

Cross-cultural Comparison of Chinese and Foreign Media Translation of Chinese Culture-loaded Words

Gu Xiaojing^{1,a,*}, Yang Yan^{2,b}

^{1,2}*Faculty of Foreign Languages and Cultures, Kunming University of Science and Technology,
No.68, Wenchang Road, Kunming, Yunnan Province, China*

a. 2965146466@qq.com, b. yangyanhch@163.com

**corresponding author*

Abstract: Being one of the carriers of Chinese culture, Chinese culture-loaded words, the more appropriate its translation methods are selected, the more the world can appreciate the unique charm of Chinese culture. On the one hand, Chinese culture-loaded words, one of the most significant parts of Chinese culture, has a rich cultural connotation. On the other hand, how to make the translation closer to the reader and obtain the reader's recognition and acceptance is a subject that cannot be ignored in the field of cultural translation research. From a cross-cultural perspective, this paper starts with the words unique to Chinese culture, then thoroughly enumerates the different translation methods adopted by Chinese and foreign media, and accordingly discusses the reasons for the differences. Finally, it is concluded that it is because of the different cultural connotations of the two target readers, thinking patterns, and the meanings of the same vocabulary in different texts that lead to different translation methods.

Keywords: cross-cultural communication, Chinese culture-loaded words, Chinese and foreign media, translation method

1. Introduction

With the deepening of cultural globalization, the cultural links between countries are getting increasingly closer. Apart from face-to-face communication, news reports also occupied an increasingly important position in information-promoting and cultural-exchanging. In the report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2022, Chinese President Xi Jinping points out "We will accelerate the development of China's discourse and narrative systems, better tell China's stories, make China's voice heard, and present a China that is credible, appealing, and respectable...We will deepen exchanges and mutual learning with other civilizations and better present Chinese culture to the world." Therefore, it is the main task of telling China's stories under the current background to strengthen the exchange of our culture and improve the external communication ability of our culture. The external dissemination of culture relies on various media, of which news is an extremely major and extensive way. As a main channel of cultural communication, news communication not only accelerates cultural communication but also increases the ability of cultural communication and promotes the spread and development of advanced culture [1]. Besides, the language service provided by News English is not only limited to national strategies, but more importantly, it can promote benign interaction between China and

the outside world and realize cultural understanding and mutual trust [2].

Meanwhile, China has gained more and more attention from the world. Chinese culture-loaded words, the product of folk history and culture and the cultural summary of people’s long-term production and life [3], help a lot in the spread of Chinese culture. Therefore, how to translate these words is a question that has always been the priority of scholars’ research.

In this paper, the author selects Chinese culture-loaded words mainly from the 20th National Congress report published on the website of China Daily, Global Times, and the Economist’s China section for 2022, and analyzes them. From a cross-cultural perspective, the author compares the different translation approaches to words unique to Chinese culture in Chinese and foreign media and discusses the reasons for the differences, to help translators better act as a bridge between China and the West and tell Chinese stories in the new era.

2. Chinese Culture-loaded Words

2.1. Definition of Chinese Culture-loaded Words

The concept of “China English” was first proposed in 1980 [4]. According to the definition, throughout the history of China, there is something unique to China to express. Such words like 科举 (imperial examinations), 五四运动 (the May Fourth Movement), and 白话文 (baihuawen or baihua), which were not used by English-speaking people should be called “China English”.

As for the opinion of the author, “China English” means Chinese culture-loaded word, for it is unique to the Chinese culture, whether it refers to the vocabulary of assorted ethnic groups rooted in China, reflects Chinese characteristics, or manifests national conditions, culture, and thinking of China.

2.2. Classification of Chinese Culture-loaded Words

According to different meanings, Chinese culture-loaded words can be roughly divided into five categories: vocabularies related to politics, economics, science and technology, culture, and social phenomenon [5]. However, the author prefers the following classifications: words related to politics, economics, foods, culture, and social phenomenon, namely replacing the scientific and technological words with words regarding foods. The following tables are examples:

Table 1: Vocabulary related to politics.

保持党同人民的血肉联系	maintain the Party’s close bond with the people
纠治“四风”	hammer away at the task of rectifying pointless formalities, bureaucratism, hedonism, and extravagance
“放管服”改革	to streamline administration and delegate power, improve regulation, and upgrade services

Table 2: Vocabulary related to economics.

地摊经济	street-stall economy
房子是用来住的，不是用来炒的。	Housing is for living in, not for speculation.
一揽子经济刺激计划	economic stimulus package

Table 3: Vocabulary related to foods.

刀削面	sliced noodles
辣条	spicy gluten
臭豆腐	stinky tofu/ smelly tofu

Table 4: Vocabulary related to culture, sports, and entertainment.

春晚	Spring Festival Gala
春运	Spring Festival travel rush
二十四节气	24 Solar Terms

Table 5: Vocabulary related to social phenomenon.

