

## On Translation of Nicknames in Chinese Classic Novel *Outlaws of the Marsh*

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### ABSTRACT

Chinese great classic novel *Shui Hu Zhuan*, also known as *The Outlaws of the Marsh* translated by a famed U.S.-born translator Sidney Shapiro, is rich in nicknames. In this paper, nicknames are divided mainly into five groups according to different standards. Then the author comments on Shapiro's translation in great details and draws a conclusion that Shapiro's translation is quite successful and he has made a great contribution in spreading Chinese culture to the Western world.

### INTRODUCTION

*Shui Hu Zhuan*, written by Shi Nai'an, a writer in Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) in ancient China, is one of the Four Great Classic Novels of Chinese literature. It has been translated into different English versions by different translators from different angles. *The Outlaws of the Marsh* was translated by a famed U.S.-born translator Sidney Shapiro, other popular versions are as follows: *All Men Are Brothers* was translated by American famous writer Pearl S. Buck, *Water Margin* was translated by J. H. Jackson, while the most recent translation, titled *The Marshes of Mount Liang* was translated by Alex and John Dent-Young. This paper mainly discusses translation of nicknames in Shapiro's version.

Nickname is a name used informally instead of a person's own name, usually a short form of the actual name or a name connected with one's character or history. It usually employs the most concise and exact words to describe and indicate a person's appearance, personalities, anecdotes, personal encounters, hobbies or special skills. By using nicknames, authors are able to create a three-dimensional effect on readers and add some color to the heroes' self-image.

#### Classifications of Nicknames in The *Outlaws of the Marsh*

*The Outlaws of the Marsh* has been famous for its successful and vivid portrayal of the 108 heroes who have their pe-

culiar nicknames respectively. It is also characterized by its colorful collection of nicknames. *The Outlaws of the Marsh* is a must for people to mention and quote as long as they talk about nicknames. The author Shi Nai'an used nicknames to reflect the then reality and shape heroes' images, which achieved great breakthroughs in artistic style. Here I must make clear that the same nickname may also belong to different groups according to different standards. Based on their typical characteristics, I classify them roughly into five groups as follows:

The first group is classified based on the heroes' appearance seen in table 1

The second group is connected with their personalities:(see table 2)

The third classification is based on some arms or objects:(see table 3)

Nicknames connected with animals

Some names of beasts such as dragon, tiger, snake, ape, panther, snake, scorpion, turtle, rat, dog, flea and unicorn are used to show their worship, bravery, peculiarity, skill or to protect themselves from enemies' attack. Here I'd like to mention two large groups connected with brave and ferocious dragon and tiger. The following two tables are arranged in the same order as the above three tables:

**Table 1.** Heroes' appearance

Chinese names	Chinese nicknames	English translation of the nicknames by Shapiro
林冲	豹子头	The Panther Head
杨志	青面兽	The Blue-Faced Beast
鲁智深	花和尚	The Tattooed Monk
宣赞	丑郡马	The Ugly Son-in-Law
皇甫	端紫髯公	The Purple Beard
王英	矮脚虎	The Stumpy Tiger
郑天兽	白面郎君	The Fair-Faced Gentleman
杜兴	鬼脸儿	The Demon Face
刘唐	赤发鬼	The Red-Haired Demon

**Table 2.** Personalities

Chinese names	Chinese nicknames	English translation of the nicknames by Shapiro
秦明	霹雳火	The Thunderbolt
索超	急先锋	The Urgent Vanguard
石秀	拼命三郎	The Rash
周通	小霸王	The Little King
燕青	浪子	The Prodigy
李逵	黑旋风	The Black Whirlwind

**Table 3.** Arms or objects

Chinese names	Chinese nicknames	English translation of the nicknames by Shapiro
关胜	大刀	The Big Halberd
呼延灼	双鞭	Two Rods
张清	没羽箭	The Featherless Arrow
欧鹏	摩云金翅	Golden Wings Brushing the Clouds
孟康	玉竿	The Jade Flagpole
蔡庆	一枝花	The Single Blossom

**Table 4.** Nicknames connected with dragon

Chinese names	Chinese nicknames	English translation of the nicknames by Shapiro
史进	九纹龙	Nine Dragons
李俊	混江龙	The Turbulent River Dragon
童威	出洞蛟	The Dragon from the Cave
邹润	独角龙	The One-Horned Dragon
邹渊	出林龙	The Dragon from the Forest
孙胜	入云龙	Dragon in the Clouds

