

CULTURAL TRANSLATION OF CHINESE ETHNIC MINORITY LITERATURE: THE CASE OF *KING GESAR*

Traducción cultural de la literatura de la minoría étnica china: el caso de El Rey Gesar

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ABSTRACT: In this article «Cultural Translation of Chinese Ethnic Minority Literature: The Case of *King Gesar*», Duan Feng reviews translation and circulation of the Tibetan epic *King Gesar* in both China and other countries. Duan discusses that the translation of ethnic minority literature is first and foremost a cross-cultural communication, with cultural transfer and transmission as the ultimate goal, instead of being simply an interlingual transformation. Duan suggests both linguistic and literary analysis in literary translation and that cultural investigation and description in ethnographic translation be applied to express the aesthetic and cultural uniqueness and charm of ethnic minority cultures, at the same time helping the target readers understand and appreciate them. Duan finally analyses «thick translation» as a proper and effective method to translate ethnic minority literature into a foreign language.

Key words: Cultural Translation; Ethnic Minority Literature; Ethnographic Translation; Thick Translation.

RESUMEN: En este artículo Duan Feng revisa la traducción y la circulación del poema épico tibetano *El Rey Gesar* tanto en China como en otros países. Duan discute que la traducción de la literatura de la minoría étnica es, ante todo, una comunicación intercultural, con la transferencia cultural y la transmisión como objetivos últimos en lugar de ser simplemente una transformación entre lenguas. Duan sugiere que tanto los análisis lingüísticos y literarios en la traducción literaria y la investigación cultural como la descripción en la traducción etnográfica se aplicarán para expresar la singularidad cultural y estética y el encanto de las culturas de las minorías étnicas y, al mismo tiempo, ayudar a los lectores a entender y a apreciarlas. Finalmente Duan analiza la «traducción densa» como un método apropiado y efectivo para traducir la literatura de la minoría étnica en lenguas extranjeras.

Palabras clave: traducción cultural; literatura de la minoría étnica; traducción densa; traducción etnográfica.

Translation of literature from one language into another falls into the category of literary translation, a term referring to the age-old translation practice all over the world and the theoretical notions conceptualizing it. It is the main focus of translation studies, acting as the nucleus of the discipline though, at present, with increasing economic globalization, non-literary translation is rising rapidly in quantity. Ethnographic translation comes from cultural anthropology, a process of understanding and describing an alien culture in the fieldwork of ethnographers. The two modes of translation come together under the umbrella term «cultural translation», forming the theoretical framework or perspective of the present paper to examine and comment on the translation of Chinese ethnic minority literature, taking the Tibetan epic *Rgyal-po Ge-sar (King Gesar)* as the particular case.

Ethnographic translation is different from literary translation in that the former takes the whole other culture as the text while the latter has a specific source text. The source text of ethnographic translation is dynamic and abstract, while the source text of literary translation is determined and concrete. The former begins with ethnographic fieldwork, the latter with the reading of the source text. It is misleading to ignore the difference between the two kinds of cultural translation: in such a case, the linguistic characteristics of translation will be neglected and the independent status of translation studies, beginning from contrastive verbal and textual analysis, will be endangered. Yet it is equally misleading to set the two modes of translation clearly apart, for the ultimate goal of both is cultural transfer and transmission. Because of this, translation is seen as a means rather than an end. The cardinal similarity between ethnographic translation and literary translation is that both are the description and presentation of another culture.

The literature of Chinese ethnic minorities refers to both contemporary literature, written by Chinese ethnic minority writers, and epics and folktales passed, mainly orally, from generation to generation among the Chinese ethnic minorities. Among the oral literature of the ethnic minorities, three epics are regarded as the most representative, namely *King Gesar* of the Tibetan nationality, *Jangar* of the Mongolian nationality and *Manas* of the Khalkhas nationality. The literature of Chinese minority nationalities, together with the literature of the Chinese Han nationality, contributes to the charm and magnificence of Chinese literature as an integrated whole.

