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A Cross-Strata Study of To Live from the Perspective of Cultural Stratification Theory—A Case Study of Michael Berry's English Translation

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Abstract: As the core theoretical perspective of explaining the differences in the cultural circle, combined with the theory of Bourdieu field analysis, can clearly reveal the intrinsic mechanism of cross-level transmission of literary translations. Bai Ruiwen's English translation of Yu Hua's *To Live: A Novel* is a typical case of Chinese contemporary literature's dual acceptance by the elite and the masses in the West. This article takes the theory of cultural stratification as the general theoretical framework, supplemented by the theory of field analysis of Bourdieu. Through multiple case analysis, it deeply analyzes the specific strategies of Bai Ruiwen's translation to adapt to different cultural circles in the West, explores the transformation logic of cultural capital between circles, and clarifies the influence of translator's habits on the communication effect. For contemporary China The international cross-level transmission of literary classics provides targeted reference.

Keywords: cultural stratification theory; English translation of *To Live*; Bourdieu's field theory; cultural capital

1. Introduction

As a classic of contemporary Chinese literature, *To Live* carries the philosophy of suffering with a simple narrative, spanning the Chinese elite and popular cultural circles, and has been widely recognized. In 1994, the English translation of Sinologist Bai Ruiwen was published by Anchor Books Press in the United States. This translated work has been incorporated into the literature-related curricula of American universities and has evolved into a prominent research subject within sinological circles. Achieving effective cross-stratum communication among Western elite groups and ordinary readers, it has served as a vital reference for Chinese literary works seeking global outreach.

Current scholarly studies concerning the English translation of *To Live* predominantly concentrate on the accurate conveyance of cultural elements and the overall reception of the translated text. Few studies have conducted targeted analyses from the perspective of cultural hierarchy by adopting Bourdieu's core theories and adopting concrete case comparisons. Consequently, the specific translation tactics and underlying mechanisms governing its cross-stratum communication remain insufficiently clarified in existing research. This article focuses on the translation. Through multi-case analysis and detailed disassembly, it tries to analyze the adaptation path of its cross-level dissemination, which not only enriches the application of cultural stratification theory and Bourdieu theory in literary translation and dissemination, but also provides practical experience for the international cross-level dissemination of similar classic literary translations.

2. Application of Cultural Stratification Theory and Bourdieu's Core Concepts

Cultural stratification is a general theory that explains the differences in cultural circles. Its core point is that culture is hierarchical. Audiences of different circles form

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different aesthetic needs and acceptance habits due to differences in cultural capital. Among them, the elite cultural circle audience has higher cultural capital and pays attention to the ideology and aesthetics of the work, while the public The cultural capital of the audience in the cultural circle is relatively low, and they pay attention to the popularity and readability of the works.

The theory of cultural stratification is based on a multi-theoretical perspective. In A Scientific Theory of Culture, the founding work of the functionalist school, Malinowski divided the cultural structure into material, spiritual, language and organization (equivalent to behavior and institutional layers)[1] . Its induction and summary of cultural structure provides multi-angle thinking for the subsequent theory of cultural stratification. Chinese scholars Guo Daorong and others also adopted a similar multi-layer structure in the book An Introduction to Chinese Culture, dividing the basic structure of culture into material production culture, institutional behavior culture and spiritual psychological culture [2] .

Pierre Bourdieu's field analysis theory provides a core analysis tool for the study of translation and communication from the perspective of cultural hierarchy. Its core content can be roughly divided into field, habits and cultural capital: field refers to the specific space of translation and dissemination of Western literature, including business The publishing field (corresponding to the public circle) and the academic field (corresponding to the elite circle), the rules of different fields determine the communication orientation of the translation; habit refers to the translator's behavioral tendency and thinking mode, that is, "acquiring in practice and continuously aiming to play various practical roles; constantly being shaped by the environment and influencing the environment, It is constantly in the process of interacting with the environment"[3] . For example, Bai Ruiwen's multiple identities as a sinologist, translator and scholar determine the strategic choice of his translation processing; cultural capital is divided into two forms: materialization (aesthetic taste, knowledge reserve) and objectification (books, translation), and the translation language is selected. In essence, it is the coding and transformation of cultural capital, and strives to achieve wide acceptance by audiences of different circles. In summary, whether the translator's work is favored by the target language readers depends on whether the translator's habits and capital are in line with the logic in the translation field, that is to say, the more logic corresponds, the more successful the work is [4] .