### An analysis of Shapiro's translation

Nicknames in the first five tables are relatively easy to translate, for they do not carry too many cultural connotations,

**Table 5.** Nicknames connected with tiger

Chinese names	Chinese nicknames	English translation of the nicknames by Shapiro
雷横	插翅虎	The Winged Tiger
燕顺	锦毛虎	The Elegant Tiger
龚旺	花项虎	The Flowery-Necked Tiger
丁得孙	中箭虎	The Arrow-Struck Tiger
李忠	打虎将	The Tiger-Fighting General
朱富	笑面虎	The Smiling Tiger
薛永	病大虫	The Sick Tiger
顾大嫂	母大虫	The Tigress
李云	青眼虎	The Black-eyed Tiger

**Table 6.** Some nicknames based on Chinese ancient heroes, religion or allusions

Chinese names	Chinese nicknames	English translation of the nicknames by Shapiro
花荣	小李广	The Lesser Liguang
吕方	小温侯	The Little Duke
郭盛	赛仁贵	The Second Rengui
项充	八臂哪吒	Eight-Armed Nezha
李袞	飞天大圣	The Flying Divinity
孙立	病尉迟	The Sickly General
孙新	小尉迟	The Junior General
杨雄	病关索	The Pallid

and I notice that Shapiro mainly adopted literal translation in dealing with these names. As a result, most of his translation was able to convey the basic ideas of the source nicknames. I summarize his translation into three groups:

### Good Translation

Take some translation as an example: he translated “鬼脸儿” as The Demon Face, “赤发鬼” as The Red-Haired Demon, “没羽箭” as The Featherless Arrow, “玉竿” as The Jade Flagpole, “一枝花” as The Single Blossom and “青眼虎” as The Black-eyed Tiger. Basically, it is word for word translation, all of which is as vivid and lively as the original ones. When we read the Chinese nicknames, a clear and lifelike picture will emerge in our mind, and similarly, when we read the English versions, we share the same feelings.

At the same time, Shapiro introduced and spread China's culture to the Westerners. In feudal China, dragon was the symbol of emperors. The Chinese dragon is said to have the head of a camel, the horns of a deer, the eyes of a rabbit, the ears of a cow, the neck of a snake, the belly of a frog, the scales of a carp, the claws of a hawk, and the palm of a tiger. It has whiskers and a beard, and it is deaf. It is generally regarded as benevolent. As a matter of fact, dragon is the cre-

ation of our ancestors' imagination. What the dragon is like is of little significance, but what is important is that it is now a kind of cultural phenomenon. It has become a spiritual tie linking the whole nation. So we can say, the dragon, as the symbol of the Chinese nation, has become part of the Chinese people (Yuan, p.298). Therefore in Chinese, the word dragon is always associated with good things and appearing usually together with 凤(phoenix). We have such Chinese idioms as 龙飞凤舞、龙凤呈祥、龙盘虎踞、藏龙卧虎、龙驹凤雏、龙马精神、攀龙附凤、画龙点睛,etc. Now all of the Chinese people claim to be the offspring of the Dragon.

On the contrary, a dragon is not popular with the Westerners. In Western mythology, a dragon is a large imaginary animal with wings of a bat and huge fangs. It breathes out fire and smoke, and is so ferocious and destructive that people have traditionally considered it a symbol of evils fought by human beings.(Hao, p.94) In their eyes, dragon is a large monster. When we call a woman a dragon, it means that she is fierce and unpleasant. So a dragon in Chinese and in English is quite different. When we translate the dragon, we should pay more attention to its connotations in these two languages. Let's turn back to Shapiro's translation. Evidently, he adopted the auspicious meaning of dragon in Chinese and translated“出洞蛟”as The Dragon from the Cave and“独角龙”as The One-Horned Dragon which was fit for Chinese people's habit and simultaneously opened a new horizon for the Westerners.

Such nicknames as“小李广”,“赛仁贵”and“八臂哪吒”were translated with Chinese characteristics. They are good except when the target readers read such translation for the first time, they may not know who Liguang, Rengui and Nezha are, so I suggest that some explanations and allusions should be added to these Chinese famous names to make them clear and easily acceptable.

In my opinion,“小霸王”and“黑旋风”are best translated. When it comes to The Little King, we can't help thinking of “the little emperor” which is a household word in China.

