

硕士学位论文

论文题目：华裔美国文学翻译中的回译问题

学 院：中国人民解放军外国语学院

研究生姓名：刘芳

专业名称：英语语言文学

完成日期：2005年

Content

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One Elucidation of the Key Words in the Title	7
1.1 CAE literature	7
1.2 Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club.....	12
1.3 Back-translation	16
Chapter Two Replication of the Original Linguistic Manoeuvring	21
2.1 The Insertion of Pinyin	21
2.2 The Hybrid English of the Chinese Mothers	32
2.3 The Simple English in the Mothers' Narration	36
Chapter Three Restoration of Chinese Culture-specific Items	40
3.1 Deviations Due to Lack of Relevant Cultural Knowledge .	41
3.2 Deviations Caused by Ignorance of the Context.....	46
3.3 Deviations Due to Irrational Omission	52
3.4 Deviations Caused by Unwarranted Addition.....	56
Conclusion	59
Bibliography	65

Introduction

Ever since the beginning of the 1990s, Chinese American English literature (abbreviated as “CAE literature” in the rest of this thesis), which had thereto been in a marginal position, has received more and more attention from domestic academic circles. On the one hand, representative English works of major Chinese American writers have continuously been introduced in their original or translated form, the two most recent examples being the *Gateway to the Golden Mountain—Chinese American Writers’ English Classics Series* published by the Shanxi Education Press in 2002 and the *Chinese American Literary Translations Series* put forward by the Yilin Press just at the beginning of the year 2004. On the other hand, the major domestic academic magazines on foreign literature have published quite a number of essays about CAE literature. For instance, in 1998, the *Research on Modern and Contemporary Chinese Literature* published by the People’s University reprinted in full several essays on Chinese American writers such as Edith Eaton (writing under the pen name of Sui Sin Far) and Amy Tan. Moreover, some young scholars have even chosen CAE literature as the subject of their master’s or doctoral theses. For example, Hu Yong’s *The Nostalgia of Culture—The Cultural Identity of Chinese American Literature* (Beijing: Chinese Theatre Press, 2003) is actually a

modification of his doctoral thesis.

However, it is noteworthy that research on this “newly emerging cross-cultural subject” (卫景宜, 2002: 1) has mainly been restricted to literary circles. At least, it is little discussed in the field of domestic translation studies. Take the most authoritative magazine in this realm, *Chinese Translators Journal*, for example. This magazine comprises such columns as “Random Talk on Literary Translations” and “Review and Analysis of Translations” which feature theoretical discussions about literary translations. Yet, during the relatively long period from 1990 to 2003, not a single essay in either column has ever mentioned anything about the translation of CAE literature, let alone the issue of back-translation involved in it, which is to be explicated here in this thesis. Besides, among all the materials available to the present author, only a handful has directly dealt with the particular issue of back-translation in the translation of CAE literature (梁绿平, 1993; 金圣华, 1997; 金圣华, 2002; Leo Tak-Hung Chan, 2002; 王琼, 2002). Does this mean that the translation of CAE literature is not worthy to be studied? We do not think so. On the contrary, because of the complicated relationship of this peculiar type of literary creation with the practice of translation, special problems will occur during the translation of CAE literature, one of which is back-translation. Therefore, much still remains to be explored.

The cultural identity of the Chinese American writers alone invites translation as a metaphor. These authors can be seen as

belonging to the diaspora* group, whom Salman Rushdie describes in his *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* as “translated” because they have been “borne across the world”. (Rushdie, 1991:17). Then, as we study CAE literature, what we cannot fail to recognize is that, due to the authors’ unique ethnic background, the representation of Chinese culture has remained a major theme in their works. To express things Chinese with another language—English—is essentially to have the Chinese culture “carried over”, which is exactly the Latinic etymological meaning of the English word “translation”. The transmission of elements from one culture to another across a cultural and/or linguistic gap is a central concern of both CAE literature and translation, which are two types of cross-cultural writing. Thus, CAE literature “functions as a sort of cultural translation”, which “has experienced both linguistic and cultural changes.”(王光林, 2002) For these Chinese American writers, “writing translation” (Bassnett and Trivedi, 1999:41) has become a means of maintaining their cultural identity in a somewhat hostile host culture. Then, when Chinese translators exert themselves to translate such texts into Chinese, they are to a certain extent carrying out a sort of back-translation, which is “similar to a cultural

* Whereas in the past this term was typically used to underscore the racial or cultural unity of all the scattered peoples (notably the Jews) by referring to a lost homeland, in more recent postcolonial studies it has come to represent difference, alienness and mixedness, the fact that most or all of the peoples on earth came from somewhere and now live elsewhere.

round-trip over the Pacific Ocean”. (金圣华, 2002: 32) Such back-translation cannot be regarded as a simple question of restoration as various deviations may occur during this process, some of which can even pose challenges to current translation theory and practice. It is therefore a subject worth further exploration.

The present thesis is merely an initial attempt at this subject. And, for the sake of speculation, what is chosen as the subject of a typical case study is the highly acclaimed novel *The Joy Luck Club* (New York: Ivy Books, 1989) by the famous Chinese American woman writer Amy Tan together with three of its Chinese translations (程乃珊、严映薇, 杭州: 浙江文艺出版社, 1999; 田青, 长春: 吉林文史出版社, 1994; 于人瑞, 台北: 联合文学出版社, 1990; which, for convenience's sake, will be mentioned as ①、② and ③ in the following chapters).

The whole thesis falls into three chapters. Chapter One chiefly deals with the three key words in the title: CAE literature, Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, and back-translation. First, a brief history of CAE literature will be given so as to provide readers with a general knowledge about this special literary genre. Then, there is an introduction to the life and works of Amy Tan, and the structure and content of her *The Joy Luck Club*, the novel that brought her instant fame. Presented at the end of this chapter is the definition of back-translation, which is the main issue discussed throughout this thesis. Chapter Two concentrates on the discussion of the

back-translation of relevant specific linguistic engineering in the original work. The original peculiar linguistic maneuvering is categorized into three groups, and several examples are put forth in each group to compare the different replicating methods adopted by the three translations. The degree of success of these methods is duly discussed. Chapter Three is primarily concerned with problems present in the three translations about the back-translation of Chinese culture-specific items. Four types of deviations are discerned for this discussion of an accurate restoration of Chinese culture-specific items.

Chapter One Elucidation of the Key Words in the Title

There are altogether three key words in the title of this thesis, which must be elucidated at the very beginning in order to prepare readers for the discussions in the following chapters. The three words are: CAE literature, Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, and back-translation.

1.1 CAE literature

CAE literature refers to literary works written in English by Chinese living in America.* (卫景宜, 2002: 2, 142) The first CAE literary text published in the United States appeared in 1887. It was *When I was a Boy in China*, an autobiography by Lee Yanphou (1861-1938) who was in the U.S. on a study program sponsored by the American missionaries in China. He was only 24 at the publication of this book, and he graduated from Yale in the same year. In this book the author relates his life experience in China before the age of 13 and talks about Chinese sports, entertainment, diet,

* The concept of CAE literature has been an enlarging one. Originally, it only referred to literary works written in English by American-born descendants of first-generation Chinese migrants. But now it also includes works by Chinese who do not permanently reside in America, such as Lin Yutang and Lee Chin-Yang.

clothing, traditions and ceremonies. The stimulus to the production of this book is that “he was highly sensitive to the general distortion of China by the mainstream American society, and he had written this book to redress that kind of wrong practice...” (Kim, 1982:25)

In 1909, *My Life in China and America*, a more influential English autobiography written by a Chinese, was published in America. Its author, Yung Wing (1828-1912), is now hailed as “Father of Chinese Returned Students”. This book has stemmed from Yung’s anxiety about the future fate of his motherland and recounted his search in the west for a way to reform China. It has hereto retained “its everlasting cultural implication and historical value” and received more and more attention from concerned researchers. (沈潜、杨增麒, 1998: 47)

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, Edith Eaton (1865-1914), daughter to an English father and a Chinese mother, also published quite a number of literary works in English. She openly declared herself a Chinese and had written about Chinese people and cried out against the injustices done to them. Her first short story was published in 1896.

Afterwards, it was not until the mid-1930s, when Lin Yutang’s English works were published in the United States, that Chinese writers once again appeared before the American public. During the 1940s, there were about 20 CAE literary works published in America (including 8 by Lin), most of whose authors were migrants born into

the Chinese upper-class society and having received a fairly good western education. Two of these books, Pardee Lord's *Father and Glorious Descendent* (1943) and Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1945), are especially meaningful, as they are the first books written by descendents of the early Chinese migrants. Lin's works and those biographies and novels published in the 1940's had in the main catered to the desire of the American readers to know about China during the Second World War, and the major purpose of these books was to introduce to the western readers in a positive way the long history and glorious culture of China.

There was a big breakthrough both in theme and in genre of CAE literature during the 1950s. There emerged not only fiction but also poetry and non-fiction. Lee Chin-Yang's (1916-) *Flower Drum Song* (1957), which depicts the conflicts over the issue of marriage between the old and young generations of Chinese migrants in San Francisco, became the best-seller of that time and was subsequently adapted for the stage and screen.