Literary translation is a bridge for the literature of one nation to step into another. It is the «afterlife» of the literary text of the source culture in the receiving culture, where the source text is to be accepted, canonized or re-canonized. The present globalization is parallel with localization, bringing about tension between cultures and also offering opportunities for different cultures to meet each other. Translation here is defined not only as a language shift, a semantic transformation and a stylistic reproduction; it is also defined as a cultural transfer and transmission across cultures, covering motivation, attitude, strategy, method and effect in the translating process, and indicating the conflict and compromise involved in cross-cultural communication in the form of translation. In this paper, through reviewing and commenting on the translation history of *King Gesar* into foreign languages, mainly English and its circulation in the world, I argue that the translation of Chinese ethnic minority literature should be taken as both literary translation and ethnographic translation, meaning the translation of ethnic minority literature is cultural translation in essence, and in translation practice, the formal, semantic and stylistic meaning of the source text should be truthfully followed to express the aesthetic and cultural ideas of the source text, while background information concerning the source text should be provided in the target text to contextualize the reading of it.

1. TRANSLATION AND CIRCULATION OF *KING GESAR*

As a live form epic, *King Gesar*, the life story and narration of the heroic deeds of King Gesar, is widely known and sung among Tibetan, Mongolian and other minority nationalities on the Qinhai-Tibetan Plateau through the performance of bards. The epic has been passed from generation to generation in different forms and, as a result of additions to it by various poets, the epic is now composed of more than 130 volumes, more than one million verse lines and more than twenty million words, priding itself as the longest

epic in the world, which, together with its live form, forms the two very significant features of the epic. Since the very beginning, *King Gesar* has been spread and circulated among different nationalities within the Chinese boundary and then across the world as influential Chinese cultural capital. As early as the Tu Bo Dynasty (around the seventh-ninth centuries AD), *King Gesar* was spread around the neighbouring countries and areas of the Himalayas. After around the thirteenth century AD, together with the introduction of Buddhism, *King Gesar* was translated into the Mongolian language, later becoming the Mongolian *King Gesar* in its own style. This is why *King Gesar* is sometimes referred to as the heroic epic of both the Tibetan and Mongolian nationalities. In the second half of the fourteenth century AD, *King Gesar* spread to even wider areas, such as the Tu, Naxi and Yugu nationalities. The translation of *King Gesar* into Mandarin Chinese was mainly carried out in modern times, and Naiqiang Ren published several articles on *King Gesar* around the 1930s. He was the first of the Chinese Han nationality to translate and write about the epic. Since 1949, the gathering, recording and translating of the epic has been given sufficient support; various versions of the epic in the Tibetan language have been published, and so have various Mandarin Chinese versions. Scholars like Yinuan Wang and Gyanpian Gyamco have conducted intensive research on the epic and have achieved great results. The spread and circulation of *King Gesar* among the different nationalities in China has brought about the result that the original Tibetan epic has become the common wealth of the Chinese people and the collective memory of the great Chinese family.

It has been more than 200 years since *King Gesar* was first translated into foreign languages. In 1716, the Mongolian version of *King Gesar* was carved in wood in Beijing and became the first written version of the epic. The written version began to be known abroad and was taken as the source text in translation. Wang Hongyin and Wang Zhiguo (2011, 16-22) divide the spread and circulation of *King Gesar* abroad into four periods: the first translation by Russian sinologists; translation and retranslation by European sinologists; modern interpretation by US sinologists; and the translation launched from mainland China by both Chinese scholars and foreign sinologists. According to their division, the first period mainly consists of the introduction of *King Gesar* by the Russian traveller P. S. Pallas, the translation of *King Gesar* from the Mongolian version into a German version by the Russian scholar I. J. Schmidt, and the introduction of *King Gesar* by the Russian scholar G. N. Potanin. In 1776, in his travelogue titled *Reisen durch verchiedene Provinzen des russischen Reiches* Pallas described the Temple of Gesar. In 1839, Schmidt printed the Beijing edition of *Biography of Gesar Khan* in Mongolian language in Petersburg, and

turned it in German. And from 1884 to 1886, Potanin recorded segments of *King Gesar* in circulation in Amdo area. The second period is represented by the work of the French traveller and scholar Alexandra David-Néel. Her book, *The Superhuman Life of Gesar of Ling*, is both a translated version and a creative version with the collaboration of Lama Yongden during her travels in the Tibetan area. It is a translation and creation based on the versions by Pallasa and Schmidt and on the talking and singing of bards. The third period refers mainly to the research achievements by US scholars, among which *The Warrior Song of King Gesar* by Douglas J. Penick (1996) is the most influential version. Penick has also translated and written other books on *King Gesar* exclusively for the performance of the epic on the North American stage. The last period covers the Chinese version of *King Gesar* by Gyanpian Gyamco and Wei Wu and the English version of it by Wang Guozhen, Zhu Yongmei and Han Jia. In 2013, Canongate Books in Great Britain published *King Gesar*, written by Alai and translated by Howard Goldblatt and Sylvia Li-chun Lin. This is an event included in «The Myths» series launched by Canongate Books to retell the myth of different countries in a contemporary and memorable way.