This article will analyze according to the theory of Bourdieu field analysis, that is, the translator habitually determines the cultural capital coding strategy of the translation. Through the accurate processing of language details, it realizes the conversion of cultural capital between the Western elite and the mass circle, and finally achieves cross-level communication.

3. Case Analysis of Cross-Strata Dissemination in Berry's *To Live*

This chapter selects five typical cases (suffering narrative, rural dialogue, core main idea, cultural proprietary items, narrative perspective), adopts the triple contrast mode of "original text - Bai Ruiwen translation - comparative version (hypothetical literal translation)", combines the theory of cultural stratification with the concept of cultural capital and habits, disassembles the language details of the translation, analyzes the specific strategies adopted by Bai Ruiwen's translation to adapt to different cultural circles in the West, clarify its cultural capital conversion logic, and avoid general judgment and repetitive expression.

3.1. Translation of the Suffering Narrative - Popular and Elite Encoding of Cultural Capital

3.1.1. Original Text (Death of Fugui's Son, Youqing)

" YiShengMenChouXueChouDeTaiJi , YouQingDeLianBaiDeXiangZhi , ZuiChunYeQingLe , ZuiHouTaJiuBuDongLe . WoChongGuoQuBaoZhuTa , TaDeShenTiYiJingLiangLe , WoKuZheHanTa , TaZaiYeBuHuiDaYingWoLe . "

Berry's translation:

"The doctors drew blood too quickly. Youqing's face turned as white as paper, his lips blue, and finally he stopped moving. I rushed over to hold him, his body already cold, and I cried out to him, but he would never answer me again."

Comparative version (hypothetical literal translation):

"The doctors drew blood too hastily; Youqing's face was as white as paper, his lips were also blue, and eventually he ceased to move. I rushed towards him and embraced him, his body having already turned cold; I wept and called out to him, yet he would never respond to me again."

3.1.2. Analysis

From the perspective of Boutier's habit, Bai Ruiwen has the dual habit of both Sinologists and popular translators, and his translation processing reflects the accurate grasp of the needs of cultural capital in the two major Western circles. In terms of popular cultural capital coding, Bai Ruiwen chose "rushed over" instead of the literal translation of "rushed towards". "rushed over" is a high-frequency word in the daily life of the English public, which has a sense of action and emotional impact, and does not require complex context interpretation. In line with the acceptance habits of cultural capital in the lower audience of the public circle, the reading threshold is lowered, and the popular transformation of cultural capital is realized. In terms of elite cultural capital coding, the translation retains the restraint of the original narrative and does not add redundant emotional rendering. For example, "KuZheHanTa" is not translated as "wept bitterly and shouted his name", this kind of restraint is in line with the embodied cultural capital of the elite audience, that is, paying attention to the ideological depth and aesthetic white space of the work, providing space for its interpretation of the humanistic connotation behind suffering, and realizing the elite coding of cultural capital. Compared with the literal translation version, it can be seen that the direct translation version uses relatively written and complex expressions such as "hastily" and "ceased to move", which neither adapts to the popular needs of the mass circle nor accurately fits the aesthetic restraint of the elite circle. It is difficult to achieve cross-level communication, and Bai Ruiwen's handling It is based on its dual habits that the dual coding of cultural capital has been realized and adapted to the needs of the two major circles.