The 1960s was the preliminary stage for the rise of contemporary CAE literature. Novel became the major genre among all CAE literary works during that period—there were about 10 novels in a dozen of CAE literary creations published throughout the 1960s (Ling, 1990:355-358), and there appeared more novels portraying Chinese American communities, the most conspicuous among which was *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1961) by Louis Chu

(1915-1970). It is the first Chinese American novel to write about life in Chinatown with the kind of pidgin English popular there and the literally translated Cantonese dialect. This book received little attention at that time. But nowadays, great importance has been attached to it and it was adapted for the screen in 1989.

The changes in American political and cultural life and the upsurge of multiculturalism at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s provided new opportunities for the production of CAE literature. A research center on Asian Americans was established in the University of California, Berkeley in 1969 and there emerged two selected works by Asian/Chinese American writers: *Asian American Authors* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972) and *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* (New York: Anchor Books, 1974). In addition, Frank Chin, a pioneer of contemporary CAE literature, social critic and writer, put forward two of his most famous plays, *The Chickencoop Chinaman* (1972) and *The Year of the Dragon* (1974), which voiced the indignation of young Chinese Americans against racial discrimination and their desire to construct the cultural tradition of Chinese Americans.

The real rise of CAE literature took place in 1976, when Maxine Hong Kingston's (1940-) *The Woman Warrior—Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts*, an autobiographical novel, gained enormous success. That was the first time that a Chinese American writer had countered American racialism and tried to rewrite the

distorted and obliterated history of Chinese Americans in a new, reader-friendly way of narration.

There was a flourishing of Chinese American English writing during the last part of the 1980s. While old writers had continuously come out with new works, new writers and new books emerged in quick succession. Besides Kingston (she published *China Men* and *Tripmaster Monkey—His Fake Book* in 1980 and 1989 respectively), Chinese American writers active in the American literary world during this period include playwright David Henry Hwang (1957-) and novelist Amy Tan (1952-). The works that established their reputation, *M. Butterfly* (1988) and *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), won great favor with the American people and were both adapted for the screen.

During the 1990s, a dozen novels have emerged which depict the feelings of Chinese Americans and interrogate their identity, the most famous among which are Gus Lee's *China Boy* (1991), David Wong Louie's *Pangs of Love* (1991), Gish Jen's *Typical American* (1991), Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone* (1993) and Lan Samantha Chang's *Hunger: A Novella and Stories* (1998). CAE literature has become all the rage on the scene of contemporary American literary. As an indispensable constituent of American multiculturalism, it has gained a large readership. Besides, it has also participated in the progression of American society and culture with the unique culture and passions of Chinese Americans.

1.2 Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*

As we have seen above, Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* holds an important position in contemporary American literature. Now it is necessary to give a brief introduction of both the author and the book.

Amy Tan was born in Oakland, California, on February 19, 1952, to John and Daisy Tan, both first-generation Chinese migrants. Her father was a minister and electrical engineer, while her mother was a vocational nurse, who was forced to leave behind three daughters from her previous marriage to an abusive husband when she migrated to the United States in 1949. The eruption of the Communist Revolution destroyed not only all hope of sending for the girls but also any means of contact with them. Between Tan's 15th and 16th birthdays, the family's burden of loss intensified with the deaths of both her elder brother and her father from brain tumors. Her mother fled from the site of this emotional devastation to Switzerland with her remaining children, Tan and her younger brother. This grief, experienced so early in life, later became a recurring element in Tan's novels.

Returning to the U.S. as a young woman, Tan earned bachelor's and master's degrees in the study of English and linguistics at San Jose State University, where she also met her future husband, Lou DeMattei. In 1974, she and DeMattei were married. They were later

to settle in San Francisco. In 1976, she dropped out of the Ph.D. program at the University of California, Berkeley, horrified by the murder of a close friend. Then she took a job as a language development consultant to the Alameda County Association for Retarded Citizens and later directed a training project for developmentally disabled children. At first joining a friend who ran a medical publishing company, Tan eventually moved into freelance business writing, providing speeches for salesmen and executives of large corporations. She prospered as a business writer, but working had become a compulsive habit for her and she had to seek relief in creative efforts. So she joined the Squaw Valley Community of Writers with the simple intention of developing a hobby, but out of her early efforts came her first novel, *The Joy Luck Club*.

On its publication in 1989, *The Joy Luck Club* was enthusiastically received by critics and the public alike. Remaining on the *New York Times* bestseller list for nearly a year after its publication (Tan was therefore hailed as the woman who brought Asian-American culture to the *New York Times* bestseller list), *The Joy Luck Club* was short-listed for the National Book Award for Fiction and nominated for the National Book Critics Circle Award. In recognition of her achievement, Tan received the Bay Area Book Reviewers Award for fiction as well as the Commonwealth Club Gold Award. In addition to her \$50,000 contract, Amy Tan received around \$1.2 million from Vintage for the paperback rights for *The*

Joy Luck Club. The novel has been translated into at least 20 languages, including Chinese.

The main content of this novel is about the lives of a group of China-born mothers and their American-born daughters, and the difficulties in their communication and reconciliation. The daughters consider their mothers old-fashioned and unreasonable, while their mothers think them wild and disobedient. Tan has constructed this novel as a series of sixteen interlocking and interrelated narratives divided into four sections with four stories within each section. Each section is prefaced with a short fable or a narrative proverb in which is distilled the essence of the stories, and each section or story is introduced with a symbolic title. The sixteen stories are a series of personal narratives by eight women, four pairs of Chinese migrant mothers and their American-born daughters. The club of the title—a mah jong-and-investment group formed by the four mothers in the late 1940s—has met for over thirty years, and the novel opens shortly after the death of its founding member Suyuan Woo. To correct an imbalance of players and to fill the empty East corner left by Suyuan at the mah jong table, the three remaining members have asked her daughter, Jing-mei, to join them as her mother's replacement. Therefore, except for Suyuan who has died before the novel opens and Jing-mei whose voice opens two sections and closes two others, each character tells two stories about significant events or turning points in her life. The main theme of each of the four sections

is as follows. “Feathers from a Thousand Li Away” reveals the mothers’ early lives in distant China and describes the experiences that motivated their migration to America. “Twenty-Six Malignant Gates”, comprised of the daughters’ stories, focuses on the emotional pain of their childhoods and their discontent as adults who are still unable to comprehend what their mothers want from them. “American Translation” continues the daughters’ stories, foregrounding the American-born generation’s struggle to accept their migrant mothers as contemporary women instead of outdated relics of a long-vanished alien way of life. And finally, all of the stories come together, West meets East, and mothers and daughters achieve a fragile *détente* in “Queen Mother of the Western Skies”.

Though Tan has been criticized by some for co-opting Chinese-American culture, most critics think her uncommon command of language and storytelling a rarity among first-time authors. Hollywood brought *The Joy Luck Club* to an even larger audience. Produced by Oliver Stone, directed by Wayne Wang, and with a screenplay co-written by Tan, the film version was both a critical and commercial achievement and notable for its Asian and Asian American cast.

Amy Tan published her second novel, *The Kitchen God’s Wife*, in 1991, the third, *The Hundred Secret Senses*, in 1995, and the fourth, *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*, in 2001. In addition to her four novels, Tan has also written two children’s books, *The Moon Lady*

(1992) and *The Chinese Siamese Cat* (1994), and two highly regarded academic papers, *The Language of Discretion* (1990) and *Mother Tongue* (1990).

1.3 Back-translation

What is back-translation? The following are two most representative definitions.

The first one comes from Mark Shuttleworth and Moira Cowie's *Dictionary of Translation Studies* (1997):

A process in which a text which has been translated into a given language is retranslated into SL. The procedure of back-translation has been used for various different purposes. For example, since at least the middle of the 1970s the term has been used in the literature on Bible translation to illustrate the sometimes vast structural and conceptual differences which exist between SL and TL; however, it is also sometimes simply used to refer to a GLOSS TRANSLATION of the original Biblical text (Gutt 1991). Such back-translations are by necessity highly LITERAL, although the precise degree of literalness will vary depending on the particular feature that needs to be highlighted. Similarly, back-translation is sometimes used in contrastive linguistics as a technique for comparing specific syntactic, morphological or lexical features from two or more languages. An early use of the term in this context can be found in Spalatin (1967), while Ivir defines back-translation as

“a check on the semantic content” (1981: 59) which can be used to reveal instances of FORMAL CORRESPONDENCE. Casagrande (1954) proposes a similar procedure to diagnose “trouble-points in the process of transcoding” (1954:339). However, Toury is skeptical of any such apparent insights which back-translation may provide, arguing that the irreversible nature of translation makes all such general conclusions invalid (1980:23-24). Holmes (1988a), on the other hand, uses the evidence of back-translation to argue against the possibility of there being any “real” EQUIVALENCE between a poem and its translation. According to his reasoning, a hypothetical experiment in which a poem is translated by five independent translators, and then each of the five inevitably different translations are back-translated to produce 25 versions, all distinct from each other and from the original text, demonstrates that any claim of equivalence is “perverse” (1988a:53). Similar experiments have been both suggested and actually carried out to investigate certain areas of translational behaviour. For example, Levý posits that an examination of a number of parallel back-translations of a single text would provide useful insights into at least two UNIVERSALS OF TRANSLATION (1965:78-79), and also argues that “tendencies operative in the course of decision processes may be observed with great clarity, if the same text passes several times through the process of translation from language A into language B, and back again into A” (1967:1176); in support of this latter proposition he cites an experiment carried out by van der Pol (1956) into how the choice of specific lexical items varied during the (repeated) back-translation of a text. (p.14-15)

This definition makes it clear that back-translation has been treated more as a means to a certain aim than as a subject which itself is worthy of further investigation. At the same time, the definition implies that it is hard to achieve equivalence, at least linguistic equivalence, in back-translating a work into its original language.

