

# English Translation of Chinese Folk Culture Loaded Words

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**Abstract**—This article starts with the definition of Chinese Folk Culture Loaded Words. Then it divides Chinese Folk Culture Loaded Words into four categories. Next it describes the current situation in English translation of Chinese Folk Culture Loaded Words and finds that there are some problems in English translation. Next, through analyzing the translation examples of different Chinese Folk Culture Loaded Words, the author has discussed the corresponding English translation methods of Chinese Folk Culture Loaded Words under certain translation strategies. The author holds that literal translation, literal translation with annotation, transliteration, free translation and transformation methods in different translation strategies which include Foreignization Strategy and Domestication Strategy can be employed to translate Chinese Folk Culture Loaded Words into English. Finally, this paper concludes the importance and significance of good translation of Chinese Folk Culture Loaded Words.

**Keywords**—Chinese Folk Culture Loaded Words; classification of Chinese Folk Culture Loaded Words; current situation in English translation; strategies and methods of English translation; significance of good translation

## I. INTRODUCTION

Chinese traditional culture is the culture of internal cohesion, and the spirit of this culture is to pay attention to harmony, the individual and others, individuals and groups, people and nature organic connection, forming a cultural relationship. This contributes to the formation of national cohesion. As we all know, as China continues to “go out”, “learning from the East” has become a new trend of our society. The western world is increasingly eager to understand the bright and profound Chinese civilization. Unfortunately, there will inevitably be many words and expressions that are not available in Standard English when translating the unique Chinese values, cultural traditions, social customs, eating habits, ethnic customs and geographical features into English and enabling the western world to better understand Chinese culture, such as Confucianism, Kungfu and other Chinese Culture Loaded Words that reflect the Chinese culture. However, sowing the characteristics of China can promote the cultural exchange between China and foreign countries. But there is still much controversy about how to translate Chinese Folk Culture Loaded Words into English.

In this new century, it will be a revolution in the history of human knowledge to understand Chinese culture from the

perspective of communication, which is an important way to explore the transformation and evolution of Chinese culture. Doing a good job in the translation of Chinese Folk Culture Loaded Words is of great significance in introducing the unique civilization of China to the outside world and promoting mutual learning between Chinese and foreign civilizations. However, at present, the English translation of Chinese Folk Culture Loaded words is not unified and how to better translate Chinese Folk Culture Loaded Words into proper English has aroused the author’s interest. Thus the author decided to further explore the English translation of Chinese Folk Culture Loaded words.

## II. THE DEFINITION OF CHINESE FOLK CULTURE LOADED WORDS

No matter what region, any nationality will have its own corresponding Folk Culture. The term “Folk Culture” has appeared in China for a long time, such as Qilu Culture, Central Plains Culture, Wuyue Culture and these cultures are all divided by region. In fact, there are many other cultures as well. According to Tan Yeting, the word “Folk” in “Folk Culture” refers to the cultural phenomena which are produced in our daily life and inherited from generation to generation. In a Chinese phrase “min su” which is translated as “Folk Custom”, the “min” of “min su” emphasizes the expression space of “civil society”, that is, people’s daily society where they study, work and live. (Tan, 2010: 2) While the word “Culture” in “Folk Culture” is a concept which has very rich and complex connotation. There is another scholar Qian Mu who believes that “Culture” refers to the life of a large group of people in a certain area or a large group of people of a certain nationality, and it also refers to the comprehensive totality of all the departments and aspects of their life. (Qian, 2017: 4) Zhang Xinyue says there are also some scholars believe that Folk Culture refers to the general name of people’s customs and cultures in different regions and it is a life style and phenomenon that is repeatedly observed in the daily life of the masses and is observed by all of us. (Zhang, 2019) All in all, as far as the author is concerned, the Chinese Folk Culture Loaded Words, which express the representative culture of the Chinese people, are characterized by material, psychological, behavioral and linguistic aspects, such as Chinese Folk Habits, Spiritual Events (like religious beliefs, ethics, folk art creation), and Codes of Conduct.

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### III. CLASSIFICATION OF CHINESE FOLK CULTURE LOADED WORDS

It is well-known to us that Chinese Culture is extensive and profound because it is the accumulation of Chinese history, which makes Chinese culture colorful and prosperous. Similarly, Chinese Folk Culture is also very representative and has extensive knowledge. Besides, it is closely related to Chinese human life, and its content is also extensive and profound. According to the author's perspective, Chinese Folk Culture Loaded Words can be divided into the following four categories:

#### A. Folk Culture Loaded Words in Material Aspect

The term "Folk Culture Loaded Words in Material Aspect" refers to the words of common substances or objects that are closely related to human life and daily necessities, such as Clothing Culture, Regional Culture and Catering Culture.