单双号限行	traffic restrictions based on even- and odd-number license plates
“三农”问题	issues relating to agriculture, rural areas, and farmers
“双减”	ease the burden of excessive homework and off-campus tutoring for students undergoing compulsory education

3. Comparison of Translation Methods-using of Chinese and Western Media

3.1. Translation Methods-using of Chinese Media

3.1.1.Free Translation

Domestic media mainly use free translation to deal with vocabulary unique to Chinese culture [6]. Based on an in-depth understanding of the original text, free translation does not strictly follow the word and sentence order of the original text, instead, it reflects the meaning of the original text without pursuing word-for-word translation. This translated version is easily accepted by foreign readers. For example, the Scientific Outlook on Development (科学发展观), National People's Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) (两会), etc.

On top of that, the method of idiomatic translation [7] is also adopted. For example, 殊途同归 is translated into “All roads lead to Rome”, which can be regarded as a kind of explanation through borrowing idioms from the target language to replace the original words.

3.1.2. Transliteration

Except for free translation, sometimes media at home will also take transliteration as a means. It refers to the method of expressing the text symbols in one language with the same or similar pronunciation in another language [8]. The English names of 冰墩墩 and 雪容融, mascots of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics and Paralympic Winter Games, are not completely translated according to Chinese Pinyin, but according to pronunciation, which was translated to “Bing Dwen Dwen” and “Shuey Rhon Rhon” respectively.

Besides, Chinese pinyin is also used. For typical Chinese things or concepts such as Chinese foods, there are no equivalent words in English, so Chinese pinyin will be used [9]. As an example, the Chinese traditional food 饺子 is represented by jiaozi in English. On Chinese New Year’s Eve, the family will be together making jiaozi to greet the New Year. Jiaozi marked the arrival of the new year. Cause in ancient China, the night of New Year’s Eve was called Jiaozi (交子), meaning the change from the old year to a new year. If it is translated as “Chinese dumpling”, the cultural connotation of the alternation of new and old years originally contained in it will be lost.

The translations like the above two examples are numerous, and there are also Yin and Yang (阴阳), nvngong (女红), kowtow (叩头), etc. There is no corresponding word in English vocabulary that can express its unique cultural and political connotation, so it will take Chinese pinyin to express its characteristics.

3.2. Translation Method-using of Western Media

3.2.1. Literal Translation

Most Western media adopt literal translation to deal with Chinese culture-loaded vocabulary [6]. At present, foreign media and Western society have widely used the method of literal translation for some classical Chinese vocabulary, for example, “nets spread from the earth to the sky” means 天罗地网, “walls made of copper and steel” equals 铜墙铁壁 and “rats in the street” means 过街老鼠. These seemingly Chinglish paraphrased expressions have been widely used in Western TV media and interview programs and can be understood by foreign readers. Besides, sometimes the Western media would take measures combining literal translation with some explanations. Here are two examples from the Economist:

Example 1: “three evil forces” of terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism in the far-western region of Xinjiang

Example 2: “big whites”, the guards who enforce covid rules while swaddled in white protective overalls

In example 1, when reporting the violent attacks in Xinjiang, the Economist translates literally “three evil forces” in the president’s speeches, and then uses prepositional phrases to further show that the three forces are terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism. Just imagine that foreign readers who have no idea of the relevant background will be confused when they see such a translation. In example 2, 大白, a heroic group that emerged during the Covid-19 in China, is affectionately known by the public for wearing white protective clothing, which is also further explained in the report. If there are only “big whites”, it will inevitably remind people of the characters in the movie “Big Hero 6”, resulting in ambiguity.

3.2.2. Free Translation

Free translation is to completely follow the norms of the target language without considering the expression form of the original language and to adopt the method of translating its general meaning

while ignoring its form [6].

Example 3: to hope that one's son will become somebody

Example 4: dynamic zero-Covid policy

Due to the difference between traditional Chinese and Western ideas, the dragon is often regarded as a symbol of auspiciousness in China, while it is an evil symbol in Western countries. Hence translators often avoid literal translation when translating vocabulary and idioms related to “dragon”, like translating 望子成龙 into “to hope that one's son will become somebody” in example 3. And in example 4, the Economist used the phrase “dynamic zero-Covid policy” (动态清零) when reporting the Chinese policy towards the pandemic, which made it easy for overseas readers to understand the background and purpose of the policy.

3.2.3. Transliteration plus Explanation

The transliteration of Western foreign words in China has many successful examples, such as coffee, McDonald's, sofas, models, etc. Similarly, some words that are unique to Chinese culture are also spread abroad. For example, 风水 is translated to “feng shui” or “feng-shui”, and can be used as both nouns and verbs, which has been involved in *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 5th Edition*. In the dictionary, its verb usage is that “feng shui a room/house, etc.: to place the future and other things in a room or house in a particular position so that it is arranged according to the feng shui system” [10]. In practice, however, it is limited to theoretical statistics. If the translator blindly adopts the method of transliteration, it may easily make foreign readers bemused. Therefore, transliteration is rare in foreign magazines, and the words adopted in this way are generally just some Chinese Pinyin words that have been included in the English dictionary, such as wushu, Yin, Yang, and Tai chi. In most cases where transliteration is used, the translator will add an explanation as an appositive after Pinyin to make it easier for the reader to understand [11]. For example, 富二代 is translated into “fuerdai” and note the explanation: the second-generation children of the super-rich. There are two more examples:

Example 5: These were included in a classified publication called *Zhongban Tongbao*, or “General Office Circular”.

