication Theory**

#### **3.1. Concept of Intercultural Communication and Its Relationship with Translation**

Intercultural communication refers to the communication between one's native language and a non-native language, as well as between individuals with different language and cultural backgrounds. From the perspective of intercultural communication, translation is a cross-cultural communication activity because it involves transferring and exchanging information between different languages and cultures. Translation is not simply converting one language to another; it also requires considering the cultural differences between the source language and the target language and how to accurately convey the cultural information and connotations of the original text to the readers. Translators must understand the cultural origins and cultural differences between the East and the West to bridge the linguistic gap and accurately express the thoughts and meanings conveyed in the original text [4].

#### **3.2. Origins of Cultural Differences Between Mainland China and Taiwan**

The cultural and language differences between Taiwan and the mainland are due to various factors, including historical, political, economic, social, and educational reasons, which will be listed below. Historically, Taiwan and the mainland have different historical experiences and cultural legacies. Taiwan was incorporated into China's territory during the Ming Dynasty, while the mainland experienced multiple political upheavals and social changes. Therefore, there are significant differences in the historical and cultural backgrounds of the two sides; Politically, due to differences in political systems, legal systems, and social systems between Taiwan and the mainland, this has also led to differences in culture and language between the two sides; Economically, with the continuous development of the economy on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, there are also significant differences in economic structures and levels of economic development between the two regions. These economic differences can also affect people's lifestyles and values on both sides; Educationally, There are also differences in educational systems and educational philosophies between Taiwan and the mainland. These differences may have an impact on people's ways of thinking and language expressions.

#### **3.3. Linguistic and Cultural Differences Between Mainland China and Taiwan**

The language and cultural differences between mainland China and Taiwan are reflected in various aspects. Firstly, the Chinese language used in mainland China and Taiwan has many differences in terms of vocabulary, pronunciation, and even script. For example, the use of some traditional characters is more common in Taiwan, while simplified characters are predominantly used in mainland China. Additionally, there are also differences in the way certain words or phrases are pronounced, which can lead to misunderstandings or confusion when people from the two regions communicate. Secondly, the two regions have distinct cultural traditions and values, which are reflected in their language and daily customs. For example, Taiwan has a more traditional Chinese culture, with strong influence from Fujian and Taiwan, while mainland China has a more diverse

culture influenced by various regions and ethnic groups. This can result in different approaches to communication, interpersonal relationships, and even dining etiquette. Thirdly, differences in social norms between mainland China and Taiwan can also affect language use and cultural practices. For instance, the way people address each other, the use of polite language, and how people interact can vary significantly between the two regions. In some cases, people from Taiwan may perceive the way people from mainland China communicate as being too direct or impolite, while people from mainland China may perceive the way people from Taiwan communicate as being too polite or formal. Lastly, mainland China and Taiwan's education systems and curricula have also contributed to language and cultural differences. For example, students in Taiwan are usually exposed to a more traditional Chinese culture and language education, while students in mainland China receive more diverse cultural and language education due to the influence of multiple ethnic groups and regions. These differences can affect how people from the two regions view culture and language and express themselves.

In summary, the differences between the language and culture of mainland China and Taiwan are numerous and complex, reflecting the diverse history, culture, society, and education systems of the two regions. These differences can sometimes lead to misunderstandings and communication barriers between people from the two regions, but they also highlight China's rich cultural diversity and heritage. Thus, translators must delve into the origins of Chinese mainland and Taiwan cultures and the resulting cultural differences to accurately bridge the linguistic gap and convey the thoughts and meanings embedded in the original text [5].

#### 4. Comparison of the Chinese Mainland and Taiwan Translations of the Book “*Educated: A memoir*”

The Chinese translation of the original book title *Educated: A Memoir* presented challenges for translators because of the difficulties in accurately conveying the central theme and intentions of the original work. Several versions of its literal translations, such as “受教” (Shou Jiao, Being Educated), “教育改变人生” (Jiao Yu Gai Bian Ren Sheng, Education Changes One's Life), “教育的力量” (Jiao Yu De Li Liang, The Power of Knowledge), and “知识改变命运” (Zhi Shi Gai Bian Ming Yun, Knowledge Changes One's Fate), only partially or entirely retain the literal meaning of *Educated: A Memoir* while neglecting the considerations of the central ideas conveyed throughout the book. Moreover, these translations lack a sense of beauty and do not meet the aesthetic expectations of Chinese readers [6].