Clothing Culture refers to the cultural customs related to people's wearing clothes, shoes, hats and accessories. The corresponding Folk Culture Loaded Words include "ba fu lu qun" which is translated as "skirt with colorful trim", "Zhong shan Zhuang" which is translated as "Chinese tunic suit", "fa zan" which is translated as "hairpin" and so on which are all very famous in China.

According to Bai Jingyu, Regional Culture refers to the culture formed by the region, natural conditions and geographical environment. It is manifested in the fact that different nationalities use different language ways to express the same phenomenon and things. Besides, different nationalities have much difference in ways of understanding things in life like metaphors, aesthetic tastes and perceptions of the same thing. (Bai, 2010: 57) Here, the Folk Culture Loaded Words include "bei wu" which is translated as "a room with a southern exposure", "diao jiao lou" which is translated as "Diaojiailou house", "chang cheng" which is translated as "the Great Wall" and so on.

Food Culture, as its name directly implies, is related to food. There is an old saying in China that "Food is the paramount necessity of the people.", and there are lots of descriptions of food in Chinese literature works. It is recorded that there are fifty-five chapters in the book *The Scholars*, which includes more than two thousand kinds of food, including feast, daily food and dessert, such as fried shrimps, fried crucian carp, stewed skin, honey orange cake, chowder, and so on. And it can make the reader have a sense of identity with the Chinese people because the cooking methods such as cooking, braising, stewing, simmering, frying, and other cuisine methods are almost same with the modern cuisine and cooking skills. (Huang, 2019) Because of its long history and different customs, the cooking methods in China have formed different styles and characteristics, and the most famous of which is the famous Eight Major Cuisines. For example: "Ma Po's bean curd" of Sichuan Cuisine, "steamed minced pork Hall" of Huaiyang Cuisine, and "Roast Peking duck" of Peking Cuisine and so on.

#### B. Folk Culture Loaded Words in Psychological Aspect

Folk Culture Loaded Words in Psychological Aspect mainly refer to words reflecting people's psychological customs and cultures. These cultural loaded words mainly focus on beliefs, including taboos, natural worship, ancestor worship and other worship. Taboos are widely distributed in China. There are taboos from worldly things to the taboos of the sacred. And taboos contain many superstitious elements, which are almost related to people's psychology.

As for nature worship and ancestor worship, many people have a special belief in God. The religious connotation in China is quite rich and profound, which contains many aspects. Firstly, it has the primitive religion of nature worship and totem worship in ancient times; secondly, the worship of heaven and earth and the worship of ancestor belong to it either; thirdly, it also contains Buddhism and Taoism which have been widely spread since the Han and Tang Dynasties; in addition, the Islam, Catholicism and Christianity which were influenced by traditional Chinese culture are all belong to the category of Chinese religion. (Wen, 2019) There are also a lot of typical Cultural Loaded Words, such as "zhong guo fo jiao" which is translated as "Chinese Buddhism", "shang xiang" which is translated as "to offer incense to Buddha", "pu du zhong sheng" which is translated as "to save all living beings from sufferings" and so on.

#### C. Folk Culture Loaded Words in Behavior Aspect

Folk Culture Loaded Words in Behavior Aspect mainly refer to the words which are reflecting the behavior closely related to psychological folklore, including the Folk Culture Loaded Words of Festivals, Life Etiquette and other activities.

First and foremost, one of the typical Folk Culture Loaded Words in Behavior Aspect is Chinese festivals. Today we can witness many traditional festivals, such as the Lantern Festival, Tomb-Sweeping Day, the Dragon Boat Festival, the Mid-Autumn Festival, New Year's Day, New Year's Eve, and so on. And people in China have all kinds of activities almost in every festival, such as Guessing Lantern Riddles, Dragon Boat Races, Admiring the Full Moon and so on, which are all very representative and typical.