The Black Whirlwind first appeared in chapter 38 from page 779 to 799 of the English Version(Note 1). Here Black was used to describe Li Kui's complexion (facial features), while Whirlwind showed that, on the one hand, he was as fast and violent as a whirlwind, and on the other hand, he swept across everything like a whirlwind. For example, when he had some wine with Dai Zong and Song Jiang, he said “All right, but none of those piddling little cups for me. I want a large bowl.” When they ate fish, he pulled the fish out of his bowl with his hand and ate it, bones and all. Compared with him, Song Jiang ate with elegance. Considering the fish was not fresh, Song Jiang took two sips of soup and stopped eating. Dai Zong didn't like salted fish either. Li Kui who had finished his own bowl said: “If you brothers don't want yours, I'll eat it for you.” He scooped the fish out of Song Jiang's bowl with his fingers and consumed it, then did the same with Dai Zong's. He spattered the whole table with soup(Note 2). From his speech and manners we can see that Li Kui was a straight-forward loyal fellow, but he was rude and rash. The slightest injustice drove him wild, and he tore

into bullies. In short, this part of translation is translated successfully and vividly manifesting Li Kui's true characters.

### Mistaken Translation

In Table 2, “浪子”was mistakenly translated as The Prodigy. I consult Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English and its explanation is a person who has unusual and very noticeable abilities. So “浪子”does not mean Prodigy. I find another translation for “浪子”----The Prodigal. In that dictionary, it explains that prodigal is a person who leads a life of careless wasteful spending and perhaps immoral pleasure and its Chinese equivalent is 浪子 or 奢侈挥霍的人, so from my perspective The Prodigal should be a proper and exact translation.

### Poor or Under Translation

Some culturally-loaded nicknames were under-translated which can not express the source nicknames exactly. Take“花和尚”for an example. “花和尚” is a pun in source language and has two meanings, one is that Lu Zhisheng's back was tattooed and the other is that he did not observe the disciplines of Buddhism which required that monk should be a reverent Buddhist and practice vegetarianism, and not drink any wine, kill people or set fire. But Lu Zhisheng did all of the things above out of various reasons. So The Tattooed Monk only translated its Chinese literal meaning instead of its connotations. Here I try translating “花和尚” as The Undisciplined Tattooed Monk.

Nicknames in Table 6 are closely related with some ancient heroes, religion or allusions which are the most difficult to translate, for they carry too much information. For example, “小温侯”吕方 was translated as The Little Duke, here Duke confused readers. “温侯”was Lü Bu's (吕布,a figure in the novel Three Kingdoms) literary name given by Wang Yun (王允) after Lü Bu helped assassinate Dong Zhuo(董卓). Lü Fang liked to imitate Lü Bu including using the same weapon----halberd,what's more, Lü Fang had the same surname as Lü Bu, hence his nickname was 小温侯. When it was translated as The Little Duke, the social background reflected in the name completely disappeared. I translate it as The Little Wen Hou.

Sunli and Sunxin's nicknames are taken from a famous general of Tang Dynasty----Yu Chigong(尉迟恭) who led his army to defeat the uprising of Wang Shichong (王世充)and Dou Jiande(窦建德),etc and rendered outstanding service for the Emperor Li Shiming(李世民). When “病尉迟”and “小尉迟”were translated as The Sickly General or The Junior General,the basic meaning of 尉迟 did not exist, nor did Chinese historical culture hidden in their nicknames. Here I translate them as The Sickly Yuchi and The Lesser Yuchi respectively. When the two English versions appeared for the first time in the novel, the translator should explain Yuchi in great details.

Similarly,杨雄's nickname“病关索”was translated as The Pallid, which described only his complexion instead of the allusion about Guan Suo (关索). It is said that Guan Suo was a young and handsome man with weapons and the third son of Guan Yu (关羽) (a figure in another Chinese classical novel Three Kingdoms). But 病关索 means that 杨雄's com-

plexion is rather pale and he is like Guan Suo in some aspect. So I translate it as The Sick Guan Suo.

### CONCLUSION

Language is the carrier of culture, spreading and reflecting culture. Nicknames in the source language are colorful, vivid, impressive, interesting and frequently quoted. Nicknames translated by Shapiro are able to convey the basic information of the source language, although there do exist some defects. On the whole, Shapiro's translation is vivid and precise. He had made a lot of contributions to introducing China's ancient civilization and culture to the Westerners and widened their horizons.

### Notes

Note 1 & 2. *The Outlaws of the Marsh*, translated by Sidney Shapiro. Volume II. Beijing: Beijing Foreign Languages Press, 1988, pp.779 --799.

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