3.2. Translation of Rustic Dialogue - Precise Response to Strata-Specific Needs

3.2.1. Original Text (Dialogue between Fugui and His Mother)

"WoNiangShuo : ' RenZhiYaoHuoZhe , JiuYouXiWang . NiDieZouLe , WoHaiZai , NiHaiZai , ZanMenYiJiaRenHaoHaoHuoZhe , JiuShenMeDouYouLe . '"

Berry's translation:

"My mother said, 'As long as a person is alive, there is hope. Your father is gone, but I am still here, you are still here. If our family lives well, we will have everything.'"

Comparative version (hypothetical literal translation):

"My mother said: 'As long as one is alive, there is hope. Your father has passed away, I am still here, you are still here; if our family lives well, we will possess all things.'"

3.2.2. Analysis

The case focuses on the cultural capital conversion of rural dialogue, and the core responds to the specific needs of the two major circles. For the public class, Bai Ruiwen's handling fits their acceptance habits: "NiDieZouLe" is translated as "Your father is gone", instead of the literal translation of "Your father has passed away", and "is gone" is in English. The common colloquial expression of the public to express "the death of a loved one" avoids the sense of formality and distance of "passed away", reduces the cost of understanding, and adapts to the lower level of cultural capital in the public circle. Translating "JiuShenMeDouYouLe" as "we will have everything" is concise and straightforward, in line with the simple perception of "hope" of the public circle, and realizes emotional resonance. For Western elite readers, this translated version preserves the integrity and core connotation of the original work without oversimplification or vulgarization. The classic proverb "As long as a person is alive, there is hope" faithfully

delivers the original text's outlook on life without superfluous explanatory content, perfectly fitting the reading and aesthetic needs of elite groups. Furthermore, Bai Ruiwen disassembles the lengthy and fluid sentences in the original Chinese text into concise phrases that conform to English linguistic conventions. This translation approach not only eliminates the ambiguity arising from rigid literal translation but also maintains the logical coherence and ideological essence of the original dialogues. Such exquisite processing stems from the translator's professional literacy as a sinologist: he is able to precisely perceive the linguistic and cultural disparities between China and the West, thereby achieving the effective and smooth transformation of cross-cultural symbolic capital.

3.3. *Translation of the Core Theme - Stratum-Adaptive Encoding of Cultural Capital*

3.3.1. Original Text (Concluding Theme)

"RenShiWeiHuoZheBenShenErHuoZheDe,
ErBuShiWeiHuoZheZhiWaiDeRenHeShiWuSuoHuoZhe . "

Berry's translation:

"Man lives for the sake of living itself, not for anything outside of living."

Comparative version (Howard Goldblatt's translation):

"Man lives for living's sake, not for what lies beyond living."

3.3.2. Analysis

The translation of the core main idea directly determines the hierarchical adaptation effect of cultural capital. The difference between Bai Ruiwen's processing and Ge Haowen's translation reflects the influence of different translators' habits on communication orientation. Bai Ruiwen chose "for the sake of living itself" instead of "for living's sake" translated by Ge Haowen. "For the sake of" is an expression that is both popular and philosophical in English- It not only meets the language habits of the public, but also can quickly understand the core meaning of "for living itself", but also has a more written texture than "living's sake", which meets the needs of the elite circle for the accuracy of ideological expression and realizes the dual adaptation of cultural capital. Although Ge Haowen's translation of "for living's sake" is more concise, it is slightly colloquial, lacks philosophical depth, and is difficult to meet the cultural capital needs of the elite circle. Therefore, its translation is more inclined to mass communication and fails to achieve cross-level communication. Judging from the Boutier field theory, Bai Ruiwen's treatment adapts the dual rules of the Western commercial publishing field and the academic field: the business field requires language to be popular and easy to spread, and the academic field requires accurate expression and depth of thought. This adaptability is the key to its translation to achieve cross-level dissemination.