Besides, Life Etiquette also has very remarkable characteristics. The Chinese people pay much attention to the rites of life because in their opinions, Life Etiquette is very meaningful. First of all, the birth ceremony, which symbolizes the beginning of a person's life, and it stands for the way of inheriting human race. Second, the coming-of-age ceremony, which is a necessary condition for a teenager to enter the adult society. It also represents a person's maturity. Third, the wedding ceremony. As we all know, marriage has always been a significant event since ancient times. In the past, there was a tale about the Grabbing-bride Ceremony in Yunnan and Inner Mongolia in China, but there was no such customs in southeastern China. What's more, the funeral, which is symbolizing death. There are many burial customs in China, such as Burial in the Ground which is a funeral style before the eighties of the last century; Celestial Burial which is a popular burial way around the border of China; Cliff-burying which appeared before the Qing Dynasty of China and in the Yangtze

River valley along the east coast of China. In addition, birthday ceremonies and other celebrating activities, which mark the entry of an important age stage, also belong to the content of Life Etiquette.

#### D. Folk Culture Loaded Words in Linguistic Aspect

Folk Culture Loaded Words in Linguistic Aspect mainly refer to those related traditional art words that reflect people's feelings and wishes by means of language, including folk literature such as ballads, myths, fables and some words and allusions.

Folk literature in China is very widely classified. In ancient China, folk songs, legends and myths were frequently popular. First, there are many typical myths such as "Nvwa bu tian" which is translated as "Nvwa fixing up the sky"; "Jingwei tian hai" which is translated as "the bird Jingwei trying to fill the sea". Second, the four Great Classical Novels which are *Journey to the West*, *Water Margin*, *Dream of Red Chamber*, and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* have a high reputation all over the world. In addition, *The Book of Songs* which is a book compiled by folk songs are also wide spread in China and so on.

In addition to folk literature, some Chinese words and allusions also highlight Folk Culture with specific Chinese characteristics. First, some color words in China describe a certain color of things. For example, "red" indicates joy and happiness. And in Chinese traditional weddings, brides wear red clothes, and couplets in Spring Festival are also red. However, the meaning of "red" in other countries may be different. For instance, it sometimes expresses anger under the English background, such as the phrase "see red" which means somebody gets very angry and irritated suddenly. Besides, Chinese allusions also have certain characteristics, such as "qi ren you tian" which is translated as "the man of Chi worried lest the sky fall", "gou yao hao zi duo guan xian shi" which is translated as "dog bites rats to meddle in matters" and so on.

#### IV. CURRENT SITUATION IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF CHINESE FOLK CULTURE LOADED WORDS

Due to the cultural differences between Chinese and English, especially the phenomenon of lexical vacancy and semantic vacancy of Chinese Folk Culture Loaded Words in English languages, it leads to a great obstacle of accurately translating Chinese Culture Loaded Words into English. The phenomenon of vocabulary vacancy in Chinese-English translation of Folk Culture refers to that which can be clearly and easily explained in Chinese, but it cannot be expressed in only one word or a simple sentence and it even can be difficult to explain in English. The phenomenon of semantic vacancy refers to that Chinese words can be correspondingly translated in English, but the meanings carried by each language are different because of the cultural differences between the two nations. (Jiang, 2004) The author finds that the English translation standard of Chinese Folk Culture Loaded Words are not uniform and there still have many problems in translation. For instance, some proper nouns in Chinese Folk Culture Loaded Words have many ways to translate in English and there maybe also have no methods to translate in English. For example, "qing ming jie" which is a festival in China can be

translated as three ways that are Tomb-Cleaning Day, the Brightness Day and Qingming Festival. Besides, one of the Chinese food which is called Dumplings or jiaozi have the same meaning. In addition, Peking Opera and jingju also mean the same thing in Chinese and so on.

#### V. STRATEGIES AND METHODS OF TRANSLATING CHINESE FOLK CULTURE LOADED WORDS INTO ENGLISH

A well-known scholar and translator Yu Guangzhong has said: "the translator's responsibility is to reconcile the differences between two languages that is not only to take care of the original text and protect its spirit and connotation but also to take care of the translation under the pressure of the original text, which is helpful to cater to the original meanings and also prevent it from being wronged or even beyond recognition." (Yu, 2014: 234) Therefore, translation of the Folk Culture Loaded Words should not only handle two languages properly, but also need to realize the communication between two cultures. Si Xianzhu also believes that the translation method is not arbitrary, but it is based on certain principles and programmes, specifically based on a certain "translation strategy". Translation strategies can be divided into two categories: Foreignization Strategy and Domestication Strategy. (Si, 2018: 53) The author holds that the duty and the highest principle of translation should be faithful to the original work and as a disseminator of culture we also should reproduce original cultural connotation and act in translation. Therefore, Chinese Folk Culture Loaded Words can be translated into proper English by Literal Translation, Literal Translation with Annotation, Transliteration, Free Translation and Transformation.

