

# A Study on Translation of Culture-loaded Words in China's Global Communication with Functional Equivalence Approach

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**Abstract:** With Nida's functional equivalence, this thesis concentrates on the necessities of translating culture-loaded words in China's global communication, categories of culture-loaded words. And based on the theory, the corresponding translation strategy is proposed, which is foreignization. The thesis aims to spread more of Chinese culture to the outside world so as to make a multi-culture world with less cultural shocks.

## 1. Introduction

Culture symbolizes a country's soft power. Culture-loaded words or culture-loaded terms carrier the special culture of different countries. China, with an over five-thousand-year history, has colorful culture in food, languages, regions, religions, as well as materials. Since the Reform and Opening up policy was proposed, China has been communicating with the outside world more frequently. Therefore, to accurately spread information during cross-cultural activities, translation plays a key role.

Many experts have been doing researches on Chinese-English translation and find out culture-loaded words are uneasy to translate. Thus, to make the source text (ST) be equivalent to the target text (TT) and to properly translate culture-loaded words arouses experts' attention. To most experts, they would like to choose foreignization. Zheng Dehu<sup>[1]</sup> advocated that when translating those culture-loaded words, it would be better to choose foreignization because foreignization would help to correctly and accurately spread Chinese culture. Wang Yinquan<sup>[2]</sup> pointed out that experts had reached a consensus to choose foreignization such as transliteration, annotation, literal translation etc., which is not only advisable but also available. When researching on *The Story of the Stone*, Qian Yaxu and Ji Mofang<sup>[3]</sup> both said foreignization are advisable.

To correctly tell China stories, translators need to balance the ST and the TT. They have to help readers in the receptor languages have the same feeling or understanding of the TT with the readers in the original language. Therefore, translation is a complex cross-culture activity which has to take many factors into consideration. Eugene Nida<sup>[4]</sup> said, "the nature of the message: in some messages the content is of primary consideration, and in others the form must be given a higher priority; the purpose of the author and of the translator: to give information on both form and content; to aim at full intelligibility of the reader so he/she may understand the full implications of the message; for imperative purposes that aim at not just understanding the translation but also at ensuring no misunderstanding of the translation; the type of audience: prospective audiences differ both in decoding ability and in potential interest."

Translation of culture-loaded words is a sophisticated but necessary work. However, the current researches on it isn't enough which urges us to study from different aspects with multiple approaches. Foreignization, as an advisable translation strategy, is agreed by most experts, yet there are still many issues needs solving.

## 2. Translation of culture-loaded words in China's global communication

### 2.1 Necessities to study on translation of culture-loaded words

Yu Lixia<sup>[5]</sup> advocated “culture-loaded words are like bridges among different countries as well as translators to fill up the cultural gaps. Thus it is the translators' responsibility to translate culture-loaded words correctly and accurately.”

In ancient times, Ancient Egypt, Ancient China, Ancient Babylon and Ancient India had colorful and comparative advanced technologies. However, Ancient Babylon had disappeared and the other three had declined. Ever since the Opium War, economy, education, politics, culture etc. has been badly struck. It was until 1949 that China won its independence. In 1978, the Reform and Opening-up policy was proposed. Forty years has passed, it's time to presents a cultural and brave China to the outside world.

Chinese culture symbolizes Chinese spirit and illustrates the country's soft power. Although many scholars and experts are devoting themselves to spreading Chinese culture and telling China stories, there still exists many translation problems which need more researches to solve. For instance, in *China daily*<sup>[5]</sup>, the latest report on Chinese Laba Festival—8<sup>th</sup> day of 12<sup>th</sup> lunar month, there appears two different versions of the food that people eat, one is Laba Congee and the other is Laba porridge. The former is in the *Better Chinese* part, while the latter is in the *Better English* part. This kind of translation, to some degree, would confuse some receptors. According to the dictionary, “porridge” is “a type of soft thick white food made by boiling oats in milk or water, eaten hot, especially for breakfast” and “congee” refers to “(in Chinese cookery) broth or porridge made from rice”. Thus, to fully express the specialty of this festival and help foreigners have a deep understanding of it, “congee” would be a better choice. If the translator still wants to choose the word “porridge”, he/she should add “rice” before “porridge” because the main material in the congee is rice. From the perspective of translation strategy, “porridge” belongs to “domestication” and “congee” belongs to foreignization. This kind of phenomena—one culture-loaded word with two or more translations, are actually very common in translation China's global communication. Therefore, experts and translators should do more researches so as to make those different versions unanimous.

Moreover, as *the Belt and Road Initiative* has been proposed, communication between China and other countries increases. Meeting the foreign countries' demand for Chinese culture is also a good way to benefit the relationship between China and other countries. Thus it is time to do more deeper studies on translation of culture-loaded words and to translate accurately.

### 2.2 Fundamental Theory—Functional Equivalence

Eugene Nida's formal equivalence strengths the fidelity to the original lexical details and grammatical structures which, without exegesis, causes confusion to the receptors; while dynamic equivalence is to make both the receptors and the original readers understand the text in a similar fashion. They both have their respective merits and demerits. In the later years, Nida distanced dynamic equivalence and preferred the concept of functional equivalence which concentrates how people interact in cultures.

This thesis chooses functional equivalence as its fundamental theory since the aims of translation in China's global communication is to encourage people in different cultures to interact more frequently as well as to enrich global cultures so as to eliminate cultural shocks.