By contrast, the Taiwanese translation by Lin Shiqi combines literal translation and free translation to create the title “垃圾场长大的自学人生：从社会边缘到剑桥博士的震撼人生” (La Ji Chang Zhang Da De Zi Xue Ren Sheng: Cong She Hui Bian Yuan Dao Jian Qiao Bo Shi De Zhen Han Ren Sheng; The Astonishing Life of a Self-taught Individual Raised in a Junkyard: From the Margins of Society to a Cambridge PhD). While this translation captures the author Tara's childhood and adolescence spent in a junkyard, growing up in a deprived environment and receiving informal education through self-study, it also emphasizes her transformative journey from societal marginalization to becoming a Cambridge PhD holder, which is rather inspiring.

However, the Taiwanese translation is lengthy and does not conform to the characteristics of a concise title or the reading habits of Chinese readers. It also lacks poetic beauty and space for imagination [7]. Moreover, the title may mislead readers into thinking this is just another inspirational book about self-taught success, similar to other bestsellers, and therefore lose interest in reading it. However, this is not the case. Although the book does tell the story of Tara growing up in a scrapyards, in a primitive family where her father insisted on “no school, no medicine” and how she self-taught herself to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree from Brigham Young University and eventually a Master

of Philosophy and a PhD in history from the University of Cambridge. What the author wants to convey is not just an inspirational story of how she worked hard to achieve a Cambridge PhD from a scrapyard. Rather, it is about her journey of breaking free from the shackles of her primitive family and finding herself [8].

The translator of the mainland version of the book, Ren Aihong, once said, “The process of translating the title is extremely difficult. The original book’s name is concise and powerful, and one word summarizes the core of the whole book, but translating it into Chinese is somewhat difficult”. After struggling for most of the year, she suddenly remembered a sentence in the Bible’s Psalms. That is “Flee as a bird to your mountain”. This sentence coincides with the central idea of the entire book and the spiritual connotations that the author intends to express through this book. For one thing, Tara’s father was a devout Mormon, a branch of Christianity. Under the influence and control of his father, Tara was familiar with the Bible from a young age; therefore, her ideas and values were deeply influenced by Christian doctrine. To some extent, the Bible is Tara’s enlightenment book.

For another, Tara lived in the Buck Peak Mountains of Idaho until the age of 17, never seeing the world outside the mountains with her own eyes. Later, through university education, Tara’s vision finally opened up. Her father’s control no longer constrained her body and mind; she gained freedom of soul and spiritual independence. She no longer understood everything around her through her father’s dictation but had her judgment and thinking [9]. So Ren Aihong decided to adopt the Chinese book title “你当像鸟飞往你的山”(Ni Dang Xiang Niao Fei Wang Ni De Shan, Flee as a Bird to Your Mountain )”, which is taken from *The Bible: Psalms*. Indeed, her translation received the approval of the author Tara Westover.

On the one hand, the pun “Flee as a bird to your mountain” has a dual meaning. One is “to escape”, and the other is “to find a new faith”. The author fled the mountains of her hometown, seeking education like ‘a bird’, and found ‘the forest of her true faith’. On the other hand, the author’s family once rescued an injured owl and imprisoned it at home. The owl refused to be trapped and almost beat itself to death. Tara’s father said: “It’s better to be with the mountains than with us. It does not belong here, nor can it be taught to belong here.” So they had to release the owl [10]. Therefore, Ren Aihong’s version not only implies the author Tara’s educational experience but also closely relates to the author’s life experience, implying philosophical principles.