##### A. Translation Methods under Foreignization Strategy

Foreignization Strategy refers that the translation should accommodate the linguistic characteristics of the source language, and try to maintain the form of expression of the source language, so that the form of the translation can be as close as possible to the style of the original author. (Hua, Hu, 2016: 215) Under this strategy, Literal Translation, Literal Translation with Annotation and Transliteration can retain the characteristics of the source language culture to a certain extent, and at the same time these methods can leave a deeper impression on the readers.

##### 1) Literal Translation

Literal Translation: as the name implies, means translating the cultural information and grammatical form of the original text directly with corresponding words, preserving the characteristics of Chinese Folk Culture as much as possible, so that English readers can understand the relevant culture more directly and clearly. It can also broaden readers' horizons, and promote direct communication between the two cultures. For example, the famous phrase "guo hua" in Chinese which is describing one of the Chinese paintings is translated as "Chinese painting". Here "Chinese" is the representative of the country, "painting" is a way of art, and when these two words are combined together, it just means the Chinese famous traditional painting properly. This translation method is simple and clear. Similarly, there are other



examples like “hong bao” which is translated as “red bags”, “chun jie” which is translated as “the Spring Festival”, “wang yang bu lao” which is translated as “to mend the fold after a sheep is lost”, and “cheng men shi huo yang ji chi yu” which is translated as “when the city gate catches fire, the fish in the moat come to grief”. These direct translations are not only one to one correspondence, but they are also easy to be understood, so that English readers can have a clearer perspective on Chinese Folk Culture.

### 2) Literal Translation with Annotation

Translation is a purposeful intercultural interaction. Due to the differences between Chinese and Western cultures, Literal Translation usually can only accomplish language transformation. However, translators often need to adopt annotation methods to accomplish cultural transformation. On the one hand, they should retain the national characteristics and cultural individuality of the original text; on the other hand, they should conform to the linguistic habits of the target language and let the recipient understand it. (Dong, 2015) Thus the author believes that Literal Translation with Annotation can be used in translating Folk Culture Loaded Words in Chinese language aspect. For example, a famous Chinese idiom which is “sha ji jing hou” can be translated into “killing the chicken to frighten the monkey”, and then translators use “to punish some body as a warning to others” as an annotation to further explain it. This annotation also clarifies the inherent cultural significance of the original text for English readers. Similar translations also include “san ge chou pi jiang ding ge zhu geliang” which is translated into “Three cobblers with their wits combined equal Chuheh Liang, the master mind.”. It is hard to expect English readers to know who Zhu Geliang is, however, the annotation of “the master mind” makes English readers understand the role and status of “Zhu Geliang” who is very clever more easily.

### 3) Transliteration

Due to the reasons for lexical vacancy, some Chinese Folk Culture Loaded Words can not be accurately expressed through English Literal Translation. But the pronunciation and basic expression of the translated Chinese Folk Culture are similar to that of the original language. So Transliteration can be used under these conditions. Such a translation not only preserves the pronunciation and intonation of the original culture, but it also integrates with English language, enriching the language culture of Chinese Folk Culture Loaded Words. When discussing the Chinese Folk Culture Loaded Words in Linguistic aspect, the translation of the word “Kong Fuzi” is especially typical because the word “Confucius” is very similar to the original Chinese pronunciation, which strengthens the readers’ further understanding of Chinese Folk Culture. In addition, there are other words and phrases which are translated by Transliteration like “Fengshui”, “Kung fu” and so on. In the Chinese diet culture, “tofu” and “Jiaozi” are also transliterated directly which are very representative. In the Chinese language culture, “Kua fu” and “Nvwa” are transliterated as well. These words or phrases under Transliteration embody the uniqueness and inheritance of Chinese Folk Culture and also promote the foreign exchange of Chinese Culture.

## B. Translation Methods under Domestication Strategy

Domestication Strategy refers to localizing the source language to the target language or the target language readers, reproducing the content of the original text by means of expressions customarily used by the target language readers. (Hua, Hu, 2016: 215) Under this strategy, the author considers that Free Translation method and Transformation method can help readers better accept the Chinese Folk Culture that they did not understand, and make the translation closer to the readers.