2. TRANSLATION OF *KING GESAR* AS AN ETHNOGRAPHIC PRACTICE

In translating Chinese ethnic minority literature into a foreign language –to be specific, into English– the usual way is to translate the ethnic minority language into Mandarin Chinese and then translate the Mandarin Chinese into English. The reason for this is that very few people know both the ethnic minority language and English at same time. Translators in China are generally located in two professional areas: one is translation between nationality languages, such as translating the ethnic minority language into Mandarin Chinese or vice versa; the other is translation from Chinese into a foreign language or from a foreign language into Chinese. The separation of the two circles divides the translation of ethnic minority literature into two stages, which makes translation of this kind very complicated. Of course, the more effective way is to translate the ethnic minority language directly into the foreign language; this approach was not uncommon in the Western colonial period when Western missionaries came to China to spread their religion. Western missionaries entered the ethnic minority areas and built up face to face interpersonal relationships with local people. At the same time as their religious teaching, they also learnt the ethnic minority language and introduced the ethnic minority literature and culture back into their own countries. Their translation method was therefore a

direct translation from the ethnic minority language into the foreign language. David-Néel's translation belongs to this trend, though her translation is combined with her own creation. In her research, she undertook a large amount of fieldwork, such as listening to the different visions of the epic by different bards, making friends with lamas, and finally forming *King Gesar* in her mind.

In translating living and spoken ethnic minority literature, translation is no longer a text to text transformation: it is more an ethnographic practice. Various ethnographic methods, such as participation and investigation, etic view and emic view, and reinterpretation are employed to allow the translator access to a very immediate experience, with perception and cognition of the culture s/he is going to introduce into his own culture. The translator is, of course, unable to reflect the source culture objectively and completely if the translator's work is viewed from historical and social perspectives. Ethnographic translation, emphasizing cultural transfer instead of language transformation, is the basic feature of translation of Chinese ethnic minority literature by those early Western missionaries and travellers and it is highly connected with «imitation», a term used by John Dryden (Munday 2016) to refer to very free translation.

While collecting, analysing and translating *King Gesar*, David-Néel was aware that her translation of the epic was to a large extent a matter of her own writing. The source texts of *King Gesar* she had collected were mainly spoken ones. The bards performed the epic on the basis of some oral formulaic rules and a narrative plot and there was no fixed version. Let us take the version that David-Néel collected in east Tibet, for example. It was the best version at that time and authoritative in the local area where *Gesar* was born. David-Néel (1978, 3) warned that the version should not be seen as an absolutely faithful echo of the primitive legend. Her translation is regarded as creation, for there is a very vague line between translation and creation in her case. The source text exists and also does not exist, so it is impossible to adhere to the principle of faithfulness and text-based equivalence. David-Néel's translation should be regarded as cross-cultural transmission, a cultural reading compiled by her and a Chinese Tibetan cultural canon interpreted from a Westerner's vantage point.

David-Néel's book *The Superhuman Life of Gesar of Ling* is 390 pages long: the preface and postscript written by her are 88 pages in total, occupying one-fifth of the whole book. David-Néel's paratext in her translation is a very detailed ethnographical record of *King Gesar*, within which the most significant part is the record of her conversations with the bards. This communication breaks up the temporal and spatial barrier between author and translator, source text and target text, source culture and target culture.

The degree of the translator's familiarity with the source text and culture will surely contribute to her understanding and translation of the source text, and ultimately to the acceptance of the target text. The translation of ethnic minority literature mainly involves translating living and spoken literary texts that are widely spread among the common people and are being sung and performed by them. Ethnographic investigation is a very effective step for the translator to take before she settles down to translating. In her preface and postscript, David-Néel describes the diversity and complexity of the epic, and the problems and solutions in her translating and writing practice. For Western readers, before reading the translated text, David-Néel's preface shows them around an alien land that they have never been before. In this way, their vision and expectation based on their own culture will become softened and inclusive.