3.4. *Translation of Culture-Specific Items--Removing Barriers to Strata-Specific Reception*

3.4.1. Original Text (culture-specific Item Related to Rural Culture)

"WoDieNianQingShiShiGeBaiJiaZi, DuQianShuGuangLeJiaLiDeTianChan ,
HaiChaDianBaWoNiangMaiLe , HouLaiBeiWoYeYeDaDuanLeTui , CaiSuanShouLeXin .
"

Berry's translation:

"In his youth, my father was a prodigal son who gambled away all the family's farmland and almost sold my mother. It wasn't until my grandfather broke his leg that he finally turned over a new leaf."

Comparative version (hypothetical literal translation):

"My father was a black sheep when he was young; he gambled and lost all the family's farmland, and even nearly sold my mother. Later, my grandfather broke his leg, and he finally calmed down."

3.4.2. Analysis

Culture-specific items (e.g., "BaiJiaZi," "ShouLeXin") are the core obstacles to cross-cultural communication, and its translation directly reflects the translator's ability to adapt

to cultural capital in different circles. For popular circles, Berry translates "BaiJiaZi" as "prodigal son" rather than "black sheep" (literal version). "Prodigal son" is a well-known idiom in English, corresponding to "people who squander family property and go astray", no additional explanation is needed. It can be understood, which reduces the acceptance barrier of the masses and adapts to their lower level of cultural capital. Translating "ShouLeXin" as "turned over a new leaf" which is also a common idiom in English, expressing "change and self-renewal" and fits the language habits of the public. For the elite circle, the translation retains the core connotation of cultural proprietary items. Details such as "gambling money and losing all the field" and "broken legs" have not been simplified, which not only conveys the family ethics and survival status of China's local society, but also provides a space for cultural interpretation for the elite audience, in line with their high cultural capital needs - can it be enough to interpret the deep connotation of Chinese local culture through these details. Although the literal translation of "black sheep" is also an idiom, it focuses more on "the aliens in the family", which fails to accurately convey the core meaning of "loser", and "calmed down" cannot accurately express the meaning of "reflecting the heart", which is difficult to be accurately understood by the public. It can't meet the cultural interpretation needs of the elite circle.

3.5. Translation of Narrative Perspective - Adapting to Strata-Specific Aesthetic Needs

3.5.1. Original Text (Fugui's First-Person Narration)

"WoZuoZaiTianGengShang, KanZheLaoHuangNiuZaiDiLiChiCao,
XinLiKongLuoLuoDe, ZheMeDuoNian, ShenBianDeRenDouZouLe,
JiuShengXiaWoHeZheTouNiuLe."

Berry's translation:

"I sat on the ridge of the field, watching the old ox graze, my heart empty. After all these years, everyone around me had left, leaving only me and this ox."

Comparative version (hypothetical literal translation):

"I sat on the field ridge, watching the old yellow ox eating grass in the field; my heart was empty. For so many years, the people around me had all gone, and only I and this ox remained."

3.5.2. Analysis

The treatment of the narrative perspective reflects the translator's adaptation to the aesthetic needs of different circles, and also reflects the influence of their habits on the translation strategy. As a translator who is familiar with the aesthetics of Western narratives, Bai Ruiwen's handling is in line with the aesthetic needs of the two major circles: for the mass circle, it is necessary to simplify the redundant expression of the literal translation, such as deleting "yellow" ("yellow of the old cow") has no special meaning in the Western context, but instead increases the reading burden. Translating "XinLiKongLuoLuoDe" as "my heart empty" is simple and direct, which is in line with the aesthetic habit of "direct lyricism" in the public circle and adapts to its lower level of cultural capital. Translating "JiuShengXiaWoHeZheTouNiuLe" as "leaving only me and this ox," using a present participle construction, enhances narrative flow and visual imagery, improving the reading experience for popular audiences. For the elite circle, the translation retains the restraint and infectious power of the first-person narrative of the original text, and does not add unnecessary psychological descriptions, such as not translated as "my heart was filled with emptiness and loneliness", this kind of restraint is in line with the aesthetic pursuit of the elite circle, that is, paying attention to the implicit beauty and ideological depth of the narrative, which can interpret the loneliness and tenacity of Fugui through concise narrative, which is in line with its relatively high codified cultural capital. The expressions of "yellow ox" and "the field ridge" in the literal translation version are too cumbersome, and the sentence pattern of "had all gone" and "remained" lacks a sense of picture, which is neither in line with the reading habits of the public nor the elite. Beauty demand.