It is not difficult to find that Ren Aihong takes the approach of foreignization that effectively preserves the linguistic style and characteristics of the original work. It reflects the author’s religious beliefs and the central idea of emphasizing the importance of education. Without disturbing the author’s intentions, it allows readers to approach the work with curiosity and imagination, experiencing the collision and communication between Chinese and Western cultures. Taken from *The Bible: Psalms*, “Flee as a bird to your mountain”, aligns with the author’s childhood exposure to the Bible and the significance of education in her journey.

Through the comparison and analysis of the book title’s mainland and Taiwanese translations, it is apparent that the mainland Chinese translation adopts a foreignization strategy, effectively preserving the linguistic style and characteristics of the original work. It reflects the author’s religious beliefs and the central idea of emphasizing the significance of education. Additionally, it meets the aesthetic expectations of Chinese readers. On the other hand, the Taiwanese translation adopts a strategy of domestication and, while being straightforward and understandable, it increases the burden on readers and thus diminishes their further reading interest.

Furthermore, the Chinese mainland version by Ren Aihong has a rating of 8.7 on Douban (a popular Chinese reading platform), which is relatively high and indicates that most readers will receive the book. The translated book ‘你当像鸟飞往你的山’ (Ni Dang Xiang Niao Fei Wang Ni De Shan, Flee as a Bird to Your Mountain) is also very popular, with more than 199,000 people having read it, which boasts a larger reader base than the Taiwanese version by LinShiqi. The book reviews and

Douban ratings show that readers' feedback for this book is also quite positive, with most readers expressing their love for the book and appreciation for the author, Tara Westover. One reader commented: "This book gives people strength! Although the protagonist in the book has difficulties that most of us have not experienced, she struggled and grew again and again, and ultimately achieved herself! All of this is because of her persistence, her desire for knowledge, and her pursuit of the future!"

## **5. The Translation Methods of Domestication and Foreignization Strategies and Their Application in Book Title Translation**

The so-called domestication refers to transforming the source language by using expressions commonly used in the target language culture. It advocates that the translation should cater to the target language or the readers of the translation, eliminating reading barriers and creating a sense of familiarity for the readers. Translation methods under the domestication strategy include free translation, adaptation, creative translation, and imitation translation, among others. From the perspective of translating English book titles into Chinese, domestication is more in line with the needs of Chinese readers, allowing them to resonate emotionally and feel a sense of cultural identity. It is also beneficial for increasing book sales. However, domestication, which requires translators to satisfy readers' reading habits and eliminate cultural barriers, may reduce the original text's cultural nuances and regional characteristics and even hinder cultural communication.

Alienation aims to preserve the exotic atmosphere of the source language, requiring translators to approach the original author in their translations and retain the writing style of the source language, allowing readers to overcome cultural barriers by reading the context and experiencing the unique charm of foreign cultures. Translation methods under the alienation strategy include literal translation, transliteration, zero translation, word-by-word translation, and more. From the perspective of translating English book titles into Chinese, alienation makes the translated title more in line with the characteristics of English book titles, which is more appealing to Chinese readers who want to experience overseas cultures. However, at the same time, it may make some Chinese readers feel unfamiliar.

## **6. Conclusion**

Domestication and alienation play important roles in intercultural communication as two fundamental translation strategies. Therefore, in the process of translating English book titles, whether using the domestication strategy or the foreignization strategy, one should not separate it from the context and pragmatic meaning of the original work. It is necessary to adopt appropriate translation methods while remaining faithful to the original book title, its main content, and central ideas. The goal is to effectively combine the strategies of alienation and domestication, striving to achieve the same pragmatic effect as the original work.

The choice between domestication and foreignization for translating literary book titles rests on the expressive characteristics of the title. If the title is simple and easy to understand, the translator should adopt the strategy of alienation. This approach will not only avoid creating excessive reading barriers for readers but also preserve the characteristics of the original title, allowing readers to experience the charm of foreign cultures. On the other hand, for titles that are more complex, cumbersome, or prone to misunderstandings, translators should use the domestication strategy to eliminate cultural barriers and stimulate readers' interest in reading. In conclusion, domestication and foreignization each have their advantages and disadvantages. Translators should handle them flexibly according to different situations or even combine them. They should not blindly choose between domestication or foreignization and should not completely separate the two strategies.

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