David-Néel adopted a prose style in her translating and writing of *King Gesar* instead of choosing the form of sentence, line and rhythm, which are the very basic features of an epic. Perhaps, to her, it was more important to tell her readers this curious story than to follow the style of the epic; furthermore, the source texts she referred to were various and changing. It is somewhat regrettable that David-Néel failed to convey the textual uniqueness of the epic, but her great contribution to introducing Tibetan culture to the Western world is undeniable.

In 1996, Douglas J. Penick published *The Warrior Song of King Gesar*. It is an imitation based on various texts, including David-Néel's *The Superhuman Life of Gesar of Ling* (1981), Ida Zeitlin's *Gesar* (1927), Walther Hessig's *The Religions of Mongolia* (1980) and many other texts and reviews. Penick's epic is a translation without a source text, a «pseudo translation», in translation studies terminology. It is an imitation and creation based on his research on *King Gesar*. Besides *The Warrior Song of King Gesar*, in 2009 Penick also wrote *Crossings on a Bridge of Light: The Songs and Deeds of Gesar, King of Ling as He Travels to Shambhala Through the Realms of Life and Death*. The two books were originally the scripts for an opera and drama on King Gesar on the North American stage. Penick paid much attention to the style of his books. He used a style that was half prose and half verse, emphasizing the poetic line and rhythm. The style of his books is very close to that of the Western heroic epic and the language goes very well with modern style. When Penick wrote his *King Gesar*, the story of Gesar had long been known to the Western world: therefore he used very little ethnographic information, which to some extent affects the reliability of his books and his authority as a Tibetan studies scholar. By the time Penick wrote *The Warrior Song of King Gesar*, translation studies had already undergone a cultural

turn: a research paradigm shift showed the focus of study moving from the source text to the target text, from author to reader, and from source culture to target culture.

Various theories from neighbouring fields such as cultural studies, gender studies and postcolonial studies have been borrowed and used in translation studies. In the 1990s, terms like «manipulation», «subversion» and «rewriting» appeared in translation studies to question the faithfulness and equivalence to the source text in previous translation theories. In cultural anthropology, writing culture was also used to question whether the traditional ethnographic investigation and interview could objectively reflect the other culture. Penick's *King Gesar* is obviously a post-structural and postmodern approach to *King Gesar*. It consists of the imagination of the Western world and is tailored according to the expectation of the Western world. In Western translation history, Edward Fitzgerald's adaptation of the Persian *Rubaiyat* is an example that shows how non-Western literary works are modified and canonized, a rare case in Western translation history. The other case is the translating and rewriting of Chinese poems of the Tang Dynasty by Ezra Pound in the early years of the twentieth century. His *Cathay* is both an experimental piece of traditional poetry and at the same time an imagist poem about his native land. As Penick (2009, ix) said in the foreword to *The Warrior Song of King Gesar*, it becomes obvious that Gesar, and the epic of his life, describe more than a simple fable or historical documentation, but rather the life force and energy of Tibet. In the translation and writing of *King Gesar*, the value of cross-cultural communication is never over-stated.

In the translation and westward spread of *King Gesar* described above, the absence of subjectivity of Chinese translators is clearly seen. In translating Chinese ethnic minority literature into foreign languages, there has been a heated discussion on whether it should be translated by Chinese translators or foreign translators. Those who argue for the foreign translator think that a text translated by a Chinese translator is unlikely to be accepted by target readers because of the language problem and cultural difference. This is indeed the case, but from the perspective of cultural transfer, translation launched from mainland China by Chinese translators builds up an outgoing discourse to express the source culture's attitude, strengthens cultural confidence and cultural identity, and constructs a polyphonic dialogue between the Chinese culture and other cultures in the world.

In 2009, Wang Guozhen, Yongmei Zhu and Han Jia in collaboration translated into English a new Chinese version of *King Gesar* (Gyamco and Wu 2009). This translation of the epic into English was the first by translators in mainland China, showing the change of translation direction and

a discourse on *King Gesar* coming from its homeland. In terms of cross-cultural communication, the cultural significance of the translation of the epic is much greater than the translation itself. The source text was written by Gyamco Gyanpian and Wu Wei, the former himself a Tibetan. They wrote the book in Mandarin Chinese, as is usual currently for ethnic minority writers. The authors have added many footnotes and illustrations to help readers understand the epic. Though the epic is written in Mandarin Chinese, it contains abundant ethnographic information about the Tibetan nationality and has a rich Tibetan flavour. When translating the book into English, the translators faced the very high demand of knowledge about Tibetan history, religion, culture, literature, art, etc. A close reading of the English version of the book shows that the translators have failed to meet this demand, because there is much mistranslation and deletion of ethnographic information about the Tibetan nationality in the target text. This will inevitably lessen or restrict access to the unique charm of the ethnic minority literature. However, the translation of ethnic minority literature launched from its homeland is something which should be encouraged and done persistently, for it is a way to display the self-identity and confidence of native cultures.