The second definition is an entry written by Mu Lei and Liu Shusen in *A Companion for Chinese Translators* (1997) with Lin Huangtian as the chief editor:

Back-translation refers to the translation of language A into language B and later back into language A as cited material, or the translation from the third or fourth language back into the original one. For example, the English for “磕头” is “kowitz”. It is a sort of back-translation when the former is used to substitute the latter in English-Chinese translations. Some of the translations are unadvisable, or even merely improvisations as the translators have no alternative. Still, they have been translated into foreign languages and spread to foreign lands. Similarly, it is also back-translation when many foreign objects, names of persons or places, and literary allusions appear in works translated from Chinese into that language as source material after they have been transplanted into Chinese, e.g. “夏娃” (Eve). Back-translation also refers to the restoration of the translated work into the original one as a means of examining the linguistic accuracy of the former during the process of literal translation. Back-translation is mainly translated word for word, but is surely conditioned by the differences in social, cultural and historical background, linguistic

structure and rhetorical techniques between the source language and the target language. Generally speaking, it is easy to restore into the original content of universality, words written in a simple style and unique items such as proper names. However, it is difficult to restore elements with special cultural connotations such as rhetorical techniques. (p.303)

By comparison, the second definition has paid more attention to the cultural restrictions contributing to the difficulties in the accurate restoration to the original through back-translation.

Ivir claims that translation means translating cultures instead of languages. (quoted from Bassnett and Trivedi, 1999:21) As background to their English literary creations, the Chinese American writers are actually transposing a culture—to be understood as a language, a cognitive system, a literature, a material culture, a social system and legal framework, a history, and so forth. That is, the Chinese culture or tradition acts as a metatext that is rewritten—explicitly and implicitly—in the literary creations of these writers. That is exactly why we have mentioned in the Introduction that CAE literature functions as a kind of cultural translation. During the translation of such literary works into Chinese, the metatext “which has been translated into a given language is retranslated into SL”, and then there occurs the phenomenon of back-translation as defined in the first definition given above. In the following two chapters, we are to analyze the major back-translation problems

present in the three Chinese translations of *The Joy Luck Club* about the replication of the original linguistic manoeuvring and the restoration of the Chinese culture-specific items.

Chapter Two Replication of the Original Linguistic Manoeuvring

Amy Tan has been hailed as among the “magicians of language”. In her maiden work, *The Joy Luck Club*, Tan has displayed her amazing ability in linguistic manoeuvring. We will specify three types of linguistic engineering and discuss the re-presentation of them in the three translations.

2.1 The Insertion of Pinyin

In essence, CAE literary works are created in English. Yet Chinese, normally Cantonese or *putonghua*, is usually part of their texture, providing an authentic effect of the specific atmosphere and linguistic flavor of Chinese migrant communities in America. As Hu Yong points out, “Chinese American writers are all keen on having Chinese characters literally or freely translated into English and then inserted into their works, ... this kind of loan linguistic symbols even become a common feature of the new-generation Chinese American literature.” (胡勇, 2003: 149-151) As a matter of fact, the most conspicuous linguistic phenomenon in the source text of *The Joy Luck Club* is the extensive employment of a sort of italicized pinyin originally created by the author herself. This can be viewed as a kind

of transliteration, an attempt to reproduce in the American readers' ears the sound of Chinese spoken by the Chinese protagonists in the novel through the romanization of Chinese characters. In this way, "the colloquiality of the essence of related experiences is emphasized". (乐黛云、张辉, 1999: 295) The romanized Chinese language appears not only as single words, but also as whole sentences. At the same time, in order to make the text less difficult for monolingual American readers, an English explanation of the word or a literal or free translation of the sentence is presented nearby, just as in the following two examples (the boldface words are for emphasis, added by the author of the present thesis):

1. You are the son of a mother who has so little respect she has become *ni*, **a traitor to our ancestors.** (p.36)

2. I was about to get up and chase them, but my mother nodded toward my four brothers and reminded me: "*Dangsyng tamende shenti,*" **which means "Take care of them," or literally, "Watch out for their bodies."** (p.130)

This writing technique belongs to the "appropriation strategies" now prevalent among postcolonial writers^{*}. According to

^{*} Though China has never been fully colonized, here we relate CAE literature with postcolonial literature as postcolonialism is a way of looking at "intercultural power

Ashcroft *et al.*, “appropriation is the process by which the language is taken and made to ‘bear the burden’ of one’s own cultural experience”. (Ashcroft et al. 1989:38-39) During this process, language is adopted as a tool and utilized in various ways to express widely differing cultural experiences. In the case under discussion, the repeated insertion of pinyin in the novel indicates the author’s attempt to “abrogate the privileged centrality of ‘English’ by using language to signify difference while employing a sameness which allows it to be understood”. (ibid: 51) The frequent appearance of such romanized Chinese makes the original book a sort of multilingual text, the translation of which challenges the long-established concept of translation as being from **one** language to another. When the target language, Chinese, happens to be the foreign language present in the source text, how to reproduce the language difference in the target text? Can we still achieve “faithfulness” and “equivalence” which have long been held as infallible precepts? According to Han Ziman, under such circumstances, the functions of the foreign language in the source text are hard to be replicated in the target text. (韩子满, 2001) Is that so? First, let’s take a look at what is functional equivalence.

In the book *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, Eugene Nida put

relationship, the psychosocial transformations brought about by the intertwined dynamics of dominance and submission, geographical and linguistic displacement” (Robinson, 1997:16), with which CAE literature is also deeply concerned.

forward the concept of dynamic equivalence, which means “the degree to which the receptors of the message in the receptor language respond to it in substantially the same manner as the receptors in the source language”. (Nida and Taber, 1969:25) Later, to avoid confusion, Nida changed “dynamic equivalence” to “functional equivalence” and defines the latter as “different degrees of adequacy from minimal to maximal effectiveness on the basis of both cognitive and experiential factors”. A minimal functional equivalence is stated as “the readers of a translated text should be able to comprehend it to the point that they can conceive of how the original readers of the text must have understood and appreciated it”, while a maximal equivalence is defined as “the readers of a translated text should be able to understand and appreciate it in essentially the same manner as the original readers did”. (Nida, 2001:87) That is to say, though absolute equivalence is hard to achieve, still we can try our best to approach it infinitely. Now let’s have a look at the different ways in which the three translations handle the intriguing linguistic phenomenon of the insertion of pinyin in the original text through two examples and see how they have achieved functional equivalence.

3. My auntie, who had a very bad temper with children, told him he had no *shou*, no respect for ancestors or family, just like our mother. (p.35)

① 舅母对待孩子，向来粗暴得很。我弟弟不服地瞪她一眼，她马上训斥他目无尊长，如此大逆不道的行为，就像我们妈妈。(p.33)

② 我的舅妈向来对小孩子没耐心，她说弟弟不 shou (孝)，对于长辈和家人不尊敬，就象我妈妈一样。(p.28)

③ 我舅母对小孩脾气甚大，告诉弟弟他不知“羞”，就像我们的妈，不尊宗敬祖。(p.32)

It is to be borne in mind that the presence of romanized Chinese in the source text is by no means of random occurrence. Instead, it is a strategic arrangement of unusual ingenuity. In the case of single Chinese words, they appear in the form of pinyin mostly because they have such rich cultural connotations that it is difficult, if not impossible, to find fully equivalent words in English. Jin Shenghua claims that the word “*shou*” in the source text is the pinyin of the Chinese character “孝” as the whole novel has put emphasis on the emotional attachment between the mothers and their daughters and the filial piety the daughters show to their mothers. (金圣华, 2002: 43-44) ③ back-translates it as “羞” and is therefore improper according to the original context. In this case, the translation is certainly not functionally equivalent with the original text.

It is well known that Confucianism has been the dominant ideology in traditional Chinese culture and has remained a great influence on Chinese people’s way of thinking. Confucian teachings attach great importance to filial piety as the latter is regarded not only as the most important ethical standard for handling all kinds of

relationship within a family, but also as the foundation of the ethical and political relationship and that of the social order of the whole human society. (吴枫, 2000: 500) There is even a Confucian classic entitled *The Book of Filial Piety* which explicates the Confucian thinking about filial piety. Then, the word *shou* actually stands for the latent presence of traditional Chinese culture, so it is out of the question to find an English word equivalent with the Chinese “孝” both in denotation and in connotation. And that is exactly why Amy Tan has chosen to transliterate this character as an attempt to preserve its full meaning.