With functional equivalence approach, translators could give priority to forms, meanings, content, or interactions according to its corresponding contexts. For example, the original text “wushu/martial art, taichi, xiucui, juren, jinshi<sup>[6]</sup>” is now popular in most English-speaking countries. These culture-loaded words are rendered with formal equivalence because form should be given priority here.

### 2.3 Classification of culture-loaded words

Nida classified culture into five types: ecology, material culture, social culture, religious culture and linguistic culture<sup>[7]</sup>. Based on Nida's classification, Yu Lixia proposed ecological culture-loaded words, culture-loaded words from allusions, social culture-loaded words, religious culture-loaded words, and linguistic culture-loaded words.

Ecological culture-loaded words are various owing to the location, geological structure, and

ecosystem, which brings difficulties to translation. For example, the west wind in China means cold, winter, or loneliness; east wind in China means warm, spring, or happiness. Thus, there is an old saying in China “Everything is ready except the east wind”. However, west wind in the European countries means warm and happiness, because the North Atlantic Current from the west brings warm to them. Thus, Shelley wrote a poem *Ode to the West Wind*; while the east wind from Siberia is cold.

Allusion is the old and classical stories in the history, which is usually quoted in the poems. Allusions are treasures that can illustrate philosophical principles or the special qualities that someone owes. Poems with allusion presupposes that the potential readers know the allusion. Therefore, to translate such kind of culture-loaded words in China’s global communication, translators should give more explanation.

Social culture-loaded words have symbolic meanings because they are connected with some special events; Religious culture-loaded words are related to religion. Chinese belong to Sino-Tibetan languages while English belongs to Indo-European languages. There are four pitches of sound in Chinese and only two in English. Besides, more conjunctions are used to make the sentence logical in English. This also makes it difficult to translate linguistic culture-loaded word into English.

### 3. Tactics to translate culture-loaded words

Chinese culture-loaded words carry much of the traditional Chinese culture. For example, witchcraft in Chinese Miao Nationality (“Wu Gu” in Chinese phoneticize) is a special custom. Foreignization is the most advisable strategy because, according to the scholars, it makes the ST and TT be equivalent in functions, forms, connotations, and meanings. According to the classification of culture-loaded words and different contexts, the following specific measures are available.

#### 3.1 Transliteration with annotation

Transliteration is to translate according to the pronunciation. This method adds new nutrients to the target language yet may also confuse the receptors. Thus, it needs annotation to explain the connotation or the symbolic meaning for the receptors.

“Qi, Ying, Yang, Jing<sup>[8]</sup>” are translated with transliteration because there is no equivalent words in the target language. Translators have to create a new word. In consequence, the balance between the receptors and the translators is lost. To make them balanced again, Zhang Jian<sup>[8]</sup> advocated there should provide an explanation. Thus, “Qi” should be explained as “This is a term with a number of connotations. It refers not only to the respiratory gases, but, more often, to the nutritious materials circulating with the blood and to the vigor of the body. In terms of modern medicine, it may be compared to the body’s resistance to diseases, its adaptability to environmental changes and its power to recuperate from various pathological conditions.<sup>[8]</sup>”

Peng Jingsong<sup>[6]</sup> also advocated this tactic to translate. She listed many examples of the culture-loaded words of the Zhuang Nationality, such as “aeuqloegdoz, Mehloggyap, Mohit, Caenquengz, Cojvuengz<sup>[6]</sup>”. She explains in her thesis that these words carry special meaning and culture of the Zhuang Nationality with no equivalent words in the target language.

#### 3.2 Literal Translation

Literal translation is another tactic of translation, with which translators needn’t do much changes on the words, sentence sequence, or grammatical structure. Most importantly, with this tactic, the TT and ST could be equivalent in both forms and meanings. For example, “Belt and Road Initiative”, “streaming government and developing authorities, great truths are always simple, crossing the river by feeling for stones, community-level self-governance, matters of confidence, an all-out effort to enforce strict party discipline<sup>[9]</sup>”.

In *A Dream of Red Mansions* translated by Yang Hsien-YI and GLADYS YANG, many poems are literally translated. The form of the poems are often given the priority. Thus, the TT and the ST are generally equivalent in forms. And the inner-culture interact between the receptors and the source text has also achieved. For instance, in the first chapter, when a Taoist saw the Buddhist verse on the back of the stone, it reads

“unfit to mend the azure sky,  
I passed some years on earth to no avail;  
My life in both worlds is recorded here;  
Whom can I ask to pass on this romantic tale? <sup>[10]</sup>”

Through the poems, the receptors will clearly know that this stone has spent some years in the worlds. After coming back to the Blue Ridge Peak, the stone recorded all the life stories and hoped that someone could help him pass the romantic stories to.

### 3.3 Zero-translation, pragmatic translation, and paraphrasing

There are still many other tactics, such as zero-translation, pragmatic translation and paraphrasing. With zero-translation, translators could omit those less important or redundant information, provide explanation for the abstract notions, and even create some new words; with pragmatic translation, translators could distinguish the polysemous words with contexts; with paraphrasing, translators could translate according to the receptors' thinking habit.

All in all, no matter what tactics or strategies the translators would chose, they should ensure the ST and TT are equivalent as much as possible so as to tell China story.

## 4. Summary

This thesis analyzes the necessities of translating culture-loaded words, fundamental theory, classification of culture-loaded words, and provides some specific tactics for translating culture-loaded words. It founds out that foreignization, such as transliteration with annotation, literal translation, zero-translation, is the strategy that would help the TT and ST be functional equivalent to the largest extent.

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