### 1) Free Translation

There will inevitably be some semantic vacancy in the process of translating Chinese Folk Culture Loaded Words into English because of the differences between Chinese and English culture, expression and other aspects. At this time, Free Translation can be adopted by the translators. The term “Free Translation” means to ignore the linguistic form and alphabetical meaning of the source language and to express the cultural information with equivalent translation vocabulary. For example, the allusion “si mian chu ge” in Chinese language culture is translated into English as “be besieged on all sides”. This idiom in Chinese Folk Culture means somebody has been caught in somewhere surrounded by the enemies on all sides, reaching the situation of isolation danger. Here “be besieged” refers to the action of being surrounded by enemies; and “all sides” indicates that the place is very dangerous and bad. Thus, this English translation is quite appropriate. If it was translated literally and directly, the meaning of metaphor will be lost and the reader is much likely to be confused. There is another example which is taken from *Dream of red chamber*, one of the four great masterpieces of China. One of the main characters Jia Baoyu has said that “qing ren yan li chu xi shi” which can be translated as “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.”. Assuming that Xishi is transliterated directly into Xi Shi, the reader will be much likely not to know who this person is, nor will he or she know that it represents the person who speaks the sentence likes. And it is possible to cause some misunderstanding. In fact, there are numerous words, phrases or sentences loaded with Chinese Folk Culture. Although some of them may result in the loss of the cultural images of the source language to some extent, all these indicate the similarity and integration of the two languages.

### 2) Transformation Method

As we all know, on account of differences in history, culture, living habits and religious beliefs, there will be differences in understanding of the same thing among different nationalities. For example, one thing has a good moral in one language and one culture, but it may lose its unique charm or even be meaningless in another language or another culture. If the translation of Chinese Folk Culture Loaded Words is involved in something inappropriate, it will probably lead to misunderstanding and unnecessary disputes and contradictions between two nations. Thus when translating this kind of Folk Culture Loaded Words with individuality, it is not a bad way to adopt the method of Transformation. There are two major examples followed:

#### a) Conversion represented by “color”

In China, the color word “white” is often associated with death and badness, indicating unfortunate and unlucky things. At funerals in China, people often wear white filial piety and white flowers to express condolences. However, in western countries, “white” represents purity and beauty. For example, in western countries, the bride wears white wedding dress to represent the purity and loyalty of love between husband and wife which is different from Chinese culture. Therefore, in order to translate the Chinese Folk Culture Loaded Words which carries the meaning of “justice”, “purity”, “beauty” and other implied meanings into English, the color word “red” should not be used only and in most cases, the word “white” is also needed. For example, a noble man in China can be translated as a white man. Similarly, “purple” is the same as “yellow” in Chinese. It means the supreme power. Therefore, the English translation of a Chinese phrase “born in the imperial family” is not suitable for “be born in the yellow”, but should be translated as “be born in the purple”.

#### b) Conversion represented by “animals”

The cultural meaning of animals is similar to that of color words. Different nationalities may have different ideas and understandings of the same animal. For example, in the mind of the Chinese, tiger is a fierce animal with strong physique. Therefore, many idioms in China came from the image of tiger, such as “hu bei xiong yao”, “long zheng hu dou” and so on. But in Western culture, lion is the king of beasts. In their conception, lion is the most brave and dignified symbol, which can be reflected in the British lion’s emblem. Therefore, in translating certain Chinese Folklore Cultures, translators need to use the Transformation method locally, such as “hu kou ba ya”, which is not suitable for literal translation as “beard the tiger in his den”, but it should be translated as “bear the lion in his den”. What’s more, there has another typical example that is “hu tou she wei” and it is translated as “in like a lion, out like a lamb”. Here, “a lamp” is a feature to stand for the weak side. And such a transformation can make English readers understand it clearly at a glance.

### VI. CONCLUSION

With China’s further opening up, the unique Chinese Folk Culture in the form of Loaded Words keeps in moving towards the whole world. At this time the proper and precise English

translation of Chinese Folk Culture Loaded Words plays a significant role. Therefore, under the melting pot of increasingly frequent cross-cultural communication, translators should apply the most accurate and appropriate translation methods that can reflect the Folklore Culture with Chinese characteristics to the greatest extent, so as to convey the unique cultural information of Chinese Folk Customs perfectly. Besides, English readers can have a deeper understanding and impression of Chinese Folk Culture. Furthermore, it can play an important role in promoting Chinese Culture and promoting inter ethnic relations of China through great translation. Last but not least, to use an accurate translation method under a precise translation strategy is meaningful to promote cultural exchanges among many countries and to promote Chinese and foreign civilizations to learn from each other.

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