Such usage of language as the transliteration of Chinese words does have an important function in inscribing difference. It signifies a certain cultural experience that it cannot hope to reproduce but whose difference is validated by the new situation. Cultural distinctiveness is one of the major points Tan has repeatedly tried to elaborate on. For instance, when one of the Chinese mothers talks about a mah jong table she once owned in China, she says that (the emphasis is added by the author of this thesis)

4. My table was from my family and was of **a very fragrant red wood, not what you call rosewood, but *hong mu*, which is so fine there's no English word for it.** (p.11)

The mother thinks that the two cultures are so distinctively

different that some items peculiar to one culture even cannot be named by the other culture.

Now let's turn to analyze the remaining two translations. ① does not even consider having the word “*shou*” accurately back-translated and has therefore failed to re-present the strategic arrangement in the author's literary creation. Of course, it cannot achieve the same function as the source text does. Among all the three translations, only ② has restored the word correctly. However, as we have analyzed above, the word “孝” surely means much more to the Chinese readers than the simple explanation “respect for ancestors or family” does to the American readers. As a result, the target text is effectively not functionally equivalent with the source text.

It is also interesting to note that Nida speaks of maximal functional equivalence as “the readers of a translated text should be able to understand and appreciate it in essentially the same manner as the original readers did”, which implies that target text readers usually understand and appreciate less than the source text readers do. (Nida, 2001:87) Yet the case under study just proves to the contrary. The preservation in the translations of the multilingualism in the original text and its textual functions will be discussed in the following example.

5. “*Jrdaule*”—I already know this—she said, as if to ask why I was telling

her this again. (p.200)

① “我早知道了。”她只是很平静地说，好像很奇怪为什么我还要再跟她说一声。(p.180)

② “Jrdaule (知道了),”她说，好象是责问我为什么又把这事告诉她。(p.162)

③ “知道。”她用中文说，好像在问我为什么我还要再告诉她一次。(p.193)

The multilingual phenomenon here has two kinds of textual functions. First, it serves as a narrative strategy, foregrounding the occurrence of code-switching. The Chinese mothers in the novel normally converse in English, but they will sometimes switch to Chinese to express their strong emotions such as rejection and anger or to initiate a shift into a different register of intimacy. (Bloom, 1997: 91) Here, language becomes a political issue. Acutely aware that power and position are determined in large part by an individual's ability to speak correct English with one of the approved accents, the mothers create their own private hierarchy within their circle, privileging the Chinese language. In the present case, the code-switching indicates a shift to intimacy as it is a scene in which a mother reacts to her daughter's plan for a second marriage. The

second function of the multilingualism here is to defamiliarize the text and make it moderately difficult for the monolingual American readers.

① has completely obliterated multilingualism in the original text and thus rendered target text readers ignorant of the fact that here the mother has changed from English to Chinese. Consequently, it is impossible for them to be aware of the strategic meaning of this code-switching as an indication of the mother's passion toward her daughter. Meanwhile, the defamiliarization effect of the source text is totally lost on the target text readers and they will then encounter little difficulty in their reading process.

② has retained the original pinyin and offered the corresponding Chinese characters in following brackets. On the one hand, the difference in orthography here will surely remind readers that some change has occurred. Though this kind of pinyin does not conform to the standard Chinese pinyin system, Chinese readers will nonetheless quickly find out that it does not belong to a foreign language, and then realize that the mother is actually talking in her nonstandard Chinese dialect here and that a code-switching has taken place. On the other hand, since this sort of pinyin is not standard, it may more or less have a defamiliarization effect on the Chinese readers at their first sight and make them think a little before they fully understand this phenomenon. Therefore, it is a more advisable translation method than that of ①. Still, the inadequacy of this

method is that the target text is essentially monolingual and thus potentially poses less a challenge to the Chinese readers than the source text does to the monolingual American readers. The defamiliarization effect is then somewhat weakened.

③ is barely satisfactory in relaying the first function as it is able to make the readers aware that here the mother is speaking Chinese. But as it has also made the original multilingual text a monolingual one, just like ①, it has failed to reproduce the second function, too. Besides, another handicap with this method is that it cannot truly convey the language difference existent in the original text. It may mislead the Chinese readers and make them believe that “用中文说” is the original wording in the source text. Meanwhile, that sort of sentences actually exist in the original work, for example,

6. “Ann! Why do you Americans have only these morbid thoughts in your mind?” cried my mother in Chinese. (p.105)

The translation of this sentence given by ③ is as follows:

“哼！为什么你们美国人心里只有这些病态的想法？”我妈用中文大声说…… (p.98)

Then, it is impossible for the target text readers to know that the words spoken here “用中文” is completely different in form from

those in the previously mentioned English sentence. For this reason, the translator of ③ cannot be said to have successfully reproduced the language difference in the source text.

In a paper discussing the German translations of T.S.Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Armin Paul Frank and Birgit Bödeker propose a peculiar solution to a somewhat similar problem. There are a number of famous English and German quotations in their original linguistic form in Eliot's long poem, *The Waste Land*, which is mainly written in English. In the German translations, all of Eliot's German quotations are retained while the English ones are translated into German, and the "foreignness areas" for English and German readers have thus been exchanged. Therefore, Frank and Bödeker suggest that the German translators might conceivably serve their readers best by rendering the German quotations by marked translations into English so as to least affect the foreignness-familiarity ratio of the quotations. (Kittel and Frank, 1991:60)

If we continue this train of thought and translate the romanized Chinese utterance in the above example into English, then what will happen? Of course, under that condition, the target text will place as much demand on its monolingual Chinese readers as the source text does on its monolingual American readers, and the defamiliarization effect is almost the same. Yet then the Chinese readers will no longer realize that the mother here is in effect speaking in Chinese, let alone understanding the priority she has attached to her native language

and the political intention revealed thereby. Such a translation is surely not functionally equivalent with the source text.

2.2 The Hybrid English of the Chinese Mothers

As we have mentioned in the previous section, the Chinese migrant mothers conduct their usual conversation in English. And as indicated in the novel, they have a very low competence in English, with high interference from Chinese, their mother tongue. Their spoken English is described by Sau-Ling Cathia Wong as a kind of hybrid English featuring “the preponderance of short, choppy sentences and the frequent omission of sentence subjects”, which to her are “conventions whereby the Chinese can be recognized as Other”. (Palumbo-Liu, 1995:188-189) We should be aware that before its recent “Europeanization”, the Chinese language was characteristic of “short, choppy sentences” because the Chinese tend to “break the whole into parts” while the westerners are prone to “gather parts into a whole” in employing language. (王力, 1957: 290) And the “frequent omission of sentence subjects” is a common practice in both written and oral Chinese, though it does not conform to the standard English grammar, which normally requires a subject for each sentence. (王力, 1957: 64) Therefore, the Chinese mothers’ hybrid English provides the American readers of the original work with a glimpse of the grammatical structure of Chinese sentences. On

the other hand, even when the mothers' English utterances are grammatically correct, they are nonetheless mostly not idiomatic enough. For instance,

7. "Now you understand my meaning," said my mother triumphantly.
(p.203)

Though it is not difficult for the American readers to understand the sentence "now you understand my meaning", still it rings strange to their ears for its lack of idiomaticness. This sentence is in fact the word-for-word translation of the Chinese utterance "现在你明白我的意思了" (㊸, p.196), and therefore a case of "the adaptation of vernacular syntax to standard orthography" (Ashcroft *et al.* 1989:70) which attempts to insert the Chinese linguistic presence.

Then, it can be seen clearly that the "maternal" language is always at work in the foreign language, between which "occurs a constant process of translation, an abysmal dialogue, very difficult to bring to the light of day". (Venuti, 1992:134) The Chinese mothers' hybrid English can therefore be viewed as a translation of their native language, Chinese. And that is why we treat the translation into Chinese of this kind of English sentences as back-translation.

The deployment of this writing technique is also among the appropriation strategies proposed by Ashcroft *et al.* In the case under discussion, Amy Tan has rendered the English language "foreign" to

its own monolingual native speakers through the act of appropriation, bringing the received English which speaks from the center under the influence of a vernacular tongue, and has therefore resisted and defied “colonial and imperialist monolingualism which continues to believe that it can read the world through its own dominant language”. (Venuti, 1992:137) It is actually difficult to reproduce this linguistic hybridity and its political objective. Let’s take the following sentence and its translations as an example:

8. “Already cooked enough for you. See? One soup, four dishes. You don’t eat it, only have to throw it away. Wasted!” (p.195)

① “都为你们准备好了。看，四菜一汤，你们如果不留下来，吃不了，可浪费了!” (p.175)

② “我们已经做了许多，足够你们吃的。看，一个汤，四个菜，你们如果不吃，就只好倒掉了，太浪费了!” (p.157)

③ “已经煮好了，够你们吃的。看！四菜一汤。你们不吃的話，只好丢掉了。浪费唷!” (p.187)

The sentence in the source text is choppy and ungrammatical, and can leave a great impression on the American readers because of its special defamiliarization method. Yet what is alien in the original

turns out to be familiar in the translations; the strangeness being neutralized as back-translating restores the original. In the three Chinese translations, the natural and fluent Chinese will no longer draw any extra attention from its Chinese readers. Therefore, none of the three translations can be said to have achieved functional equivalence with the source text.