Based on the above five cases, it can be seen that Bai Ruiwen's translation processing is not accidental, but based on the multiple habits of his Sinologists, translators and

scholars, it accurately grasps the differences in cultural capital between Western elites and the masses, and realizes the conversion of cultural capital between the two major circles through the accurate coding of language details. The core translation strategies adopted in this rendition can be generalized in three dimensions. In terms of lexical selection, the translator adopts expressions that balance popular accessibility and philosophical profundity, preventing the text from being either overly abstruse or excessively informal. Regarding sentence structure, redundant verbal descriptions are streamlined to adapt to the general English readership's reading conventions, while the solemn narrative tone and profound ideological implications of the original text are fully preserved. In dealing with culture-specific items, the translator employs widely recognized English idioms to remove cross-cultural communication obstacles. This method retains the intrinsic core of Chinese cultural connotations and simultaneously satisfies the in-depth interpretative demands of elite readers.

The shortcomings of the comparative version (assuming the direct translation version and other translations) further confirm the targeting of Bai Ruiwen's strategy, that is, only by realizing the dual coding of cultural capital and accurately adapting to the cultural capital needs of the two major circles can the cross-level dissemination of translation be realized. In addition, Bai Ruiwen's strategy also reflects the dual rules of the Western translation field: the popularization needs of the commercial publishing field and the ideological needs of the academic field. Its translation balances the rules of the two major fields to achieve cross-level communication.

4. Deep Mechanisms and Internal Contradictions of Cross-Strata Dissemination in *To Live*

4.1. Deep Mechanisms of Cross-Strata Dissemination

Combined with the previous case analysis and the core concept of Boutier, the deep mechanism of cross-level dissemination of the English translation of *To Live* can be summarized as the triple linkage of "habit-capital-field": First, the translator's habit is the core drive, and Bai Ruiwen's multiple identities (Sinologist, translator, scholar) make it not only have the ability to interpret the cultural connotation of the original text Ability, and can accurately grasp the needs of different circles in the West and form the strategic habit of "dual adaptation"; Second, the conversion of cultural capital is the core path. Through the coding of language details, the translation realizes the dual conversion of popularization of cultural capital, adapts to the level of cultural capital of different circles, and breaks down the barriers of the circle; Third, the field rules are external support. The dual recognition of the Western commercial publishing field (the popular positioning of Anchor Books Publishing House) and the academic field (college courses, academic research) provides space for the cross-level dissemination of translations. The benign interaction between the two major fields has promoted the translation in different circles. Widespread spread of layers. In addition, the characteristics of the original text of "elegance and vulgarity" provide innate conditions for the conversion of cultural capital. Its simple narrative and profound philosophy can meet the needs of the two major circles at the same time and become the text basis for cross-level dissemination.