Ethnographic translation comes from ethnographic practice wherein ethnographic writing is an effective way to describe a culture. It includes the stance and attitude of the translator towards the other culture and towards the presentation of the other culture. As stated, the source text in ethnographic translation is usually a living and spoken text, highly localized in its social and historical context, such as an epic, lyrics, sacrificial words, preaching text, and so on. Hence, the translation of ethnic minority literature includes textualization of the spoken ethnic minority literature. In ethnographic translation, language transformation is still a basic task, and in this respect there is nothing different from the literary translation well known to us. Linguistic contrast and analysis is the main task at this level. Yet ethnographic translation is much more than this, and its final aim is to describe and present the other culture. Therefore, another important task of ethnographic translation is to describe the other culture through treating the whole other culture as a text. Its interpretative, rhetorical and writing features are much more emphasized than is necessitated by the translation criterion of being truthful and equivalent to the author and the source text. Ethnographic translation endows the translator with power which is so strong that sometimes the translator «translates» the other culture without a source text. Ethnic minority literature is characterized by being dynamic, immediate, contextualized and localized, and the translation of it needs to employ many translation strategies besides those in literary translation. In

ethnographic translation, the cultural unit, rather than the linguistic unit, is the focus. The basic assumption is that culture is translatable, and when culture is taken as the text, it motivates and justifies the translator in making maximum use of cultural factors in the translation.

3. THICK TRANSLATION AS AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH

Based on his own experience, Mark Bender (2005, 143-44) has proposed three methods of translating Chinese ethnic minority literature into English. The first is English translation based on a second language: that is, the ethnic minority literature is first translated into Mandarin Chinese, which becomes the second language in the translation. This kind of translation aims mainly at the transformation of linguistic signs and lacks ethnographic information about the first language source text. The second is that the first kind of translation is supplemented with sufficient ethnographic information –such as background information about the literary text and the people who narrate it, the setting and situation in which it happens and develops– to help the readers understand the meaning of the original text and appreciate its charm. In this mode of translation, the original text version is displayed along with the second language version. The third method is to translate the minority language into the foreign language directly, which appears to be the most ideal method of translating ethnic minority literature into a foreign language but also the most difficult one, for people who know both the minority language and the foreign language are very few. The practical and operational method is the second method, requiring interaction and cooperation between translators of national minority languages and translators of Mandarin Chinese and foreign languages. The translators of national minority languages need to provide as much background information in their Chinese version as possible to create an environment for translators translating Chinese into a foreign language to feel that they are in the right area or have it exactly right. Meanwhile, the translators translating Chinese into a foreign language need to take an active attitude towards translation as an ethnographic practice and to see themselves as ethnographers. Cooperation between Chinese translators and foreign translators is also an ideal mode, as illustrated by the collaborations between Xianyi Yang and Glads Yang, and Howard Goldblatt and Sylvia Li-chun Lin.

In translating Chinese ethnic minority literature into a foreign language, «thick translation», as proposed by Kwame Anthony Appiah (2000) can be an effective method. Thick translation –a term following Clifford Geertz's

(1973) «thick description» in *The Interpretation of Cultures*— is also called «thicker contextualization». It is translation that seeks, with its annotations and its accompanying glosses, to locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context (Appiah 2000, 427). In his essay, Appiah takes the example of how Ghanaian oral text is translated into English and the translated text accepted in the English world to illustrate that the uncertainty of meaning in literary translation results from differences in language structure, and the status of the translated text also depends on the ideology of the receiving culture. Appiah criticizes the formal reasoning of analytical philosophy and gives positive affirmation to the active role of Austin's speech act theory and Grice's conversational implicature theory in the process of searching for meaning. Appiah obviously agrees with the statement that the meaning of a word is in its use. Thick translation brings people back to the time when the source text is produced and helps them understand the social and cultural background against which the source text comes into being. Appiah's thick translation has specific reference—that is, the translation of literary works of marginal cultures into mainstream cultures. He emphasizes that thick translation can bring forth respect for the marginal culture and call for resistance to the cultural superiority of the mainstream culture. Linguistic translation theory shows there exists a dynamic equivalence or functional equivalence between the source text and target text, implying the age-old notion behind traditional translation theory, that the source text is superior to the target text. Yet the fact is that the translator cannot fully reflect the author's intention and the target reader cannot have the same expectation as the source text reader. The target text is a place open to various meanings to be specified and decided. Appiah thinks that literary translation is not solely about conveying literal meaning but also pragmatic meaning, the implied and hidden meaning between the lines of the literary text. In interpretative anthropology and new historicism, the thick description of the context for literary and cultural production combines present reading and understanding with the historical context, and thick translation is doing the same.