The hybrid English spoken by the Chinese mothers in the original text bears the imprint of their unique cultural positioning and is “a form of self-identification, a means of inscribing their unique existence on a culture that continues to exclude them, a strategy for preserving their heritage even as they embrace a new life”. (Huntley, 1998:65) Also, it “bears witness to the ‘contamination’ of English from within” and makes a political statement of its own to contest linguistic dominance”. (Chan, 2002) When what is strange to the monolingual American readers is “familiarized” in the translations, it has utterly lost its original textual function.

2.3 The Simple English in the Mothers’ Narration

This part is concerned with the preservation of the writing style of the original work in the translations. It has been mentioned in Chapter One that *The Joy Luck Club* is composed of sixteen stories among which each of the three remaining mothers tells two. One of Amy Tan’s essays, *Mother Tongue*, focuses on the connections

between ethnic identity and language and provides for readers a cultural and theoretical background for her fiction as well as for the works of other writers of non-western ancestry. In this paper, Tan remarks that the language in these six narratives is “what I imagined to be her (Tan’s mother to whom this novel is devoted—the present author) translation of her Chinese if she could speak in perfect English”. (From: <http://www.usao.edu/facbassictycb/amytan.htm>) This is the reason why we regard the translation of these stories into Chinese as a sort of back-translation. In the same article, Tan also says that

...I later decided I should envision a reader for the stories I would write. And the reader I decided upon was my mother, because these were stories about mothers. So with this reader in mind—and in fact she did read my early drafts—I began to write stories using all the Englishes I grew up with... Apart from what any critic had to say about my writing, I knew I had succeeded where it counted when my mother finished reading my book and gave me her verdict: “So easy to read!”

Tan’s own mother, Daisy, does not speak fluent English and thus Tan, as a tribute to her own mother, has employed a simplified English in her work. Therefore, her writing style is simple, succinct, and easy to understand. Then, how is this style retained in the translations? Here is an example:

9. This was a shocking sight. We were in mourning. But I could not say anything. I was a child. How could I scold my own mother? I could only feel shame seeing my mother wear her shame so boldly. (p.248)

① 这是十分犯忌的，因为，我们还在戴孝呢！但我只是一个小孩子，我能说些什么呢？我怎么可以指责自己的母亲呢？看着她如此毫无顾忌地华服盛妆，我为她感到羞愧。(p.217)

② 这身打扮真讨厌。我们还在服丧。我能说些什么呢？我还是个孩子，怎么能责备自己的妈妈呢？看到她一身华丽的装束，对自己先前受到的污辱毫不掩饰，我心里很羞愧。(p.202)

③ 这种景象让人目瞪口呆，我们还在大孝期间，可是我不便置喙，我只是个孩子，我怎么能够责怪我自己的母亲？我只能自惭形秽，眼睁睁望着我妈肆无忌惮地大张艳帜。(p.239)

The language of the original English sentence is plain and easy to understand, and nearly all the words are “small words”. ① and ② have kept closely to this writing style. While in ③, the two short sentences are loaded with a string of five idioms. Proper use of idioms with restraint will render one’s writing rhythmic, vivid, concise and graceful. But when employed excessively, they will make the writing seem affected. In the case of ③, such a highly-concentrated use of idioms makes its style a little too ornate

and redundant. It looks more like the translator's style rather than that of the original writer. We do not deny that a translator should have his or her own style, as "the style of the translated text should be that of the original text tinted with the translator's stylistic characteristics". (孙致礼, 1999: 20) While on the other hand, "the fact that a translator should have his or her own style does not mean that s/he can forget that of the source text, willfully unbridling his or her style and going so far as substituting the original style with that of his or hers. On the contrary, s/he should try his or her best to convey the style of the source text with all his or her cultural attainments and his or her grounding both in Chinese and the foreign languages". (杜承南、文军, 1994: 85) In ③, the translator's personal writing style is so striking that it has even screened that of the original work. In so doing, the translator has in fact greatly damaged the artistic charm of the source text.

In the above paragraphs we have discussed the different ways in which the three Chinese translators handle the particular linguistic engineering in the original work. We can see that to some of the peculiar translational problems, none of them has given a totally satisfying answer. Then, how have they performed in the back-translation and restoration of the Chinese culture-specific items abundant in *The Joy Luck Club*? We will have a look at this issue in the following chapter.

Chapter Three Restoration of Chinese Culture-specific Items

As a great portion of the novel is about the mothers' reminiscence of their life in China, it is unavoidable that their narratives involve the transmission of a great number of Chinese culture-specific items. For the transmission of these items, Tan has chiefly adopted two foreignizing translation methods. One is the transliteration method as we have mentioned in the first section of Chapter Two, examples being *chaswei* (杂碎, p.20), *Syi Wang Mu* (西王母, p.239) and *chunwang chihan* (唇亡齿寒, p.161). And the other is literal translation, e.g. "peach-blossom luck" (桃花运, p.159), "looking for a needle on the bottom of the ocean" (海底捞针, p.328) (while a domesticated version would be "looking for a needle in a haystack" or "looking for a needle in a bottle of hay"). By the adoption of the foreignization strategy, Tan has tried to maintain the distinctiveness of Chinese culture and free it from its long-time inhibited and silenced situation in the western context. When back-translated and restored to their original, the innumerable exoticisms appear without drawing the least attention to themselves and have therefore lost their original cultural and political functions.

However, the question we are chiefly concerned here in this chapter are the deviations frequently occurring during the

back-translation of Chinese culture-specific items. How to correctly restore them in back-translation is also a thorny problem. Deviations may take place here and there throughout the process. After a meticulous examination, it is found that there are mainly four types of errors the three translators have committed in their translations, and these will be analyzed one by one in the following sections.

3.1 Deviations Due to Lack of Relevant Cultural Knowledge

Quite a number of the mistakes made by the translators during their restoration of Chinese culture-specific items of the source text can be attributed to their inadequate mastery of relevant knowledge about our own culture. This can be shown clearly in the next few examples.

1. The matchmaker bragged about me: “An earth horse for an earth sheep. This is the best marriage combination.” (p.44)

① 那媒婆不住地向洪太太夸耀着我：“看呀，就好比骏马配上金马鞍，多般配，真个应着门当户对这句话了。” (p.42)

② 媒婆在旁边夸我说：“一个属马，一个属羊，真是天生的一对呀。” (p.35)

③ 媒婆夸我“地马配地羊，婚姻的绝配。”(p.40)

Here the narrator is recollecting her first marriage arrangement back in China when she was merely a baby girl. It is well known that in traditional Chinese culture there are twelve animals (rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, rooster, dog and pig) used to symbolize the year in which a person is born. In addition to these, years are also associated with one of the five elements: wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. Metal years end in zero or one on the lunar calendar; water years end in two or three; wood years end in four or five; fire years end in six or seven; and earth years end in eight or nine. Thus, according to the years in which they were born, the narrator is an earth horse, while her future husband is an earth sheep. In accordance with the traditional way of marriage arrangement in old China, the narrator was selected by her birth year as being a compatible partner for her future husband. By substituting “an earth horse for an earth sheep” with a Chinese proverb “骏马配上金马鞍”, ① has totally ignored the original cultural coloring and obliterated an aspect in the custom of traditional marriage arrangement described in the original work. ② is an incomplete translation as it, either because of the translator’s oversight or due to his lack of relevant knowledge, does not have the word “earth” restored. ③ has preserved both respects: the symbolic animals used to denote the years of the characters’ births and the associated

element. Its mistake lies in the fact that the conventional wording for “earth” in this case is the Chinese word “土” instead of “地”. Such a mistake can be caused by no factor other than the translator’s ignorance in this aspect of traditional Chinese culture.