Example 6: ...a Beijing hukou, the household registration papers needed to access housing, jobs, schooling, and other public services.

In China, 中办通报 refers to the official documents used by the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China to award the advanced, criticize mistakes, and convey important instructions. Therefore, this word is translated through Chinese pinyin, and then an appositive is added to escape it with an expression that is easier for Western readers to understand. While in example 6, when describing the unique citizenship authentication documents in China, the Economist also uses the transliteration of Chinese pinyin before adding appositive words for further explanation, so that Western readers can better grasp the importance of “hukou”, a household registration system in China.

In the above two examples, if these words are simply translated into pinyin without explanation, it will cause trouble for Western readers, which is not conducive to Chinese culture going global. Furthermore, when talking about the problems in the English translation of China's foreign propaganda, sometimes the so-called translation just translates Chinese characters into pinyin, which cannot be counted as a translation at all [12].

4. Factors Affecting Different Translation Methods-using

4.1. Cultural Connotation

Cultural connotation [13], refers to the general meaning including the connotative meaning and cultural meaning carried in the different cultural circumstances. If the translator does not have a certain understanding of the target language culture, it is likely to cause cultural confusion [14] and cultural misunderstanding. For example, Chinese people often use animal offal as ingredients to cook, while foreigners will regard it as disgusting and scary. Therefore, translators should be cautious in translating to avoid cultural confusion. Given that, the translation of the traditional Chinese dish 红烧狮子头 is unified as “braised pork ball in brown sauce” in the book *Enjoy Culinary Delights: The English Translation of Chinese Menus*, instead of “a red burnt lion head”. Foreigners will feel frightened if they see “a lion head” on the menu. From the above examples, it can be known that translators need to be careful when switching between two or more languages to promote effective cultural and linguistic communication.

4.2. Mode of Thinking

Thinking is one of the abilities of human beings, but a certain thought pattern belongs to certain people [13]. It works as a bridge both for culture and language and is closely related to culture and language. The difference in thought patterns is one of the main causes of cultural variety and language variety. In the 5,000-year history of China, the sages represented by Confucianism mainly understood the world mainly from the concern of the social reality such as in politics and ethics. Thus, Chinese people are greatly influenced by traditional Confucianism and pay more attention to ethics. While the influence of the geographical environment in the British and American countries, coupled with several industrial revolutions, the level of social industry there is relatively high, and more attention is paid to cognition, resulting in logical analysis and empirical knowledge. Therefore, it led to the form of a scientific cognitive thinking mode in Western countries. In addition, Chinese people focus on the whole, while Westerners lay more emphasis on the individual. As early as the Chinese People’s War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, our country put forward the idea that solidarity is strength. After the founding of the People’s Republic of China, the thoughts of the Chinese developed into serving the people wholeheartedly under the leadership of the Communist Party of China. In comparison with China, all values in Western culture are centered on personality, which emphasizes the supremacy of the individual, so individualism governs the way of thinking and actions of Westerners.

4.3. Context

In addition to considering cultural factors in the translation process of Chinese culture-loaded words, the selection of words is also a key part. Comparing Chinese and English vocabulary, a Chinese word can find several corresponding words with the same meaning in English. However, although the meanings are roughly the same, the interpretation of emotional and cultural colors is completely different in different contexts. There is a saying in English, “No context, no text”, which means that without context, the meanings may not be accurately understood, and text cannot be formed. For example, 红包 in Chinese refers to the New Year’s money for children or the elderly in Chinese New Year, or a gift for expressing blessings at weddings, birthday parties, etc., which can be translated as “lucky money in red envelopes” or “red envelopes”. However, 红包 appearing in the officialdom is usually derogatory, and it is understood as the money used when bribing or accepting bribes. At this time, the translation of “bribes” can better reflect its emotional color. Therefore, the

context is also an essential part that needs to be considered when translating.

5. Conclusion

During the translation process, the culture inside the vocabulary should be shown as much as possible, so that our national culture's features can be carried forward, and the translator can be a qualified spokesperson for Chinese culture. In the book *Discourse and the Translator*, it points out that the translator is the first and most crucial transmitter, not only requires the translator to have a bilingual ability but also needs to be bicultural [15]. Only in this way can translation activities play a role as a link between the original author and the target reader, to better convey the original spirit. Besides, the translator should conduct a lot of research on the translation of Chinese vocabulary and accumulate corresponding experience, so that to make the English translation of Chinese vocabulary more comprehensive and scientific.

In an era of cultural globalization, the export of Chinese culture is related to whether the Chinese story can be told well. Therefore, serving as a bridge between languages, translators should choose translation methods based on a cross-cultural perspective properly, fully take the influencing factors such as the cultural connotation, the ways of thinking of people from various cultural backgrounds, and context into account, so that can be eligible messengers of Chinese culture.

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