ABSTRACT

More and more of Louis Cha (Jin Yong’s) martial arts fiction has been translated into English in the past decade. Though numerous studies of Jin Yong’s novels are available, not much emphasis has been placed on the topic of translations to date. This paper will examine the translatability and untranslatability of Jin Yong’s martial arts fiction, based on the issues involved in transferring to an alien culture the multifarious facets of Chinese culture, be they classical allusions, historical anecdotes, or oriental values and Chinese customs.

Martial arts fiction bears a high degree of untranslatability, which should not be understated, even though the text can and has been translated. Ironically, given the existence of linguistic universals that ensure translatability, untranslatability results from structural incompatibilities between languages when each linguistic community interprets reality in its own manner.

Chapter 1 of the paper provides the scope, objectives and the method of analysis of this academic exercise. Jin Yong, the history of martial arts fiction in traditional Chinese literature and the translated texts of Jin Yong’s martial arts novels are introduced in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 is the heart of this paper, presenting the translational concepts of “equivalence in meaning”, “translatability” and “untranslatability”, before going into the argument of the untranslatability of Jin Yong’s martial arts novels due to linguistic and cultural incompatibilities between the Chinese and English languages and the possible ways to dissolve untranslatability. Chapter 4 looks into the role of the reader in judging the success of the translated text and the possible influences the translated text may have on the target language. Chapter 5 then draws conclusions on the English translations of Jin Yong’s martial arts fiction.