2. “...Autumn moon warms. O! Geese shadows return.” Baba was reciting a long poem he had deciphered from ancient stone inscriptions. (p.68)

① “秋月怡人，荷塘鹤影……” 父亲开始吟诗了，并且向众人作着解释。(p.63)

② “秋月暖兮，鹅影归，” 爸爸在吟诵一首长诗，那是他从古碑上猜度出来的。(p.54)

③ “……秋月暖兮鹅影归……。” 爸爸正在吟一首他解自古石碑文上的长诗。(p.63)

Each culture has its own unique literary tradition, including distinctive literary images. In the traditional culture of China, wild goose (雁) has always been regarded as a most poetic bird which frequently appears in many genres of literary works. Because it is a kind of migratory bird, it will fly to the south in autumn to seek the warmth and the ample food supplies there. And that is why Chinese literati have constantly associated it with the arrival of autumn and

such connotations as parting, desolateness and nostalgia. There are a large number of ancient poems that involve wild goose as a peculiar literary image, e.g. “愁绝雁声从北至，苍然秋色自西来”、“渚清沙白今送君，朔风旅雁高入云”、“凄凉满地芦花月，撩乱连天鸿雁秋”、“夜闻归雁生乡思，病入新年感物华”，etc. (quoted from 刘占锋，2002：301—303)

It is amazing that none of the three translators has succeeded in the restoration of this image. ① back-translates the “geese” in the source text into “鹤”，but the English word for “鹤” should be “cranes” instead of “geese”. Besides, crane in China is usually viewed as a symbol of longevity and has little to do with the seasonal atmosphere indicated in the original poem. Both ② and ③ take it for granted that “geese” just refers to the Chinese “鹅”. But in traditional Chinese culture, 鹅 is usually seen as an ordinary domestic fowl. Unlike 雁, it is not regarded as an enduring literary image.

The thousands of years of Chinese literary history has witnessed the emergence and development of a variety of literary genres. For example, Chinese verse alone is consisted of such genres as poetry (诗), *ci* poetry (词), song (曲), poetic prose (赋), etc. In CAE literary works, especially in novels, other genres may be embedded. The back-translation of such embedment should conform to the literary norms of the target culture. Let’s see how the three translations have performed under such circumstances:

3. “For woman is yin,” she cried sadly, “the darkness within, where untempered passions lie. And man is yang, bright truth lighting our minds.” (p.82)

① “女人是阴，”她痛苦地唱道，“她注定只能冷却自己的热情，就像阴影一样，没有光彩。男人是阳，夺目耀眼，女人只有借着男人，才有光彩。” (p.72)

② 她伤心地哭诉着：“女人属阴，心底黑如墨，隐藏私欲无穷多。男人属阴，心似一团火，照亮正道通银河。” (p.64)

③ “女人是阴，”她悲极而啼：“黑暗内伏，未敛的情感所居。男人是阳，清明的真理照耀我们的心。” (p.75)

In the case under study, one of the Chinese mothers is recalling a shadow play she watched on a Moon Festival in her childhood. The quoted sentence was classically sung by a person playing the role of Chang'e, a legendary figure. It is common knowledge that the singing part in Chinese traditional opera is a kind of verse, which has both literary and musical qualities. As a literary genre, it is “of the same origin but belonging to different branches” together with poetry and the *ci* poetry, and was enormously influenced by the latter two during its formation. (齐森华等, 1997: 1) Therefore, just like poetry and the *ci* poetry, it attaches great importance to rhythm and the

relative regularity in form. ① sounds more like a colloquial speech rather than a verse. The aesthetic appeal in the singing part of traditional opera is irrevocably lost for the Chinese audience. ③ has taken into consideration the formal elements indispensable for this special type of verse. However, it seems a little incongruous for an ancient mythical character to utter such modern literary expressions as “未敛的情感” and “清明的真理”. While it is still open to question whether ② has faithfully rendered the meaning of the source text, it is a more satisfying choice in reflecting the unique features of the libretto of traditional Chinese opera.

3.2 Deviations Caused by Ignorance of the Context

In some cases, ignorance of the context rather than lack of relevant cultural knowledge contributes to the errors the translators have committed in their back-translation of Chinese culture-specific items. This will be confirmed by the following two examples.

The first one has to do with the restoration of the protagonists' names in the novel. In Chinese culture, names are not merely “labels” to distinguish one from the other; they represent all the long-term greetings and expectations from parents to children. A name is the essence of a person, and it is a gift (the first gift) from parents to be carried for the rest of one's life. In literary works, the names of the characters are usually bestowed certain unique

meanings which have something to do with the main themes of these works. In the novel *The Joy Luck Club*, almost each Chinese name has a story behind it, packed with messages about life, love, dependence and memory. The implications of the names of the most important mother-daughter pair in the novel, Suyuan Woo and Jing-mei Woo, count much for readers to truly apprehend the sacred relationship between the mothers and their daughters. Therefore, it is essential for the translators to correctly restore the two names. However, this task is rather difficult to fulfill as the spelling of these names does not conform to the standard Chinese pinyin system and there are normally many homophones in Chinese. The three translations present the names as follows:

Suyuan Woo	Jing-mei Woo
① 吴素云	吴精美
② 吴宿愿	吴晶妹
③ 吴宿愿	吴菁妹

As a matter of fact, the implications of these two names are both explicated in the original novel. It is stated that “Suyuan” means “Long-Cherished Wish” (p.322). Before she migrated to America, Suyuan Woo had been forced to abandon a pair of twin baby daughters during her flight from the approaching Japanese invaders. She has been missing the two lost daughters throughout the rest of her life and has made much effort in an attempt to find them in her old age. Thus, her “long-cherished wish” is to see the whole family

reunited. Therefore, the proper back-translation of her name should be “宿愿”, and both ② and ③ have given the correct answer. The “素云” presented by ① is not right in implication though it is similar to “Suyuan” in pronunciation and seems rather poetic.

Besides, at the end of the novel, when her American-born daughter Jing-mei Woo goes back to China to fulfill the recently deceased Suyuan’s last wish and unite with her two half-sisters who have already been found, there is such sentences in her narrative,

4. And although we don’t speak, I know we all see it. Together we look like our mother. Her same eyes, her same mouth, open in surprise to see, at last, her long-cherished wish. (p.332)

The three translations are given as follows:

① 我们一声不吭地盯着那逐渐明亮的画面，我们都很像妈妈：一样的眉目，一样的嘴唇，我们看见妈妈了，正惊喜地注视着她的梦幻成真。
(p.281)

② 虽然我们都没有说话，我知道我们都能看到，我们长得都象妈妈，和她一样的眼睛，和她一样的嘴唇，大睁着惊喜的眼睛终于看到了她的宿愿。
(p.266)

③ 虽然我们口中不说，我明白我们都看得出：我们一道儿，看起来

就像我们的母亲。她一样的眼睛，她一样的嘴巴，惊愕地张大了嘴瞧，好不容易，她宿愿成真。(p.318)

We may notice that the “long-cherished wish” at the end of the last sentence echoes the “Long-Cherished Wish” in the previous text, which acts as the explanation of the name “Suyuan”. Here, ② and ③ have successfully reproduced the original intratextual coherence, while ① has failed in this respect because it is impossible for readers of this translation to see there is any relationship between the name “素云” and the expression “梦幻成真” here. The artistic arrangement of the original work is blurred.

Also in the novel, Jing-mei’s father explains to her the meaning of her name in this way,

“Jing” like excellent *jing*. Not just good, it’s something pure, essential, the best quality. *Jing* is good leftover stuff when you take impurities out of something like gold, or rice, or salt. So what is left—just pure essence. And “Mei,” this is common *mei*, as in *meimei*, “younger sister.” (p.323)

Then, Jing-mei’s name “represents her mother’s past and present, losses and hopes”. (Huntley, 1998: 48) It means “the younger sister who was supposed to be the essence of the others”. (p.323) For Suyuan, her American daughter would be the replacement child who would enable her to bear the loss of the twins.

Therefore, it is reasonable whether “Jing” is back-translated into “精”, “晶” or “菁”, while “妹” is an undoubted choice for “Mei”. ① has once again failed to convey the true implication of this name.

Now let's turn to the other example:

5. When I was little, my mother told me my great-grandfather had sentenced a beggar to die in the worst possible way, and that later the dead man came back and killed my great-grandfather. (p.104)

① 小时候听妈妈说，外曾祖父曾将一个乞丐判凌迟处死。后来，这个乞丐的鬼魂来向外曾祖父索命了。(p.89)

② 我还很小的时候，妈妈告诉我曾祖父曾经以最坏的方式处死了一个乞丐，后来那个死鬼又回来杀了我的曾祖父，…… (p.83)

③ 当我小时候，我妈告诉我，我的高祖父曾经用天底下最坏的办法定一名乞丐死罪。不久后，亡魂转回世间谋害了我高祖父。(p.97)

The traditional family structure in China is much more complex than that of the western societies. In the old society, when Confucianism was the dominant ideology, it was a common practice for several generations to live under the same roof. The forms of address between direct family members and those between relatives are so complicated that it is rather difficult for a westerner to

comprehend. In western countries, there are only some general terms which function as forms of address. For instance, “uncle” may be used to address one’s mother’s older or younger brothers or those of one’s father’s. In *The Joy Luck Club*, the forms of address conform to the western conventions. Therefore, in the back-translation of such terms, it is necessary to fix them according to the context.

In the above example, the three translators put forward three different versions for the address “great-grandfather”. Then, which is the right one?

First, “great-grandfather” refers to one’s mother’s or father’s grandfather and should be rendered as “外曾祖父” or “曾祖父”. ③ is wrong in back-translating it into “高祖父” as the latter actually refers to the father of one’s great-grandfather and is therefore the English address “great-great-grandfather”.

Then, we should know that the narrator is of mixed blood. Her mother is Chinese, while her father is an English-Irish American. According to the context, the story her mother told her took place in ancient China. Thus, the “great-grandfather” is in fact the one on her mother’s side and should be restored as “外曾祖父”. ① has given the correct translation.