Theo Hermans (2003) has also discussed thick translation in his paper entitled «Cross-Cultural Translation Studies as Thick Translation». He takes two examples to illustrate his idea that translation as cross-cultural communication is a very complicated process. The first example is the translation of Aristotle's *Poetics* by the English poet John Jones. In his translation, Jones reinterprets the text and totally subverts the canonical interpretation and translation of *Poetics* in the Western world. The second example he gives is the translation criteria given by the Chinese translator Yan Fu. Yan's three word criteria *Xin*, *Da*, and *Ya* (truthfulness, expressiveness and elegance)

have been interpreted and translated into at least fourteen versions. Hermans argues that cross-cultural translation is a complicated, never-ending process of interpretation. In translation, understanding and presentation are closely bound. When a text of a given language and a given culture is translated into another language and another culture, the meaning of the source text will to some extent be lost in the translation, for literary translation involves the literary creation of the translator, though this creation is based on a given text and the extent is limited. The loss of meaning of the source text in translation can be compensated by certain translation methods. For instance, the failure to express cultural connotations fully can be made up by providing sufficient extra information in notes and prefaces and so on. Thick translation shows that complete translation is impossible and, because of this impossibility, the role of the translator becomes visible. Translation is not transparent and the language of translation is narrative and rhetoric, which have the function of modifying and fixing a certain angle of narration. The translation of Yan mentioned by Hermans above is a good case to show how thick translation is employed in translation. Yan lived in the late Qing period of Chinese history, when Western books on social science and literature began to be translated and introduced into China in large numbers. Yan attempted in his translation to cultivate and enlighten ordinary Chinese people with Western ideas, so in his translation of *Evolution and Ethics* by Thomas H. Huxley, he added comments and notes, either at the beginning and end of his translation or right in the text, to explain the historical background, the historical status and the highlights of the book and similar ideas in traditional Chinese philosophy and culture. In his translated text of *Evolution and Ethics*, his comments and notes occupy nearly half of the total pages of the translated text. The advantage of thick translation is that at the same time as keeping the original form and flavour of the source text, it keeps the readers totally aware of the meaning and narrative of the source text.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The ultimate purpose of the translation of Chinese ethnic minority literature into a foreign language is to convey the aesthetic and cultural uniqueness and charm of the ethnic minority literature and culture. It is also a way of showing the awakening of ethnic identity. Because of the orality of ethnic minority literature, its translation is to a large extent a rhetorical narration, which means the intervention of the translator is obvious in the transcription and translation. This brings us to an ethical issue for translators,

including Mandarin Chinese translators and foreign language translators. The translator is given ethical responsibility—namely, the professional norms of the translator and his willingness to show understanding of and respect for the other culture in his translation. Translation ethics does not only mean being faithful to the source text, but it also means being faithful to the source culture. Translation ethics here refers also to translators' efforts to display the uniqueness of ethnic minority literature in the receiving culture and to take the marginal culture into account in the context of translation, globalization and localization.

Looking back at the history of foreign language translation of Chinese ethnic minority literature, it is not hard to find that research is quite limited in both quantity and quality. Chinese ethnic minority literature used to be taken as an unseen part of Chinese literature as a whole. In translation studies, where written text and source text are stressed, living and spoken ethnic minority literature has not been given due attention. All this explains why we are doing research in this area, and there are many worthwhile issues. In our research, we repeatedly stress the importance of faithfully expressing the linguistic and stylistic characteristics of ethnic minority literature to display its unique charm; at the same time, we advocate that its translation as cultural translation should not be limited to linguistic transformation but should focus on cultural transfer and transmission. This seeming contradiction points towards the integration of taking text as text in literary translation and taking culture as text in ethnographic translation, and provides an interdisciplinary perspective to research and practice in this field.

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