4.2. Internal Contradictions of Cross-Strata Dissemination and Their Resolution

The cross-level dissemination of translations is not impeccable. There is a core contradiction: the balance contradiction between popularization, excessive popularization will lead to cultural downgrade and lose the recognition of the elite circle. Bai Ruiwen cracked this contradiction through accurate language coding: in terms of core ideology and cultural connotation, adhere to the elite standard, retain the ideological depth and cultural characteristics of the original text, and meet the needs of the elite circle; in terms of language expression, he takes into account popularization, chooses words and sentences that are easy for the public to understand, and lowers the reading threshold, meet the needs of the mass circle. Interpreted through Boutier's cultural capital theory, such a balanced translation approach essentially embodies the two-way adaptation of

cross-cultural capital. It neither compromises the rigorous cultural appreciation standards of elite audiences nor overlooks the cognitive and receptive boundaries of ordinary mass readers. Through refined linguistic coding, the translation enables the effective circulation and transformation of cultural capital across elite and public reading spheres. Nevertheless, this adaptive balance comes with inherent limitations. The popularized translation of certain culture-specific items inevitably dilutes the uniqueness of indigenous Chinese culture to some degree, making it challenging to fully satisfy elite readers' pursuit of detailed and authentic cultural interpretation. This dilemma constitutes an unavoidable paradox inherent in the cross-stratum dissemination of cross-cultural literary works.

5. Cultural Significance of Cross-Strata Dissemination in Berry's *To Live*

Translation activities themselves are a field, and translators, publishing editors, agents, etc. constitute its unique system [5]. Based on cultural stratification theory and Boutier's analytical framework, the cross-stratum dissemination of the English version of *To Live* carries three core theoretical implications. Primarily, it bridges the cultural divide between Western elite and mass reading groups, verifying the feasibility of cultural capital conversion. By virtue of targeted and elaborate translation strategies, this classic literary work gains widespread recognition among audiences from distinct social and cultural strata, offering a compelling empirical case for the practical application of cultural stratification theory; Second, it provides practical reference for the "going out" of Chinese contemporary literary classics, clarifies the importance of translator habits, cultural capital coding and field adaptation, and proves that only by accurately grasping the cultural capital differences in different circles of the target language can we achieve cross level communication; Third, it promotes the cross-cultural dissemination of Chinese life concept and local culture. Through the dual coding of cultural capital, it not only allows Western readers to understand the survival status and life resilience of ordinary Chinese people, but also allows Western elite readers to deeply interpret the ideological depth and cultural connotation of Chinese literature, enhancing Chinese and Western Party cultural identity has promoted cross-cultural exchanges.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Summary of Findings

Using cultural stratification theory as a general framework and integrating Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital, habitus, and field, this paper conducts a triple comparative analysis of five representative cases. The core findings are as follows. Future research can be conducted based on corpus research to produce more objective results [6]. Berry's multiple habitus determines a "dual encoding of cultural capital" strategy in his translation. Through precise handling of vocabulary, syntax, culture-specific items, and narrative perspective, he achieves conversion of cultural capital between Western elite and popular circles, aligns with the dual rules of the Western translation field, and ultimately realizes cross-strata dissemination. The cross-strata dissemination of the translation results from a triple interaction of "habitus-capital-field," with the original text's "elite-and-popular appeal" providing the textual foundation, and the balance between elitization and popularization resolving internal contradictions. The success of Berry's translation offers an important reference for the international cross-strata dissemination of other classic contemporary Chinese literary translations: accurately grasping differences in cultural capital across target-language strata, strengthening the adaptability of translator habitus, and balancing field rules are key to achieving cross-strata dissemination.

6.2. Limitations and Future Directions

The limitation of the research in this article is that although different types of fragments are selected from the case comparison, the overall communication effect of other complete translations of *To Live* (such as Ge Haowen's translation) is not compared,

and there is still room for deepening the analysis of translators' habits; the specific differences in acceptance of readers from different classes in the West are not combined with audience research data, divided into The analysis is not deep enough. In the future, we can combine the complete comparison of different English translations of *To Live* to deeply analyze the impact of translators' habits on communication strategies; combine Western audience research data to explore the details of readers' acceptance of translations from different circles, and optimize the cultural capital coding strategy; expand the research ideas to other translations of Chinese contemporary literature classics, and further Verify the communication mechanism of "habit-capital-field" and provide a more comprehensive reference for Chinese literature to "go out".

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