3.3 Deviations Due to Irrational Omission

All of the three translators have occasionally made some

omissions, some of which are rather irrational whether or not the translators have done so on purpose. Omissions at different places may have different negative effects, for example,

6. ...a woven hamper filled with *zong zi*—the sticky rice wrapped in lotus leaves, some filled with roasted ham, some with sweet lotus seeds... (p.71)

①一大篮粽子..... (p.65)

②一篮粽子，还有火腿、甜莲子..... (p.57)

③一个编筐里满是粽子——莲叶裹了糯米，有些包了烤火腿，有些包了糖莲子..... (p.66)

In the original text, the narrator is recollecting the preparations made for an outing in her childhood back in China. The traditional food *zong zi*, which is usually eaten during the Dragon Boat Festival on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, is actually wrapped with bamboo or reed leaves instead of lotus leaves as described in the source text. It is a mistake made by the author. Amy Tan herself did not have the experience of living in China at the writing of this book, but both of her parents migrated from China to the United States to start new lives, thus giving her a full taste of Chinese culture. This is the foundation for all of her works. However, as her knowledge of

China is only fragmentary and second-hand, she is just trying to recreate her imaginary motherland when she depicts activities in her mother's culture and deviations may occur sometimes. Still, such deviations have done no damage to the artistic achievement of this novel. As translators who function as intermediaries, we do not have the right to make any change of this flaw. ③ has done well in retaining the original content as it is in order to truly reflect the author's imagination of a faraway motherland. The method of omission adopted by ① and ② is not appropriate since it has covered some truth revealed by the source text.

At other times, omissions made by the translators may leave out the rich cultural implications in the source text. That is what has happened during the translation of the sentence below:

7. She whispered something in Chinese about “things not being balanced,” and I thought she meant how things looked, not how things felt. And then she started to move the larger pieces: the sofa, chairs, end tables, a Chinese scroll of goldfish. (p.112)

The three translations are as follows:

① 她用汉语说了一套什么不平衡，中国话叫“相克”。我想，她指的是视觉的不平衡，而不是感觉的不平衡。然后，她开始搬移大家具：沙发，椅子，沙发茶几，还有一轴中国画。(p.96)

② 她用汉语低声地说：“什么东西失衡了。”我想她是指外观而不是感觉。然后，她又开始搬动大件的東西：沙发、椅子、桌子、一个中国式的金鱼卷轴。(p.89)

③ 她用中文低语一番，说是“事情不太平衡”，我想她意思是事情看起来，而不是感觉上不平衡。接下来，她开始搬动大件的東西：沙发、椅子、墙几、一幅有金鱼的中式卷轴。(p.104)

The practice of geomancy, *feng shui*, refers to people's selection, arrangement and handling of their dwelling circumstances so as to ensure their survival and good fortune in the future. It is a way to harmonize mankind with nature. (吴康, 1993: 540) When large-scale changes are impossible, *feng shui* practitioners frequently turn to symbolic solutions. Here the narrator's mother thinks that their new house is situated in an ominous surrounding and “goes against the nature” (p.112). As it is out of the question for them to move to another place in the foreseeable future, she tries to make some remedies by rearranging the inner setting of the house. Strategically placed aquariums containing goldfish are often prescribed for structural problems that cannot be altered, in part because aquariums symbolically bring all five elements together into balance. And that is why in this case, the narrator's mother moves “a Chinese scroll of goldfish” in substitution for live goldfish, which represent life and growth. (Hamilton, 1999) In the three translations given above, both

② and ③ have notified the content of the picture, “goldfish”, while ① has omitted this by only saying “一轴中国画”, irreversibly obliterating the profuse cultural connotations hidden behind the “goldfish” and obscuring the author’s original intention.

As we have seen in the above examples, the translators have committed some errors with irrational omission in the back-translation of certain Chinese culture-specific items. Sometimes they have even performed the contrary by unnecessary addition of Chinese culture-specific items nonexistent in the source text. This is just the issue to be discussed in the following section.

3.4 Deviations Caused by Unwarranted Addition

The Joy Luck Club abounds in Chinese culture-specific items since the author is a descendant of Chinese migrants in America and this novel of hers takes China as the background of some stories within. But this does not warrant the unnecessary addition of culture-specific items not present in the original work. Let’s analyze this problem through the following examples.

8. This is how a daughter honors her mother. It is *shou* so deep it is in your bones. The pain of the flesh is nothing. The pain you must forget. Because sometimes that is the only way to remember what is in your bones. (p.41)

① 一个女儿，就是这样地孝顺着她的母亲。这种孝，已深深印在骨髓之中，为此而承受的痛苦显得那般微不足道。你必得忘记那种痛苦。因为有时，这是唯一的途径，能让你意识到“发肤受之父母”的全部含义。
(p.39)

② 这就是一个女儿对她母亲的敬意，深藏于骨髓下面的 shou (孝)。肉体的疼痛算不了什么，你只有忘记它，才能要记住铭刻在骨髓里的东西，有时这是唯一的办法。(p.33)

③ 这是一位女儿向她母亲致敬的方式，这种深切的“羞”是深入骨髓的。皮肉的痛苦微不足道，这种痛苦你必须忘怀。因为有时这是唯一记取深入骨髓的方法。(p.38)

A conspicuous difference between the first translation and the other two is that the former includes in itself a quotation from *The Book of Filial Piety*, which is part of the saying “身体发肤，受之父母，不敢毁伤，孝之始也”。(quoted from 吴枫, 2000: 500) In the novel, the narrator's mother, in an attempt to cure her own long-diseased mother, cuts a piece of meat from her arm and cooks it with herbs and medicines. This quotation may look fit under such circumstances, but it will not do here as it is not at all present in the source text and may mislead Chinese readers, giving them the wrong impression that Amy Tan is so well-versed in Confucian classics that she actually says this in her book.

Similar phenomena appear in ③ frequently, one of which is the employment of Chinese intertexts that the original work does not contain. For example, one of the titles of the sixteen stories is “The Moon Lady”. That is a story recounted by a Chinese mother about her experience on a Moon Festival in her childhood when she went boating upon the Tai Lake together with her family. The other two translations have rendered the title literally as “月亮娘娘” and “月神”, while ③ presents it as “惟见湖心秋月白”, which is obviously an intertext of the line “惟见江心秋月白” in Bai Juyi’s poem *Song of the Lute Player* (《琵琶行》). Similarly, in another mother’s reminiscences of her childhood life in a rich household where her mother lived a humiliated and wretched life as a concubine, she mentions a clock in her mother’s bedroom, which could play music while giving the correct time. The author gives the imitation of the musical tune as “ni-ah! nah! nah! nah! nah-ni-nah!”. These onomatopoeic terms are in turn translated by ③ as “凄凄! 惨惨! 戚戚!” This will surely remind Chinese readers of a famous *ci* poetry by Li Qingzhao, *A Weary Song to a Slow Sad Tune* (《声声慢》), which opens with such a line: “寻寻觅觅, 冷冷清清, 凄凄惨惨戚戚。” It is true that the addition of such intertexts by the translator of ③ looks quite harmonious with the original context and may get a ready response from Chinese readers. Still, such additions are unwarranted due to similar reasons as discussed in the previous paragraph. The author does not pretend to be a scholar familiar with Chinese classical literature and there is

no necessity to make her up as one.

Conclusion

The present study has tried to make an initial research into the back-translation problem in the translation of CAE literature. For the subject of a typical case study we have chosen three Chinese translations of the international best-seller *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan, one of America's most popular Chinese American novelists. The research concentrates on the performance of the three translations in replicating the linguistic engineering and restoring the Chinese culture-specific items in the original text through back-translation and has found that their performance in these two perspectives is far from satisfying.

In the source text, language has become “a place of struggle” (许宝强、袁伟, 2001: 108) where the Chinese language tries to subvert the hegemonic dominance of the standard English language. The insertion of romanized Chinese words and expressions with rich cultural connotations serves to convey the sense of cultural distinctiveness and emphasize the experiential gap that lies at the heart of any cross-cultural text. After being back-translated and restored to the original, the alien becomes the familiar and the tension between the two languages is somehow relented. Besides, the Chinese readers will surely have much more consciousness of cultural identity with the restored items than the Americans do with

the ones in the original work. Thus, the translations have a different effect on the target text readers from that of the source text on its readers and it is then almost impossible to achieve absolute functional equivalence, which has conventionally been regarded as a standard to evaluate translated texts. Nevertheless, we should grope for ways to infinitely approach this ideal. The three Chinese translations of *The Joy Luck Club* have shown to us some of the probes.

Sentences appearing in their pinyin form usually indicate the occurrence of code-switching as the Chinese mothers resort to their mother tongue to express their strong emotions. It is also a method of defamiliarization which makes the text moderately difficult for monolingual American readers and reminds them repeatedly of the presence of the Other in the text. Back-translation into monolingual texts may still inform readers of the happening of code-switching, but the defamiliarization effect is then completely lost. On the other hand, the retaining of the original pinyin certainly places much less demand on the Chinese readers than the source text does on the monolingual American readers, though it is a more advisable way to better re-present the language difference present in the original work and is therefore more functionally equivalent with the source text. Translating the romanized Chinese utterances into English may better maintain the defamiliarization effect, but the Chinese readers would then be unaware of the priority attached to Chinese by the migrant

mothers and their cultural and political intentions in doing so.

The mothers' hybrid English is in most part a translation of their Chinese by marrying the syntax of their native language to the lexical forms of English. Their hybrid English is a form of self-inscription in an alien culture, a way of preserving significance in the new reality of America. All of the three translations back-translate it into fluent, natural Chinese, thus obliterating the strategic function of this kind of hybrid English in the source text.

The novel *The Joy Luck Club* can be seen as the site of contestation between languages. The above-mentioned types of linguistic manoeuvring within the novel give the American readers a taste of the authentic life in Chinese American communities. They are also a revelation of the author's intention of breaking up the myth of Eurocentrism and pushing the Chinese culture toward the center from its former marginalized position. The successful replication in back-translation of this political function performed by language poses a great challenge to our current translational practice.

Another problem has to do with language in the back-translated portion of this novel is the preservation of the writing style of the original text. As a tribute to her mother who has a low competence in English, Tan has employed a simple English that is easy to understand. However, as we have seen in Chapter Two, one of the translators has back-translated the narrative parts of the Chinese mothers, which are considered to be a translation by the author

herself, in a much too ornate style and has thus failed to remain faithful to the source text.

Chinese culture-specific items have been transmitted into the original novel through such foreignizing techniques as transliteration and literal translation. When back-translated, these items will irrevocably lose their original textual function of maintaining the distinctiveness of Chinese culture and challenge the dominance of western culture. Moreover, the restoration of the plentiful Chinese culture-specific items present in the original work is not such a simple task as many people may imagine. Four kinds of deviations in the back-translation of such items are listed after a meticulous examination of the three translations.

We normally take it for granted that a translator would have a good command of his or her native culture. But as we have seen, some of the errors committed in the translations are exactly due to their translators' lack of relevant cultural knowledge, especially that of traditional Chinese culture. Other deviations show that the translators have ignored the context within the novel as an important determinant element in the accurate restoration of some Chinese culture-specific items.

The other two kinds of deviations are contrary in origin but similar in their destructive results. One is due to irrational omission while the other is caused by unwarranted addition. The former may hide the fact that the author herself has made some mistakes in the

usage of those culture-specific terms as a result of her incomplete knowledge about Chinese culture. Some of the omissions also tend to blot out the profuse cultural connotations underlying such terms. The major defect of the last kind of deviation is that it may mislead Chinese readers and make them believe that the culture-specific items added by the translators themselves are actually existent in the source text, giving them the wrong impression that Tan herself is somewhat well-versed in traditional Chinese culture.

Since the presentation of “Chinese stories” is a common practice in CAE literature, back-translation becomes a prevalent issue in the translation of such literary works. More effort to explore a way of properly dealing with this issue will turn out to be beneficial for the successful translation of CAE literary works. CAE literature is a cultural dialogue between China and the West brought about by Chinese American writers who have been brought up in the “contact zone” (Bassnett and Trivedi, 1999:58) where the two cultures come together and establish ongoing relations. It is therefore of great realistic significance in an era when different cultures are moving from confrontation to friendly dialogue. It is a research subject with much potential to be tapped. However, as a certain scholar has pointed out, “the severe shortage of translations of Chinese American literary works has resulted in a bottleneck effect in our domestic research on this sort of literature.” (胡勇, 2003: 27) Consequently, it can be safely predicted that a great many more Chinese American

literary works will be translated gradually. Back-translation, as a problem peculiar to the translation of CAE literature, should get more attention from scholars in domestic translation studies field. The present thesis is merely a preliminary step towards the eventual discovery of satisfying methods to solve a variety of back-translation problems in the reproduction of CAE literature. Due to the limited ability of the present author and the few materials available on this subject, this research is far from perfect. Much more needs to be done in this long-neglected realm.

Bibliography

Primary References

Tan, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. New York: Ivy Books, 1989.

程乃珊、严映薇译,《喜福会》,杭州:浙江文艺出版社,1999。

田青译,《喜福会》,长春:吉林文史出版社,1994。

于人瑞译,《喜福会》,台北:联合文学出版社,1990。

Secondary References

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature*. London: Routledge, 1989.

Bloom, Harold. *Asian-American Women Writers*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 1997.

Chan, Leo Tak-Hung. *Translating Bilinguality: Theorizing Translation in the Post-Babelian Era*. *The Translator*, 2002 (1). 49-72.

Frank, Armin Paul and Birgit Bödeker. "Trans-culturality and Inter-culturality in French and German Translations of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*". *Interculturality and the Historical Study of Literary Translations*. Eds. Harald Kittel and Armin

- Paul Frank. Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1991.
- Hamilton, Patricia L. *Feng Shui, Astrology and the Five Elements: Traditional Chinese Belief in Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club*. *Melus*, Summer, 1999.
- Huntley, E.D. *Amy Tan: A Critical Companion*. Westport, Connecticut•London: Greenwood Press, 1998.
- Kim, Elaine. *Asian American Literature—An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context*. Temple: Temple University, 1982.
- Ling, Amy. “Asian American Literature”. *Redefining American Literary History*. Eds. A.C.V.Brown Rueff and Jerry W.Ward, Jr. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1990.
- Mehrez, Samia. “Translation and the Postcolonial Experience: The Francophone North African Text”. *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*. Eds. Lawrence Venuti. London and New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Nida, Eugene A. and Charles Taber. *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. Leiden:E.J.Brill, 1969.
- Nida, Eugene A. *Language and Culture: Contexts in Translating*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2001.
- Prasad, G.J.V. “Writing Translation: The Strange Case of the Indian English Novel”. *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*. Eds. Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi. London and New York: Routledge, 1999.

- Robinson, Douglas. *Translation and Empire: Postcolonial Theories Explained*. Manchester: St Jerome Publishing, 1997.
- Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. London: Granta Books, 1991.
- Shuttleworth, Mark and Moira Cowie. *Dictionary of Translation Studies*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 1997.
- Simon, Sherry. "Translating and Interlingual Creation in the Contact Zone—Border Writing in Quebec". *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*. Eds. Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi. London and New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Tan, Amy. *Mother Tongue*. From: <http://www.usao.edu/facbassictycb/amytan.htm>
- Tymoczko, Maria. "Post-colonial Writing and Literary Translation". *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*. Eds. Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi. London and New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Wong, Sau-Ling Cathia. "'Sugar Sisterhood': Situating the Amy Tan Phenomenon". *The Ethnic Canon: Histories, Institutions, and Interventions*. Eds. David Palumbo-Liu. Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.
- 贝尔·胡克斯.语言,斗争之场[A].许宝强,袁伟.语言与翻译的政治[C].北京:中央编译出版社,2001.
- 韩子满.多语文本与翻译[J].翻译学报,2001(6).23-38.
- 胡勇.文化的乡愁—美国华裔文学的文化认同[M].北京:中国戏剧出版社,

2003.

黄源深.翻译的风格[A].杜承南,文军.中国当代翻译百论[C].重庆:重庆大学出版社,1994.

金圣华.有关文化的还原问题[A].桥畔译谈—翻译散论八十篇[C].北京:中国对外翻译出版公司,1997.

—“翻译工作坊”简介—谭恩美《喜幸会》的翻译[A].译道行[C].武汉:湖北教育出版社,2002.

梁绿平.文学作品英汉复译中一些非语言范畴的难点—林语堂《风声鹤唳》译后体会[J].山东外语教学,1993(3).44-46.

林煌天.中国翻译词典[Z].武汉:湖北教育出版社,1997.

刘占锋.中国名诗句通检[Z].开封:河南大学出版社,2002.

齐森华等.中国曲学大辞典[Z].杭州:浙江教育出版社,1997.

沈潜,杨增麒.容宏与《西学东渐记》[M].郑州:中州古籍出版社,1998.

斯蒂芬·P.桑德鲁普.《喜福会》里的汉语[A].乐黛云,张辉.文化传递与文学形象[C].北京:北京大学出版社,1999.

孙致礼.翻译:理论与实践探索[M].南京:译林出版社,1999.

王光林.翻译与华裔作家文化身份的塑造[J].外国文学评论,2002(4).148-156.

王力.中国语法理论[M].北京:中华书局,1957.

王琼.文化的正常化与陌生化—《瞬息京华》及其中译本个案分析[J].广东外语外贸大学学报,2002(4).60-63.

卫景宜.西方语境的中国故事[M].杭州:中国美术学院出版社,2002.

吴枫.十三经大辞典[Z].北京:中国社会出版社;长春:吉林人民出版社,2000.

吴康.中华神秘文化辞典[Z].海口：海南出版社，1993.

张子清.与亚裔美国文学共生共荣的华裔美国文学[J].外国文学评论，
2002(1). 93-103.